

Mistaking Africa

*Curiosities and Inventions
of the American Mind*

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The Origins of "Darkest Africa"

Across the grasslands of West Africa, the epic of Sundiata continues to be told almost eight hundred years after this hero united the kingdoms of the upper Niger River and founded the massive Mali empire. In the best-known prose translation of the epic, the singer-storyteller Mamoudou Kouyaté begins by relating his qualifications as speaker: "My word is pure and free of all untruth." For him, "the art of eloquence has no secrets." Then he commands his audience to pay attention: "Listen then, sons of Mali, children of the black people, listen to my word, for I am going to tell you of Sundiata, the father of the Bright Country, of the savanna land, the ancestor of those who draw the bow, the master of a hundred vanquished kings."¹ In any of its many versions, the ensuing story is full of confidence, adventure, and wisdom. It is the story of "the Bright Country."

How different the Sundiata epic is from the stereotypical Western view of Africa as the "Dark Continent." In the Western view, Africa has been a land of primitives who practice the "darkest" of customs. These include cannibalism, ritual murder, incest, witchcraft, and incessant warfare. Everywhere Westerners looked in Africa they found depravity. Or, they found peoples who had never advanced beyond the stage achieved by European children. They had only a rudimentary ability to speak language, form governments, create art, and, indeed, think.

This dark view of Africa has been so predominant that we must ask where it came from. Scholars have investigated this question by going back to the origins of Western civilization to see whether Africans have always fared so badly. Their conclusion is that the image of the Dark Continent is a recent fabrication, developed in the nineteenth century at a time when Europeans became increasingly interested in both science and African conquest.

Africans in Antiquity

In ancient Greece and Rome, race does not seem to have been a significant issue. Frank Snowden, who has prepared what is perhaps the most complete study of race in the ancient Mediterranean, states that these civilizations regarded "yellow hair or blue eyes a mere geographical accident, and developed no special racial theory about the inferiority of darker peoples."² Indeed, Mediterranean peoples referred to exceptional physical traits to assert the fundamental unity of humanity. Thus, the extraordinary fairness of the Scythians and the darkness of the Ethiopians became lessons in how physical difference should make no difference in judging a person's worth.³ There were cultural conflicts in these times, of course. The various city-states and empires frequently displayed ethnocentrism toward other cultures, and they certainly engaged in war. Nonetheless, at most times there was a certain cultural equality that allowed interaction and relatively free traffic in goods and ideas. It was not considered strange to find Ethiopians living in and succeeding in Greece, Rome, and elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean.

We also know that Africa contributed to the other cultures of the Mediterranean. Pre-Arab Egypt and even the Upper Nile kingdoms such as Meroe were relatively well known to Greeks by the fifth century B.C.⁴ What we do not know is how much the Greeks and others borrowed from Africa. Some historians claim that Greek civilization actually emerged from African ideas and that nineteenth-century European scholarship tried to hide the debt for racist reasons. It will take some time to sort out the evidence, but this debate is largely a modern one over race bias. In the ancient world, the debate would not have made much sense because the people of that time didn't think in such racial terms.

The question of race has also been raised with respect to ancient Hebrews and Christians because they are the progenitors of modern Western religions. There is no indication, however, of Jewish or Christian racism toward Africans or anyone else. One does find an effort in Judaism to exclude those who were not Jews, but this was exclusion based on religion and culture, not race. In modern times, Christian racists have insisted that the Hebrew Bible supports the view that God believes blacks to be inferior. Their primary evidence comes from their understanding of Genesis 9:18-29, where Noah curses his youngest son Ham and Ham's descendants, the Canaanites: "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." Ham is supposed by some to have been black, and the curse is believed to indicate God's approval of slavery. American segregation, the colonization of Africa, and apartheid. But there is no evidence that the Hebrews saw it this way or that they were anti-African or racist. Today's mainstream biblical scholars are unanimous in agreeing that the

passage in Genesis was not a condemnation of the black race but an attempt to explain the rift between Israel and Canaan and to denounce Canaan for its immoral culture. And there is no indication in the Bible that the inhabitants of Canaan were black.⁵

The most frequently studied case where race might be a factor in the Christian testament comes from the story of Philip, a Christian who baptized the black eunuch treasurer of the queen of Nubia. Superficially, this tale from the Acts of the Apostles might be understood as a comment on race and used as an endorsement of either missions to Africa or racial equality. But modern scholars say that it was neither and that the issues of Africa and race were not important in the story. Rather, the point was that Christians should accept even eunuchs, whom Jews had refused to receive as converts.⁶ Moreover, Snowden writes, the early Christians adopted the Greek view of the unity of humanity and used both Ethiopians and Scythians to illustrate how Christianity was for all. For example, both Origen and Augustine, early Christian commentators, employed the metaphor of blackness to describe the souls of sinners. But in a play on words and ideas, they contrasted the blackness of the Ethiopian's skin, which was natural, with the blackness of a sinner's soul, which was acquired by neglect. All sinners were black, whereas Ethiopians who followed Christ were white. Although blackness was employed as a metaphor for sin, it was specifically dissociated from the blackness of the Ethiopian's skin.⁷

The Arab conquest of North Africa after A.D. 639 made direct contact between Europeans and black Africans difficult. Thus, black Africa was of minor concern to Europeans for the next eight hundred years. Black Africans did appear in Europe, however, in various roles. One of their most interesting occupations was as "black knights," important characters in some medieval epics. In these epics, African difference was treated in several ways and served as a device to construct medieval ideas about chivalry. In light of modern European racism, it is striking that in the medieval epics black knights were considered fully human and often exceptionally competent.⁸ We also know that Europeans traded regularly with Africans south of the Sahara through Arab intermediaries. There is even evidence that the Renaissance in Europe was fueled by the importation of large quantities of West African gold. In addition, the works of a few Arab geographers who traveled to sub-Saharan Africa became available in medieval Europe. Indeed, Arab sources provided the best knowledge on the interior of sub-Saharan Africa until the late 1700s.

Western Views of Africans, c. 1400-1830

Not until the mid-1400s and the opening of Europe's Age of Exploration did Africa again enter European consciousness. This time, the relationship

between Europe and Africa and, indeed, between Europe and the rest of the world was quite different. The Portuguese, Spanish, British, Dutch, and French explorers, and others who followed them, were a pugnacious lot who were out to profit from non-Europeans. And yet, although they eventually conquered most of the world, the Europeans were not mere predators. They felt a need to justify their actions in moral terms, and they frequently wondered about the meaning of their relations with other peoples.

Historian Michael Adas argues that until the mid-eighteenth century, Europeans' perspectives on their relationships with non-Europeans tended to be formulated by and confined to missionaries and philosophers. Less educated Europeans who traveled would have found it difficult to originate such broader views, because they were largely ignorant of the nature of the achievements of their *own* civilization. They could not have made comparisons, for example, between Europe and Africa, or between Europe and China. This was fortunate for Africa in the sense that ordinary travelers who wrote accounts of African societies did not filter what they observed through any strong ideological biases.⁹

In his book *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, Philip Curtin makes the point more forcefully. Curtin says that in the eighteenth century, when at least 6 million slaves were taken from Africa, Europeans in general "knew more and cared more about Africa than they did at any later period up to the 1950s."¹⁰ This remarkable statement is based on the facts that Europeans could obtain information about Africa from relatively unbiased traders and travelers, and that Europeans had not yet connected *race and culture* in ways that prevented them from seeing Africa fairly.

This information leads to the realization that most of our modern stereotypes about Africa are a result of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century associations of African race with African culture. We know that eighteenth-century Westerners preferred their own culture to all others and were not without racist ideas, but, unlike nineteenth-century Europeans, they did not presume that everything Africans did was inferior simply because of their race. Eighteenth-century links between race and culture were unconscious and imprecise. Curtin calls this a form of "moderate racism," which "condemned individual Africans as bad men—or all Africans as savage men—but . . . left the clear impression that Africans were men."¹¹

One way to illustrate this attitude is to point out the efforts that Europeans made to help Africans who had been forcibly removed from Africa to return to the continent. In Britain, the example of Sierra Leone is foremost. This colony on the west coast of Africa was conceived in the 1780s by philanthropists who wanted to give free blacks residing in Britain and non-African parts of the British Empire the opportunity to repatriate, and it was organized on utopian principles that were supposedly applicable to all human societies.

This effort was clearly racist in the sense that it rid European territories of many blacks. However, such plans show that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Britons still believed that blacks could not only rule themselves in Africa but establish utopian communities if they were provided the proper tools and legal framework. Unfortunately, planners of such resettlement experiments rarely took into account the actual physical conditions in Africa, the training and skills of the settlers, or previous failed attempts to establish utopian communities. In 1808, the British government took over Sierra Leone as a naval base and as a colony in which to resettle the thousands of slaves freed during the effort to end the slave trade.¹²

An American example also illustrates the ambiguous Western attitudes toward race. Beginning in the 1820s, the American Colonization Society supported a "Back-to-Africa" movement that attempted to colonize Liberia, on the coast of West Africa, with groups of freed American slaves. As in Sierra Leone, the organizers had mixed motives. Aiding African Americans to live in Africa was in one sense a vote of confidence for the ability of blacks to rule themselves. However, most society members were northern Whites who were troubled by the growing number of freed slaves in northern cities, and many saw the enterprise as an opportunity to establish Christian missions in Africa. The U.S. government contributed some funds for colonization, and one settlement was named Monrovia after President James Monroe, a member of the society.¹³ Unfortunately, like Sierra Leone, Liberia was never prosperous.¹⁴

The antislavery movement provides another illustration of the "moderate racism" that existed in the minds of Europeans and Americans at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From our perspective it would seem logical that abolitionists were attempting to eliminate racism in their efforts to end slavery. But the abolitionists' arguments were primarily about the immorality of slavery and the slave trade rather than the immorality of racism. Proslavery and antislavery activists alike were racist, but both assumed that cultural factors were at the heart of the slavery question. For proslavery proponents, the Africans' inferior culture justified the institution. Antislavery activists argued that Christian charity required abolition and that Africans had the *potential* to acquire civilized culture.¹⁵

And there was an economic issue for both sides: Slavery tended to be supported by those who benefited from it and abolition by those who would benefit from its end.

The Birth of the Dark Continent

Sometime in the mid-eighteenth century a new trend in how Europeans viewed the rest of the world began to develop. It did not reach its peak for

a century or more, but in hindsight it is clear that the old models were being challenged. The reason for this transition was the series of revolutions that were underway in Europe: the Enlightenment, the revolution in science, the Industrial Revolution, and the resulting global revolution in trading and conquest. These new conditions gave increased prestige and power to those who were concerned with the material world and with domination of other cultures. The revolutions also undermined views of the world that promoted the essential equality of humanity. Europeans had a growing sense that theirs was a superior and powerful civilization.

Michael Adas argues that, as the modern global revolutions got underway, the missionaries and philosophers who had once been the interpreters of the non-West became less important. They were increasingly replaced by traders, scientists, technicians, soldiers, and bureaucrats, who subsequently determined what Europeans thought of the world. These new interpreters had more pragmatic interests—domination rather than conversion or understanding—and they aggressively shaped European thinking to serve their goals.¹⁶

We can see this shift in perspective in Western attitudes and actions toward China, which had been celebrated in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as an example of a gifted civilization. A popular artistic style, chinoiserie, imitated Chinese motifs in furniture, architecture, art, fabrics, porcelain, gardens, and the like. Likewise, Chinese laws, administration, commercial practices, and ethics were considered solid, if not perfect. By the late eighteenth century, however, China's image in Europe was in severe decline. European traders complained about excessive bureaucracy, corruption, and trade restrictions. Protestant missionaries complained about superstitions. And many observers derided the Chinese for not achieving more in science and technology. By the time of the first Opium War (1839–1842), when Europe demonstrated its brutality as well as its new technological superiority, Western assessments of China had turned overwhelmingly negative.¹⁷ In the United States, of course, the use and abuse of Chinese laborers in the American West contributed to this image.

For Africa, the shift was equally significant but less noticeable, because Africans had never been held in high esteem among Europeans. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, Europeans and Americans began associating African race and African culture, linking the two ever more closely. Philosophers and missionaries tended to follow the lead of traders, soldiers, and scientists in the move toward finding justifications for domination. This growing race consciousness was frequently expressed in the new language of science. For America, one of the questions early in the century was whether science supported the biblical account of the origin of the different races. Until the scientific revolution, the most

common explanation of human diversity was provided by the Hebrew Bible: God created humans and they were dispersed after the fall of the Tower of Babel. Those who thought more deeply about the question, however, realized that there were problems with the biblical stories. How, for example, was it possible for Adam and Eve's sons to find wives (Gen. 4)? And how could humans who all descended from Adam have achieved such physical diversity?

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the principal contending explanations for human diversity were either that all humans descended from Adam—the monogenist position—or that there were separate creations for separate races—the polygenist position. Slavers and slaveholders tended to be polygenists because the belief in separate races implied that God could approve of different treatment for blacks. Reformers tended to be monogenists, for the opposite reason. If the Bible could not settle the debate, scientists in America believed they might. They began to ask whether nature, by itself, could have produced the immense diversity of plants and animals on earth. They made two basic assumptions: that nature could cause diversity through the influence of climate and that the biblical account of creation was correct in dating the age of the earth at between 4,000 and 5,000 years. The scientists then concluded that nature could *not* have produced the earth's biological diversity in such a short time. Therefore, by the 1840s most American scientists believed that science supported the polygenist, multiple-creations position, a view that was consistent with racism.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century science was, of course, heading for a collision with the biblical view of creation. The monogenists and polygenists both assumed that the biblical account of creation was fact and that science needed only to fill in the details. Meanwhile, about the turn of the nineteenth century, new archaeological discoveries in Egypt began to cast doubt on biblical chronology by demonstrating that human life on earth was older than the Bible had indicated. And the study of fossils began to show that the earth itself might be vastly older than the Bible allowed. If these findings were accurate, then neither the polygenist nor the monogenist theory could explain human origins or human interrelationships.

As the long chronology of evolution became more apparent, scientists began to work toward understanding the actual biological mechanism by which diversity could occur. Among the theories proposed early in the century were Herbert Spencer's survival of the fittest and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's inheritability of learned traits. Then in 1859, Charles Darwin described the theory of natural selection in *The Origin of Species* and showed how species could evolve through an interplay between biology and the environment. Darwin's natural selection theory prevailed, of course, but it caught on very slowly. Moreover, it still did not include an

adequate explanation of the biological mechanism by which individuals came to vary from each other.

Darwin himself remained a Lamarckian, believing that learned traits were inherited. He thought that biological variation arose because parents learned traits that they passed to their offspring at conception. Interestingly, the Lamarckian understanding of variation seems at least partially responsible for the fear that some European colonists had of "going native" (taking on African customs) while in Africa. Many believed that by dressing up formally for dinner while in the African "bush," they were more likely to give birth to civilized children. It was only in 1902 that Gregor Mendel's work with plant variation was rediscovered after being lost for a century in an obscure journal, and the genetic theory of variation began to spread. Not until the 1920s and 1930s did American scientists commonly accept Darwin and the genetic theory of evolution, and American cultural acceptance took decades longer. In fact, these theories still have not permeated all corners of our society.

Well before Darwin, the new scientific theories of evolution began to add fuel to Western racism. Race logic in America and Europe concluded that if humans had evolved, presumably from apes, some humans had evolved more than others. Such logic naturally kept the creators of the new myths—white, upper-class, northern European males—at the top of the race hierarchy. Below them came other races and classes, and women. Among the inferior races, Asians were most advanced, then Africans, Native Americans, and Australian Aborigines. These scientific theories, unlike the older race theories, inextricably linked race and culture. Curtin notes that "whereas race had been an important influence on human culture, the new generation saw race as *the* crucial determinant, not only of culture but of human character and of all history. Hundreds of variant theories were to appear in the mood of this new emphasis."¹⁹ The scientific proof seemed to be everywhere—in the shape and size of heads, in skin color, in differences between males and females, in comportment, in the complexity of societies, and in the nature of art and religion. The greater the perceived physical and cultural difference from European culture, the less developed the race.

While Europeans developed these pseudoscientific ways of linking race and culture, they also became convinced that they had to conquer Africa. What is striking here is that they waited so long to begin. By the time Europeans invaded sub-Saharan Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, Africa had long remained the only continent unsubdued by European power. The reasons for the delay included the difficulty of the environment, the danger of violence, the slave trade, and the lack of easily tapped mineral wealth. But the second half of the nineteenth century brought the end of the slave trade; improvements in guns, boats, and medicine; an in-

tensified search for industrial raw materials and markets; and heightened nationalist competition among the European states. Explorers set out to "discover" the African interior, traders staked out corners, and missionaries founded stations as far inland as they could while still maintaining their supply lines. As the century progressed, interest in Africa grew until it finally became impossible for European governments to *not* colonize the continent.

This shift toward imperial thinking was already apparent by the middle of the century. In theoretical terms, the shift was marked by fewer arguments for the *conversion* of Africans and more for European *trusteeship* like Europeans, implying that Africans were just as human as Europeans. Trusteeship, however, implied that Africans were biologically inferior and needed to be taken care of, a perfect justification for conquest. Europeans in Africa naturally began to look for evidence of why Africa should need European help.²⁰ Educated Africans, who had formerly been trusted with responsibilities, were moved aside and labeled incompetent. African customs were increasingly described as savage. Cannibalism was imagined in practically every corner of the continent. Childhood became the universal metaphor for the African state of mental and cultural development.

A Myth for Conquest

Thus the myth of the Dark Continent was born. It originated in mid-nineteenth-century Europe when scientific race theory was developed without reference to the actual cultures of Africans in Africa. Then it was transferred to Africa by Europeans who had both a theoretical and a practical interest in seeing Africa as primitive. And when scientific race theory combined with imperialist urges to conquer, there was no end to the primitiveness that could be found.

The Dark Continent myth is still with us a century and a half later, at least in a diluted form. It is the legacy that leads us to many of the "African" words I listed in Chapter 1. Anyone who reads the literature of the late-eighteenth-century European travelers in Africa—who describe Africans as human—and then reads the late-nineteenth-century travelers—who criticize Africans as depraved—will wonder if this is the same continent. In the eighteenth century, Europeans on the whole were genuinely interested in discovering what Africans were doing, even if they disapproved of what they found. For example, Mungo Park, who is sometimes considered the first modern European explorer of Africa, traveled to the upper Niger River in 1796; although he underwent many difficulties, he evaluated individuals and experiences on their own merits and

did not generally condemn whole groups or cultures.²¹ By the late nineteenth century, however, Europeans were able to see only a primitive continent full of tribes of savages and barbarians.

Of course, there was a great deal of hypocrisy involved in this attempt to reduce Africans to the lowest forms of humanity. European violence eradicated African violence. Christian love justified missionary control. And the white race, which had only recently stamped out its own slave trading and slaveholding practices, called Arabs and Africans inferior because they traded and held slaves. When European slave trading in Africa came to an end in the 1870s and 1880s, Europeans engaged in an antislavery campaign against Arab slave traders on the Nile and in East Africa, and then against African traders. As discussed above, in the antislavery campaign in Europe in the early part of the century, the arguments made by both sides were more cultural than racial. Now, however, Europeans demanded that racially inferior Arabs and even more racially inferior Africans allow themselves to be saved from their depravity by racially superior Europeans. Patrick Brantlinger writes:

The myth of the Dark Continent defined slavery as the offspring of tribal savagery and portrayed white explorers and missionaries as the leaders of a Christian crusade that would vanquish the forces of darkness. . . . When the taint of slavery fused with sensational reports about cannibalism, witchcraft, and apparently shameless sexual customs, Victorian Africa emerged draped in that pall of darkness that the Victorians themselves accepted as reality.²²

There were actually several versions of the Dark Continent myth, depending on whether the source was Christian or secular evolutionist. In the Christian version, God becomes the sponsor of the colonial effort. Christian missionaries, who are mostly whites, are called upon to save God's pagan children in Africa. This version can be seen clearly in the mission movement that grew dramatically during the nineteenth century. More secular versions of the myth ranged from a crass "survival of the fittest" conquest to a more sophisticated "trusteeship on behalf of civilization." Official government policies tended toward the latter definition, and twentieth-century colonial bureaucrats spoke in terms of the care they were providing: Colonialism was supposedly a generous gift to Africans.

