



*Jacob U. Gordon*  
*Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong*

*Focus on  
Civilizations  
and Cultures*

# TRENDS IN AFRICAN STUDIES

NOVA

FOCUS ON CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURES

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JACOB U. GORDON

AND

STEPHEN OWOAHENE-ACHEAMPONG



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**FOCUS ON CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURES**

# **TRENDS IN AFRICAN STUDIES**

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## PREFACE

This book *Trends in African Studies* is a response to the challenge of the paucity of materials on the history and the development of African Studies in a global context. The available substantive materials on the subject are limited, thus creating a gap in related literature. Yet, the field of African Studies continues to generate global interest, academic recognition, and respectability. This book documents the current state of African Studies and emerging trends in the field. It covers the development of African Studies in a global context: African Studies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Europe, Australia, the United States of America and Canada, South America and the Caribbean, and it analyzes the trends present in each continent. An important contribution of this book to the field of African Studies is the development of an African Studies index designed for measuring the quality of African Studies and ranking. Useful information, suggested multidisciplinary research methods in African Studies and an appendix, which includes a researched list of African Studies journals and organizations related to African Studies, are found within its pages.

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## *Chapter 1*

# **AFRICAN STUDIES: AN INTRODUCTION**

This book is a response to the challenge of the paucity of materials on the history and the development of African Studies in a global context. The available substantive materials on the subject are limited thus creating a gap in related literature. Yet, the field of African Studies continues to generate global interest, academic recognition, and respectability. It is worth noting, however, that few scholars have attempted to shed light on the history of African Studies, especially in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. These scholars include: Fage (1989); Fyfe (1994); Herskovits (1964); Gordon (2013); Guyer (1996); Zeleza (1997). This book on African Studies in a global context is therefore designed to fill the existing gap in related literature on the history, trends and challenges in African Studies. This book is organized into seven chapters: (1) African Studies: An Introduction; (2) African Studies in Africa; (3) African Studies in Asia and the Middle East; (4) African Studies in Europe and Australia; (5) African Studies in the United States and Canada; (6) African Studies in South America and the Caribbean, and lastly (7) the Conclusion. The appendix to the book contains valuable documents, including a list of African Studies Association, African Studies academic journals, and an index of related African Studies organizations and their activities.

Four related research methods were used in collecting the data in the book: literature review; survey instrument; website-based data collection; and selected interviews. These four methods complemented each other and have contributed immensely to the study. We want to note that for the purposes of maintaining accurate information on their activities, some excerpts from the websites of some of the programs covered in this work were directly taken from their various websites with or without changes made to them; and that

the various websites of the programs have served as a major source of information for this book.

In the interest of clarity, it is important to make a distinction between the study of Africa and African Studies as a discipline. The study of Africa is as old as Africa, the cradle of civilization. African Studies as an interdisciplinary field of intellectual inquiry is a product of Western academy that grew out of the concept of area studies, emerging as one of the legacies of WWII and the cold war. On the other hand, the study of Africa was conducted by ancient African scholars, and many others. In many ways, these studies provided the foundation for early knowledge production and understanding of ancient Africa. And although these early attempts to study Africa have contributed to our knowledge and understanding of Africa, they do not constitute what is now known as African Studies programs, centers, departments, institutes, schools. This raises the question, what is the definition of African Studies? Gordon (2013) defines African Studies as: A formerly organized multi-disciplinary academic study of the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora. In expanding on this definition he suggests that African Studies is three-dimensional: research/knowledge production; dissemination of knowledge/teaching; and the application/transformation of knowledge into policies and social action. He also notes that the Eurocentric definition of African Studies only focused on Sub-Sahara Africa, excluding North Africa and the African Diaspora. It is important to note the numerous accounts of early scholars who studied Africa.

