The Black Diaspora:

Africans and Their Descendants in the Wider World
1800 to the Present
Revised Edition

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In Part II of the African Diaspora, we continue exploring themes pertinent to the experiences of Africans and their descendants in the wider world. The readings in this volume span the period of 1800 to the present and expand on some subjects already introduced in Part I as well as introduce a series of new discussions.

Unlike the readings in Part I, the excerpts included in the present volume look at Diasporic communities in the Americas in addition to those communities' relationships with Africa. A major thrust in the readings deals with the continued divergences within and between these communities. Diasporic communities in the Americas varied in culture, as well as in political and economic status. At one extreme were the Samacacas of Dutch Guiana (present-day Surinam) who maintained an independent, isolated existence where strongly African cultural characteristics blended with Native American ones. At another extreme were urban free blacks of Brazil, who were in the process of constructing a new culture of European, African, and Native American elements leading to a distinctively Brazilian pattern. Economically and politically, they ranged from the newly independent state of Haiti, where some former slaves exercised political power and achieved wealth, to the extremes of suffering and deprivation on some West Indian sugar plantations. The majority of the Diasporic blacks in the Atlantic Diaspora by 1800 fell in between these extremes.
This volume is divided into nine major headings. Part I begins with a general introduction by Elliot Skinner, in which the term "African Diaspora" is discussed. Part II provides an overview of the African background to the Diaspora as well as covers aspects of the settlement and formation of Diasporic societies before 1800. Part III discusses comparative slavery in the Americas in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Part IV explores the themes of liberation, abolition, and emancipation and the differing inputs of the enslaved and the pro-abolitionist supporters, as well as the ideological and economic preconditions which contributed to the demise of slavery. Part V then examines early attempts by Diasporic blacks to return to Africa in the period prior to 1850. In Part VI, the question of how Diasporic blacks used their freedom to forge new economic and political relationships with their oppressors in the period from 1840 to 1910 is highlighted, as well as the development of new socio-cultural institutions.

The readings in Part VII cover the first forty years of the twentieth century, and highlight the emergence of new organizations and leadership, designed to combat continuing racism and exploitation. Part VIII takes up Africa again, from 1850 onwards, highlighting the renewal of links between Diasporic blacks and Africa and the rise of Pan-Africanist ideology. Part IX concludes with a series of readings covering the post World War II period to the present. Here the various strategies leading to self-determination in the diaspora, that is nationalism, civil rights, black consciousness and assimilation are discussed.

Because it is difficult to find relevant readings which are representative of all the themes covered in class discussions, the readings are introduced individually or in groups so that the regional and comparative focus is maintained. These readings and introduction should provide a critical assessment of the role of African descendants in the Americas and their impact on Africa.