At the popular level, Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "The White Man's Burden" illustrates the secular trend. Although not specifically about Africa, Kipling's poem summarized the secular justification for domination of Africa and other parts of the world at the turn of the century. "White man's burden" is now a common phrase used to capture the essence of the colonial mentality. Kipling's poem was sent to President Theodore Roosevelt just after the American annexation of the Philippines

in 1898. It urged Americans to embrace colonialism as the Britons had done:

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloak your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your Gods and you.²³

For Kipling, race itself is the sponsor of the colonial enterprise. The colonial burden is not a call from God, but from whiteness. Americans are urged to send "the best ye breed"—presumably upper-class white males—to serve people at the bottom of the racial hierarchy who are "half-devil and half-child." One might presume that the "half-devil" reference is a plea to Christians, but the poem's audience has "Gods"—plural—who are surely secular as well as Christian. Kipling is considered a defender of secular colonialism, not of religious missions. And the reference to "half-child" is pure scientific racism: The more racially different the more childlike other peoples were thought to be. Furthermore, Americans were to serve their captives forever, in "weariness," because the captives were biologically incapable of learning the ways of civilized peoples.

The most public examples of Dark Continent thinking among Americans come from Henry Morton Stanley and Theodore Roosevelt. Stanley, an orphan who left England as a young man and was adopted by an American, served on both sides during the Civil War and was a newspaper reporter on the American western frontier. He went to Africa in the late 1860s as a reporter for the *New York Herald*. His goal was to find the famous missionary David Livingstone, who had not been heard from in several years, and create one of the biggest news stories of the century. Stanley found Livingstone, of course, but more importantly he became attached to Africa and spent the rest of his life involved with the continent.

From 1875 to 1877, he crossed the continent from east to west, and he described the harrowing journey down the Congo River in his book *Through the Dark Continent*.²⁴ In the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s, Stanley participated in the conquest of the Congo by Leopold, King of the Belgians.

In both Britain and America, Stanley was easily the most influential explorer of nineteenth-century Africa. Stanley's reputation was made as a bold adventurer who conquered every obstacle, both natural and human. Although some believe that he was not a racist because he did not use the racist jargon of the day, he was nonetheless quick to judge Africans as inferior and quick to turn to violence against those Africans who stood in his way. Throughout the white world, red-blooded men and boys read and talked about Stanley well into the twentieth century. Anyone interested in Africa certainly read Stanley, and there is a direct line of influence from his books to nearly every one of the white adventurers who followed him to Africa. Stanley also inspired the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs (who created Tarzan) and H. Rider Haggard, authors who were read widely by Americans.

Theodore Roosevelt also read Stanley and developed a remarkably similar outlook on colonialism. Although Roosevelt belonged to the American upper-middle class and was not known as a violent man, he was nonetheless a conqueror. He was an enthusiastic proponent of American colonies, including Puerto Rico and the Philippines, and as president he supervised the construction of the Panama Canal. Like Stanley, Roosevelt saw a similarity between the "wild" American West and Africa. After his presidency, Roosevelt spent a year on safari in Africa (see Chapter 9). In a 1909 dispatch from Africa to American newspapers, he commented that "like all savages and most children, [Africans] have their limitations, and in dealing with them firmness is even more necessary than kindness; but the man is a poor creature who does not treat them with kindness also, and I am rather sorry for him if he does not grow to feel for them, and to make them in return feel for him, a real and friendly liking."²⁵ This is, of course, a restatement of the sentiment of "The White Man's Burden." Roosevelt's paternalistic and racist views, encapsulated in the adventure of his safari, were widely read and appreciated in the United States.

For most Americans—whether missionary, scientist, or ordinary citizen—Roosevelt's Dark Continent perspective was unquestioned in the first part of the twentieth century. Indeed, this view has been so widely and firmly held that it still persists in various forms and will likely survive well into the twenty-first century.

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"Our Living Ancestors": Twentieth-Century Evolutionism

Heart of Darkness, by Joseph Conrad, is widely considered to be one of the finest works of prose fiction in the English language. In the story, the character Marlow describes his 1891 trip up the newly explored Congo River in a small, wheezing steamboat. His mission is to find the ivory of Kurtz, a white trader who has "gone native" in the deep interior of the vast Congo rain forest. Conrad's story is gripping because it uses entry into Africa as a metaphor for entry into the dark heart of the human subconscious. As Marlow ascends the river, he experiences ever deeper human depravity until he finally reaches Kurtz, who lives among his own tribe of shouting cannibals with his sensuous African mistress. "Going up that river," says Marlow, "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings." He recalls that "we were wanderers on a prehistoric earth."¹

It is a superbly written story, but many consider it racist. Indeed, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe argues that *Heart of Darkness* cannot be considered great literature, no matter what its aesthetic merits, because it rests on racist premises.² One might hope that in a future era the story will not make sense without an extensive introduction explaining how people in the nineteenth century connected Africa with the primitive. For the present, however, the story is quite comprehensible because we are still not sure that Africa is not the Dark Continent or that Africans are not primitives. We can see similar thinking, for example, in a 1990 *National Geographic* article about a trip up the Congo River. The author specifically compares the Congo today with the river as portrayed by Conrad: "As the days passed, the river appeared just as it had to Conrad a hundred years ago: Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world."³

Knowing little of African languages or African thought, the *National Geographic* author jumps from the fact that in the Lingala language the concepts for *yesterday* and *tomorrow* are expressed by the same word, to the stereotypical conclusion that for Congolese "time seemed to stand still. . . . There is now, and there is all other time in both directions."⁴ Although this makes for intriguing reading, it is bad science, bad linguistics, and bad anthropology. *National Geographic* can do better.

Biological Evolutionism

The key to our thinking about Africa as primitive is our idea of evolution. Primitive *means* less evolved. Therefore, if we are going to untangle ourselves from Dark Continent myths, we need to deal with evolutionary theory. The problem is not the modern scientific understanding of evolution but an old-fashioned view that still has some currency in American popular culture. This view features three articles of faith relevant to this discussion: the ideas that evolution takes place along a single line that leads to progress, that some species and subspecies are more evolved than others, and that species claw their way to the top.

In this older version of evolutionary theory, change occurs along a line that stretches from the simplest living forms to the most complex, from microbes to mammals. As each successive species evolves, a new and higher rung is added to the evolutionary ladder. Humans, who have climbed to the top, are the most advanced of the species. But all humans are not equal. White human males of the upper socioeconomic classes are at the very top of the human segment of the ladder. Others trail in a biological hierarchy constructed according to class, sex, and race.

The mechanism by which evolution worked in this nineteenth-century theory was "survival of the fittest." Those species and subspecies that could dominate others would rise to the top. The *exact* way this would happen was not clear because scientists did not have a firm grasp of genetics until well into the twentieth century. What did appear clear was that species were in competition with each other for survival. The "law of the jungle" was "eat or be eaten."

When Conrad wrote in *Heart of Darkness* that he was going back in time as he went into Africa, he did not just mean that he was going back in historical time. He meant that he was going back in evolutionary time. Africans were literal biological specimens of what whites had once been. Whites had left these living ancestors in the evolutionary dust. In America, as in Europe, this "truth" was held almost universally. President Theodore Roosevelt, writing to Americans from East Africa in 1909, shortly after his retirement, echoed this view: "[In Africa,] nature, both as regards wild man and wild beast, did not and does not differ materially from what it was in Europe in the late Pleistocene."⁵

Evolutionism

In the second half of the nineteenth century, evolution became one of the primary ideologies by which Westerners organized and perpetuated their world. They applied theories of biological evolution to societies and devised a system that became known as Social Darwinism. Since Darwin's version of evolutionary theory was more accurate than the versions used in Social Darwinism, the association of his name with this social theory is somewhat unfair. Many scholars, therefore, now refer to it as Social Evolutionism, or simply *evolutionism*.

Evolutionism is composed of a variety of nineteenth-century theories about how societies advance from the simple to the more complex and how the degree of advancement in one's society is related to the degree of advancement of one's race. In America, a widely used model was developed by Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), an upstate New York lawyer turned anthropologist. He described three categories of peoples: *savage*, *barbarian*, and *civilized*.⁶ Savages were hunters and gatherers, barbarians were agriculturists, and the civilized lived in cities, used writing, and had organized states. For Morgan, progressive human inventions allowed early humans to evolve psychologically, and, as a result, societies advanced toward civilization.

William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) proposed a more overtly racist theory, arguing that all men were not created equal and that competition within and among the races would result in the elimination of the ill-adapted and encourage racial and cultural progress. Sumner, a Yale professor, was widely known in America as an ardent advocate of laissez-faire capitalism, individual liberties, and evolutionism. Culture, he believed, originates in instincts such as the sex drive and hunger. He was against providing any societal help to the lower classes because of their biological inferiority and because it would drain resources from the superior middle class.

Evolutionism eventually filtered into the popular imagination in Europe and America. For example, Gaetano Casati, an Italian explorer, expressed the "survival of the fittest" model quite graphically as he described what he observed in Central Africa in the mid-1880s:

The life of primitive nations is an incessant agitation for the attainment of progressive comfort, which leads to higher civilization. Ignorant of the future and careless of the present, the savage tribes instinctively attack and destroy one another. Sooner or later the weaker are reduced to impotence, the stronger fortifies itself, rules, and assimilates with the conquered, and in the end makes the weaker submit to its caprices.⁷

President Roosevelt described Africans in evolutionist terms that are both unilinear and racist. In the foreword to his collection of dispatches

from East Africa, he noted that "the dark-skinned races that live in the land vary widely. Some are warlike, cattle-owning nomads; some till the soil. . . ; some are fisherfolk; some are ape-like naked savages, who dwell in the woods and prey on creatures not much wilder or lower than themselves."⁸ Roosevelt also included several pages describing the low state of African culture, such as the following: "Most of the tribes were of pure savages; but here and there were intrusive races of higher type; and in Uganda . . . lived a people which had advanced to the upper stages of barbarism."⁹

According to the logic of evolutionism, race and culture were one; superior races produced superior cultures, and, naturally, the white race and white culture were superior. Who would devise such a theory and put themselves anywhere except at the pinnacle? Evolutionist theories also had a self-justifying aspect to them. Other cultures were defined not just in terms of how they *differed* from Western culture but in terms of what they *lacked* that Western culture had. With this kind of logic, other cultures and races were always bound to lose out when compared to the West, because Western culture and race were the only standards that counted. Africans as well as others with very different cultures were inferior by definition.

The Primitive African

The logic of evolutionism assumed that Africans were mentally equivalent to children and therefore could not produce art, religion, language, writing, literature, or political structures that were as advanced as those of the West. Perhaps in the distant future, in hundreds or even thousands of years, Africans would evolve to become capable of higher forms of culture.

Let me illustrate by describing the Western evaluation of the Mangbetu of northeastern Congo, the African culture with which I am best acquainted.¹⁰ In the eighteenth century the Mangbetu consisted of many small and separate clans who spoke closely related dialects. Interspersed among them also lived clan groups of peoples speaking several unrelated languages. Toward the end of the century, one particular Mangbetu clan, the Mabiti, began to dominate the others through force and clever marriage alliances. By the mid-nineteenth century the Mabiti leader had carved out a small kingdom, which he organized into chiefdoms ruled by family members. Over time, the king could not maintain the unity of his lands, and some of the subordinate chiefs broke away to found new kingdoms. In 1873, the original kingdom itself was conquered by non-Mangbetu neighbors, leaving the purely Mangbetu kingdoms arrayed in a ring around the usurpers. The usurpers largely adopted the Mangbetu culture of their subjects.

This centralization of the Mangbetu kingdoms led to a courtly lifestyle for the rulers. Georg Schweinfurth, the first European to visit the region (in 1870), was greatly impressed as he described the capital of the central kingdom in his travel account. The large village included a broad central plaza surrounded by the houses of King Mbuza's favorite wives, a meeting hall that measured 150 feet long and 50 feet high, and a large royal enclosure where the king had storehouses of weapons, food, and regalia. Thousands of people were present for public gatherings. Schweinfurth employed words such as "elegant," "artistic," and "masterpiece" for the wide range of Mangbetu artistic culture that he observed—music, dance, dress, architecture, metallurgy, woodworking, basketry, and pottery.¹¹

Although all of the Europeans who visited the Mangbetu were impressed, they did not consider the Mangbetu their biological or cultural equals. Instead, they fit them into the evolutionist hierarchy, proclaiming the Mangbetu to be more evolved than their neighbors, who had not yet developed kingdoms. The Europeans perceived that the Mangbetu rulers had slightly more European physical features such as lighter skin and longer noses, and deemed this to be the reason for the higher level of Mangbetu culture. But they still considered the Mangbetu less evolved than the lighter-skinned Arabs who came to the region in the 1880s to trade in slaves and ivory.

Schweinfurth qualified his positive evaluation of the Mangbetu so they could fit into the racial hierarchy. He portrayed the Mangbetu as *advanced savages*, noting, for example, that in Africa it was possible to speak of "culture, art, and industry in but a very limited sense."¹² He also depicted Mbuza as "a truly savage monarch" in whose eyes "gleamed the wild light of animal sensuality."¹³ Most importantly, Schweinfurth created the myth that the Mangbetu were the world's greatest cannibals, with Mbuza dining daily at cannibal feasts (see Chapter 7).

It is astounding today to realize that Schweinfurth evaluated the Mangbetu after spending only three weeks in the area and without speaking a local language or even mixing with the Mangbetu more than a few times. He excused his lack of language skills by declaring that the Mangbetu language was rudimentary and that direct observation was a superior way to understand others. Even more astounding, Schweinfurth's 1870 evaluation went unchallenged until after the 1960s. Those who followed him as explorers, conquerors, colonizers, and missionaries largely accepted his perspective. Regarding cannibalism, for example, when others found that the Mangbetu were not as hungry for human flesh as Schweinfurth had reported, they attributed this to the fact that Europeans had outlawed the practice.

The Western evaluation of the Mangbetu and their neighbors is duplicated for African groups everywhere south of the Sahara. The more an

African culture resembled a Western culture, the more evolved its creators were supposed to be. The lighter an African people's skin, the more Europeans found advanced features in their culture. In all cases, however, Africans were still deemed primitives.

Virtually every Western academic discipline worked out classifications that connected African culture to biological inferiority. In religious studies, for example, the use of magic and witchcraft, the worship of multiple gods, and reverence for ancestors were considered not only backward but irrational. Missionaries who labored to convert Africans therefore believed that although many Africans outwardly complied with the forms of Christianity, they would always need missionaries because, like children, they could not understand the religion's deeper meanings and were always in danger of backsliding.

Psychologists, led by such notables as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, believed that Africans and other "primitive" peoples could provide clues to the human subconscious because Africans were thought to operate at a more basic mental level than Westerners. Freud wrote: "We can . . . judge the so-called savage and semi-savage races; their psychic life assumes a peculiar interest for us, for we can recognize in their psychic life a well-preserved, early state of our own development."¹⁴ He adds that "a comparison of the psychology of the primitive races . . . with the psychology of the neurotic . . . will reveal numerous points of correspondence."¹⁵ Other theorists proposed that Africans actually desired a dependent, colonial relationship with superior Europeans.¹⁶ In popular culture, Africans who began to think and act like Europeans were frequently said to "ape" the Europeans because their actions were considered imitative rather than fully intelligent and conscious.

Likewise, African artists were considered only basic and imitative. Westerners came from an artistic tradition of realism, so the abstractness of much of African art was thought to be an indication of African inability to produce realistic depictions of natural forms such as the human body. Because Westerners value overt displays of creativity in art, they did not recognize that in Africa forms tended to endure, while artists played with variations on form. Assuming that Africans did not know how to create, Western observers missed the significance of abstraction, the subtle creativity within similar forms, the importance of individual artists, and the wide variety of African creative arts that were not linked to religion or leadership.

One of the major ways that Westerners evaluated Africans was in terms of science and technology. European culture was strong, of course, in its understanding of the elements of nature and in its ability to combine those elements into practical tools. Whether it was firearms, clocks, trains, boats, medicines, matches, cloth, or axes, Westerners could produce more,

higher quality, and less expensive goods than Africans. We might even say that in the late nineteenth century, Europeans were so far ahead of Africans in the technology of domination (guns, boats, trains, medicines, and so forth) that the gap between the two has never been larger, before or since, thus making conquest easier and cheaper than it would have been at any other moment in history.

This technology impressed Europeans as much as Africans. Indeed, many scholars believe that the whole evolutionist idea of progress became primarily associated in the late nineteenth century with the conquest of nature and the acquisition of wealth. For Westerners, the symbol of progress was machinery, with each new invention symbolizing ever greater progress—the clock, steam engine, locomotive, light bulb, telephone, automobile, airplane, radio, rocket, television, and computer. Africans in the nineteenth century did not have trains or steamboats. They did not even have wheelbarrows or plows.¹⁷

What Africans did have was knowledge of overall human dependence on nature and the technology necessary to survive in many different African environments. Dependence on nature was frequently expressed through elaborate rituals that evoked natural powers, spirits, and ancestors. However, Africans also utilized their extensive and accurate knowledge of nature in hunting, gathering, farming, herding, fishing, house building, pottery making, woodworking, and other technologies. Westerners frequently mistook African ritual for African science and therefore made erroneous comparisons with Western science and technology. Yet, despite its degradation of African knowledge, colonialism always depended heavily in practice on African understanding of both society and nature.

Changing Paradigms

Most of us no longer talk or even think about Africa in the stark evolutionist terms discussed above, because our civilization made significant changes in this regard during the twentieth century. It is important to reflect on how we have changed and how our own views of Africans are still in the process of changing. For simplification, we can divide the ways our views have changed into three broad categories: views of ourselves, views of others, and views of nature.

Changing Views of Ourselves

The Dark Continent portrayals of Africa developed at a time when Westerners envisioned themselves to be potential masters of both society and nature. Indeed, there was much to encourage them. The peoples of Africa

were subdued and organized into colonies that produced raw materials for the West's growing industries, while the Asian colonies continued to increase their output as well. Scientists made regular and important discoveries, and technological advances poured forth in medicine, transportation, communication, weaponry, electricity, and many other fields.

But even while the West was making such progress, Westerners began to discover that colonialism, science, and technology had limits and drawbacks. World War I serves as an example of certain ambiguities in terms of progress. The allies confidently heralded the conflict as the "war to end all wars," yet it became the most destructive war in history to date. White-on-white violence escalated as Europeans killed each other with airplanes, tanks, machine guns, chemical weapons, and other inventions of modern genius.

The rest of the twentieth century produced similar ambiguous "successes." Despite their progress, Westerners continued to experience massive setbacks: a global economic depression, a second world war more destructive than the first, the Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Cold War, the decline of colonialism, and threats to the environment. Achieving global empire proved impossible, and science and technology became problematic. America experienced the difficulties of a pluralistic, urban, consumer-oriented society where racial, ethnic, gender, and class relationships were in constant turmoil. Westerners had to take second and third looks at the optimistic assumptions they had made about themselves at the beginning of the century. They could no longer be sure that they had all the answers.