To be sure, the history of the study of Africa is about the study of the genesis of the human race. There are numerous accounts of historians and geographers of Africa that date back to the 11th century when the first university in the world, the legendary University of Timbuktu, was established in the Mali Kingdom. Included in the list of these early Africanists were: Al-Bakri, 1014-1094; Ibn Batuta, 1304-1369; Ibn Khaldun, 1332-1406; Leo Africanus, 1494-1554; Ahmad Baba, 1556-1627; Herodotus, 480BC; Manetho, a 3rd century historian of Egypt; Amelia Edwards, 1831-1892; John Gardner Wilkinson, 1797-1875; Carl Richard Lepsius, 1810-1884; and William Mathew Flinders Petrie, 1853-1942. From the time of these early Africanists, the literature in African Studies has grown and continues to grow. Fyfe (1976), Jewsiewicki and Newburg (1985) have provided useful comparative studies; Fage (1989, 1993) and Fyfe (1994) focus on African Studies in Great Britain; Ray (1991) discusses African Studies in Canada, and Guyer (1996) gives a perspective on African Studies in the United States and Herskovits (1964) makes an analysis of African Studies in the United States

and Europe. It should be noted here that at the time of writing this volume, the literature on African Studies in Africa was nonexistent. Meanwhile, Zeleza (1997) challenges the practice of African Studies and its political significance in his volume, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crisis*. He argues that 'as a discursive formation, African Studies is immersed in the contexts and configuration of the Western epistemological order' (Zeleza 1997: 55). Arguably, the European and American writing about Africa was, at the time of the transatlantic slave trade, apologetic.

In Africa, the development of African Studies is a post-colonial phenomenon since colonial policies did not encourage Africa-centered educational system. Not only did the colonial administrators not encourage Africa-centered education, they had no knowledge of African history; some of them had limited knowledge based on their prejudices and stereotypes. The notion that Africa had no history, and that the Africans were primitive and inferior, was pervasive among colonial administrators. In a few instances, such as South Africa, a School of African Studies was established at the University of Cape Town in 1920. Ntsebeza (2012) has suggested that the school was designed to study the philology of African natives to enhance the knowledge of colonialists to govern and control the natives. For the most part, colonial education was never intended to be Africa-centered; indeed it was Eurocentric, notwithstanding the early efforts at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Kwegyir Aggrey, under the sponsorship of the Phelps Stokes Foundation of the United States of America, to change African educational system (Dekutsey, 2012). As most African nations gained independence in the 1960s, the Africanization of African institutions was seen by many African leaders as an important part of national development. African nationalism was useful in the Africanization process. President Kwame Nkrumah was very clear about the role of African Studies in the advancement of Africa. At the official opening of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana on October 25, 1963, he stated: 'This Institute must help to foster in our University and other educational institutions the idea of education, which will produce devoted men and women with imagination and ideas, who, by their life and actions, can inspire our people to look forward to a great future' (Nkrumah 1963: 4).

Another major early source of scholarship on Africa was the travelers of the ancient world who attempted to explore Africa. The list includes Strabo and Hanno of Carthage; Arab and Chinese scholars who discovered and chronicled a succession of powerful African Kingdoms including ancient Ghana, Songhai, Wangara, Bornu and Mali. As Nkrumah (1964: 7) pointed out in his speech to the First International Congress of Africanists, 'The

Chinese, too, during the T'ang dynasty (AD 618-907), published their earliest major records of Africa; but Chinese acquaintance with Africa was not confined to knowledge of Egypt only. They had detailed knowledge of Somaliland, Madagascar and Zanzibar and made extensive visits to other parts of Africa.' Among these early scholars is the accomplishment of a young Zulu student, Isaka Seme, who won the first prize of the Curtis Medal Orations at Columbia University on April 5, 1906. In introducing his speech, Seme noted: 'I have chosen to speak to you on this occasion upon "The Regeneration of Africa."' 'I am an African,' he said, 'And I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion.' He concluded the prize-winning speech with a poem he wrote:

'O Africa!

