

# African Society and Culture

## Get Ready to Read!

### What's the Connection?

By the time Europeans came to Africa, people all over the continent had developed complex cultures. For most Africans, life centered on farming villages, like the ones you will read about in this section. Here the family formed the basis of society.

### Focusing on the **Main Ideas**

- The Bantu migrations helped shape many cultures in Africa south of the Sahara. (page 469)
- The African slave trade changed greatly when Muslims and Europeans began taking captives from the continent. (page 472)
- Enslaved Africans developed rich cultures that influenced many other cultures, including our own. (page 474)

### Locating Places

**Benue River** (BAYN•way)

### Meeting People

**Dahia al-Kahina**

(dah•HEE•ah ahl•kah•HEE•nah)

**Nzinga** (ehn•ZIHN•gah)

### Building Your Vocabulary

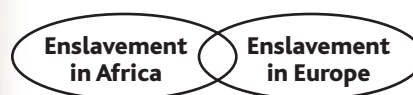
**extended family**

**matrilineal** (MA•truh•LIH•nee•uhl)

**oral history**

### Reading Strategy

**Compare and Contrast** Create a Venn diagram like the one below showing the similarities and differences between the enslavement of Africans in Africa and the enslavement of Africans in Europe.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

## When & Where?



3000 B.C.

c. 3000 B.C.  
Bantu begin migration across Africa

A.D. 1000

c. A.D. 650  
Queen Dahia al-Kahina fights Muslims

1500

c. 1441  
First enslaved Africans arrive in Europe

## Life in Medieval Africa

**Main Idea** The Bantu migrations helped shape many cultures in Africa south of the Sahara.

**Reading Focus** Have you ever noticed that even though people are different, they all have some things in common? Read to learn why people in different regions of Africa have similar traditions and cultures.

Around 3000 B.C., fishing groups along the **Benue River** (BAYN•way) in present day eastern Nigeria packed belongings in their canoes and moved south and west. The wanderers called themselves *Bantu*, meaning “the people.”

The Bantu traveled slowly and by different routes. At least some paddled up the Congo River—a waterway twisting 2,700 miles (4,345 km) through the rain forests. Many settled, for a time, in the grasslands of central Africa. From there, they fanned out over much of the land south of the Sahara. By A.D. 400, Bantu peoples had settled much of Africa.

Historians are not sure why the Bantu left their homeland. Perhaps the land became too crowded. Maybe farmers wore out the soil. Or the Bantu may have just drifted, the way pioneers sometimes do.

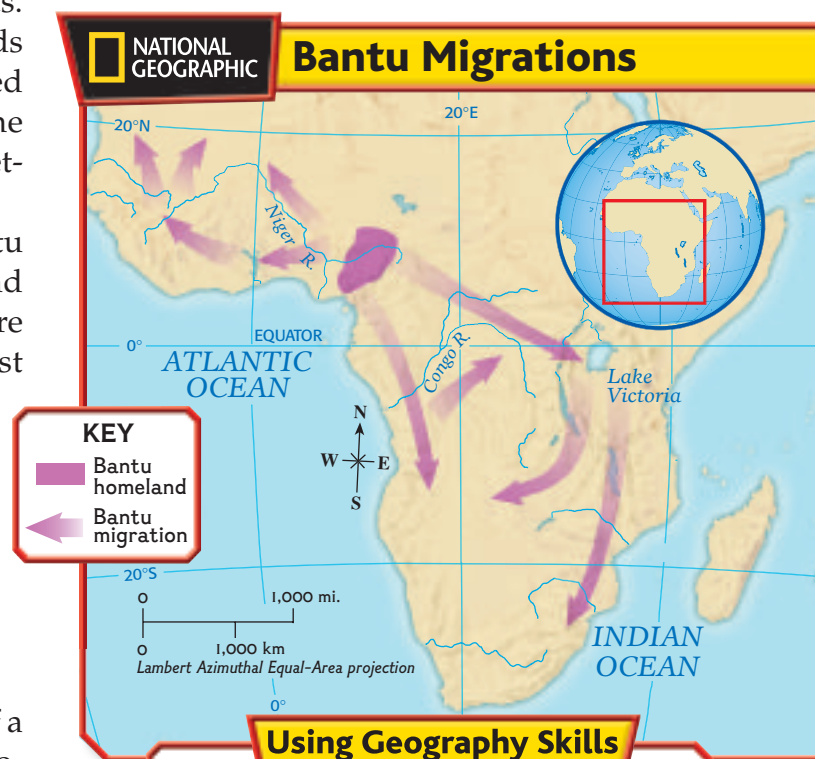
Wherever they went, the Bantu took their culture with them. They spread skills such as pottery making, mining, and ironworking. They also spread their language. Today more than 120 million Africans speak hundreds of Bantu languages, including Swahili.

