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The Nature of a Continent. British Broadcasting Corporation.

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The Nature of a Continent is the first of a series (*The Africans*) of nine one-hour programs that focus on the history and contemporary life of Africa. It was written and narrated by Ali Mazrui, an African academic who is widely known and who, although he teaches in the United States, provides a uniquely African perspective with which some Westerners may not always feel comfortable. Mazrui looks at the three segments of what he calls Africa's triple heritage: its indigenous heritage, Western culture, and Islam. It is the coexistence of these three legacies, he feels, that helps explain the diversity of the continent. This series was originally broadcast in 1986, but it has remained perhaps one of the best overall examinations currently available on video of the continent as a whole. This first tape deals with what is perhaps Africa's most powerful indigenous force: its geography and climate. Concerned as he is with water as one of the most important components in Africa's geography, perhaps it is only natural that after having presented Africa as the birthplace of humankind, he then proceeds to show, not forgetting to quote Herodotus, how the Nile river was an essential element in the birth of the first great civilization. From the history of Egyptian civilization to the place of women in African society (they are central to African economy Mazrui says, more so than in the Western world), to the slave trade and colonialism, to the contemporary crises of the post-colonial states, Mazrui continues to look at the role of water and weather. He states that nature in Africa is wedded to culture, and for centuries nature protected Africa from foreign invasions and influence, with the notable exception of Islam. Mazrui

speaks of the African environment, recalling that, in traditional African culture, the earth was treated as a partner rather than something to be used and abused, that animals had souls and were not placed on the earth merely for someone's profit, and that the forest had a virtually religious function and did not exist merely as a repository for firewood. Mazrui explores the coexistence and interlocking influences of Africa's three great religious traditions (traditional, Christianity and Islam) and the means by which Africa's human and natural resources have been exploited. He finishes his look at the African environment by stating that "man, the environment and moral values need to be in harmony" if both the earth and the people are to survive. He ends by showing baptisms in the old Coptic Church in Ethiopia where the Nile begins and from where it flows to Egypt, the original cradle of Africa where our story began. This is a beautifully photographed, powerful look at Africa. It is filmed in various locales all over the continent in both rural and urban settings. There are some scenes that might be considered difficult to watch, such as the killing of elephants, the slaughtering of pigs, and children starving and dying from malnourishment due to the effects of drought. Recommended for high school students or older, this program ought to provide a lot of food for thought and discussion. It is a welcome relief for much of what passes for informed opinion and knowledge of this continent. A book based on this series entitled *The Africans: a Reader* is available, as well as a *Viewer's Guide: the Africans*, something that teachers or students could use in conjunction with the series.

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