Like some great century plant shall bloom  
In ages hence, we watch thee; in our dream  
See in thy swamps the Prospero of our dream;  
Thy doors unlocked, where knowledge in her tomb  
Hath lain innumerable years in gloom  
Then shalt thou, waking with that morning gleam,  
Shine as thy sister lands with equal beam.' (Quoted in Nkrumah 1962: 15)

Several factors gave rise to African Studies in Africa:

### 1. The Race Factor

Throughout the 17th, the 18th and the 19th centuries European scholars and the European public in general referred to Africa as the "Dark Continent." Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, who in 1899 wrote, perhaps best articulated this view of Africa:

The Negro, more than any other human type, has been marked out by his mental and physical characteristics as the servant of other races.... But the Negro in a primitive state [he] is a born slave. He is possessed of great physical strength, docility, cheerfulness of disposition, a short memory for sorrows and cruelties, and an easily aroused gratitude for kindness and just dealing. He does not suffer from home-sickness to the over-bearing extent that afflicts other peoples torn from their homes, and he has little or no race-fellowship—that is to say, he has no sympathy for other Negroes; he recognizes, follows, and imitates his master made him happy. Above all, he can toil hard under the hot sun and in the unhealthy climates independently of any race affinities... (Johnston 2011: 151-152).

Johnston's view reflected the prevailing opinion of the 19th century and for the most part of the 20th century. Caucasians believed and some still believe that white people were physically and mentally superior to Africans and peoples of African descent and they should therefore conquer them in order to civilize them. Many Caucasians regarded black people as inherently inferior. The famous British historian, Arnold Toynbee (1934-1961) concluded that Africa had no history. The colonial office (1768-1884) in London pursued the British Colonial policies in Africa, based on the so-called "civilizing mission" of Africans. In the Americas, slavery dominated American life. The publication of the *Bell Curve* by Charles Murray in 1994 was a rehash of the racial attitude of the West toward Africa and descendants of Africa. In his lecture on Africa and historical research to the Royal African Society in London, A.P. Newton (1923: 268) asserted, 'Africa had no history before the coming of Europeans.' And at the heart of the struggle for the full participation of African and other Black scholars in the African Studies Association, founded in 1957, the famous white American historian, Philip D. Curtin (1995) wrote 'The Ghettoizing of African History' in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He described the growing numbers of Africans and African Americans teaching African history in American universities as consequently "lowering" scholarly standards.

## 2. Discovery of the Origin of the Human Species

The search for the origin of the human species has had a tremendous impact on archeological studies, especially in Africa. Among these studies in Africa are the works of social scientists that are worth noting: L.S.B. Leakey (1970); Clark (1970); Phillipson (1985); Mirzai et al. (2009); Herskovits (1967); Mellars (1991); Berger (2001); and Lieberman (2011). Based on these and other works, Africa is generally accepted as the cradle of civilization. The highest primates were present in the Nile Valley forty million years ago and, some twenty million years later, a creature named *Kenyapitecus* appeared at Olduvai Gorge in East Africa. The material evidence for Africa as the cradle of humankind depends largely upon the recovery and examination of ancient bones, fossils, stone tools, and other artifacts. A recent publication by the *Science Journal* on October 2, 2009 points to a new track in the search for human origin. *Ardipithecus*, nicknamed "Ardi," the nearly complete fossil of a 4.4 million year old female ancestor was discovered in Ethiopia.

### 3. The Legacies of WWII and the Cold War

The Cold War politics forced the West and the communist bloc to compete for Africa's attention and resources. Thus in the interest of their national security, the West and the communist bloc became engaged in the study of African languages and culture. For the U.S. the need for its presence in world affairs dominated the American public views of Africa. The post WWII concern was internationalism. The Ford Foundation led the way in the 1960s in promoting and funding African research projects and organizations. The United Nations has also played a significant role in promoting African Studies as it focuses on the challenging problems facing Africa.