Changing Views of Others

A second major way in which twentieth-century thinking has changed concerns Western views of other cultures. Two primary influences forced a reinterpretation of non-Western cultures: anthropology and the collapse of colonialism. Anthropologists were the first to take the so-called primitive cultures seriously. From about 1900 onward, a growing number of them assumed that Africans were humans equal to whites, with complex cultures, significant histories, meaningful philosophies, high art, and so forth. This transformation took a century to complete, and in a sense it is still in progress; however by midcentury it was well under way and spreading quickly to other disciplines.

There is no one moment or place where this transformation began, but the work of Franz Boas, an American anthropologist, is illustrative. Boas, a German-born and -educated natural scientist, became interested in the 1880s in the cultures of the Native Americans of western Canada and the U.S. Pacific Northwest. Originally convinced that natural laws governed

human conduct and social evolution, Boas changed his mind after he had lived with and studied Native American peoples. Once Boas began to accept these peoples on their own terms, he found them to be his equals. He concluded that the differences among human societies were solely due to the various ways that societies learn to adapt to their circumstances. In addition, Boas came to understand that all societies had "evolved," but in a multilinear fashion. To Boas, there were no primitive peoples and no primitive cultures. He became a proponent of what is widely known as *cultural relativism*, the idea that each culture should be understood on its own terms rather than in comparison to others.

Boas proposed that, to discover how a particular society came to be the way it was, one had to take into account many different factors including environment, history, cultural practices, nutrition and disease, invention and discovery, and borrowing and trade. The anthropologist therefore had to adopt a holistic perspective on culture, studying practically everything a society did. Boas insisted that professional anthropology had to include *fieldwork*, in which scholars actually lived with the peoples they studied and participated in their daily lives.

In the evolutionist climate of the day, Boas' work was not immediately accepted by scholars or by Americans in general. Over time, however, his influence on anthropology and on the American view of other cultures has become enormous. He taught at Columbia University for forty-three years (until 1942) and trained many of the most famous American anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century, including Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits. Boas is considered the founder of modern anthropology in America. Not surprisingly, the race supremacists of Nazi Germany rescinded his Ph.D. and banned his books in the 1930s.

When anthropologists began to adopt relativist perspectives and undertake serious fieldwork among Africans, they found that they agreed with Boas. The customs that the West had considered primitive were found to be both rational and creative efforts to cope with environment and history. Indeed, after about 1960, anthropologists began to look at European and American societies in the same way they looked at nonmodern societies, and they discovered that the West was no more rational or creative than African societies.

Building on the work of Boas and many others, anthropologists of today are reticent to make generalizations about cultures or to trust systems that purport to explain the evolution of societies. For example, although many anthropologists categorize the world's societies according to different types, virtually none link categories to race or consider one type of society to be superior to another. Many anthropologists have abandoned classification entirely because they see that all labeling does injustice to the enormous variety of societies and situations.

Modern anthropologists are even less likely than Boas to suppose that ultimately they can understand what is going on in societies. They believe passionately that they can *improve* our understanding, but now see cultures as infinitely complex. They are similarly cautious about the idea of progress, believing that we need to understand progress in the same way we understand societies, that is, holistically. An activity that appears to represent cultural progress may, in the long run, cause a disaster because of some unforeseen flaw. If we can identify progress at all, it must include the well-being of global society and the global environment. Many anthropologists are also coming to believe that the idea of cultural relativism and the practice of fieldwork, useful as they have been in changing our racist perceptions of other cultures, can themselves be ways to distance and exploit others. There is more discussion of this topic in Chapter 12.

The discoveries of twentieth-century anthropology spread slowly to other disciplines and then began to filter into American popular consciousness. Scholarship was not, however, the only force pushing us toward new views of other cultures. The West's colonial empires began to crumble after World War II; Europe was simply too exhausted and too preoccupied with rebuilding to hold on. India and Pakistan gained their independence from Britain in 1947, and other European colonies in Asia followed, by consent or by revolution. The Philippines, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico moved away from U.S. colonial control, either by gaining outright independence or by modifying their relationship with the central government in Washington. In the United States, African Americans made headway against racism. And in Africa, Western-educated Africans led the push for independence in the 1940s and 1950s. By the mid-1960s, only a few African territories, including the five white settler colonies of southern Africa, remained under white rule.

The newly independent countries of Asia and Africa were fragile, frequently in need of aid, and vulnerable to pressure both from their former European colonizers and from the two global superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. But global realities were nonetheless changing. In the mid-1970s, a news commentator observed that a recent global summit had been the first occasion when world leaders had all sat at one table, and each had considered everyone else to be fully human. Essentially, the commentator's observation was correct: The independence of Africa had finally forced the West to consider Africans as real people, even if they were poor or powerless.

Changing Views of Nature

The third major twentieth-century change that modified our view of Africa is the transformation in the way we view nature. The old evolutionist

model of unilinearity, human racial diversity, and survival of the fittest has been deeply undermined by the biological sciences. In fact, we now know that many of the evolutionists' ideas about nature were completely backward. Instead of life evolving along only one pathway, it evolves along many. Instead of humans belonging to many races, they belong to only one (see Chapter 11). And instead of survival of the strongest, there are multiple survival strategies including the ability to cooperate and fit in.¹⁸

At first, evolutionists and racists attempted to take the new biological knowledge and turn it to old purposes. They were, for instance, deeply interested in linking discoveries in genetics with human behavior. An example is the idea of eugenics, advocated by the English scientist Francis Galton in the second half of the nineteenth century. Galton suggested that marriage partners ought to be selected so that superior men and women would breed and produce a superior race. The American Eugenics Society, founded in 1926, argued that immigration from the "inferior" nations of southern Europe ought to be limited; that insane, retarded, and epileptic persons ought to be sterilized; and that the upper classes attained their positions because of their superior genes. Indeed, Congress did limit immigration, and many states passed sterilization laws. Eugenics began to lose followers, however, after the atrocities of Nazi Germany, which called for the elimination of Jews, Gypsies, blacks, homosexuals, and others based on such reasoning.

One of the most important biological lessons of the twentieth century is the realization that we *must* cooperate and fit in if we are to survive. The relatively new biological science of ecology is founded on the model of life as a web, not a race or a ladder. The late Lewis Thomas, a physician, scientist, and author of thoughtful essays, reminds us of the dangers of one-path evolutionism and the belief that only our path represents progress:

A century ago there was a consensus that evolution was a record of open warfare among competing species, the fittest were the strongest aggressors, and so forth. Now it begins to look different. The great successes in evolution, the mutants who have made it, have done so by fitting in with and sustaining the rest of life.

Up to now we might be counted among the brilliant successes, but classy and perhaps unstable. We should go warily into the future, looking for ways to be more useful, listening more carefully for signals, watching our step and having an eye out for partners.¹⁹

Lingering Evolutionism

Evolutionism is an attractive theory for many Americans because it puts whites at the top of nature's ladder. A theory like this will certainly die a

slow death in the minds of those who most benefit from its comfort. Indeed, deep pockets of evolutionism remain despite the twentieth-century lessons of history, anthropology, and biology. The most apparent Dark Continent images of the first half of the twentieth century are thankfully behind us, but more subtle versions remain.

One place where we can still identify lingering traces of evolutionism is in contemporary racist thought. It is very difficult, however, to find specific examples of how racism affects our current attitudes toward Africa because, since the mid-1900s, most Americans have learned to hide their race prejudices from public view. Perhaps the clearest cases we find are in off-the-record comments made by national leaders. We know, for example, that President Richard Nixon and many prominent members of his staff routinely used racist slurs when talking in private about African affairs.²⁰ We cannot, unfortunately, accurately estimate the effect of such racism in sustaining Africa's current marginal position in international affairs.

Some segments of our society, however, do not hesitate to express openly their race prejudice toward Africans. As just one example, Stanley Burnham, in *America's Binomial Crisis: Black Intelligence in White Society*, includes a chapter entitled "Primitive Society in Africa."²¹ Repeating practically every Darkest Africa myth in his discussion of precolonial Africa, Burnham concludes that "cognitive deficiency" was the cause of Africa's perceived backwardness. Likewise, his chapter on modern Africa is filled with horror stories; Burnham quotes psychologists of the 1930s and 1950s to document a "real-life personality profile" characterizing Africans as having "a short attention span, an impatience with abstractions, and a relative inability to empathize with others."²² In light of what we know today about culture and psychology, it might seem that Burnham himself fits the profile better than an African. But to see such untruths in print serves as a painful reminder that the harshest of American race evaluations of Africa have not completely ended.

Even if Americans could rid themselves of racism, they could still maintain substantial portions of the evolutionist myth. For example, I frequently hear people state, "Africans are living as we did seventy-five years ago!" or ask, "How far behind us are Africans?" Such statements and questions imply a kind of cultural evolutionism, the idea that African cultures will someday evolve to look like our culture. Cultural evolutionism seems plausible because we know that a hundred years ago we, too, lived in a mostly rural society and that Africans are currently moving into cities and working to build modern societies. Thus many assume that Africans will inevitably pass through certain historical stages—"like we were in the 1920s"; "like we were in the 1950s"—and then eventually "catch up" to us. But history doesn't work this way. There is a more complete discussion of the problems with "catching-up thinking" in Chapter 6.

The idea that there are no backward peoples, no primitives, is difficult to grasp. It is not the same as saying that there are no ideas, individuals, or societies that are dysfunctional. And it does not mean that there are no irrational or incompetent individuals. It merely means that, on the whole, other people are about as rational *and* irrational as we ourselves are. If they are different, it is because they have lived in different circumstances, with different understandings of reality and different problems to solve.

The Paleolithic era is long past, and we find ourselves living together on the planet in the twenty-first century. Those who are most *unlike* us are just as much a part of the present as we are. They should not make a headlong rush to "catch up" to what Lewis Thomas called our "classy and perhaps unstable" Western culture. We have many lessons to teach the world, and we also have much to learn in order to build a society that is able to sustain all of us, as well as the planet itself. Our best partners may be those who are *not* going in exactly the same direction as we are.

Real Africa, Wise Africa

As Dark Continent images lose their relevance in America, there are opportunities for more positive images of Africa to emerge. To give a mundane example, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton used an African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a single child," in the title of a book that urges Americans to work together to nurture their children.¹ Likewise, a store in the town where I live that sold African artifacts called itself "Tribal Gatherings," an effort to emphasize a positive, communal aspect of African life. Such views of Africa are much-needed correctives to our Dark Continent stereotypes.

There are pitfalls, however, even in our positive approaches to Africa, because they tend to ignore modern Africa life. Some people even make conscious efforts to exclude modern and foreign aspects so as to portray a mythical *Real Africa*. And, as Dark Continent images recede, the *Real Africa* is increasingly interpreted as a *Wise Africa*. Ironically, this new Africa seems to be almost the opposite of a dark continent as it symbolizes the attitudes and feelings that we would like to incorporate into our own lives: community, lack of stress, harmony with nature, natural healing, and healthy personality. However, the Dark Continent and *Wise Africa* constructions are not really opposites. Their common source is the presumption that Africans represent *difference*. In the negative Dark Continent, Africans are savages or children, and their differences are emphasized so we can convince ourselves that we have evolved. In the positive *Wise Africa*, Africans are naturally good, and their differences help us to criticize our own society and consider how we can live as we were originally created, as we were "meant to be."

A few examples will reveal how we look for the *Real Africa*, often to portray a *Wise Africa*. These fall into six categories: ethnography, art, tourism, African sexuality, Africans in America, and African Americans.

Ethnography

Anthropologists have produced many ethnographic studies of African cultures that are based on fieldwork in Africa and on the assumption that Africans are the human equals of Westerners. Unfortunately, most of these studies are written for other scholars and are difficult for ordinary Americans to access. Our popular versions of African ethnography tend to be found in magazines like *National Geographic* and in television documentaries. Such popular presentations of Africa are relatively infrequent, but they usually attempt to treat Africa with care, avoiding any blatant Dark Continent depictions.

Popular ethnography is not immune, however, from Wise Africa stereotypes. A 1990 article in *National Geographic*, for example, portrays the cliff-dwelling Dogon of Mali in a favorable light but depicts their culture as a static relic. The author informs us that "the Dogon's ways have changed little over the centuries. They are like the wild grass whose name they share."² His intent may be positive, but he romanticizes the Dogon and makes them seem distant and incomprehensible. Moreover, the author contradicts himself when he informs us that a good proportion of the Dogon have converted to Islam and Christianity, and that most of the Dogon cliffside dwellings have been "abandoned for more prosaic settlements on the flats below." The culture is hardly unchanging.

The same author is "wild with excitement" when some Dogon show him a secret cliff-cave tomb of the Tellem, an extinct people who left the Dogon area in the sixteenth century.³ Why? We can assume that it is because he believes he is discovering the unchanged and untainted Real Africa that he seems to be searching for throughout the article. And he assumes that his readers will be equally interested in this Africa. He is probably right.

Anthropologists themselves can fall into the same trap. One recent example is Katherine Dettwyler's *Dancing Skeletons*, in which the author describes her first medical anthropological fieldwork in Mali. Her task was to investigate the diets of children who lived in some of the poorer suburbs surrounding the capital, Bamako. Several months into her research, Dettwyler was asked if she could undertake a study of infant nutrition in a rural part of Mali. The goal was to help an international development organization prepare teaching materials for rural Malians that would enable them to feed their children better. She jumped at the opportunity both because of the data that she could use for her own research and because of the opportunity to visit rural villages. She explains, "The 'real Africa,' the one I'd read about and studied in countless ethnographies, lay out there, beyond the influence of the capital city, beyond the influence of the West. Here it was, being offered on a platter. I tried to control my emotions and sound casual."⁴

Dettwyler is not alone among anthropologists. Dennis Hickey and Kenneth Wylie, in a study of twentieth-century American writing about Africa, comment:

All too often Africa's siren call proved too much for the field investigator, bent on his or her personal adventure into the unknown. Here, seen in hindsight, is one of the more evident "failures" of anthropological practice, if not of theory. How could any young American, of whatever sex, religion, or race, avoid that inevitable rush of adrenaline when he or she heard the first drum across the river on his or her first night in the "bush"? It was true that Africa possessed "tribal" (i.e., pre-industrial) peoples, many of whom lived in romantically round thatched dwellings, amid circling forests or hills. . . . But of course, even in the 1920s, an urban Africa existed and was rapidly expanding, not to mention an Africa of dynamic social and cultural transformation where, if anything, little of the old was preserved if anything of the new could be acquired. . . . This Africa . . . was rarely considered by anthropologists until the decade of the 1970s.⁵

Dettwyler, in *Dancing Skeletons*, is refreshingly honest about her eagerness to visit "the real Africa," and she talks openly about her ambivalent feelings toward Africa as a sympathetic, urban Westerner. More frequently, anthropologists have described rural Africa as though it had no significant connection to the modern world that has been impinging on it since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. There is a propensity to "factor out" these influences, even in locations where towns are only twenty or thirty miles away, where people go to jobs or schools in town, and where they sell their crops through towns to the world market. The anthropologists themselves are invisible in most of the classic ethnographies. They don't have typewriters, cars, radios, refrigerators, girlfriends or boyfriends or spouses, or, for that matter, opinions. It all looks very scientific and pristine.⁶

Professional anthropologists have now begun to recognize these problems in their work and have searched for ways to overcome them. They are now more likely, for example, to openly include information about themselves, their living arrangements, their personality clashes, and their biases. They also take more care to present a broad view of African culture and to acknowledge that change and foreign influences are also a part of Africa. Furthermore, anthropologists today recognize that African cultures, like our own, contain ambiguities and contradictions. They increasingly attempt to include many different points of view, including those that are critical of the anthropologists' own findings. Although the new ethnographies look less objective and scientific, because they include personal information and leave loose ends, they more accurately reflect both African culture and the ethnographic enterprise because they do not hide their weaknesses behind facades of pseudoscientific scholarly authority.

Art and Artifact

In the twentieth century, African art made a remarkable transformation from symbolizing African savagery to representing African genius. At the beginning of the century, African art appeared in natural history museums not as art but as artifacts, ordinary material objects produced by Africans. By the 1980s, African art occupied its own wing in New York's famed Metropolitan Museum of Art and its own museum in Washington—the National Museum of African Art, a branch of the Smithsonian Institution. Both museums treat African art as they do the art of other civilizations. Across the United States, museums of art and natural history have recently created or hosted major exhibitions of African objects as art.

Museum professionals have been at the forefront of efforts to educate the American public about African cultures. Yet even those with Africanist expertise and sufficient funds struggle to interest the American public in wider African culture. Casual museum-goers enjoy looking at stereotypical masks and statues, and they remember "the fetish with all the nails in it." However, they are less impressed with everyday objects such as baskets and pots, and museums have a difficult task in situating African art in its modern context. After all, we expect museums to preserve and feature difference, not similarity. To a great extent, museums must provide what the public believes is the Real Africa, if they are to attract patrons.

A 1996 exhibition in Philadelphia serves as an illustration. The Franklin Institute (primarily a technology museum with many interactive exhibits) presented a special exhibition on Africa created by Chicago's Field Museum (a large natural history museum). The Franklin Institute also prepared special programs on African innovations in technology, the astronomy of African skies, and African wildlife. All of this was done well, and it certainly intended to depict Africa in a positive light. Yet a look at the museum's "School Field Trip Planner," a guide for teachers, portrays Africa largely as rural and natural. The guide's cover features a zebra, an artistic crocodile, a mask, baskets, men with spears, and a woman adorned with traditional jewelry. Only a faint background map of countries and capitals gives a hint of modern Africa (see Chapter 10). The exhibition celebrated Africa, but this publication emphasized rural and historical stereotypes rather than Africa's modern context.⁷

An interesting way to think about how we view African art in American museums is suggested by Wyatt MacGaffey, an anthropologist whose work has focused on the Bakongo people of Central Africa. He explains, "In order to allow art works their full artness, we believe we should be have toward them in a particular way—should enter, in fact, into a sort of social relationship with them. We speak of encountering art, of being in

its presence, of allowing it to speak to us."⁸ He notes that Bakongo *minkisi*, objects that the Bakongo considered to have magic power, are analogous to objects we call *art*. The Bakongo would not call their *minkisi* "art" and we would not call our art "*minkisi*," but in both there is a mystical power attributed to objects. We have appropriated African objects and turned them into African "art," and now we expect that the Real Africa will speak to us, as art. Indeed, we prefer certain kinds of African art—masks, statues, and power objects such as *minkisi*—because they hold more magic for us than baskets and pots.

Private collectors and dealers have generally done much less than museums to help Americans understand Africa in a contemporary context. The reason is that the supposedly primitive qualities of African art have acquired status among collectors. The prestige enjoyed from owning a well-made "traditional" statue or mask can be likened to that gained from owning a Western painting or statue by a well-known artist. Just *any* African art won't suffice. It must be old and in decent condition, and it must have been used, preferably in an important ritual. For most collectors, masks, statues, and objects in the form of people or animals are better than objects that are only decorated with geometric designs. In other words, the best art for a collector tends to feed on and reinforce stereotypes about Africa.

Art collectors and dealers have so highly commercialized African art that damage has been done to Africa. Dealers and their agents scour the continent looking for the most desirable pieces. Many African countries have laws that prohibit or restrict the export of such national treasures, but certain types of art have acquired so much value in the United States (and in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere) that sellers and customs officials can rarely resist the money they are offered. Thieves, smugglers, and forgers also find the high prices an encouragement to enter the market.⁹ Consider an experience I had recently while leaving Nairobi, Kenya. Waiting for my plane, I struck up a conversation with an American who turned out to be a collector of African art. He confided that he was joyful because he had just bought a precious mask. African traders had smuggled the mask out of a distant West African country where laws prohibit the export of authentic art pieces. The American had landed in Kenya that afternoon on a through flight from Madagascar to New York. He had taken a taxi to his dealer in town and picked up the mask, and was now flying out to Frankfurt. Because he was a transit passenger, he was not likely to be searched, and even if he was, the Kenyan customs agents would not know the mask's value since it was from another part of the continent. The man was ecstatic. Sadly, he was also a professor of African art who was profiting from his knowledge and presumably his love of Africa.