The Bantu migrations, or movements of a large number of people, are the reason people all across Africa share some common ideas and traditions. The Bantu, for example, believed in one supreme creator and a spirit world where ancestors live. As you read in the last section, this was a common belief in many places in Africa.

**Importance of Family** The family formed the basis of African society. People often lived in **extended families**, or families made up of several generations. They included anywhere from ten to hundreds of members.

Many villages, especially Bantu villages, were **matrilineal** (MA•truh•LIH•nee•uhl). They traced their descent through mothers rather than fathers. When a woman married, however, she joined her husband’s family. To make up for the loss, her family received gifts—cloth, metal tools, cattle, or goats—from the husband’s family.

All families valued children greatly. They saw them as a link between the past and the future. Some people, like the Yoruba of what is today Nigeria, believed



### Using Geography Skills

The Bantu wandered from their homeland around 3000 B.C.

1. Along which river did the Bantu people travel when they migrated west?
2. How did the Bantu migration affect cultures throughout southern Africa?



▲ This panel shows a family from the Congo at work.  
*What was an extended family in Bantu society?*

an ancestor might be reborn in a child. They also knew children guaranteed that the family would live on. In praising the family, one Yoruba poet wrote:

“When a group of boys, girls,  
 men, or wives,  
 Go together in a happy company,  
 Dignity attends them in  
 every step.  
 . . . . .”  
 —Yoruba, “Dignity”

**Education and Community** In Africa’s vil-  
 lages, education was carried out by the  
 family and other villagers. Children learned  
 the history of their people and the skills  
 needed as adults.

In West Africa, griots, or storytellers,  
 helped in schooling. They kept alive an  
**oral history**—the stories passed down from  
 generation to generation. Many stories  
 included a lesson about living. Lessons  
 also were given through short proverbs.

One Bantu proverb stated: “A good deed  
 will make a good neighbor.” Grandparents  
 and other older people also kept oral histo-  
 ries alive.

**Role of Women** As in most medieval soci-  
 eties, women in Africa acted mostly as  
 wives and mothers. Men had more rights  
 and controlled much of what women did.  
 Visitors to Africa, however, saw exceptions.  
 European explorers were amazed to learn  
 that women served as soldiers in some  
 African kingdoms.

African women also won fame as rulers.  
 In the A.D. 600s, Queen **Dahia al-Kahina**  
 (dah•HEE•uh ahl•kah•HEE•nah) led the  
 fight against the Muslim invasion of her  
 kingdom, which was located about where  
 Mauritania is today. Another woman ruler  
 was Queen **Nzinga** (ehn•ZIHN•gah), who  
 ruled lands in what are now Angola and  
 Congo. She spent almost 40 years battling  
 Portuguese slave traders.

✔ **Reading Check Explain** How were Bantu  
 families organized?

## QUEEN NZINGA

c. 1582–1663

### *Angolan Warrior-Leader*

It was rare in the 1600s for women to take active roles in politics and war, but one African woman—Queen Nzinga of Matamba—was known for her military leadership and political skills. Nzinga was the daughter of the king of the Ndongo people. The Ndongo lived in southwest Africa in what is today called Angola. Nzinga quickly learned archery and hunting. She was intelligent and a natural athlete. Nzinga's father failed to notice his daughter. He was too busy defending the kingdom from the Portuguese, who wanted to buy enslaved Africans and ship them overseas.

Even though she was female, Nzinga knew she could be a strong leader. She did not want to learn the enemy's language, but she soon realized that it could benefit her. She asked a captured priest to teach her Portuguese.

In 1623 Nzinga became queen. She declared all of her territory to be free territory and promised that all enslaved Africans who made it to the kingdom would be free. For nearly 30 years, she led her people in battles against the Portuguese. She allied with other African kingdoms to seal the trade routes used to ship enslaved Africans out of the country. In 1662 she negotiated a peace agreement with the Portuguese. She died the next year at age 81.



▲ Enslaved Africans in a ship's hold being taken to America.



◀ The Portuguese built Elmire Castle on the coast of Ghana to hold enslaved Africans before shipping them overseas.

### Then and Now

Do research to find the name of a modern female leader. Compare her leadership skills to those of Queen Nzinga.

# Slavery

**Main Idea** The African slave trade changed greatly when Muslims and Europeans began taking captives from the continent.

**Reading Focus** You know that there was a time in American history when people of African ancestry were enslaved. Read to learn about slavery in African society and the beginning of the European slave trade.

In 1441 a Portuguese sea captain sailed down Africa’s western coast. His goal was to bring the first African captives back to Portugal. During the voyage, the captain and his nine sailors seized 12 Africans—men, women, and boys. The ship then sailed back to Portugal. These captives represented only a small portion of a slave trade that would grow into the millions.

