

Africa: a Continent of Contrasts

By Jude Badaki

Writing a concise but short survey of Africa would make a sketchy work like this almost impossible because it means attempting to describe, in relatively few words, the geography, language, history, culture and ways of life in 61 countries. Down through the ages Africa has bewildered visitors and new discoveries about it are still made to this day.

Africa is the second largest continent in the world. It has a land mass of dense rain and mangrove forests, the semi-arid savannah, and the arid deserts. The two monstrous deserts on the continent are the Sahara desert (the world's largest desert) and the Kalahari continent desert. Rising above are the Atlas mountains and the two highest peaks

of Mts. Kenya and Kilimanjaro.

Exotic animals such as zebras, gorillas, or cheetahs roam these rolling plains and lush greenery. The



*Children at play, Nigeria.
Photo Courtesy of Bunmi Ishola*

tropical climate in Africa is responsible for the wet and dry seasons. Temperatures are generally high though some parts of north, east and South Africa have extremely cold

climates at certain times of the year.

Africa is indeed a land of contrasts

W.S Leakey, an archaeologist working on a site in East Africa, found fossil remains that traced man's origins to Africa. This fossil is named *Australopithecus Africanus*. With a population of about 900,000,000 over 1000 languages and dialects are spoken in Africa but the most widely spoken are: Kswahili, Arabic, Creole, and Afrikaans. Of equal significance too is the official language inherited from colonial days: English, French, Arabic and Portuguese.

Africa is the home of the Egyptian pyramids and the ruins of Great Zimbabwe. Many artifacts from Africa kept in museums worldwide testify to its rich history and cultural heritage. Africa was colonized by European countries in the 1700s and 1800s. By the early 1900s, most African colonies had got their independence from Europe.

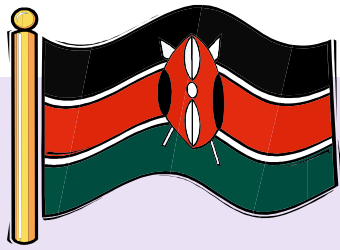
The major religions are Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. Social life in Africa is very interesting

also. The people celebrate a lot of festival and rites characterised by songs, music and dances. Some of these have evolved into modern songs. Traditional music in Africa is produced by the use of musical instruments like drums, gongs, flutes, musical bows and trumpets.

Finally, the continent's contrasting physical beauty, its wide variety of flora and fauna, its hospitable people, its rich history and cultural heritage place this cradle of human civilization as one among the world's foremost wonders.

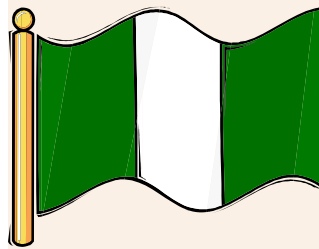
Spotlight on Kenya

Kenya is a country located in the East Africa. Its neighboring countries are: Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Kenya has also a sea coast along the Indian Ocean. The largest city and the capital is Nairobi. Mt Kenya, is Africa's second highest peak. It is regarded as the realm of Ngai, god of the local Kikuyu people and traditionally all Kikuyu homes were built to face the sacred peak.



In late 19th century Kenya became a colony first to Germany and later to Great Britain. Kenya became an independent country in 1963.

Spotlight on Nigeria



Nigeria is one of the developing countries in West sub-Saharan Africa. It is a country of great diversity. Its people belong to many ethnic groups and speak over 250 languages.

Two important rivers, the Niger and the Benue, run across the full length of the country's landscape into the Atlantic ocean. Nigeria has a rich history dating back to the Stone Age. Nigeria has been an independent country since 1960



and is officially called The Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Questions to ponder

1. Many of the countries in the African continent were colonies to different nations. Find out which countries colonized the African continent. Are any of the African countries colonized today?
2. How is African continent related to the history of the United States?