Many of those who smuggle great works of art out of Africa argue that the pieces are better off in America than in Africa. In Africa, they will be destroyed by use or by environmental conditions or be sold anyway by corrupt officials. Besides, say collectors, more people will enjoy them in America. Whatever the merits of these arguments, theft is theft. Museums in Africa need help in finding the resources to keep and preserve African art in Africa. With prices as high as tens of thousands of dollars, often neither African nor American museums can afford to purchase even legitimately acquired pieces.

African arts are also available to Americans in the form of crafts and inexpensive copies of original pieces. With increasing frequency I see African baskets, textiles, jewelry, masks, statues, designs, and other forms of art as clothing and as decorations in homes and public places. This is beneficial because it trains the American eye to consider African forms as beautiful and approachable. Such Americanization of Africa has its problems, too, however. If we merely adorn our lives with Africa's objects and designs, we are missing opportunities to build relationships that will sustain both Africa and ourselves. At the very least, when we buy a basket we could learn where it came from and how it is used. We might also explore how it came to us. Who actually made it? Does the maker ever use such an object, or was it created to please Westerners who think this is how an African object ought to look? How much was the maker paid? How do such objects come to our stores? In this way our image of Africa can be connected to contemporary Africans.¹⁰

Touring Africa

There is an episode in the first *Star Trek* series in which Captain Kirk and a few members of the *Enterprise* crew find themselves on a planet created as an ultimate vacation spot by an exceedingly clever culture. On this planet it is possible to live out one's deepest fantasies in complete safety because everything is an illusion. For example, one can fight heroic battles and die, but then be made whole again in a special hospital. Captain Kirk and his companions do not understand what is happening; some of the crew members are killed, and the survivors are terrified. When an alien arrives and explains the circumstances, however, Kirk decides to stay a few more days and have a romantic fling with a woman from his past. He also decides to beam down the whole *Enterprise* crew "for the best shore leave they have ever experienced."¹¹

Such a planet would be a tour operator's dream: a safe opportunity for tourists to create their own desired reality. Lacking such a destination, however, the tourist industry works to create safe, satisfying illusions here on Earth. In general, most tourists desire physical comfort and an en-

vironment that is different from home but still pleasant. Physical comfort is easy to quantify: good hotels, clean food and water, safe roads, air-conditioned buses, and an absence of thievery and violence. Pleasant difference is more difficult to achieve. Tourists' expectations of both familiarity and difference must be met. The Las Vegas casino industry and Disney World have found successful formulas for combining the comfort of familiarity with the illusion of difference. Western Europe is also successful as a tourist destination because it offers Americans similar cultures that are still mildly different from home. Of course, most tourists in Europe do not see it as it really is. Rather, they see a tourist-oriented Europe that is set up to cater to their illusions of what the Real Europe is like: museums, restaurants, cathedrals, monuments, shopping arcades, boat rides, and bus tours.

Africa can provide some of what tourists seem to want. Egypt, for example, affords Western-style amenities plus spectacular antiquities, although it is having some trouble providing safety due to political unrest. East and southern Africa deliver well-managed animal safaris. West Africa offers a number of heritage tours that are increasingly popular with African Americans. Most capital cities in Africa support a museum, a crafts market, and souvenir shops. Some provide urban re-creations of traditional life and tours to rural villages. For example, in Nairobi, the Bomas of Kenya is a theme park with an amphitheater for cultural programs, a cluster of houses in architectural styles from different parts of Kenya, and a crafts market. If tourists in Kenya want to visit rural Africa, they can purchase a bus tour of a Maasai homestead, complete with dancing and singing. South Africa is even better organized for tourists. Perhaps it offers less wilderness in its game parks than other countries, but it is a good choice for those who want to do more than watch animals. Many features of daily life in South Africa resemble life in the United States, and, therefore, the country provides numerous opportunities for experiences that feel comfortable to Americans, such as Western-style restaurants, museums, zoos, mall-type shopping, and easy car rental and driving. In addition, South Africa has its own local tourism trade that supports experiences such as Shakaland, a Zulu culture resort and theme park.¹²

Tourist Africa isn't the real Africa, just like tourist Europe isn't the real Europe. It is carefully managed, commercialized, and exoticized. The dancing and drumming of cultural performances are pitched to tourists' illusions of what they would like Africa to be, with seams covered up and a bit of quaint wilderness added. The villages visited by tour buses put on a show and collect their pay. This Africa is satisfying to most tourists, but one quickly reaches the geographical limits of the tourist cocoon. Whereas in western Europe an American can spend weeks traveling

alone, in Africa, a wandering American will soon encounter real differences and many raw edges. Beyond a few tourist havens, Africa is frequently neither comfortable nor pleasantly different to the inexperienced traveler. If you want to go beyond the safe confinement of the well-managed tour, find a friend or a special tour guide.

A few tour operators offer more variety in African experiences. When the political situation permits, for example, one can pay to ride in an open truck and camp along the Trans-African Highway. This "highway" is mostly a dirt road that transits the Sahara Desert from Tunisia to Niger and then winds through Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo, Uganda, and Kenya. I have seen trans-Africa tourists arriving bedraggled in northeastern Congo and would recommend this adventure only for the young and hardy. Besides, how much of Africa can you see while riding all day in a truck and setting up camp every evening? You will see more if you tour Africa on a bicycle or with a backpack.¹³ For an interesting account of Americans backpacking through Africa, read Pam Ascanio's *White Men Don't Have Juju*. Ascanio and her husband sold their belongings and experienced Africa by public transport and without prior African travel experience. She relates her adventures with a healthy amount of skepticism and a clear love of humanity.¹⁴

College and university study tours are further ways to see a more ordinary Africa. Two of my favorite people, a professor I had in college (now retired) and his wife, have conducted study tours to Africa for at least twenty-five years. Participants stay in ordinary hotels and even homes, eat in ordinary restaurants, walk on the streets, shop in street markets, ride in local buses and trains, listen to Africans tell about their lives, visit villages, and engage in a host of other quite common activities. The resulting tour is much more interesting and much less expensive than the commercial tours, and the extra effort is manageable even for senior citizens. More importantly, these "intentional tourists" do not just consume Africa and leave. When they return home, they are in a much better position to understand Africa than tourists who have paid thousands of dollars more.¹⁵

Even on study tours, however, one can mistake Africa. Study-tour guides report, for example, that participants often have an urge to find the Real Africa in rural areas. They like to imagine that they are explorers who are discovering Africans who have never seen whites before. They frequently see rural Africans in idyllic terms, as rustics who have captured the basic meanings of life and are unencumbered by the modern world. Study-tour participants also tend to despise more conventional tourists, saying "we're not like them"; nonetheless, they enjoy the tourist experiences at major attractions, souvenir shops, and game parks, which they frequently regard as the Real Africa, unspoiled by humans. By con-

trast, some study-tour participants only focus on negative aspects of everyday Africa and reconfirm the Darkest Africa myths. Interestingly, college and university professors who are on their first trips to Africa can also be reluctant learners. Social scientists, especially political scientists and economists, frequently have such preconceived notions about how the world operates that they spend their time looking for evidence of those theories rather than experiencing Africa as it comes to them. Scholars in literature, art, and music tend to be better listeners and observers.¹⁶

An incident related by a friend who led a study tour to Zimbabwe can illustrate the tourist search for the Real Africa. The American university students on the tour first spent a few days in the capital, Harare, where they studied culture, politics, and language while living with urban families. Then they spent a couple of nights in a village living with rural families. The village had brick houses with concrete floors and corrugated iron roofs. Village kids went to school, listened to the radio, followed Zimbabwean soccer and politics, and knew about international and American music. One of the university students was assigned to the house of the village chief where, on the first night, there was a funerary celebration of some sort. The next morning the wide-eyed student told the group that he had finally seen "the real Africa." Of course, what he meant was that he had isolated something that corresponded to his stereotypes and had identified it as the Real Africa.

Selling Sex

In the West, Dark Continent myths portray Africans as lascivious. This is not the place to explore African sexual attitudes, but we can note that there are many factors that are responsible for African attitudes and that attitudes differ considerably from one place to another. In this complex context, it is curious to see African sexuality reduced to lust, however positively it is portrayed. In an episode of the TV sitcom *Home Improvement*, a joke about Africa refers to sexuality. Tim's neighbor Wilson is robbed and becomes very upset because his African "mucus cup" (what-ever that is) has been taken. The police officer asks what it's worth and Wilson says, "Not much in Detroit, but in Africa it'll get you six goats and a virgin."¹⁷ This feeble joke objectifies African women and makes fun of African men.

In a health food catalog, an advertisement for *yohimbe*, an aphrodisiac sometimes used in West Africa, notes that "anthropologists tell us Yohimbe has been used for thousands of years. Yohimbe is derived from the reddish bark of a West African tropical tree. In its native land, it is enjoyed as a ceremonial herb in the mating rituals of African tribes."¹⁸ This is rubbish, even if positive, entertaining rubbish.

The 1998 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition includes an article on the Maasai of Kenya that shows swimsuit-clad white women in semierotic poses with blanket-clad Maasai herders. The photographer prefaces his photographs with a paragraph that explains: "The idea was to capture the raw, unspoiled beauty of this place and this people." He wants the Real Africa. Who is he kidding? His white guide arranged with the Maasai "chief" to pay \$1,000 for a day of photography: "We won't bother anyone, and besides, it'll be fun! [The Maasai headman] had obviously had plenty of experience with what Westerners consider 'fun.'" So much for unspoiled. (Kenyan middle-class society is in fact very modest about sexuality, and the country has strict laws against pornography.) The photos themselves show the Maasai men with passive faces, while the women display a variety of typically sexy poses.¹⁹

The juxtaposition of Western models and rural African men is oddly consistent in this article. *Sports Illustrated* might argue that the goal is to show both groups of subjects in a positive light, as "unspoiled beauty." But in each instance there is an artificial construction of an illusory object meant to be taken as real. Neither the Western women nor the African men are portrayed as whole, complex people. To add insult, the swimsuit article is preceded by a page of "facts" about Kenya, such as: "Youngsters run through the rain with butterfly nets to catch flying ants, which they bake in a mud oven and eat"; "A tattoo on the right shoulder of a Turkana warrior means he's killed a man; on the left, a woman"; and, "In the Luo tribe, the ritual circumcision has been replaced by the practice of extracting four to six teeth from the lower jaw."²⁰ These bits of information represent pure exoticism because fragments of culture are extracted from their context and allowed to stand for the whole. *Sports Illustrated* paints Africans as primitives and ignores almost completely the modern context in which they live. The excessively cute comments that accompany these "facts" (e.g., "They wash [the flying ants] down with a nice merlot") demonstrate that Africa is being made fun of.²¹

Africans in the States

Quite a few Africans have come to the United States as immigrants, permanent residents, and visitors. They arrive as athletes, professionals, students, refugees, and in many other capacities, and their stories are always interesting and frequently courageous. Some accounts are available in print; for example, the story of a young Nigerian woman's childhood and arrival in America,²² or the experience of an East African man.²³ Western-educated Africans can help us understand our own perceptions of Africans. Many of them sense that Dark Continent images of Africa are still very much alive in the United States. Here, for example, are excerpts

from an interview with an African economics professor who teaches in the United States (and happens to like Americans):

Q: How do you think that Americans perceive Africa?

A: The Dark Continent.

Q: Do people really say that?

A: Oh yes. They ask me if I live in trees.

Q: Do they really say things like that, or do they mean it as a joke?

A: No, they really ask. They don't know. They ask, "Do you live with animals?" "Do you eat snakes?" Things like that. I've had colleagues say to me, "Oh, you must not be typical." One person asked, "Is one of your parents white? The stuff you're telling me is not my idea of Africans."

Q: Did you grow up with white kids at all?

A: No. Once in a while we'd see an expatriate, a British or American person, coming to our little town. We would go out of our way to welcome them. But we would just say Hi to them and then leave.

They think of Africa as a big safari. They say, "Oh, I want to go and watch animals." One person told me his fantasy is to put on his walkman and listen to Diva while watching elephants passing by. That would be like me saying I want to put on a walkman and sit in Times Square and watch all those Chinese riding their bikes.²⁴

Another African I interviewed said that Americans often ask her whether she lived around elephants when in Africa. She also related that recently she went to a slide show given by an American who had just returned from a mission station in Congo (Kinshasa), her home country. The show was filled with stereotypical photographs of poor people, "like *National Geographic* photographs." She became so upset that she was unable to talk to people after the show.²⁵

In contrast, Americans can also pay great respect to Africans in the United States. For example, Malidoma Somé has become something of a celebrity in several American subcultures including the men's movement. Somé, a Burkinabe (a person from Burkina Faso) with doctorates in both political science and literature, became involved in the American men's movement when he was a student and perceived the movement's potential relevance to a wider audience. In his book *Of Water and the Spirit*, he describes how he was taken from his home as a very young child and raised by dictatorial French Jesuit priests. Fleeing back home at age twenty, Somé could no longer understand his Dagara traditions or even his language. The elders struggled to reunite him with his people and culture through a dangerous initiation ritual. Eventually, Somé became a Da-

gara shaman and he now teaches Dagara wisdom to Western audiences. One of his messages is that all males can learn from African initiation ceremonies how to mark the passage from boyhood to manhood, overcoming the crises of adolescence and becoming comfortable with adulthood.²⁶ I find Somé an exceptionally interesting writer. Yet the book is still

problematic as a window on Africa, because it is written specifically in response to American (and African?) longing for a place where life is wise, prime, basic, and good. It might be an antidote for overdoses of Dark Continent myths and Western civilization, but it also falsifies and obscures contemporary Africa. An advertisement for an audiotaped lecture produced by Somé announces that "Somé addresses the desire to recover our 'inner indigenusness'—being at home in our bodies, the natural world, and our communities. He describes the right use of ritual, importance of expressing grief, and working in same-gender groups."²⁷

Another African who has become a popular cultural interpreter to Americans is Mpeti Ole Surum, a Kenyan. When studying in the United States, Surum discovered how ignorant most Americans are about Africa, so he started to visit schools and churches to offer stories about his Maasai homeland, as well as songs and dances in which audiences were invited to participate. Soon he had developed such a thriving business that he engaged three booking agencies.²⁸ The major Kenyan newspaper, the *Daily Nation*, reported the story and also published a critique by Mutahi Mureithi. Mureithi noted that Surum was quoted in American newspapers as having said that the Maasai lived "as they have for 2000 years" and that they "still leave the earth the way they found it."²⁹ The African critic complained that Surum's positive ecological message was confounded by a perpetuation of the myth that Africans live and have always lived static lives. Moreover, one might add, the ecological point could also be challenged.

Mureithi quotes Surum as telling Americans the following story about his father: Surum once gave a portable radio to his father, a cattle herder. The old man enjoyed the "small people" inside who were talking, but when he tired of listening and did not know how to turn it off, he smashed the radio with a stick. Evidently, the story was widely believed and enjoyed in America. Mureithi was shocked, however, and concluded that "your guess is as good as mine what the audience were left thinking about the intellect of the African."³⁰ The critic asked whether, if respect from foreigners is so hard to come by, Africans ought to tell Americans such falsehoods. Kenyans, even very old Kenyans, have lived with some form of modern technology for decades and are not stupid.

Surum made a videotape, *Wandering Warrior*, describing his life because he could not keep up with the American demand for personal appearances. An advertisement for the videotape gives further insight into

what he and his publicist see as being important to potential viewers: "Even the most complacent high school students sit up and take notice when Tom bellows tribal incantations across the stage while dressed in full hunting regalia." The choice of words—*tribal, incantations, regalia*—emphasizes the exotic aspects of the experience, while his adopted American name, "Tom," makes the exotic acceptably positive and familiar.³¹

As a final example of ways that Americans perceive Africans in the United States, I'll relate a story told by author George Packer about an African friend, Simon Tamekloe, who had been one of his Peace Corps trainers in Benin. An extraordinarily able teacher, Tamekloe had experienced numerous problems getting a good job or a graduate education. In frustration, he quit teaching in Benin, took a job at a beachfront hotel, and began running part-time cultural tours for English-speaking foreigners. Knowing the European and American tourists' taste for the exotic, he billed himself as a "voodoo tours specialist." Competition was tough, but he enthralled his clients and finally got a break when a wealthy African-American woman from Houston invited him to the United States to give talks. In Houston, his hosts treated him as a celebrity, arranging lectures at colleges and civic organizations and writing glowing reviews in local newspapers. Tamekloe played his role as an authority on the Real Africa in convincing style, wearing traditional Benin robes and giving lectures on traditional Benin customs. But when he returned to Africa, he went back to his Western-style clothing, to the same limited opportunities, and to a series of letters from Americans who made promises of help that they never kept. Tamekloe's comment? "I'm like a puppet dangling on a line, manhandled and manipulated this way and that for the pleasure of onlookers."³² Perhaps Tamekloe's experience represents the way that African culture is often treated in America.

An African-American Example

During the Dark Continent era, most African Americans more or less accepted the dominant European-American belief in African backwardness.³³ The reasons are multiple. Because the general cultural climate in America promoted evolutionism, it would have been exceedingly difficult to see Africa in any other terms. Most African Americans were Christians and believed that most Africans, as non-Christians, needed salvation. Moreover, because whites gathered and interpreted nearly all the information about Africa, African Americans had little opportunity to imagine or discover a nonprimitive Africa.³⁴

Even an unknown and backward Africa, however, could symbolize "home" for African Americans. From the beginning, Africa represented freedom and played an important role in black American discourse about slavery,

racism, and oppression in white America.³⁵ A prominent example of Africa's place in African-American consciousness occurred in the 1920s when black Americans demonstrated widespread enthusiasm for the Back-to-Africa movement led by Marcus Garvey. Although Garvey's movement never sent emigrants to Africa, during its brief period of success it enrolled hundreds of thousands (some say millions) of African Americans in the cause of liberating Africa for the black race. Historian John Hope Franklin calls this "the first mass movement" among black Americans and notes that it indicated their doubts about ever achieving equality in America.³⁶

Ethiopia also played an important role in African-American consciousness. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both whites and blacks frequently employed the word *Ethiopia* as a synonym for Africa, following the biblical and classical traditions. In the early twentieth century, the country of Ethiopia (or Abyssinia) was the only part of Africa that remained independent of Western colonialism, a result of the crushing African defeat of an Italian army in 1896. Moreover, Ethiopians were mostly Coptic Christians, not so-called pagans. Thus, the country could symbolize African-American aspirations for their own, as well as African, freedom.³⁷ Historian William Scott notes that, although American blacks knew little about Ethiopia itself, Ethiopianism was a "gospel of world-wide African redemption" that had been preached in black communities throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America.³⁸ In the 1920s, Marcus Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement tapped into widespread Ethiopianism, and when fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, American blacks strongly protested.³⁹

In the anti-Italian campaign, African Americans projected themselves for the first time into global politics. They campaigned for American support for Ethiopia and offered material aid and soldiers for the Ethiopian army. Yet this interest in the actual Ethiopia—rather than an idealized Ethiopia—caused many problems related to race. For example, Ethiopians, whose skin is relatively light-colored, did not consider themselves to be black, and they often treated American blacks as racial inferiors. Moreover, some American blacks opposed aid to Ethiopia because Ethiopians were not black enough. Many white Americans also had difficulties with the situation because they disliked fascist Italy but didn't want American blacks helping Ethiopians. They also used the Ethiopian claim of whiteness against African Americans.⁴⁰

Until the mid-twentieth century, the few American voices that proclaimed the value of African achievements were usually African-American. Even before the American Revolution, various black intellectuals described precolonial African history in positive terms. In the nineteenth century, such well-known figures as William Wells Brown, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Delany spoke of a civilized Africa. In the first half of the twentieth century, Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois became

the preeminent American spokespersons for African accomplishments. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life in 1915 and the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916, and his 1922 college text, *The Negro in Our History*, included a chapter on African history.⁴¹ Du Bois championed African-American consciousness of African greatness, and he promoted Pan-Africanism, a movement that linked black leaders in North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. At the same time, he opposed Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement because he felt that the African-American "home" was America, not Africa. A focus on Africa, he said, would divert blacks from the struggle for equality in America.⁴²

As Africans and African Americans gained power in the second half of the twentieth century, an increasing number of Americans, both white and black, came to understand that Africa has always contributed to global history. African-American scholars played important roles in making accurate information available. In 1947, for example, John Hope Franklin published a widely read history of African Americans that opened with a solid discussion of African civilizations. After African independence and the civil rights era of the 1960s, Dark Continent myths largely vanished among black Americans.

