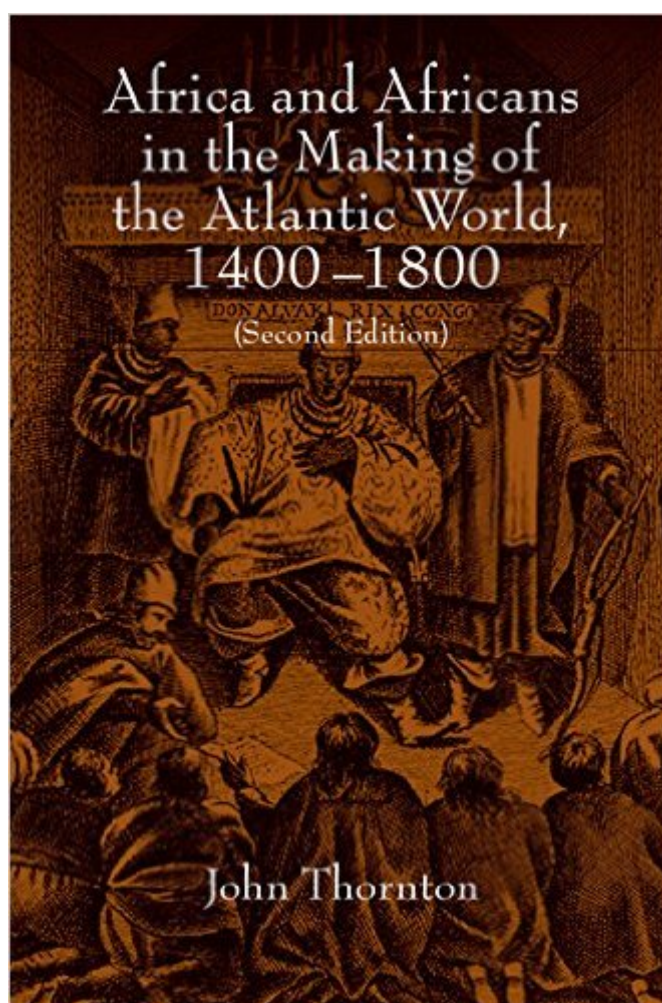


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Africa And Africans In The Making Of The Atlantic World, 1400-1800 (Studies In Comparative World History)



Synopsis

This book explores Africa's involvement in the Atlantic world from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. It focuses especially on the causes and consequences of the slave trade, in Africa, in Europe, and in the New World. Prior to 1680, Africa's economic and military strength enabled African elites to determine how trade with Europe developed. Thornton examines the dynamics which made slaves so necessary to European colonizers. He explains why African slaves were placed in significant roles. Estate structure and demography affected the capacity of slaves to form a self-sustaining society and behave as cultural actors.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Issues of race have become central to American historiography in the past generation or so, and no modern historian of the American colonial era (or any other era afterwards, for that matter) can justifiably ignore its impact. Yet despite this, it is astonishing how little of the African political, social and cultural origins of New World slave populations is brought to bear on analyses of the Atlantic world. This relatively slim yet dazzlingly efficient book amply redresses this blind spot. In addition, the passivity customarily attributed to Africans is swept aside and replaced with a much more realistic and complex agency asserted on both sides of the Atlantic. It is truly astounding how much Thornton is able to cover in such detail within a mere 334 pages that include a rather general and theoretical introduction to Atlantic historiography with its roots in Fernand Braudel's pioneering "Annaliste" school of regional history, and an initial chapter on the birth of the modern Atlantic world as a whole (albeit with a recurrent focus on Africa's role). Aside from this initial placesetting, the book

is divided into two parts--"Africans in Africa", and "Africans in the New World". In the first section, Thornton skillfully explores the impact of European-dominated Atlantic trade on west African societies and economies, deftly dissolving common myths as well as disassembling the more carefully constructed theories and assertions of several generations of earnest historians.

This work serves as an excellent prelude to Hugh Thomas' *SLAVE TRADE: The Atlantic Slave Trade from 1440...*, Ira Berlin's *MANY THOUSANDS GONE*, and Price, et al.'s *MAROON SOCIETIES* since it touches on many issues developed in those works. In addition, it looks at how African culture influenced and encouraged the slave trade. Starting with a consideration of African concepts of property (i.e., only personalty and chattel could be considered property by individuals since all realty was under collective ownership and could only temporarily be alienated), Thornton builds on how chattel property, notably slaves, were the basis for individual wealth in West Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans. Next, he considers how this caused the numerous wars and raids that continued to take place throughout West Africa. He also looks at whether (and to what extent) supposed European superiority encouraged the slave trade - or at least made it a more violent and dehumanizing practice. Europeans governments were kept out of Africa and had to largely rely on factors or intermediaries for trade - with the exception of the Luso-Africans in Angola. Europeans traders had to submit tariffs and bribes to the local rulers and nobility, as well as meet the rulers' quotas at inflated prices. As to economic pressure for trade, Thornton notes that there were no essential goods which the West sold to these leaders that could not have been otherwise attained in Africa. In addition, iron and horses could be bought from the Arabs and were also produced and bred in West Africa.

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