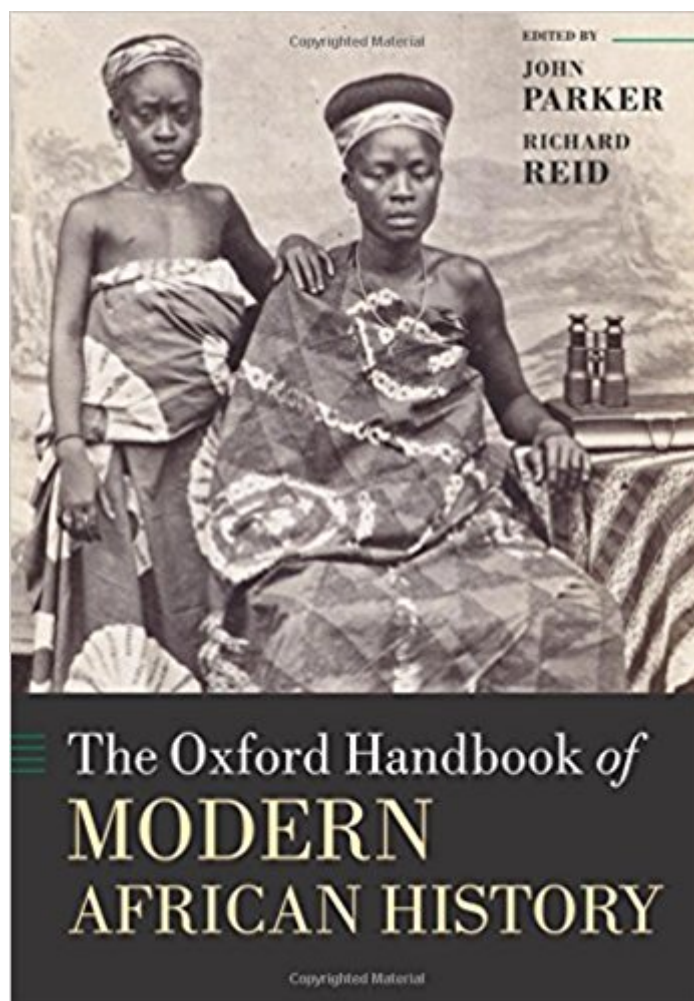


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# The Oxford Handbook Of Modern African History (Oxford Handbooks)



## Synopsis

The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History represents an invaluable tool for historians and others in the field of African studies. This collection of essays, produced by some of the finest scholars currently working in the field, provides the latest insights into, and interpretations of, the history of Africa - a continent with a rich and complex past. An understanding of this past is essential to gain perspective on Africa's current challenges, and this accessible and comprehensive volume will allow readers to explore various aspects - political, economic, social, and cultural - of the continent's history over the last two hundred years. Since African history first emerged as a serious academic endeavour in the 1950s and 1960s, it has undergone numerous shifts in terms of emphasis and approach, changes brought about by political and economic exigencies and by ideological debates. This multi-faceted Handbook is essential reading for anyone with an interest in those debates, and in Africa and its peoples. While the focus is determinedly historical, anthropology, geography, literary criticism, political science and sociology are all employed in this ground-breaking study of Africa's past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Handbook will be of major interest to both teachers of African history and the curious general reader. And since most essays include sections on 'future directions' and subjects ripe for further investigations, prospective researchers, too, have reasons to be grateful for the appearance of this

timely addition to the Oxford Handbooks series."--History Today"The volume's essays offer a fascinating panorama of the landscape of African history as it is today: in many ways a vibrant picture of the breadth and subtlety of research. The essays often impress with their grasp of the continent as a whole, and in their coverage of interactions between politics, society, and culture...[A]n invaluable addition to an outstanding series."--Journal of Historical Geography"[S]et to be a great success."--English Historical Review

John Parker teaches African history at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is the author of *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (2000); *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God* (2005; with Jean Allman); and *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (2007; with Richard Rathbone). He is currently conducting research on the history of death and the end of life in Ghana. Richard Reid is Professor of the History of Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is the author of several books, including *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda* (2002), *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa* (2007), *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the present* (2009; 2012), *Frontiers of Violence in Northeast Africa* (2011), and *Warfare in African History* (2012). He is the editor of *Eritrea's External Relations: Understanding its Regional Role and Foreign Policy* (2009), and has written a number of articles on various aspects of violence and liberation struggle in nineteenth- and twentieth-century northeast Africa. His work has focused particularly on the history of warfare and military culture in Africa; now he is researching historical consciousness and culture in Uganda. Professor Reid is also an editor of the *Journal of African History*.

This is an anthology, but what all authors have in common is that they write from a postcolonial perspective. The result is an African history that mainly concentrates on colonial rule and exploitation. It is very little explanation and analysis of African history prior to the colonial area. Traditional social anthropological knowledge about tribal culture and their political systems are thrown into the dustbin and explained as invented history by white anthropologist. (However, there is little explanation of how African society was organised, if it was not through tribes and clans). This is pity, because if traditional social anthropological knowledge had been taken into account (with critical reservations), then we would probably got a much better understanding of Africa's encounter with the outside world and its consequences. In the postcolonial world, Africans are mainly victims of European colonial exploitation only. However, they are probably right when describing how the colonialists used and transformed tribal structures and

power to fit into their colonial system. Postcolonialists are obsessed by not describing any cultures as "others" or "exotic". It is like if shame thinking has returned it is a shame to describe other societies as different from European or less technically advanced. In this book it results in almost comic proportions as for example when one author gives example of violent innovations for warfare and that the "most remarkable instances of religious violence" took place in the Sokoto caliphate in Northern Nigeria, in order to illustrate that Africans were not that less advanced than Europeans. In my experience, after working with development projects in more than 20 different countries in Africa and Asia, I am doubtful that post-colonialist theory has contributed much to positive development. On the contrary, postcolonial arguments have become a powerful tool for the mighty. President Mugabe and corrupt strong men all over Africa are happy to blame today's problems on colonialism in order to divert attention from the real problems of today, and their own mismanagement. Even within development and aid organisations, reference to colonialism tend to divert attention from problems related to local traditions. Ordinary poor Africans however, see and experience the corruption and the dysfunctional institutions every day. They are perfectly aware that traditional family and tribal thinking (where you reward your connections) is an obstacle to development. They want a society where they can trust institutions, police, administrators, contracts, and property rights and where they get their reasonable proportions from farm output and a decent salary for their work. Within the development industry, the consequence of postcolonialist thinking is that focus has been transferred from trying to understand local cultures and then adapt development policy accordingly, into how to introduce European and western institutions and policy. In many instances these policies are implemented by persuasion into African countries by World Bank, EU and aid agencies with little regard to local cultures and traditions. The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History was written by 26 of the world's leading experts on African History. They are all white - from Europe or North America. Not a single African was engaged to contribute to their own history! As such, this is a new version of how westerners with interpretation privilege describe Africans - "the others".

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