Yet for black Americans, Africa continues to be "useful to think with," because American society is still race conscious and evolutionist. Now the temptation is to create countervailing Wise Africa myths.⁴³ In the extreme, some African Americans believe in a mythical, superior Africa whose only problems are contamination and degradation by the West. In some versions of what is labeled Afrocentrism, for example, the Real Africa whose always culturally wise and frequently culturally superior. Not long ago, I attended a workshop on Africa in which Afrocentrist graduate students verbally attacked the Africans who were presenters. The crux of the assault was that, because the Africans had Western educations; because they were Christians, Muslims, or secularists; and because they did not espouse Afrocentrist views, they were not really Africans. The American Afrocentrists claimed to be the real Africans.⁴⁴

Such a Wise Africa is a mirror image of the Dark Continent, but it is still an American image. It is still American because it is about American racism and because it frequently accepts American definitions of progress. Wise Africa is constructed to compete with the equally mythical Wise West, which defines progress primarily in terms of great states, great wealth, great discoveries and inventions, complex technologies, universal religions, and other Western benchmarks.

The Noble African

Westerners have constructed positive images of Africans and other non-Westerners for a very long time. As far back as classical Greece and Rome,

Western authors idealized various peoples on the fringes of the known world. And from the era of European expansion onward, Amerindians, Polynesians, and other non-Westerners sometimes appeared in Western literature in the form of wise characters who critiqued Western civilization. One example comes from the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, in the eighteenth century, employed a version of the "noble savage" to assert that democracy was the best form of government. The idea of the noble savage, which developed in the late seventeenth century, maintained that so-called primitives lived as God intended all humans to live. Rousseau believed that originally people were neither sinful (as in the Bible) nor in need of kings (as in Thomas Hobbes's defense of monarchy), but were noble, healthy, happy, good, and free. Democracy said Rousseau, would reestablish the original condition of humankind.

After about 1800, the widely held Dark Continent myths made it difficult to sustain positive images of the primitive African. Increasingly, Africans were seen as savages who needed to be controlled and, if possible, trained to do useful work. Yet both colonial missionaries and secularists preferred to employ Africans who were "uncorrupted" by the West. Government officials frequently found that Western-educated "troussered blacks" and "mission blacks" caused problems because they could challenge the West on its own terms. And missionaries preferred Africans who were "innocent," meaning those who would accept Christianity in a biblically appropriate "childlike manner."⁴⁵ When Africans read the Christian scriptures, they sometimes concluded that it was the missionaries themselves who were not following the Bible. Thus, for many colonists, the Real Africa was an illusionary place where Africans were good children.

I can illustrate the last stages of the colonial Wise Africa with a Broadway show that opened in 1947. *Angel in the Wings* included a song entitled "Civilization," which has a line that might be familiar to some readers: "Bongo, bongo, bongo, I don't want to leave the Congo." The character who sings the song is a stereotypical African "native" who describes the problems of civilization. Missionaries, he says, try to convince Africans that life is good in civilized societies, but he has heard that people have to work, pay for things, and endure tremendous noise and violence. There is even an atom bomb. So, "Bongo, bongo, bongo, I don't want to leave the Congo.... I'm so happy in the jungle I refuse to go."⁴⁶ In this song, Africa is a land of innocent primitives who don't work, but Africa can also offer wisdom to civilization.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Westerners attributed more dimensions to Africans, so that we now view Africans as more complex and more like us than ever before. Nonetheless, our positive stereotypes, like our negative ones, still focus on difference. African people who are

labeled by experience with the West do not serve well as authentic symbols of difference, because they are too much like ourselves. Thus, in our positive myths, we are generally less interested in Africans who are modern and urban (or even Christian and Muslim), and more interested in Africans whom we can portray as truly different, truly authentic—those who reinforce whatever we believe to be more traditional, more rural, more noble, or more ancient about Africa. As we have seen above, some ethnographers, art collectors, tourists, European Americans, African Americans, and even Africans themselves adhere to this focus on difference. Indeed, we all do it, to some extent.

Such Wise Africa myths are understandable because they are "useful to think with." They help us overcome our Dark Continent images. They allow us to reflect on what our civilization does to us. They serve as critiques of ongoing racism and, for some, as focal points for efforts to build self-respect and community. But although such myths are understandable in the American context, they are problematic for Africa itself. They put "the real Africa" in an idyllic past or an isolated village. The real Africa is neither savage nor idyllic, and it is not isolated from urban Africa or from ourselves.

tured generic "natives" included no cannibals and invariably made fun of us, not of others. Today's cannibal jokes contain fewer specific references to Africa and more self-critical references.

The following poem by Roger Lell uses cannibalism in a humorous and self-critical way:

Missionary Cannibal

COME, he said
HEAR THE TRUTH I SPEAK.
CANNIBALISM IS FREEDOM FOR ALL.
CANNIBALISM IS LIFE FOR SOME.
KILL YOUR ENEMIES & EAT THEM.
THEN THEY WILL NO LONGER BOTHER YOU.
THERE IS NO GREATER PLEASURE IN
LIFE THAN TO EAT THE ONES YOU HATE.
EAT BEFORE YOU ARE EATEN.

*They listened & they came in droves,
thousands of them, to hear
the words of the great Cannibal Missionary
from Africa.*

COME, he told them, FOLLOW ME.

*So they left their homes, their families,
& their possessions & followed him
to the Great Cannibal Feast.*

*They were the best meal his people had
eaten in years.¹⁵*

Here Lell turns the "missionary and native" themes of earlier cannibal jokes upside down. For him, cannibalism is a metaphor for whatever negative influences Christian missionaries had on African culture. The missionaries "ate" the Africans' cultures.

As with other accusations of savagery directed toward Africa in the past, accusations of cannibalism have diminished in recent years because of increasing awareness and protest. Indeed, as in the Lell poem, the joke is more and more on us. But the use of cannibalism as a veiled symbol for African otherness still appears on Internet sites and in television cartoons, computer games, novels, and movies. It will likely remain so, if we continue to mistake Africa for something it is not.

8

Africans Live in Tribes, Don't They?

When African students come to the college where I teach, one of the first questions they are asked is, "What tribe do you belong to?" The African students usually respond happily until they discover that the American idea of *tribe* is much different from theirs. Then they become amused or angry at American ignorance and stereotyping. For us, to be part of a tribe sounds exotic and somewhat savage. The label *tribal* can imply an unthinking, primal attachment to kin. As we will see below, however, Africans understand tribe in a different way. Modern Africans have attachments to their kin, but they also have professional, religious, regional, national, and other loyalties. Moreover, modern African "tribes" are just that, modern. They bear only superficial resemblance to the organizations that existed fifty years ago or to those that Europeans found a century ago when they conquered the continent.

Most scholars of Africa have, in fact, abandoned the term *tribe* because it is too confusing and inaccurate. They fear that if they were to use the word in the African sense, they would be understood in the American sense. Indeed, many scholars see the almost knee-jerk American association of Africa with *tribe* as our most salient stereotype about Africa. The myth of Africa as tribal confuses us because it relies on outmoded concepts that were formed during a more racist and imperialist era. If Americans are to understand Africa today, they need to abandon their old ideas about tribes.

For this reason, it would be helpful to investigate what *tribe* means and why it came to be associated in the American mind with Africa. We can also examine other words that scholars now prefer.¹

A Textbook Definition

The word *tribe* is used today by some anthropologists, so first we ought to be clear about what it refers to in a technical sense. A popular anthropology textbook designed for college students defines *tribe* as one of four major types of social organization: band, tribe, chiefdom, and state. A tribe, says the author, is "a group of nominally independent communities occupying a specific region, which speak a common language, share a common culture, and are integrated by some unifying factor."² Tribes consist of one or more subgroups with integrating factors that are not centralized around a single individual, as they are in a chiefdom. Frequently, kinship (vertical unity) as well as associations and age-grades (horizontal unity) are the organizational factors of such groups. Some tribes are integrated by a "Big Man" who holds the group together loosely by the force of his personality and whose position is constantly contested and not hereditary.

By this somewhat technical definition, Africa is not full of tribes; historically, about half of African societies would be excluded because they were organized in bands, chiefdoms, or states. And many of the remaining societies do not fit the definition of *tribe* for other reasons. For example, the Amba of Uganda and the Doroobo of Kenya are sometimes called tribes, but the Amba have two languages, while the Doroobo live among the Nandi and Maasai and do not have their own territory. Moreover, strictly speaking, tribes cannot exist at all in modern Africa because all African peoples live in modern states, which hold ultimate sovereignty over their populations.

Classifying types of societies is an extraordinarily difficult task that requires scholars to understand how each society operates and then to select a few characteristics that are equally representative of several societies so as to make up a category. But reality is vastly more complex than classification schemes, so *any* scheme will be partly inaccurate. In a sense, we *impose* our classifications on reality, and some categories fit better than others. In Africa, *tribe* barely fits at all.

A Word with a History

The word *tribe* has a very long history. It comes from a Latin root, *tribus* (pl. *tribi*), used to describe a unit of the Roman state. Originally, Roman tribes were based on territory—at first there were four urban and sixteen rural tribes—and each territory/tribe was considered to have its own culture. The tribes performed administrative functions such as taxation, conscription, and census taking. By 241 B.C. there were thirty-five rural tribes, and more were added as the Romans conquered new territories. Later, people could also formally *enroll* in a tribe, indicating that they had lost

their primarily territorial and cultural bases. Increasingly, different tribes lived among each other. The lower classes and freed slaves tended to join urban tribes.

The Latin derivative *tribe* entered the English language through Old French in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was often used to translate Hebrew and Greek words that signified the organizational units of ancient Israel and Greece, as in "the tribes of Israel." It appeared in translations of the Bible and occasionally in Shakespeare. *Tribe* was a useful word, because it could summarize the very different political organizations of Israel, Greece, Rome, and other ancient societies.³ Similar developments occurred in other European languages.

The word was also useful for describing many of the peoples whom the British encountered as they began to establish their global empire after about 1600. Thus, distinct groups of Native Americans, Africans, South Asians, and others were referred to as "tribes." At this time, however, the word still had a neutral meaning and was interchangeable with the words *nation* and *people*. The terms all meant a generalized group of people who shared a culture, and they were applied to Europeans as well as non-Europeans.

These words began to diverge in meaning in the late eighteenth century. Europeans, who increasingly thought of themselves as more advanced than other peoples, needed words to distinguish themselves from others. The word *people* retained its general usage, but *nations* came to be thought of as larger groupings with more complex social structures and technologies. The word *tribe* was reserved for groups that were smaller and, supposedly, simpler and less evolved. Our modern ideas about primitives and the Dark Continent emerged in the same era. By the mid-nineteenth century, the word *tribe* had assumed a negative meaning that implied political organizations that were primordial, backward, irrational, and static. A person didn't join a tribe; one was born into it. People in civilized societies could actively select from among different, creative courses of action, but tribal people followed tribal customs without thinking. It was indeed fortunate for tribes that they had such customs to guide their actions, because members were so limited intellectually. Of course, "tribalism" was expected of such people. In other words, to be tribal was to be genetically incapable of more advanced thought or political organization.

In the twentieth century, the meaning of the word *tribe*, as it applied to Africa, developed in two directions. The first, favored by white politicians and colonial administrators, was a variation of the nineteenth-century definition of tribes as having closed boundaries and unchanging customs. This was administratively useful because it allowed colonialists to make sense of and create order out of the bewildering variety of African politi-

cal organizations. Administrators needed a way to get a handle on Africa, and if they could do so organizationally rather than by force, the task would be easier. Therefore, administrators rearranged African reality to fit the tribal model.

Writing of colonial rule in British Tanganyika (today's Tanzania), historian John Iliffe notes that in the 1920s administrators believed that all African social organization was ordered by the kinship principle. To them, "Africa's history was a vast family tree of tribes. Small tribes were offshoots of big ones and might therefore be reunited."⁴ And all tribes needed to have chiefs, theoretically because chiefs were more advanced than village councils, and practically because white administrators could rule Africans more easily when they could work through a clear chain of command. When the British were done, Tanganyika had been fully tribalized. British administrators in the 1920s did not consider themselves to be doing violence to African political organizations. Rather, they intended to help Africa by putting it *back in order*.

Because the reordering was based on history that didn't exist, however, history had to be extensively reinvented to fit it. For this task, the British had the cooperation of many Africans. Indeed, Africans—like all peoples—had long been adept at reinventing their histories in order to suit current political needs. Since the major integrating principle was kinship, groups that were combined or split creatively manipulated their genealogies to make sense of the new arrangements. In the same manner, Africans who sought power as chiefs could be quite sure of finding historical "proof" for their claims. Likewise, because colonial rule disrupted African cultures, many Africans were looking for new identities for themselves and found them in invented historical roots.⁵ We now speak of the invention of tribes in Africa. There have been many studies in the past several decades that have described how tribal self-consciousness developed during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

As an administrative tool, the ideology of *tribe* caused a great deal of difficulty for both Europeans and Africans. This was because it had two contradictory purposes, to change and to remain the same. Administrators wanted docile Africans who would produce cash crops, and they expected to get this by transforming Africans into orderly "tribesmen." But *tribe* implied a childlike people, something that Africans were not. Whenever Africans resisted, the British could apply the ideology of African childishness to justify the use of force: Those who didn't cooperate needed firm parental discipline. Yet the need to use force revealed the fundamental contradictions in the idea of colonialism as a progressive institution.⁶

The second direction in the development of the word *tribe* was favored by anthropologists. In the 1920s, anthropologists began to live with Africans and to take their day-to-day lives more seriously. Their experi-

ences revealed that the nineteenth-century definition of *tribe* was deeply flawed. They found that tribal peoples were neither unthinking nor less evolved than Westerners. And they learned that tribes were constantly changing and adapting, just as were their own societies. Anthropologists have sometimes been called servants of colonialism, because they provided the information and categories necessary to organize African peoples. Although this negative label has some validity, it is also true that anthropologists were among the first to recognize that African complexity was creative rather than irrational and chaotic.

The End of the Tribe

In the 1960s, studies on African tribes took on a new urgency as most African countries became independent and colonial definitions became clearly irrelevant.⁷ Anthropologists focused on the flexibility of various African tribal organizations, which linked or separated small groups as needed. The evidence was already there, in administrative reports and ethnographic studies, and only needed reinterpretation to support the new model. Colonial administrators had used African flexibility in this area to form and re-form administrative units. And the field anthropologists of the colonial era had recognized that Africans frequently used invented traditions to reconstitute their political organizations.

Morton Fried argued in the same decade that *tribes* did not evolve by themselves out of simpler forms, as had been thought. Most tribes, he said, form in reaction to *external* pressures, not internal ones. The only way tribes become as cohesive as those described by our traditional definition is when groups of people are forced to unite for self-defense. And, Fried asserted, major external pressures are applied by larger political units. He concluded that colonialism *caused* tribes to form.⁸

Also, beginning in the 1960s, some scholars began to argue for the abandonment of the word *tribe* in reference to urban Africa, where Africans live more modern lives. The major contender to replace *tribe* was *ethnic group*. Surprisingly, the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* are not very old, having been initiated by North American sociologists after World War II. The terms were invented to describe the kind of cultural consciousness that a group might develop in a modern city. Urban *ethnicity* was seen as more fluid and diffuse than the group consciousness of people in rural areas. The word *tribe* was then reserved mainly for rural peoples.⁹ By 1970, *ethnic group* had been solidly accepted by many Africanists. In that year, two Northwestern University professors published an extensive proposed syllabus for university-level African studies courses that made the distinction between *ethnic group* for towns and *tribe* for rural areas.¹⁰

This distinction did not last. *Tribe* was so widely recognized as imprecise and tainted with primitivism that it largely ceased to be employed by Africanists. By the late 1970s, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, art historians, ethnomusicologists, political scientists, and other scholars had switched to the term *ethnic group*.

This new usage was also supported by many African intellectuals. Usually educated in Europe or America, these Africans knew of the popular Western association of *tribe* with savage, and they also knew about the complexity of the situation in Africa. Moreover, they wanted to help defeat so-called tribalism in Africa. For such Africans, the concept of the clearly definable tribe—developed as a tool of colonial domination—was a primary obstacle in postcolonial domestic and international politics. What Africa needed was to break down the rigid “tribes” that were not, in fact, African. A new image of Africa in Europe and America that downplayed tribes would help, because foreigners would see Africa more accurately and because they would not continue to dominate Africa by playing one so-called tribe against another.¹¹

Contemporary African Uses of *Tribe*

For Americans, one of the confusing aspects of modern Africa is that ordinary Africans continue to use the word *tribe*. This would seem to suggest that Africans themselves recognize that they live in tribes. To some extent they do, because contemporary political and social systems are derivatives of earlier systems. We should be careful, however, not to assume that Africa's idea of *tribe* is the same as ours. Most Africans do not equate *tribe* with the savage or the primitive. Their use of the word seems more like the meaning of our phrase *ethnic group*. Moreover, Africans are aware that they have *various* identities and loyalties including kinship, language, region, religion, country, town, continent, school, profession, and class. *Tribe* takes its place among these other factors to form complex and changing patterns.

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, one of the first things an American usually asks an African is what tribe he or she is from. This is because we assume that one of the most important subjects to Africans is their tribe and that this topic will help us connect. The question can reveal our ignorance, and it can be insulting. Most Africans in fact do not think of themselves as part of a tribe so much as part of a lineage. The tribe is large and diffuse, whereas the lineage is small, cohesive, and immediate. In addition, because most Africans have layers of identity, asking about their tribe may be puzzling to them. Why would you want to know immediately about tribe and not, say, about family, region, religion, or profession?

The question can also be insulting because many Western-educated Africans know that the word *tribe* is frequently American code for primitive. Moreover, in the African political context, the bold question “What is your tribe?” can create tension. It would be like asking a new acquaintance in the United States, “What is your socioeconomic class?” instead of “What do you do for a living?” Likewise, if we saw someone whose race was not clearly evident, we would not immediately ask, “What is your race?” At least for public purposes, we strive to act out our belief that “all persons are created equal” because we know it is essential for public order.

Of course some Africans, like some Americans, broadcast their ethnic identity. It is still possible to find Africans who are *creating* tribes for many of the same reasons they were created during the colonial period. This brings up a thorny problem. To see Africans demand to be identified first by their tribe tends to confirm the American cultural suspicion that, in Africa, we are facing a primal force that is uncivilized, undemocratic, and unmodern. We react similarly to anyone who demands to be identified first by their race, or sex, or class. But, once again, there is more to consider.

