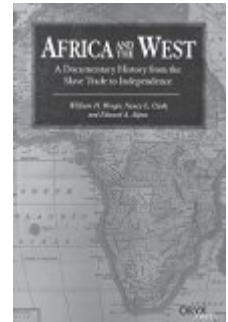


**William H. Worger Alpers, Nancy L. Clark, Edward A..** *Africa and the West: A Documentary History from Slave Trade to Independence*. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 2001. ix + 428 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57356-247-8.



**Reviewed by** Randal Maurice Jelks

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Any teacher of African history knows that finding an accessible one-volume collection of primary documents is a chore. The difficulty is that there is a dearth of these volumes in print. When doing one's own course pack, there are endless choices to be made; the materials are written in Arabic, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Spanish, and finding a suitable translation into English can be difficult. Additionally, there are oral histories of African ethnic groups and monarchies, documented in the fieldwork of anthropologists and historians, that must also be incorporated. The sources for teaching African history are plentiful enough. However, it is the range of sources that bogs down teachers, especially those who are new to the field. The three authors of *Africa and the West*, William Worger, Nancy Clark, and Edward Alpers, have tried to resolve this dilemma in this one-volume compilation of 120 documents. They have constructed the volume so that "a wide range audiences, from middle school, high school, and college students and beyond to anyone interested in the history of the African continent" can

have access to the wealth of these materials (p. viii).

The authors have chosen to go down a familiar path. They emphasize Africa's relationship with western political states from the era of the Atlantic slave trade through European colonial domination and independence movements, culminating with the democratization of South Africa in 1994. Another way of viewing their compilation is as a narrative from Olaudah Equiano to Nelson Mandela or the Guinea Coast to Johannesburg--not in an easy, linear fashion, but through a winding, disjointed path fraught with possibilities and dangers in both the European and African worlds. This volume keeps its focus on sub-Saharan Africa and the developments in the Atlantic world. Therefore the range of materials begins with a fifteenth-century Papal Bull granting the Portuguese a monopoly on slavery and closes with the post-colonial record of genocide in Rwanda.

What makes it usable is that the authors have given solid introductions to each section; moreover, they offer succinct introductions before

each entry, providing valuable information so that the reader can grasp the material. The ordering of the material in sections entitled "Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade," "From Abolition to Conquest," "Colonialism and Its Critics" and "The Contradictions of Post-Colonial Independence" all make the volume handy. The authors ought to be commended for their effort.

This is a good one-volume source which I would highly recommend, however, it is not perfect. Although the choices of material are superb, there are interesting omissions. For example, while the authors provide the fifteenth-century Papal Bull, they do not include King Afonso I (Nzinga Mbemba) of Congo's 1526 appeal to the Pope arguing that enslavement was endangering his region. The failure to include such writings could lead readers to believe that Africans were not aware of the dire consequences of slavery until the eighteenth century, when abolitionist slave narratives began to be published in Britain. The oral histories of particular African communities are another interesting omission. The authors might have included some of these accounts to demonstrate the mindsets of various African societies in this era. The document in this volume that comes closest to addressing the worldview of Africans during this period is entitled, "The Asante King questions British motives in ending the slave trade." The cosmologies of Africans are essential to understanding the conflict generated between the West and Africa over their long interactions. The inclusion of more material concerning African cosmologies would have strengthened the volume and assisted students in understanding the cultural context of many African societies, both during and after the slave trade era.

Another criticism I have of the volume is its regional limitation. Although one must respect the authors' position that Africa is too diverse and too large to cover comprehensively in any one volume, there is still a problem with the arbitrary separation of North Africa from the sub-Saharan

region, particularly in the period of the slave trade. North African Muslim slave traders were part of the exploitative market of slavery too. Also, as the authors are well aware, the erosion of the Ottoman Empire in parts of North Africa gave Europeans another entry point into the entire continent. The encroachment into Africa was not only the result of the slave trade but also the slow death of a great land-based empire. In the long run, European incursion into the continent from both the North and the South brought nationalistic awareness among Arabic-speaking Africans as well as those below the Sahara. Kwame Nkrumah, for example, saw himself not only as a Ghanaian, but also as an African. One justification, in his mind, for marrying an Egyptian woman rather than a fellow Ghanaian was overall African unity. (Of course, I concede, this was a naïve and romanticized view of Africa on Nkrumah's part.) The liberation struggle of Gamal Nasser and Nkrumah has an ideological continuity that needs more documentary comparison than given in this volume.

Despite its limitations, I recommend the book highly. It will solve a problem for many new teachers and enrich student understanding of African history. The authors are to be commended for making accessible this rich material in a format from which teachers and students may benefit.

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