**Slavery Within Africa** Europeans did not invent slavery. For a long time, it had existed throughout the world. In Africa, Bantu chiefs raided nearby villages for captives. These captives became laborers or were freed for a payment.

Africans also enslaved criminals or enemies taken in war. These enslaved Africans became part of the Saharan trade. However, as long as Africans stayed in Africa, hope of escape still existed. Enslaved Africans might also win their freedom through hard work or by marrying a free person.

The trade in humans also grew as the trade with Muslim merchants increased. The Quran forbade enslavement of Muslims. Muslims, however, could enslave non-Muslims. Arab traders, therefore, began to trade horses, cotton, and other goods for enslaved, non-Muslim Africans.

When Europeans arrived in West Africa, a new market for enslaved Africans opened. Africans armed with European guns began raiding villages to seize captives to sell.



▲ On a slave ship, enslaved people were transported in the dark, crowded spaces of the ship’s cargo deck. **Why were enslaved Africans used on Portuguese plantations?**

**The European Slave Trade** In 1444 a Portuguese ship docked at a port in Portugal. Sailors unloaded the cargo—235 enslaved Africans. Tears ran down the faces of some. Others cried for help. A Portuguese official described the scene:

“But to increase their sufferings still more, . . . was it needful to part fathers from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from brothers.”

—Gomes Eannes de Zurara, as quoted in *The Slave Trade*

Barely three years had passed since the arrival of the first African captives in Portugal. Some merchants who had hoped

to sell gold brought from Africa now sold humans instead. At first, most enslaved Africans stayed in Portugal, working as laborers. This changed when the Portuguese settled the Atlantic islands of Madeira, the Azores, and Cape Verde. There the climate was perfect for growing cotton, grapes, and sugarcane on plantations, or huge farms.

Harvesting sugarcane was hard labor. Planters could not pay high wages to get workers, so they used enslaved Africans instead. Many Africans had farming skills

and the ability to make tools. Enslaved people were not paid and could be fed and kept cheaply. By 1500, Portugal was the world's leading supplier of sugar.

The rest of Europe followed Portugal's example. In the late 1400s, Europeans arrived in the Americas. They set up sugar plantations and brought enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to work the fields. They also used enslaved people to grow tobacco, rice, and cotton.

**Reading Check Analyze** How did exploration change the African slave trade?

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**

## The Slave Trade c. 1450–1800

**Using Geography Skills**

Long before enslaved Africans were sent to the Americas, they were traded within Africa and to Muslim countries.

1. From which part of Africa were the most enslaved people taken?
2. To what parts of the Americas were enslaved people taken?

▲ West African statue of Portuguese soldier

**473**

Michael Holford

# The Way It Was

## Focus on Everyday Life

**Kente Cloth** *Kente* is the name of a colorful woven cloth. Its name comes from a word that means “basket.” The first weavers were mostly men. They used fibers to make cloth that looked like the patterns in baskets. Strips were sewn together to make colorful patterns. *Kente* was worn by tribal chiefs and is still popular today. This African folktale about *kente* cloth has been handed down for generations:

One day two friends walked through a rain forest and saw a spider creating designs in its web. They took the spider web to show their friends and family. They were greatly upset when the web fell apart in their hands. They returned the next day to watch and learn as the spider did a weaving dance and spun another web. The friends took their newfound skills to their looms and made colorful cloth they called *kente*.

African women wearing *kente* cloth



### Connecting to the Past

1. Why does the legend suggest that Africans learned to weave *kente* cloth from a spider?
2. Why do you think the first *kente* cloth weavers were mostly men?

## African Culture

**Main Idea** Enslaved Africans developed rich cultures that influenced many other cultures, including our own.

**Reading Focus** Do you have any traditions that have been in your family for a long time? Read to learn how Africans took their culture with them when they were enslaved and sent overseas.

“We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets,” declared Olaudah Equiano in describing the Igbo people of West Africa. He might have added artists, weavers, woodcarvers, and metalworkers too. African peoples like the Igbo excelled in many art forms.

When slave traders seized Africans like Equiano from their homelands, they also uprooted their cultures. Africans carried these cultures with them in what has become known as the African Diaspora—the spreading of African people and culture around the world.

People of African descent held on to memories of their cultures and passed them down from generation to generation. The heritage of Africa can be seen and heard in the United States today—not just in the faces and voices of African descendants but in their gifts to our culture.

**African Art** Cave paintings are the earliest form of African art we know about. They show people hunting animals, dancing, and doing everyday chores. As in other parts of the world, African art and religion developed hand in hand. Early African cave paintings, as well as later art, almost always had some religious meaning or use. Woodcarvers made masks and statues, for example, to celebrate African religious beliefs. Each carved piece of wood captured some part of the spiritual world.