Mainstream Western white culture has long used the concept of the primitive, in reference to tribe, race, sex, disability, abnormality, and so forth, as a way to maintain power over others. Those who strike back by wearing their difference as a weapon seem threatening. On college and university campuses in the United States, for example, white students sometimes complain about African Americans or Hispanics who have their own organizations or who sit together at lunch. Yet if whites have similar, whites-only organizations, they are labeled racist. It may be regrettable that we live in a society that fosters such self-segregation, but the fact is that this behavior is thoroughly modern and not a throwback to so-called tribal times. In the United States, being self-consciously ethnic has provided many minorities with psychic and even physical protection against the frequently hostile larger society.

Some modern Africans have also felt it useful to be self-consciously ethnic. The writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, for instance, had long identified himself as a Nigerian and had participated in the wider Nigerian culture. But in the 1990s, he felt it necessary to publicly declare himself Ogoni in order to defend his Ogoni people against exploitation by the Nigerian government and Shell Oil. He protested the loss without compensation of Ogoni oil and the pollution of Ogoni land. The government responded that it was acting on behalf of all Nigerians, who should share the oil. It branded Saro-Wiwa a tribalist, a traitor, and an instigator of violence, and, to the horror of the world, he was executed in 1995. It is clear now that the oppressive military government in Abuja framed Saro-Wiwa so they could be rid of him.

A question we might ask in the context of Soro-Wiwa's execution is whether his version of tribalism bears any resemblance to what Americans currently conceive of as African tribalism. The answer is, very little. The Western definitions of *tribe* recall precolonial African political structures and do that badly. But our inaccuracies in describing the past are mild compared to our inability to describe the present. Today's worst "tribal" conflicts have taken radically new, modern forms. Soro-Wiwa acted in a modern arena defined by cities; by state bureaucracies and armies; by newspapers, books, radio, and television; by automobiles, airplanes, telephones, video cameras, fax machines, and computers; by foreign corporations and foreign governments; and by Western-educated Nigerians.

Africa's contemporary *tribes* and *tribal conflicts* are simply not captured by the American understanding of these words.

Other Tribes

You may note that we continue to use the word *tribe* for Native Americans and that there is little protest. There is a difference, however, because our concept of a Native American tribe is not the same as our concept of an African tribe. In the nineteenth century, Native Americans were considered just as primitive as Africans, and they were herded into reservations or killed. But in modern times, Native Americans have become more mainstream in American culture, or they have become almost "sacred" to many Americans as shamans, ecologists, artisans, and artists.

Interestingly, under different circumstances most Native Americans would probably not use the word *tribe*. United States history has made the term politically useful, however, so Native Americans have embraced it publicly. A U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1946 obligates the federal government to compensate those Native Americans who could claim exclusive occupation and use of their land since time immemorial. Such compensation is legally due only to bureaucratically defined "tribes." "Under these circumstances," says Morton Fried, Native Americans "have vested interests in the concept of tribe and are obliged to provide the deepest history for it."¹² Providing such deep history is easier if people consider themselves tribal today. Thus, the terms *tribe*, *tribal council*, and *tribal elder* are common in public discourse even though other terms might be more accurate or preferred.¹³

Tribes is also used to designate minority groups in Latin America and across Asia. In some cases it is applied technically, as a description of a type of social organization, and is not meant to connote primitiveness. This is how anthropologists might apply it. But, more frequently, *tribe* is employed by a majority to imply that a minority is primitive. In the latter case, the term seems similar to our application of it in Africa.

The continued use of the word *tribe* around the world, varied as its meanings are, may help us explain why we find the word acceptable for Africa. Because most so-called tribes do not complain, why should we change? We have to remember, however, that the people who are labeled as tribes usually cannot complain, because they lack the tools and opportunities to make their voices heard.

African Tribes in America

In the 1970s, American use of the word *tribe* in reference to Africa dropped dramatically. Apparently, the media were listening to Africanist scholars and Africans themselves. Yet the word still appears here and there in such prestigious publications as the *New York Times*. Likewise, when television news comments on events such as those in Rwanda, Liberia, or South Africa, the word is often considered an appropriate tool of both description and analysis.¹⁴ It also tends to appear in other places where the public is the intended audience and the author is not a scholar of Africa, such as labels for museum exhibits, documentaries, movies, and music recordings. Judging from freshman students at college, I would guess that it is in frequent use in high school social studies classes.

The persistence of the word *tribe* has at least two roots. One is our lack of awareness that the word does not fit African reality. Many Americans are well meaning but ignorant. And even if they are not well meaning, Americans have shown themselves willing to drop derogatory terms for the sake of "political correctness." We no longer find it acceptable to use certain racial, ethnic, or gender labels in public even though prejudice is still very much a part of our society. If we knew that so-called tribal peoples around the world objected to being referred to as such, many of us would change our words in order not to be publicly offensive.

But there is a second, deeper reason for our failure to change: Americans still equate *tribe* with *savage* and believe that modern African problems can be explained by African primitiveness. In this sense, the word we use is irrelevant. If, for example, we substitute *ethnic group* for *tribe* but continue to apply it in the same way, there is no gain. In fact, some reporters who have abandoned the word *tribe* out of political correctness continue to analyze African situations from a nineteenth-century point of view.

For example, early press reports on the 1994–1995 civil war in Rwanda frequently called it a tribal war or, if the journalist was more aware, an ethnic conflict. Much was made of the fact that Tutsi and Hutu slaughtered each other in brutal ways that were incomprehensible to civilized Westerners. The conflict was portrayed as having origins in ancient tribal animosities. In reality, the war was vastly more complex. This is not the

place to fully analyze the situation in Rwanda, but such "tribal analysis" grossly distorts Rwandan facts. Reporters should have situated it within the contexts of European colonialism, the Cold War, neoinperialism, class structure, personal power struggles, global markets for raw materials, arms merchants, and a number of other factors. Most importantly, (1) Belgian colonialism created Rwandan "tribal" problems and dependence on foreigners, (2) the manner of the Belgian exit provoked a 1960s civil war and massacre, (3) Cold War support for military dictators deepened these problems, (4) poverty due to dependence on the global coffee market pushed local farmers to the economic edge, (5) competition between the United States and France led France to secretly arm and encourage Hutu extremists in the 1990s, and (6) international pressure to hold multiparty elections terrified urban Hutu politicians, who were likely to lose their grip on the privileges of power.

Ethnic consciousness played a large role, but not "age-old" ethnicity. This ethnicity was created and maintained in modern times. And it was not the kind of ethnicity that Americans think of when they use the terms *tribal war* or *ethnic war*. Not only do Hutus and Tutsis share the same language and culture but their relationships are mediated by modern institutions such as states with armies, identity cards, state-run newspapers and radio, cash-crop markets, and, for the Hutus, a secret hate-radio station. Moreover, there has been considerable regional and urban-rural tension among the Hutus.

To mistake the Rwandan civil war for a stereotypical "tribal" war is very dangerous because it causes us to misperceive what really happened. The United Nations, and the United States and other governments, now admit that they did not act quickly or decisively enough to stop the slide toward genocide. Last-minute efforts were too little and too late. But considering that Western governments did not really understand the problems in Rwanda to begin with, this is not surprising.

Perhaps a major reason that "tribalism" colors our first analysis of an African political problem is that we do not adequately prepare our news reporters. Reporters who do not know much about Africa, let alone individual nations like Rwanda, are likely to fall back on stereotypes and other simple ways to convey complex events. Surely they are not unsympathetic to Rwandans as people. They are just unprepared and in a hurry, and so is their audience. In Rwanda, it was as though the news teams had just arrived on the scene of an accident and were trying to make quick sense of what had happened.

In a deeper sense, however, we quickly resorted to portraying the Rwandan conflict as primordial because such a response provides support for our American view of the world. Specifically, by portraying African conflicts as age-old conflicts, we Westerners do not have to take responsibility

for our share of the causes of modern African history. Moreover, if the causes of a conflict are so basic as to be tribal, meaning savage, then we can imagine that solutions will be almost impossible to find. Thus we can congratulate ourselves for relief efforts for victims, but not feel responsible for addressing even the African causes, let alone the Western ones. Some problems are just too deep to resolve, we can rationalize. "Tribal analysis" walls off Rwanda from modern history, making it appear as if Rwanda does not participate in the same world in which all the rest of us participate.

During the Rwandan crisis I was asked by a congressman to brief him on what was going on. I prepared to give a ten-minute presentation on background causes and alternative analyses of current events. My presentation was basic because he obviously knew little about the situation in Rwanda. When I arrived, I found that he did not really want to know what was going on. His only concern was whether the brewing "tribal" trouble between the Hutus and Tutsis in neighboring Burundi might in some way spill over into his world and necessitate involving U.S. troops.

I can sympathize with Anthony Appiah, a Ghanaian scholar living in the United States, who suggests that the way we use the word *tribe* facilitates exploitation of Africans. He writes that "race in Europe and tribe in Africa are central to the way in which the objective interests of the worst-promoting tribalism and the myths of the tribe in Africa. This effort may be conscious or unconscious, but by keeping ourselves thinking that tribe matters, Africans will be easier to ignore or exploit.

Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, has applied the same logic to Western considerations of African governments. He criticizes scholars who say that Africa's ethnic divisions require dictators in order to keep the peace. The supposed African tribal mind becomes an excuse for the West not to hold African leaders to international standards.

Alternatives to Tribe

Soyinka recognizes that our word *tribe* is a problem for Africa, but rather than criticize us, he throws the word back at us. He has started calling white and black Americans the white tribe and the black tribe. Soyinka knows that we will immediately recognize that identifying Americans as living in tribes, at least the kind we think of, is threatening to our social order. It oversimplifies, promotes division, and hinders our ability to solve our many kinds of problems. Africans respond in the same way to our use of the term for them.

Soyinka's counterattack will not make the word disappear, however. It is too ingrained in our consciousness and too widely used around the

world. What we can hope for is that Americans become aware of various meanings of the word. Yet we should not use the word in reference to Africa because African reality, both past and present, is not accurately described by *any* meaning of the word. *Tribe* distorts African reality and therefore makes it impossible to understand the continent.

As mentioned above, the principal contender to replace *tribe* is *ethnic group*. But if we elect to substitute *ethnic group*, will this new term serve us well? Its primary benefits are that it is less negative than *tribe*, that it is applied to groups all over the world (making Africans seem more like people elsewhere), and that the concept was invented to describe people's group consciousness in modern societies.

The main drawback to *ethnic group* is that the term is just as ambiguous as *tribe*. How can a single phrase apply both to a European American's mild sense of attachment to the "old country" and to the intense feelings of hatred that have arisen between warring factions in the former Yugoslavia? The only real connection among the many different uses of *ethnicity* is that the term describes a feeling of closeness to one's own group that arises in the face of contacts with other groups. It does not, however, describe the intensity of the feeling or even its precise nature. And it does not adequately describe the nature of the group itself. Moreover, if we use *ethnic group* in Africa in the same ways that we used *tribe*, we have not accomplished much. *Ethnic group* may just hide the fact that we still think that African groups, whatever their name, are composed of primitives.

Are there other options? A genuinely useful word would help us distinguish different kinds of situations and different kinds of groups. It would help us understand the negotiations and conflicts between groups and also the negotiations and conflicts between individuals and their groups. Unfortunately, there is no such word yet. It is for this reason that we must be especially careful. To pick one word and let it stand for many different situations is to mistake Africa.

A variety of words are now being used by those who are aware of the problems with *tribe*. *Ethnic group* is just one. Other possibilities include *people* (the Zulu are an African *people* who live in southern Africa); *group* (the Ogoni are a *group* in Nigeria); or simply the name of the group (the *Tiv* of Nigeria live near the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers).

With any of these alternatives, you still must be careful. *People* and *group* are emotionally neutral words with sufficiently vague definitions that they can serve in most contexts, but they are not precise enough for careful analysis. If you identify a person by the name of a specific group, that person might be offended that you picked out this characteristic as important rather than some other. A *Tiv* might prefer to be called a Nigerian first, or an author, or a mother, or by the name of a clan. Moreover, by

using *Tiv* you might be implying that the *Tiv* are all uniform, with one set of customs, one attitude, and so forth. The *Tiv*, like other African peoples, are quite diverse.

Sometimes you might not want as inclusive a word as you first might think. For example, consider using some of these words and phrases: community, society, village, farmer, herdsman, rural people, rural dweller, urbanite, citizen, local people, kin group, clan, lineage, and family. These words have more specific meanings. And when discussing pre-colonial Africa, words like band, chiefdom, kingdom, empire, state, mini-state, city-state, and others might convey a more exact meaning.

You might be tempted to use the word *nation*, because in the United States and Canada, *First Nations* is employed by some to dignify Native American groups. In the modern African context this would not be a good idea, however. Throughout the world, most people think that nations ought to have their own sovereign countries and that countries ought to be composed of only one nation. By this logic, if you identified the *Tiv* as a nation, you would be implying that the *Tiv* should form their own country with their own state government. If you were *Tiv* and held such beliefs, you would be considered treasonous by the Nigerian government, which is trying to foster a feeling of Nigerian nationality.

The basic problem is that we need labels, but almost all labels are inaccurate and easily contested. There really is no satisfactory way to solve the labeling problem. We can, however, make a reasonable attempt to be fair to Africa if we remind ourselves of two principles. First, beware of analyses that emphasize only one or two factors. Tribalism is much too general a category with which to explain modern Africa. As we learn more about specific situations in Africa, we will see that many factors are likely to be relevant. Second, strive for precision. Learn the meanings of words and try to use them appropriately. There are many terms that are more accurate than *tribe*, even if they are not themselves entirely satisfactory.

One final note: You might be curious about how Africans you meet orient themselves to the world they live in. Do they consider themselves part of a tribe? Should you ever ask? That would depend on the context. You probably should not go directly to the T-word. You can ask about country, region of the country, and hometown first. Since most Africans you meet in America will be city or town dwellers, you might ask what part of their country their family comes from originally. This is a relatively neutral question, and they can answer by revealing as much as they want about themselves. Such answers can help you discover a great deal about ways that people conceive of themselves. If you feel you must ask about tribe, you might get a small lecture on why ethnicity should not be important, why *some* people think it is important but *they* do not, or why

Americans ought to stop thinking of Africans as primitives. On the other hand, most Africans will take your question kindly. For them, ethnic diversity is a fact of life and tribe does not have the same adverse connotation as it does for us. Many people will be thankful that you have simply taken the time to show interest.

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Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams

One of the major ways we connect with Africa is through its wild animals. Most Americans easily associate Africa with images of lions and elephants and words such as *safari* and *simba*. In fact, brief reflection will reveal a surprisingly large number of ways that Americans "interact" with African animals. We are sometimes hunters and photo-tourists in Africa, of course, but here at home we are also visitors to zoos and animal parks; viewers of nature programs on television; purchasers of products that use elephants, lions, and other African animals as "salesbeasts"; and patrons of movies like *The Lion King*. Even *Sesame Street*, a television show that is comparable to mother's milk for American children, has a segment featuring an outline map of Africa that morphs into a lion, a hippo, and an ostrich while a voice repeats, "Africa, Africa, Africa."¹ Images and experiences of African animals deeply shape our understanding of the continent.

My purpose in this chapter is to investigate the ways we interact with African animals. I am particularly interested in exploring whether there are common meanings to our interactions or whether each kind of experience—safari, zoo, movies, and so forth—stands on its own. This problem was first posed to me by a student who told me that he was a hunter and was interested in going to southern Africa to kill big game. In hunter culture, southern Africa is one of the most attractive destinations because of the availability of large animals such as lions, elephants, and Cape buffalo. My student—I'll call him Richard—had dreams of hunting Cape buffalo somewhere in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, or Namibia.

I was interested in knowing how Richard would describe what hunting in Africa meant to him. His major point was that facing down a Cape buffalo would be the most "real" experience he could ever have. This animal, particularly known for its vengeful ferocity, will literally stomp you to a

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Race and Culture: The Same and the Other

Until only a few decades ago, the idea prevailed in Europe and America that some humans were more biologically evolved than others. The resulting racism, Dark Continent stereotypes, and evolutionism have been major themes of this book. Today, most Americans believe or want to believe that others are biologically the same as we are, yet few can explain the origins or significance of obvious differences among people and cultures. How is it that people can be so different and still be the same? We frequently see others doing such strange things that it is difficult for us to imagine that we all have the same basic biology.

Since this book deals with American attitudes toward a continent about which questions of race and culture have been prominent, it is important to discuss the underlying nature of our differences. What follows is not a detailed study but some ideas about directions we can pursue.

Race

When it comes to facts about the nature of race, much remains unclear. Scientists don't know for sure when or how races developed, and they are not entirely sure why. Nor can they prove that race plays no role in who we are. But science is like that. Whereas racism begins with belief, science begins with questions and doubt. Our best scientific knowledge with regard to the origins of modern races presumes that they developed over the past 100,000 years, as modern humans developed. Strong evidence suggests that *Homo sapiens* emerged first in Africa and then spread across the world, gradually differentiating into today's "races." This "Out of Africa" hypothesis, as it is called, is also known as the "Eve" hypothesis because the first genetic evidence supporting it came from the mitochondrial DNA of females.¹ We are unsure whether our early African ancestors

replaced existing populations in Europe and Asia or whether they mixed with them, but new genetic evidence from China suggests that the different Asian physical types developed only in the past 60,000 years and out of a common center. This is consistent with the idea that all races came relatively recently from Africa.² But our original African ancestors were not the "blacks" we associate with sub-Saharan Africa today. Four thousand years ago, the so-called black people occupied only portions of West Africa, and the rest of the continent was inhabited by others. The present geographical distribution of blacks throughout sub-Saharan Africa has been very recent. Blacks are an offshoot of our early ancestors, just as whites and other peoples are. Limited evidence suggests that our early common ancestors were dark skinned but not black.

Why did we eventually differentiate into "races"? Evolutionary theory proposes that differentiation occurs for adaptive reasons, but it also notes that many genetic traits are adaptive neutral, meaning that they are neither particularly adaptive nor maladaptive. Whether adaptive-neutral traits persist or change is not important for the survival of a species, at least in the short run. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether a trait such as skin color is adaptive and, if it is, what its function is. Our best guess is that skin color is an adaptive trait, a result of biological reaction to the sun. Darker skin seems to protect us against skin cancer at the sun-drenched equator whereas lighter skin allows us to synthesize sufficient vitamin D closer to the sun-poor poles and thus protect ourselves from rickets, a potentially fatal bone disease. The fact that Eskimos, Inuits, and others living in the far north are darker than Scandinavians does not contradict this theory, because the former migrated from southern parts of Asia in relatively recent times and have presumably sustained themselves in the reduced sunlight by eating a fish diet rich in vitamin D.

In any case, skin color is not much of an indication of what we are. First of all, when we say that we "see" a particular skin color, we don't usually see what is in nature, but rather what our culture says is there. "Black" skin, for example, ranges from blue-black to all shades of brown to almost white, and so-called blacks display a wide variety of physical types. "White" skin ranges from white to pink, orange, and olive, and, likewise, "whites" include a whole range of body types. Moreover, someone who is considered black in the United States might be considered white in another culture. In fact, our whole system of race classification—Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid, Pygmoid, and so forth—is a cultural artifact of the era in which Europeans were attempting to substantiate their own racial superiority.³ Our limited categories literally blind us to the infinite differences within races and to the similarities across races.

