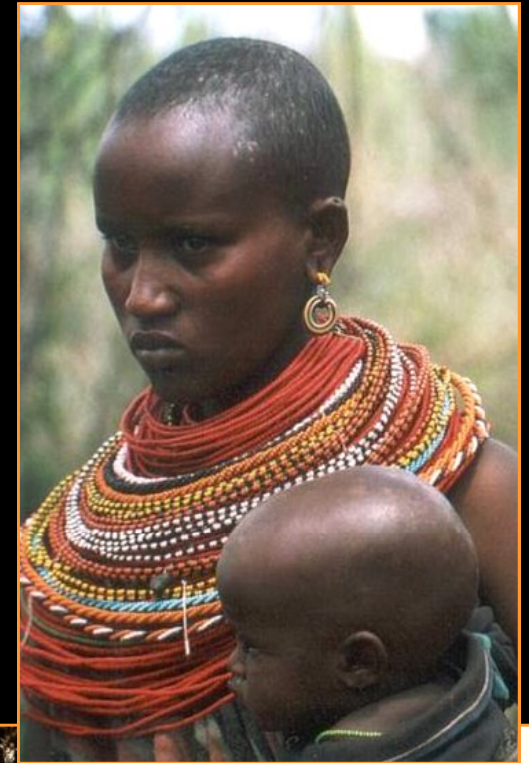
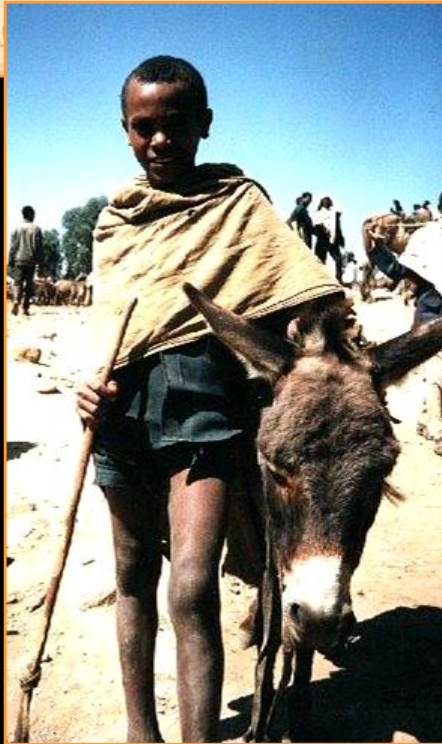
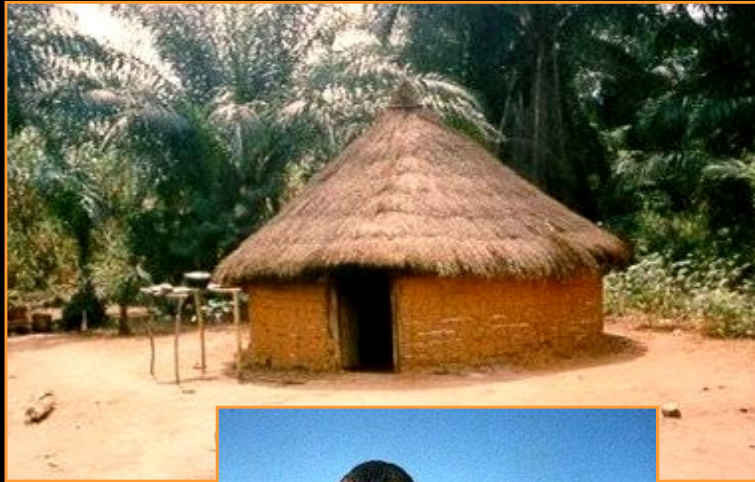


Traditional African Society



The Development of Cultural Unity

- In sub-Saharan Africa no overarching “great tradition” developed
- Sub-Saharan Africa is a vast territory of many “small traditions.”
- Historians know very little about the prehistory of these many “small traditions” and their peoples

- African cultures are highly diverse
- There is an estimated 2000 languages spoken
- Another reason for the long dominance of “small traditions” is that no foreign power was able to conquer Africa and thus impose a unified “great tradition.”

African Cultural Characteristics

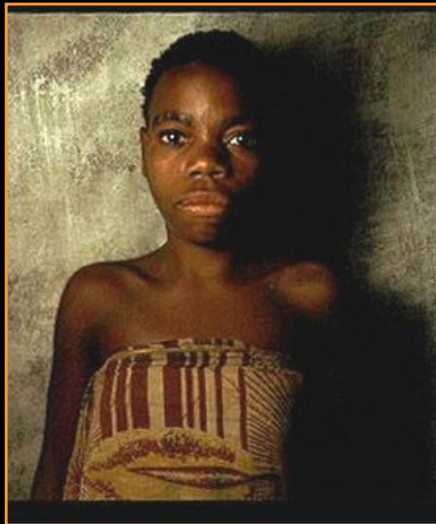
- Despite their diversity, African cultures display certain common features that attest to an underlying cultural unity that some scholars have called “Africanity.”
- One of these common cultural features is a concept of kingship in which kings are ritually isolated and oversee societies in which the people are arranged in age groups and kinship divisions.

- Other common features include cultivation with the hoe and digging stick, the use of rhythm in African music, and the functions of dancing and mask wearing in rituals.
- One hypothesis offered to explain this cultural unity holds that the people of sub-Saharan Africa are descended from the people who occupied the southern Sahara during its “wet period” and migrated south the Sahel, where their cultural traditions developed.