### 4. Pan-Africanism and the Emergence of African Independence

The Pan-African Movement, 1900-1945, helped to advance the course of African independence in the 1960s. Throughout the Pan-African Congresses that met in London, Brussels, and Manchester, England's public awareness of Africa was created by the leaders of the movement, namely H. Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, Rayford Logan, and the others. The goal of the Pan-African Movement, as expressed by its most notable leader, W.E.B. Du Bois, was African independence and the creation of the United States of Africa. African independence and the promise of independence to improve African quality of life stimulated interest in the study of Africa. Two important events directly affecting African Studies are worth noting: (1) the first Pan-African conference in Africa, known as the Accra Conference of 1958—Conference of Independent African States, and (2) the International Congress of Africanists, held in Accra, Ghana in 1962. The Accra conference in 1958 was the first Pan-African conference ever held on the continent of Africa. It brought all heads of African states to focus on the challenging problems facing Africa. The International Congress of Africanists was funded by the governments of Nigeria and Ghana, the Ford Foundation, and UNESCO. In attendance were 110 delegates and 300 observers from 65 countries. Notable speakers at the Congress included President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, J.H. Nketia, E.A. Boateng, K.O. Dike, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, M. Alioune Diop of Senegal, and Melville J. Herskovits of the U.S., among others. The Congress established the Bureau of the Congress of Africanists with K.O. Dike as President (see Brown and Crowder 1964).

## 5. The Reassertion of the African Diaspora to Its African Heritage

Long before the independence of African countries, many scholars of African descent in the Diaspora were already leading the way in the study of Africa and peoples of African descent. Among other things, these scholars provided Afrocentric perspectives of African Studies and the Diaspora. These perspectives began with the recognition of the landmark works of such scholars as Carter G. Woodson, Arthur Schomburg, W.E.B. Du Bois, George Washington Williams, William Wells Brown, Martin Delany, John Hope Franklin, and Edward W. Blyden. Throughout the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, the works of these African American intellectuals dominated the field of African Studies (Brocks 1996). Of a major significance is the establishment of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in 1915 as the oldest academy that focuses on Africa and Black America. These examples of scholarly works are sometimes characterized as responses to the 18th, 19th centuries and well into the 20th century European and White American view of Africa. In his edited volume, *African Studies for the 21st Century*, Gordon (2004) advances the course of the Afrocentric perspectives of African Studies vis-à-vis the Eurocentric perspectives and further documents the widespread varieties of African Studies. The Eurocentric view of African Studies is usually limited to the study of Black Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding Egypt and North Africa. The Afrocentric view includes the study of the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora.

One may ask: what is the state of African Studies today? This question reminds us of the fact that throughout the colonial period Africa was the preserve of western anthropologists. Africa was like a museum; a place to collect footnotes and often treated as an appendage to European history, and/or adjunct to Oriental Studies. Consequently, African Studies as an organized academic unit did not begin in Africa. Europe and the United States led the way in organized academic units that focus on Africa. In the United States, the Ford Foundation in the 1960s promoted and funded African research projects and organizations. Today the major funding source for African Studies in the U.S. is the Federal government under Title VI National Defense Act. Other Federal government funding sources include the State Department, U.S. AID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Armed Forces. At the time of writing, there were 12 Title VI funded African Studies Centers in 12 universities in the U.S. as National Resource Centers. More than 100 Centers were funded outside the Title VI