If we actually make maps of different genetic factors, they rarely correspond to the races as we know them. Instead, our genetic traits, most of

which are invisible, cross racial lines and are scattered among seemingly homogeneous populations. In short, the maps are quite jumbled.⁴ Moreover, because of recent advances in molecular genetics, we have learned that the average genetic differences among individuals of different "races" are actually smaller than the average differences among individuals within the same race or even ethnic group. Here is one summary of our genetic similarities and differences:

On average there's .2 percent difference in genetic material between any two randomly chosen people on Earth. Of that diversity, 85 percent will be found within any local group of people—say, between you and your neighbor. More than half (9 percent) of the remaining 15 percent will be represented by differences between ethnic and linguistic groups within a given race (for example, between Italians and French). Only 6 percent represents differences between races (for example, between Europeans and Asians). And remember—that's 6 percent of .2 percent. In other words, race accounts for only a minuscule .012 percent difference in our genetic material.⁵

To put it another way, the concept of race simply doesn't provide very much that is scientifically useful to us as we live our daily lives. Race helps a little in understanding why some individuals have certain physical features or are susceptible to certain diseases. But differences in most human traits can be more easily explained by one's family genetics and environment than by race. Thus race as we know it is "skin deep," a cultural myth and not a biological reality. Indeed, we are all Africans under our skin.

Given our obsession with race, it is ironic that genes account more for our sameness than for our difference. And our sameness is vast. One person who has spent his life thinking about human sameness, human behaviorist Desmond Morris, asks what similar traits the human animal displays worldwide. In his now-classic book *The Naked Ape*, Morris includes chapters on sex, child rearing, exploration, fighting, feeding, and comfort that provide ample evidence of the many fundamental traits shared by all humans.⁶ His documentary television series *The Human Animal* covers similar topics and enjoys frequent reruns.⁷ Morris's research demonstrates that our common human traits, including our attachment to groups (whether based on our race, our clan, or our friends), must certainly be a result of common biology.

Those who have attempted to test whether different races have different mental abilities have always failed to obtain meaningful results. What is required is a test that takes into account a person's physical and cultural environment, and such a test has yet to be devised. The problem is that humans are not only biological animals in the sense that Desmond Morris has described but they are also individually affected by environ-

ment (for example, nutrition and disease); history (for example, wars, slavery, and colonialism); and culture (for example, child-rearing practices and preferred kinds of logic). In addition, there are the idiosyncrasies of one's individual family and community to take into account. For these reasons, it would be virtually impossible to devise an intelligence test that would measure fairly across races. To do so would require an analysis that would take account of different environments, histories, cultures, and families. The task would be infinitely complex.

We have come to make two modern assumptions about human reality. First, because we know that there is more genetic difference among individuals of the same race than among individuals of different races, we assume that race is more a cultural than a biological construct. In other words, race does not really exist as a biological category. Second, because there is no way to test for mental differences, we assume that all humans operate with the same basic capacities. As far as I know, today's science can provide no absolute proof that these two assumptions are correct. Remember, however, that scientific inquiry begins with doubt, questioning its hypotheses. In the social sphere, it seems far safer to rely on the assumption of sameness, because this offers a way out of our dangerous racial perspectives, than to sink into the contentiousness of racial difference.

This is why those who study other cultures have generally concluded that there is no such thing as a primitive human being or even a primitive human culture. We assume that minds of similar capacity are working in all societies to solve the problems of life, and that the answers these minds arrive at will be similarly effective. On the other hand—and this is the hard part—we must not fall into the trap of believing that once we all recognize our biological sameness we will easily get along. It's a small world, but it is nonetheless a world marked by significant differences among cultures and peoples. We must take into account the influences of environment, history, and, most importantly, culture.

Culture

Other animals operate on instincts more than we do; our capacity for thinking and learning—that is, our ability to supplement and overcome our instincts through culture—is much greater than theirs. We rightly take pride in our ability to learn practically anything. Indeed, our cultural capacity is so great and so adaptive that, even though we are outclassed in terms of speed, agility, and strength by many of our competitors, we have colonized the entire globe and are reaching for the universe.

Our great capacity for culture depends on a number of our physical abilities including speech, bipedalism, and finely coordinated hands. Our

cultural capacity is also shaped by our instincts, which encourage us, for example, to share with each other and live in groups. Some version of the golden rule is perhaps necessary in any human culture, but if we were not also programmed to cooperate, society as we know it would not be possible.

When it comes to culture, our crowning glory—literally—is our brains. Our capacity for culture is only possible because of two mental traits: thought and memory. Thinking is usually regarded as the more important of the two, because it helps us determine what works in a specific situation and gives us our prized imagination and sense of freedom. Chris Stringer and Robin McKie write that the key to the evolution of modern humans was our development of new ways of thinking. They note that “to a Neanderthal, a cave bear was a cave bear. To a modern human, it was not only a threat, or possibly a source of food, it was a god, an ancestor, and who knows what else.”⁸ The modern humans who emerged 40,000 to 60,000 years ago marked the beginning of a more “fluid and generalized” ability to think.⁹ With our more developed brains, we could use ideas in one intellectual domain to think about ideas in another. We could eventually turn our hunting-and-gathering instincts toward job searching or grocery shopping. And we could turn our ability to keep track of what was going on among our neighbors toward storytelling, novel writing, and history writing. We could learn to use art, music, and religion to comment on who we are and how we want to live.

The other trait that is particularly significant in the development of human culture is memory, which deserves more attention if we are to understand the problems of race and culture. Each of us has complained that we cannot remember well, but in fact our whole world is largely created by memory. Let me give two simple examples. In Kenya, light switches move up for off and down for on, which is the opposite of switches in the United States. In Kenya, when I go to turn on a light I must stop and think. And thinking seems inappropriate and unnatural when it comes to a task that I do automatically all the time: I get momentarily confused and then annoyed. Another example is that cars in Kenya travel on the left. When I am a passenger in Kenya, I am sitting on the side of the car where I would be driving in the United States, but I have no steering wheel or brake pedal. Roads are narrow, cars pass frequently, and they come straight toward me. I am terrified. If I were to drive in Kenya, my body would take months to adjust to the point where I could trust my reflexes in the same way I do when driving in the United States.

These minor examples illustrate how dependent we are on memory. What would happen if we had no memory? What if we had to think about every small task we face such as how to brush our teeth, put on our clothes, get our breakfast, or cross a street? We would become exhausted

from thinking or, more likely, we wouldn't even be able to think because we wouldn't remember what a toothbrush, or a shoe, or a street was. And what would happen if those around us were similarly incapacitated and forgetfully drove on the "wrong" side of the road?

It is not just in our daily actions that memory constructs our world. Humans learn their religion and develop their ideas through memory. We couldn't deal with the natural world without our memory. The societies we grow up in construct whole fields of memories that tell us what the world is and what it means. Although you might think that a tree is a tree, the ways trees are used and what trees mean differ from one *memory system* to the next, that is from one *culture* to the next. Our agriculture, our industry, our science all rely on our cultural memory systems. Even such fundamentals as our logical and emotional behavior are deeply shaped by memory, so that different cultures prefer different behaviors. And when we encounter something new, we tend to reach into our memories to find an analogy or metaphor that will allow us to categorize the new experience.

When it comes to action, the kind of memory we call *habit* is particularly important. Thankfully, most of our daily activities—turning on lights, crossing streets, brushing teeth—are governed by habit, so we can use our thinking ability to work on new ideas. And happily, people around us have similar habits, so we can predict ahead of time, more or less, what they are going to do. Habit is, in a sense, a cultural equivalent of instinct that allows humans to get along with each other, to build different worlds, and to adapt to many different kinds of environments. The capacity for habit helps us feel comfortable in our world. Indeed, we talk about our habits as "second nature," thoughts and actions we have learned so well that they feel instinctive.

But what happens when we meet a person or a whole society with different memories and habits? When humans are faced with the work of trying to deal with such difference, they try to make sense of it on several levels. Our conscious minds may think, "These people are OK. They are different only because they have learned different ways to look at the world. They have a different culture." But on an unconscious level our minds notice that we are not comfortable, that our habits are unable to keep us safe, and that every signal given by others has to be consciously evaluated. We feel threatened because even our smallest acts don't have the same results they do when we are with "our own kind."

This threat is not just a threat to our ideas, however. It is actually felt as a threat to our physical body because we have *become* our habits. In other words, our culture has come to feel *natural* even though it is learned. This is why living in or dealing with an unfamiliar culture commonly produces "culture shock," a physical sense of being unsettled and a desire to

withdraw. This happens even to those who consciously want to be in the new culture. Life seems *unnatural* and demands more thinking than we can tolerate, even leading some to fall into depression.

At this point, we experience a critical moment. If we are not aware of what is actually happening, we might wrongly conclude, consciously or unconsciously, that the other culture or persons actually have a different nature from ourselves because they belong to a different race or because they are witches, or animals, or monsters, or aliens. Or, we might conclude that others need us to show them how to act more naturally, more like we do. We even have similar responses to people in our *own* culture if we perceive that they are much different from us or if we have to interact intensely with them. Numerous problems occur, for example, when two people get married and neither has had much experience with the other's gender, subculture, family, or personality type. After an initial euphoria, the differences begin to cause wear and tear on the relationship.

On Being Human

We are not instinctively equipped to handle a great deal of difference even if we are naturally curious about how others live. Most of us do not mind being spectators of difference (via movies, novels, gossip columns, travel, and so on), but we do not wish to actually experience too much of it. Our instincts evolved to help us live in small communities, and most of us will subconsciously try to create for ourselves small circles of family and friends that make up a comfortable band or clan. One researcher estimates that the ideal biological size for human communities is about 150 people.¹⁰ We tend "naturally" to be clannish (or tribal, or race-oriented, or national, or whatever).

We must somehow learn to deal with difference if we are going to survive in the world that is growing up around us. Fortunately, a significant feature of human beings is that our instincts are relatively weak, and through thinking and the influence of culture they can be channeled in new directions and even be overcome. When survival demands it, our cultural ability allows us to develop a "second nature" to deal with new environments. My presumption is that we will be happier and safer if we do not just *think* about how to deal with difference but actually develop the habit, the *memory*, of successful negotiations of otherness.

Learning to deal with difference can begin at a distance through reading, watching television, eating at restaurants, attending classes, and engaging in other experiences that are relatively easy to accept. But the deepest explorations necessitate placing ourselves in situations where we must physically experience the fact that others who also belong to the human race see the world in significantly different ways than we do. The

first step is to teach our conscious minds what I discussed above—that for humans, culture becomes habit and habit feels natural even if it is not. The second step is to teach our unconscious minds, our memories, and our bodies to recognize the same thing. This second step is more difficult, and we may need to put ourselves in potentially painful situations to give our bodies the chance to adjust to difference.

Some people are born with little fear of cultural difference, and some families, communities, and societies are better at teaching members how to cope with and enjoy such difference. Most of us, however, have to learn about difference for ourselves. I was fortunate to learn at a young age that at least one kind of cultural difference was good, because my mother's parents were recent immigrants and spoke American English with a thick foreign accent. I was also lucky that my family was not openly racist, although I remember that they associated certain traits with certain races. It was not until I was in college, however, that I spoke in any seriousness with a person from another American subculture or from another world culture. Because I wanted to experience the world, I volunteered to room with a "foreign" student, as international students were called at that time. Life as a freshman with an older African roommate was rocky, to say the least. I recall that my roommate's assessment of my level of awareness was a sighing, "You just don't know!" He was right; I didn't. By the time I graduated, I was better at negotiating difference, but I felt the shock of difference again when I lived in Africa after some graduate study. For weeks after my arrival in Congo, where everyone was black, I felt *very* white, like a thousand-watt lightbulb.

There is an often-quoted Rogers and Hammerstein lyric from the musical *South Pacific* that says, "You've got to be carefully taught to hate." The song implies that those who are not taught to hate will naturally like others. My own experience shows that this view is much too simplistic. We also need to be trained to deal with and appreciate difference. The training begins at day care centers with feelings of separation and even panic, an early experience of culture shock. It continues as we go to school and eventually leave home—perhaps to college, to a job, or to marriage. All of this separation, this experience with difference, may be interpreted as pleasurable and exciting, but it is usually painful, too. Fortunately, most of us succeed in becoming full members of our communities, and, in doing so, we also become more comfortable with ourselves living in the wider world and interacting with it.

Americans are being asked to go even further in accepting difference as we mix with each other in our neighborhoods, organizations, and jobs and as our society is increasingly entwined in the affairs of other societies. But evidence suggests that we don't go nearly as far as we could in exploring either the difficulties or the benefits of difference. We usually do

what is appropriate when the boss says, "This is your new coworker," but we rarely choose to go much further than the situation requires. In fact, we might say that for most of us the painful transitions toward living with difference—from our experiences in day care to those in our jobs—take place out of necessity rather than choice. After each transition we settle back down, living in and enjoying our new situation. Moving onward, toward *more* difference, may still be painful and remind us that our knowledge and skills are often shallow.

The rewards for putting ourselves in such potentially painful situations are great, however. Not only is there the excitement of difference but there are also the satisfying newfound skills of negotiating difference. It is indeed a pleasurable experience to "speak a new language," whether in the literal sense or in the sense of being able to cope comfortably in a different culture. But even more than this, learning to negotiate the difference of other cultures allows us to reflect more deeply on our own culture and selves, and on what it means to be human. Indeed, at its deepest levels we can discover that difference doesn't make as much difference as we once thought.

10. Robert Caputo, "Zaire River," *National Geographic*, November 1990, 5-35; Peter Reinhart, "The Living Jewels of Lake Malawi," *National Geographic*, May 1991, 42-51.
11. Charles E. Cobb Jr. and Robert Caputo, "Eritrea Wins the Peace," *National Geographic*, June 1996, 82-105.
12. Charles E. Cobb Jr., "The Twilight of Apartheid: Life in Black South Africa," *National Geographic*, February 1993, 66-93.
13. Robert Caputo, "Tragedy Stalks the Horn of Africa," *National Geographic*, August 1993, 99-100.
14. To give credit where it is due, a 1997 article on Central Africa provides a generally accurate analysis of the history of the civil wars in Rwanda and Burundi. Its major shortcoming is that it is too brief. Thus, for example, while it mentions foreign involvement since independence, it does not explain the nature and extent of that involvement. Most readers would be unable to decipher the implications of the article's points because they know little about postindependence international influence and competition in Africa. Mike Edwards, "In Focus: Central Africa's Cycle of Violence," *National Geographic*, June 1997, 124-133.
15. Colin Palmer, "African Slave Trade: The Cruellest Commerce," *National Geographic*, September 1992, 62-91.
16. Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, "Fantasy Coffins of Ghana," *National Geographic*, September 1994, 120-130.
17. Donnarue MacCann and Olga Richard, "Through African Eyes: An Interview About Recent Picture Books with Yulisa Amadu Maddy," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 69 (June 1995): 41; and Pete Watson and Mary Watson, *The Market Lady and the Mango Tree* (New York: Tambourine Books, 1994).
18. Philip R. DeVita and James D. Armstrong, *Distant Mirrors: America As a Foreign Culture* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993). In one more example, National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* of August 14, 1998, discussed the bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and described the reactions of "the natives" of those two countries. The word was used correctly and was not meant to be pejorative, but how often are the residents of France and England referred to as "the natives"?

Chapter 3

1. Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G. D. Pickett (London: Longman, 1965), 1-2.
2. Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1970), 176.
3. *Ibid.*, 217.
4. *Ibid.*, 105-107.
5. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 131-135; and Walter Bruggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 89-91.
6. Acts 8: 26-40; see, for example, Gerhard Krodel, *Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 37-38; and Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, revised by William F. Albright and C. S. Mann (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 77-79.

7. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 196-205.
8. Maghan Keita, "Africa Backwards and Forwards: Interpreting Africa and Africans in Pre- and Post-Modern Space" (paper presented at the Sixth Annual African Studies Consortium Workshop, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, October 2, 1998). Keita also notes that our modern lack of awareness of this favorable treatment of Africans during the medieval period parallels our lack of knowledge about the ancient Greek debt to black Egypt. That is, our ignorance is due to late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century considerations of Africans in terms of racial inferiority. Keita plans to publish a book-length study on this subject.
9. Michael Adas, *Machines As the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 22.
10. Phillip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 35. A comprehensive history of the idea of race is available in Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996). For selected readings by Enlightenment thinkers, see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
12. Curtin, *Image of Africa*, 123-139; and David Jenkins, *Black Zion: Africa, Imagined and Real, As Seen by Today's Blacks* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 69. See also Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).
13. Jenkins, *Black Zion*, 73-88.
14. See, for example, J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); and Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
15. See, for example, Curtin, *Image of Africa*, 138, 239.
16. Adas, *Machines As the Measure*, 22.
17. *Ibid.*, 71, 79-95.
18. For an extended discussion of this subject, see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
19. Curtin, *Image of Africa*, 364.
20. *Ibid.*, 479-480. There were somewhat different theoretical patterns among the various European colonizers. The French, for example, seemed less racist and began to talk about association with Africans rather than conversion or trusteeship. They also permitted the African *evoules* of the four communes of Senegal (small areas that the government in Paris had declared a part of France) to retain their French citizenship. On the whole, however, all European colonizers thought of Africans as racial inferiors and excluded Africans from power.
21. Mungo Park, *Travels into the Interior Districts of Africa* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1983).
22. Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent" in "Race, Writing, and Difference," ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 217.

23. Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," in *Collected Verse* (New York: Doubleday, 1907), 215–217. The complete poem has seven verses. In the Philippines, Americans tended to conceptualize themselves as older siblings rather than as parents, but the effect was similar. Leon Wolff, *Little Brown Brother: How the United States Purchased and Pacified the Philippine Islands at the Century's Turn* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961).
24. Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (New York: Harper, 1878).
25. Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist* (New York: Syndicate Publishing Company, 1910), 94.

Chapter 4

1. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Norton Critical Editions, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1988), 35, 37.
2. Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, Norton Critical Editions, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1988), 251–262.
3. Robert Caputo, "Zaire River," *National Geographic*, November 1990, 30.
4. *Ibid.*, 30.
5. Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist* (New York: Syndicate Publishing Company, 1910), 2.
6. Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (New York: Henry Holt, 1878; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1964).
7. Gaetano Casati, *Ten Years in Equatoria and the Return with Emin Pasha*, vol. 2 (London: Frederick Warne, 1891), 114.
8. Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, x.
9. *Ibid.*, 2.
10. Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, *African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).
11. *Ibid.*, 143–147, and Curtis A. Keim, "Artes Africanae: The Western Discovery of 'Art' in Northeastern Congo," in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, ed. Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, 109–132 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
12. Georg Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae: Illustrations and Descriptions of Productions of the Industrial Arts of Central African Tribes* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1875), vii.
13. Georg Schweinfurth, *The Heart of Africa: Three Years' Travels and Adventures in the Unexplored Regions of Central Africa from 1868 to 1871*, trans. Ellen E. Frewer, vol. 2 (New York: Harper, 1874), 46.
14. Sigmund Freud, "The Savage's Dread of Incest," in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), 807.
15. *Ibid.*
16. See, for example, Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (London: Methuen, 1956).

17. See, for example, Michael Adas, *Machines As the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
18. For an extended discussion of the relationship between evolutionary science and social theory in the twentieth century, see Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
19. Lewis Thomas, *Harvard Magazine*. This quotation was given to me by a friend. I apologize to readers because I was unable to locate its exact source.
20. Dennis Hickey and Kenneth C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1993), 20–21.
21. Stanley Burnham, *America's Bimodal Crisis: Black Intelligence in White Society*, 3rd ed. (Athens, GA: Foundation for Human Understanding, 1993), 49–56. (The first edition was published in 1985.)
22. *Ibid.*, 57–63.