1000 different languages; 1000+ different tribes

An African's "Search for Identity"



1. Nuclear Family
2. Extended Family
3. Age-Set
4. Clan
5. Lineage (ancestry)

TRIBE (communal living)

Mask With Headcloth, Zaire (19c)



Tribal Mark → scarification

Kisokolo Initiation Costume, Democratic Republic of the Congo



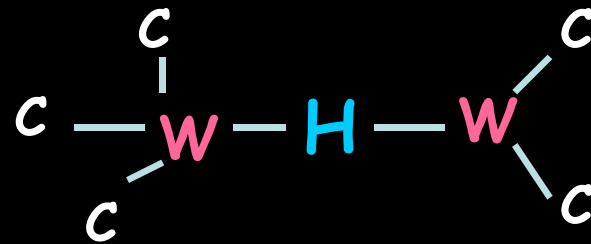
Kisokolo Initiates, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1990



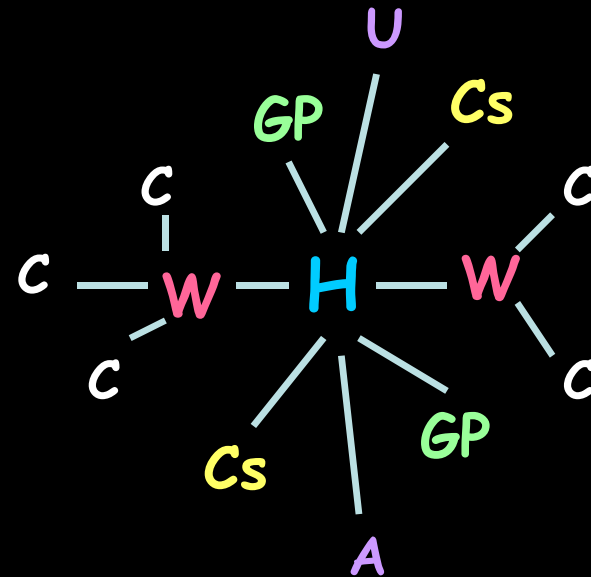
Africa : Tribe :: America : Ethnic Group

Traditional Family Structures

Nuclear Family:



Extended Family:



Family Group, Tanzania



Problems of Tribalism Today

1. The tribe is more important than the nation.
2. Communication problems.
3. Inter-tribal warfare → civil wars.
4. Tribal favorites for government jobs:
Nepotism
Urbanization:
 - Breaks down tribal traditions.
 - Tribal intermingling on the job.

Traditional African Religion



ANIMISM

1. Belief in one remote Supreme Being.
2. A world of spirits (good & bad) in all things.
3. Ancestor veneration.
4. Belief in magic, charms, and fetishes.
5. Diviner → mediator between the tribe and God.

African Diviner (Shaman)



World of the Spirits



Dogon "Spirit House"

Other Religions in Africa

ISLAM → 25%

* Nigeria

→ largest sub-Saharan
Muslim country

CHRISTIANITY → 20%

Early African Societies

Anthropologists think that the first humans lived in East Africa. Over thousands of years, people spread out over the continent, forming distinct cultures and societies.

Early Farming Societies

- During early phase of their history, Africans lived as hunter-gatherers
- About 9,000 years ago, some began to grow native crops
- In some parts, pastoralism, practice of raising herd animals, arose before farming

Pastoralists in Sahara

- First farmers likely pastoralists of Sahara—wetter 8,000 years ago
- 5,000 years ago climate changed, Sahara became drier
- As land became desert, people migrated to Mediterranean coast, Nile Valley, parts of West Africa

By about 2500 BC many people in these regions practiced herding and mixed farming.

Social Structures

Common Features

- Many societies developed village-based cultures
- At heart, extended family living in one household
- Families with common ancestors formed clans to which all members loyal

Age-Sets

- In some areas, people took part in type of group called age-sets
- Men who had been born within same two, three years formed special bonds
- Men in same age-set had duty to help each other

Specific Duties

- Loyalty to family, age-sets helped village members work together
- Men hunted, farmed; women cared for children, farmed, did domestic chores
- Even very old, very young had own tasks; elders often taught traditions to younger generations

Religion and Culture

Many early Africans shared similar religious beliefs and shared common features in the arts as well.

Examples of Beliefs

- Many believed that unseen spirits of ancestors stayed near
- To honor spirits, families marked certain places as sacred places, put specially carved statues there
- Families gathered to share news, food with ancestors, hoping spirits would protect them

Animism

- Many Africans also practiced form of religion called animism—belief that bodies of water, animals, trees, other natural objects have spirits
- Animism reflected Africans' close ties to natural world

Griots

- Many early societies did not develop systems of writing
- Maintained sense of identity, continuity through oral traditions
- Included stories, songs, poems, proverbs
- Task of remembering, passing on entrusted to storytellers, **griots**

Music and Dance

- In many societies, music, dance central to many celebrations, rituals
- Carving, wearing of elaborate masks part of these rituals as well
- Early Africans excelled in sculpture, bronze as well as terra cotta
- Traditional music performed with variety of wind, stringed instruments

Common Traits or Characteristics of Traditional African Tribal Life

1. The good of the group comes ahead of the good of the individual.
2. All land is owned by the group.
3. Strong feeling of loyalty to the group.
4. Important ceremonies at different parts of a person's life.
5. Special age and work associations.
6. Deep respect for ancestors.
7. Religion is an important part of everyday life.
8. Government is in the hands of the chiefs [kings].