African works of art also told stories and served practical purposes. Artists working in wood, ivory, or bronze showed the faces of important leaders, everyday people, and, later, European explorers and traders. Weavers designed cloth similar to cloth still worn today. You may have seen the brightly colored kente cloth of West Africa. Many people wear it today.

**Music and Dance** Music played a part in almost all aspects of African life. People used it to express their religious feelings or

to get through an everyday task, like planting a field.

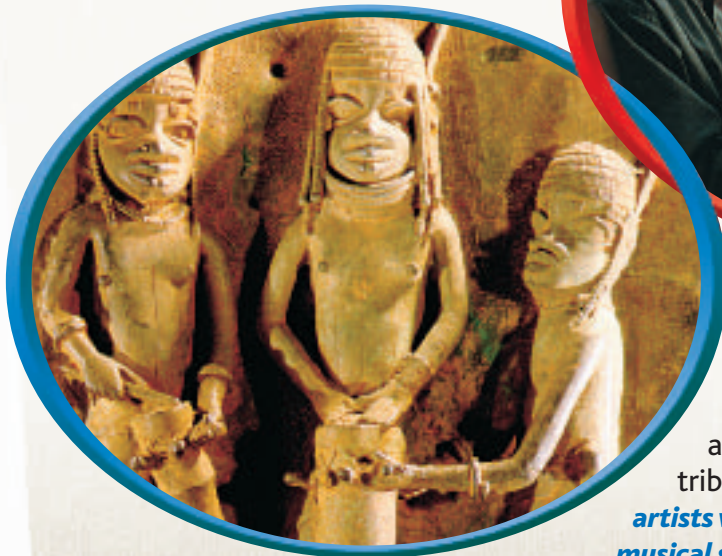
In many African songs, a singer calls out a line, then other singers repeat it back. Musical instruments, such as drums, whistles, horns, flutes, or banjos, were used to keep the beat.

Africans believed dance allowed the spirits to express themselves. So they used it to celebrate important events such as birth and death. Nearly everybody danced. Lines of men and women swayed and clapped their hands. Individual dancers

## Linking Past & Present

### African Music

**THEN** Traditional African music comes from many different sounds and rhythms. Every culture in Africa contributed to its development. Some used drums. Others used wind and string instruments. Many imitated nature through voice and dance. African music was handed down from one generation to another.



▲ Traditional African musicians

▼ Modern-day musicians



**NOW** Traditional African music influences rap, hip-hop, pop, and rock music. The use of drums and a steady beat comes from African tribal music. *Can you name current groups or artists who have been impacted by the African musical style?*





◀ Griots still share the stories and lessons of their ancestors. **What were traditional African stories often about?**

leaped and twirled. In the background, drummers sounded out the rhythm.

Enslaved Africans sometimes relied on music to remind them of their homeland. Songs of hardship eventually developed into a type of music that we know today as the blues. Songs of religious faith and hopes for freedom grew into spirituals or gospel songs. Over time, other forms of

African-based music developed, such as ragtime, jazz, rock and roll, and, more recently, rap.

**Storytelling** Africans also kept alive their storytelling tradition. A few enslaved Africans escaped and were able to record their stories. Others retold their stories aloud. Those who heard the stories repeated them. They also retold tales taught by griots in the African homeland. Popular stories often told how small animals, such as turtles and rabbits, outsmarted larger ones.

In more recent times, some African Americans have renewed ties with their past by taking African names or giving them to their children. This also helps keep alive African history and culture.

**Reading Check Explain** Why did Africans use dance to celebrate important events?

**History** **online**  
**Homework Helper** Need help with the material in this section? Visit [jat.glencoe.com](http://jat.glencoe.com)

## Section 3 Review

### Reading Summary

#### Review the **Main Ideas**

- Many Africans south of the Sahara lived in small villages. Family was very important, and women had fewer rights than men.
- Africans had kept slaves long before they began to trade enslaved persons to Muslims and Europeans.
- As enslaved Africans were taken to new areas, African culture, including art, music, and storytelling, spread around the world.

### What Did You Learn?

1. What was the African Diaspora?
2. What is the earliest form of African art known? Describe some of the subjects portrayed in the art.
3. **Organizing Information**  
Draw a diagram like the one below. Fill in details about African music and dance.
4. **Compare** How were African art and religion related?
5. **Identify** What was Queen Dahia al-Kahina's greatest accomplishment?
6. **Infer** Why do you think some Africans liked tales in which small animals outsmarted larger animals?

#### Critical Thinking

#### 3. Organizing Information

Draw a diagram like the one below. Fill in details about African music and dance.



7. **Persuasive Writing**  
Portuguese plantation owners relied on slave labor to help them grow sugarcane. Suppose you had a family member who was enslaved on a plantation. Write a letter to the plantation owner explaining why this practice is unacceptable.