Chapter 5

1. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
2. David Roberts, "Mali's Dogon: Below the Cliff of Tombs," *National Geographic*, October 1990, 100–127.
3. *Ibid.*, 126.
4. Katherine Dettwyler, *Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1994), 62.
5. Dennis Hickey and Kenneth C. Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness: The American Vision of Africa in the Twentieth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1993), 111–112.
6. *Ibid.*, 93–125.
7. Franklin Institute Science Museum, "School Field Trip Planner," spring 1996 (Philadelphia: Franklin Institute Science Museum).
8. Wyatt MacGaffey, "'Magic,' or as We Usually Say, 'Art': A Framework for Comparing European and African Art," in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, ed. Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 230.
9. See, for example, Christopher Steiner, *African Art in Transit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
10. Perhaps the least exploitative way to buy and sell African objects is demonstrated by "alternative trade" organizations such as SERRV International, which sells products from the developing world in the United States to support producer cooperatives and charities in Africa and elsewhere. SERRV has more than 2,200 outlets around the country and an Internet catalog service: <http://www.servv.org/>. The organization advertises that its "mission is to promote the social and economic progress of people in developing regions of the world by marketing their products in a just and direct manner." SERRV, a program of the Church

of the Brethren, imports handicrafts and other products from 160 artisan groups in thirty-seven countries.

11. Theodore Sturgeon, "Shore Leave," *Star Trek*, Paramount Pictures, original broadcast, December 29, 1966.

12. Shakaland is discussed in Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 187-205.

13. Many resources are available to the adventure traveler, especially in southern Africa. Interesting choices include several travel guides published by Lonely Planet (Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia); David Elise, *Trekking in East Africa*, 2nd ed. (1998); Hugh Finlay, *Africa on a Shoestring*, 8th ed. (1998); Hugh Finlay and Geoff Crowther, *East Africa* (1997); and Alex Newton, *West Africa: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*, 3rd ed. (1995). See also Richard Trillo, *West Africa: The Rough Guide*, 2nd ed. (London: Rough Guides, 1995). On the Internet, two sites that deal with backpacking in southern Africa are <<http://www.backpacking.co.za/milestxt.html>> and <<http://www.backpackafrica.com>>.

14. Pam Ascanio, *White Men Don't Have Juice: An American Couple's Adventure Through Africa* (Chicago: Noble Press, 1992). Commenting on American aid workers and embassy people in Bamako, Mali, Ascanio writes: "They bragged about their extravagant living allowance because Bamako was a hardship post. They also showed us their cellars filled with tax-free, duty-exempt food, and name brand products, shampoos, and toothpaste from home. 'Thank God, we've got everything we need,' they said, 'and we don't have to deal with the local population.' This was their badge of courage" (121).

15. I once co-led a tour with these expert guides through Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire. There are, today, other opportunities for intentional travel. For example, Travel Senegal! (a tour operator) advertises tours to Senegal "For Adventurous Travelers Only!" They provide "specialized small tours to Senegal, West Africa, for photographers, musicians, artists, writers, educators and those interested in West African Arts and Culture." Actually, the tours are arranged by a couple in Alaska, Sher and Bruce Schwartz, who provide this service as a way to help a Senegalese friend connect with interested Americans. Their friend, Pacco Mane, is a musician who speaks English well and is skilled in arranging city tours, homestays in both urban and rural settings, visits to artists and schools, cooking and music lessons, and the like: "Mane's friendly, poised and insightful disposition is a delight to work with. He's an excellent guide for non-French-speaking travelers and he understands well how to work harmoniously between both African and American cultures. Senegalese are warm and welcoming people. Guide books say that Senegal is the safest West African country to travel in, and we believe it. During our adventures there we have never felt physically threatened. Traveling to Senegal is an unforgettable experience filled with adventure, wonderment and insights into a culture much different from our own. Senegal is a poor country and unemployment is high. Our experience with Pacco Mane has been a very positive one. We feel that he is reputable and honest. We would like to see him be successful, and so we have created a web site to entice those like ourselves who dream of going to French-speaking West Africa, but who don't have the contacts to do it. Travel Senegal! is an excellent opportunity

especially for photographers to capture the essence of the country." The Travel Senegal! World Wide Web page advertises a bit of the exotic Africa—visit "the bush," "explore sacred grounds," "capture the essence of the country"—but they clearly attempt to introduce tourists to ordinary, dignified African life. Sher Schwartz and Bruce Schwartz, *Travel Senegal!* Available: <<http://www.senegaltravel.com/>>.

16. These perspectives have been gleaned from conversations with a number of study-tour guides who prefer to remain anonymous.

17. Charlie Hauck, "Alarmed by Burglars," *Home Improvement*, American Broadcasting Company, original broadcast, May 14, 1996.

18. Indiana Botanic Gardens, promotional flyer, spring 1998.

19. Walter Chin, "Kenya: The Maasai," *Sports Illustrated*, special issue, winter 1998, 66.

20. "Kenya: You Could Look It Up," *Sports Illustrated*, special issue, winter 1998, 62.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Dymrna Ugywu-Oju, *What Will My Mother Say: A Tribal African Girl Comes of Age in America* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1995).

23. Tepilit Ole Saitoti, *The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1986).

24. Anonymous, interview by author, Bethlehem, PA, May 20, 1998.

25. Anonymous, interview by author, Philadelphia, July 18, 1998.

26. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman* (New York: Putnam, 1994). Also see an article by Somé, "Rights of Passage: If Adolescence Is a Disease, Initiation Is a Cure," *Utne Reader*, July-August 1994, 67-68. Adapted from an article in *In Context* (winter 1993).

27. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Nature, Magic, and Community: The Way of the Dagara*, Wisdom of Africa Series (Pacific Grove, CA: Oral Tradition Archives, 1993), audiocassette. See also Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York: Putnam, 1998). An interesting contrast to Somé's autobiography is the autobiography of James Hall, an American who became a healer in Swaziland: James Hall, *Songoma: My Odyssey into the Spirit World of Africa* (New York: Putnam, 1994).

28. Wania Njuguna, "Cultural Ambassador on Peace Mission," *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), August 9, 1996, 2.

29. Mutahi Mureithi, "Genuine Interest in Our Culture or Mere Fascination?" *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), August 9, 1996, 2. For a critique of Western myths about the Maasai, see Paul Spencer, *The Pastoral Continuum: The Marginalization of Tradition in East Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

30. *Ibid.*

31. From the perspective of understanding Africa (rather than American attitudes toward Africa), a more interesting view of Surum might be to think about the way he has combined Africa and America. Surum married a white American woman and maintains homes in both Kenya and the United States. The advertisement for the videotape notes that "Tom also shares what he has learned of America with young Maasai. While he partakes of the bounty of American life, includ-

ing Armani suits, a luxury car, and credit cards, he is still strongly attached to his tribe and its traditions." Surum himself is good evidence that those traditions are changing rapidly. Filmmakers Library. Available: <<http://www.filmmakers.com/ANTHRO.html>>.

32. George Packer, *The Village of Waiting* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 284–291.

33. Useful general studies on African-American attitudes toward Africa up to the 1960s and 1970s include Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Harold R. Isaacs, *The New World of Negro Americans* (New York: John Day, 1963); David Jenkins, *Black Zion: Africa, Imagined and Real, As Seen by Today's Blacks* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975); Bernard Makhoswe Magubane, *The Ties That Bind: African-American Consciousness of Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987); and Okon Edet Uya, ed., *Black Brotherhood: Afro-Americans and Africa* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1971).

34. Isaacs, *New World*, 105–113. There are a number of examples of African Americans who traveled to Africa in the precolonial and colonial eras. In Central Africa, for example, the missionary William Sheppard worked among the Kuba in the late nineteenth century. See David A. Binkley and Patricia J. Darish, "'Enlightened But in Darkness': Interpretations of Kuba Art and Culture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, ed. Erid Schildkrot and Curtis A. Keim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37–62. Another African American, George Washington Williams, made a tour of Congo in 1890 and wrote an open letter to King Leopold that outlined the atrocities being committed there. Williams's biographer, John Hope Franklin, notes that "of all the 1890 observers and critics of Leopold's rule . . . only Williams saw fit to make his unfavorable views widely known immediately." John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 262–263.

In the era leading up to the American civil rights movement of the 1960s, several African-American writers are known for their travels to Africa. Perhaps the most famous is Richard Wright, whose book *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954) discusses his mixed reactions to being in Africa. Most Europeans resisted allowing African Americans into their colonies, because their presence implied too great a measure of black independence. See Sylvia M. Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

35. See, for example, Uya, *Black Brotherhood*.

36. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 367.

37. William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1941* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 2–22.

38. *Ibid.*, 23.

39. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

40. *Ibid.*, 192–207.

41. Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998); and *The Negro in Our History*, 11th ed. (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1966).

42. In the last years of his long life, Du Bois became disillusioned with the American situation, and in 1961 he moved to newly independent Ghana.

43. There are exceptions. For example, two recent accounts by African Americans portray the continent in a relatively negative light: Eddy Harris, *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); and Keith Richburg, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

44. There are many opinions, pro and con, on Afrocentrism. For a discussion by the originator of the idea see Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). For largely favorable assessments, see Dhyana Ziegler, ed., *Molefi Kete Asante and Afrocentricity: In Praise and in Criticism* (Nashville, TN: James C. Winston, 1995). Two discussions that are critical, but useful in the context of general American stereotypes about Africa, are Hickey and Wylie, *An Enchanting Darkness*, 1–6, 308–318; and Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 117–122.

45. This missionary image persists. I recently heard rural Africans referred to as "innocent" by a well-intentioned Christian pastor.

46. Bob Hilliard, "Civilization (Bongo, Bongo, Bongo)," musical composition from *Angel in the Wings*, lyrics by Bob Hilliard and music by Carl Sigman (New York: Edwin H. Morris, 1947).

Chapter 6

1. James Perry, *Living Africa: A Village Experience*, 35 min. (Bloomington: Indiana University Television, 1983), videotape.

2. For a discussion of the civilizing mission in the first half of the twentieth century, see Michael Adas, *Machines As the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 199–270.

3. For a summary of structural adjustment thinking, see Amy L. Sherman, "Re-thinking Development: A Market-Friendly Strategy for the Poor," *Christian Century*, December 9, 1992, 1130–1134. A somewhat more scholarly summary can be found in Michael Roemer and Steven C. Radelet, "Macroeconomic Reform in Developing Countries," in *Reforming Economic Systems in Developing Countries*, ed. Dwight H. Perkins and Michael Roemer (Cambridge: Harvard Institute for International Development, 1991), 55–80.

4. Ake, *Democracy and Development*, 118–119.

5. Dwight H. Perkins, "Economic Systems Reform in Developing Countries," in *Reforming Economic Systems in Developing Countries*, ed. Dwight H. Perkins and Michael Roemer (Cambridge: Harvard Institute for International Development, 1991), 45.

6. INFAC. Available: <<http://www.infact.org/aboutinf.html>>. The WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes was adopted by Resolution 34.22 of the World Health Assembly.

7. Baby Milk Action. Available: <<http://www.gn.apc.org/babymilk/>>.

12. Schweinfurth, *Heart of Africa*, 2:55.
13. Bob Thaves, "Frank and Ernest," Newspaper Enterprise Association, April 27, 1979.
14. Bob Thaves, "Frank and Ernest," Newspaper Enterprise Association, February 27, 1979.
15. Roger Lell, *Postmodern Cannibalism* (Durham, NC: Roger Lell, 1995). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Chapter 8

1. I thank colleagues who participated in an Internet discussion on *tribe* in September and October 1997. I have benefited from their comments and bibliographic contributions. The entire discussion is available at <<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~africa/>>. *Africa News* also prepared a special issue in 1990 on the meaning of *tribe* in Africa. It is available at <<http://www.africanews.org/info/tribe.html>>. The Africa Policy Information Center has published a background paper on the meaning of *tribe*: Chris Lowe, "Tribe," *Africa Policy Information Center Background Paper*, no. 10 (New York: Africa Policy Information Center, 1997). This paper is available at <<http://www.africapolicy.org>>.
2. William A. Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology*, 9th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1999), 346–351. Many but not all introductory anthropology textbooks treat *tribe* in a similar way. Some avoid the term and some, like Haviland, warn students that it is a contested category. Frequently, anthropologists also specify that a *tribe* traces its ancestry to a single common ancestor. Sometimes, definitions include chiefdoms and tribes in a single category. Marshall Sahlins, for example, calls the chiefdom the "most developed expression" of the *tribe*. Marshall Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 20–21.
3. For a discussion of the tribal organization of ancient Israel, see Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).
4. John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 324.
5. *Ibid.*, 331–337.
6. For examples, see *ibid.*, 321–322, 326–327.
7. See, for example, Morton H. Fried, "On the Concepts of 'Tribe' and 'Tribal Society,'" *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* 28, no. 4 (fall 1966): 527–540; and chapters in June Helm, ed., *Essays on the Problem of Tribe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and American Ethnological Society, 1968).
8. See, for example, Morton H. Fried, "The Myth of Tribe," *Natural History*, April 1975, 12–20.
9. See, for example, Aidan Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe," in *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*, ed. Peter Gutkind (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 28–50; and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 1, no. 1 (1960): 129–139.
10. John Paden and Edward Soja, *The African Experience*, 2 vols. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

11. For an overview of English-language perspectives on the idea of *tribe* in Africa, see Carola Lentz, "'Tribalism' and Ethnicity in Africa: A Review of Four Decades of Anglophone Research," *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* 31, no. 2 (1995): 303–328.
12. Fried, "The Myth of Tribe," 14.
13. "First Nations" and "First Peoples" are increasingly popular alternatives to "Native Americans," presumably because the word *native* does not carry sufficient dignity or force.
14. The National Public Radio program *All Things Considered*, generally a source that treats Africa well, reported that the first known case of AIDS occurred before 1960 in the Belgian Congo in a "Bantu tribesman." Such categorization and overgeneralization is problematic for both of these words. National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, February 3, 1998.
15. Anthony Appiah, "African Identities," in *Constructions Identitaires: Questions Théoriques et Études de Cas*, ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Jocelyn Létourneau, Actes du Célat, no. 6 (Québec: Célat, 1992), 58.

Chapter 9

1. Children's Television Workshop, *Sesame Street*, broadcast by WLVT, Bethlehem, PA, September 3, 1998.
2. Jeff Cooper, *To Ride, Shoot Straight, and Speak the Truth* (Paulden, AZ: Gunsite Press, 1990), 310.
3. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting* (New York: Scribner, [1943] 1972).
4. Peter Matthiessen writes about his search for the few elephants left in West Africa in *African Silences* (London: Harvill, 1991).
5. Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist* (New York: Syndicate Publishing Company, 1910), ix.
6. *Ibid.*, 20–23.
7. Marshall Everett, *Roosevelt's Thrilling Experiences in the Wilds of Africa Hunting Big Game* (Chicago: J. T. Moss, 1909), 60–61.
8. Bartle Bull, *Safari: A Chronicle of Adventure* (London: Penguin, 1992), 179–180. For another account of Roosevelt's safari and of the safari experience in general, see Kenneth M. Cameron, *Into Africa: The Story of the East African Safari* (London: Constable, 1990).
9. Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 288–289.
10. Bull, *Safari*, 182.
11. *Ibid.*, 195–196, 257.
12. Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 409.
13. *Ibid.*, 410.
14. *Ibid.*, 414.
15. For an interesting discussion of Tarzan, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 42–72.

16. Bull, *Safari*, 281.
17. *Ibid.*, 297.
18. For an Internet site that offers mostly pro-hunter views, see Wildnet Africa at <http://wildnetfrica.co.za/cits/>.
19. Smith Hempstone, *Rogue Ambassador: An African Memoir* (Sewanee, TN: University of the South Press, 1997), 242.
20. In South Africa, for example, impalas go for only \$300, but leopards are \$2,750 plus an \$850 baiting fee. Prices for white rhino and buffalo are only available "on request." Zulu Nyala Safaris, available at <http://africanadrenalin.co.za/zulunyala/tr0_zul.htm>.
21. Bull, *Safari*, 318.
22. *Ibid.*, 322.
23. *Ibid.*, 162.
24. Public Broadcasting Service, "South Africa," *Going Places*, original broadcast, May 18, 1998.
25. Frank Kusserk, interview by author, Bethlehem, PA, April 28, 1998.
26. Brian J. Huntly, "Conserving and Monitoring Biotic Diversity: Some African Examples," in *Biodiversity*, ed. Edward O. Wilson and Frances M. Peter (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1988), 258-259.
27. Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), xv.
28. For a critique of the Western management perspective in wildlife conservation and research, see Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1992).
29. Abercrombie and Fitch, *Christmas Catalog*, 1997, 73.

Chapter 10

1. AT&T, "There's No Easier Way to Get from Peoria to Pretoria," *Gourmet*, August 1997, 49.
2. Saks Fifth Avenue, "Safari: The Men's Fragrance by Ralph Lauren," *Gourmet*, March 1995, 16.
3. Jeep, "If You Can Read This Your Jeep Is Too Close," *National Geographic*, October 1996, back cover.
4. Sears Homelife Furniture Store, "The Best Place to Sleep," *Better Homes and Gardens*, August 1995, 25.
5. Franklin Institute Science Museum, "School Field Trip Planner: Pre K-12," spring 1996. Philadelphia: Franklin Institute Science Museum.
6. Intrav Private Jet Adventures, "The Civilized Way to Answer the Call of the Wild," *New York Times*, July 19, 1998, 16.
7. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Should You Contact the Spirit Realm?" *Awake!* November 2, 1996, front cover.
8. Packard Bell, "Ankle-Biting Pygmies," *Parenting*, December 1996-January 1997, 246-247.
9. See, for example, Raymon A. Eve and Bob Price, "Geographic Illiteracy Among College Students," *Youth and Society* 25, no. 3 (March 1994): 408-427.

10. Fortunoff, "The Tunnel or the Bridge?" *Vanity Fair*, November 1998, 167.
11. Chivas Regal, "You Either Have It or You Don't," *Newsweek*, combined issue, December 29, 1997, and January 5, 1998, 91.

Chapter 11

1. See, for example, Chris Stringer and Robin McKie, *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).
2. J. Y. Chu, et al., "Genetic Relationship of Populations in China," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA* 95 (September 1998): 11763-11768.
3. For an extended discussion of the origins of race thinking in the Western world, see Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996).
4. See, for example, Jared Diamond, "Race Without Color," *Discover*, November 1994, 83-89; and Stephen Jay Gould, "Why We Should Not Name Human Races: A Biological View," in *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1977), 231-236.
5. Paul Hoffman, "From the Editor: The Science of Race," *Discover*, November 1994, 4.
6. Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 127-128. See also Morris' *The Human Animal: A Personal View of the Human Species* (New York: Crown, 1994).
7. Desmond Morris, *The Human Animal*, prod. Mike Beynon, 6 tapes, 50 min. each (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Video, 1995), videotape.
8. Stringer and McKie, *African Exodus*, 212.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Robin Dunbar, "The Chattering Classes: What Separates Us from the Animals," *The Times* (London), February 5, 1994, quoted in Stringer and McKie, *African Exodus*, 208-209.

Chapter 12

1. Iode Mbumza, interview by author, Namagogle, Congo (Kinshasa), September 29, 1976.
2. Batsakpide-Mandandroi, interview by author, Nyoola, Congo (Kinshasa), September 1, 1988.
3. Many authors discuss evolutionism and the way it creates both racial and cultural hierarchies. Readers wishing to pursue the subject should first consult Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Fabian discusses the evolutionary hierarchies of twentieth-century anthropologists in terms of concepts of time.
4. Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 55-76, 129.
5. *Ibid.*, 129.
6. *Ibid.*