authorization. The African Studies Association, established in 1957, is the major academic and professional organization of African Studies in the U.S. It attracts more than 2,000 scholars and practitioners to its annual conference. There are also more than 35 other academic, professional, and philanthropic organizations in the U.S. on African Studies. They include African Heritage Association, African Literature Association, African American Institute, Association for the study of African American Life and History, Association of African Studies Programs, Association of African Women Scholars, Association of the Study of Classical African Civilization, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Ghana Studies Council, Trans-Africa, Corporate Council on Africa, International Society for the Study of Africa, and Mid-America Alliance for African Studies. Only about four such organizations are in Africa. In Europe, the development of African Studies has become widespread in the post-colonial era; some of the organizations had their roots in colonial offices. Today major European universities have established strong African Studies programs, and libraries. They include the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, African Studies Center, the University of Edinburgh; London School of Economics, University of Oxford, Leeds University; Cambridge University; United Kingdom Libraries and Archives Group on Africa; Leiden University, Netherlands; Brussels Centre of African Studies, Belgium; University at Bayreuth, Germany; University of Copenhagen, Centre of African Studies, Denmark; Warsaw University, Department of African Languages and Cultures, Poland; Moscow State University; Institut für Afrikanistik, Austria; Humboldt-University, Department of African Studies, Berlin, Germany; Universidade do Porto, Centro de Estudos Africanos, Porto, Portugal; Université Paris I France. The African Studies Association of Great Britain was established in 1963; the Canadian Committee on African Studies, which was founded in 1962, was reconstituted as the Canadian Association of African Studies in 1970; and the European Conference on African Studies (ECAS) came into being in 2009. There are also African Studies Programs in Asia and Australia: Kyoto University Center for African Area Studies, Japan; Tel Aviv University, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Israel; University of Delhi, Department of African Studies, India; University of Mumbai, Department of African Studies Mumbai, India; and La Trobe University, African Research Institute, Victoria, Australia.

The record on African Studies in Africa is spotty at best. There are about 950 public universities in Africa (AAU 2010), 350 of which are members of the Association of African Universities (AAU) with its headquarters in Accra,



Ghana. Based on available data, only about 18 universities or 2% have organized academic units of African Studies. The first institution of African Studies in Africa was established in 1947 at the Cairo University. The University of Ghana Institute of African Studies, which followed was established in 1961; the University of Ibadan Institute of African Studies in 1962; the University of Cape Town Center for African Studies in 1976; the University of Khartoum, Department of African Studies in 1972; Addis Ababa University Institute of African Studies in 2007. Others include the University of Nairobi Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies, the University of Dar es Salaam Institute of Swahili Studies, the Kenyatta University Institute of African Studies, the West African Research Center in Senegal, and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA). There is also evidence indicating some type of African Studies related activities in about 23 African universities. While the U.S., U.K., Europe, and Canada, have well-organized networks, such as the Association of African Studies, Africa has only recently organized and established an African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA).<sup>1</sup> And although there are millions of available library resource materials on Africa and the Diaspora, African universities collectively have less than 10% of these materials. Yet, these materials and most of the authentic materials on Africa are found in Africa. The problem is that Africa has failed to invest in itself and its future. The good news is that African Studies are not only thriving in the U.S., Europe, South America, Canada, and the Caribbean, but also growing in Asia, Russia, Australia, and the Middle East. Worldwide, it is estimated that there are about 180 African Studies programs, institutes, departments, and centers. The contributions of African Studies to the global academic community have been

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<sup>1</sup> At the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, an international conference on African Studies was convened at the University of Ghana, October 23-26, 2013 at Legon, Accra. And under the leadership of the Director of the Institute of African Studies, Professor Akosua Adamako Ampofo and Emeritus Professor Jacob U. Gordon, the occupant of the Kwame Nkrumah Endowed Chair in African Studies at the University of Ghana, an African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) was established on October 25, 2013. The duly elected officers of the ASAA were: President, Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza, University of Cape Town, South Africa; Vice President, Professor Akosua Adamako Ampofo, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra; Secretary, Professor Catherine Mwihaque-Naungo, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya; and Treasurer, Professor Oladele O. Layiwola, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. The ASAA, among other activities, organizes a biennial conference, the first of which was scheduled to be hosted by the University of Ibadan in October, 2015 at Ibadan, Nigeria. It is anticipated that Africanists in Africa will eventually establish another related organization, an Association of African Studies Programs (AASP). A similar organization in the US comprises about 100 Center Directors. The AASP focuses on administrative issues and funding.