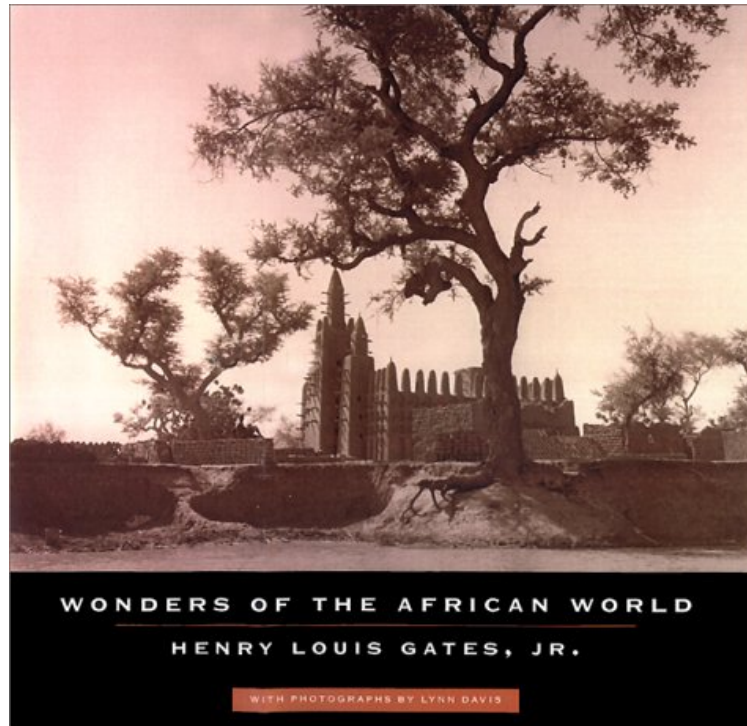


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Wonders of the African World

Henry Louis Gates Jr.

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Henry Louis Gates Jr. : Wonders of the African World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wonders of the African World:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Absolutely love this book By Cheryl Washington Absolutely love this book. This is a must have for anyone wanting to know the contributions and TRUE history of Africa!!! Very Highly Recommend!! 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. highly recommended By Ildiko Tillmann wonderful book, very interesting, lots of new information and great sense of humour. The pictures are beautiful. I highly recommend it. 19 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Illustrated Introduction By Ein Kunde "Wonders of the African World" by Henry Louis Gates is an interesting illustrated introduction to Africa, or more precisely, to ancient Nubia and modern Sudan; Ethiopia; Mali and Timbuktu; the Swahili East Coast; the historic Slave Coast and Gold Coast and modern Benin and Ghana; and South Africa and Zimbabwe. The book is a combination of personal essay, travelogue, and history. Much of the criticism of the "Wonders of the African World" TV/book production focused on Gates' sometimes goofy (to the point of insulting, think some) behavior vis-a-vis Africans; in print, Gates is more in his element and the book reads well. This is no comprehensive history of Africa; rather, Gates explores something of interest in each of the countries he visits (the relations between ancient Nubia and Egypt, Christianity in Ethiopia; the ancient library at Timbuktu; the Eastern slave trade and African/Arab lineage of the Swahili; the Western slave trade and the Asante Kingdom; and megalithic ruins in Southern Africa). Gates writes a middle course between two opposing camps: the outmoded "Africa has no history" and the extreme "All civilization originated in Africa". Gates is no scholar of the history of Africa (and he makes this clear in the opening of the book).

Readers who know little about Africa will certainly find much of interest here and will enjoy learning about Africa along with Gates. Students of African history might wonder what all the fuss is about. Everyone will admire the beautiful sepia-toned photographs by Lynn Davis. The book is filled out with well-chosen quotations from a variety of historic writers as well as vintage illustrations. Notes on sources are provided. It is a pity that Gates did not travel in central Africa, along the Congo River. That's the part of Sub-Saharan Africa with no ancient books (like Timbuktu), no lost cities of stone (like Southern Africa and Sudan), no ancient priesthood or empire (like Ethiopia). It would have been very interesting to see what Gates would have made of it. A full-fledged and highly recommended history of Africa is "Africa: A Biography of the Continent" by John Reader. Also see Basil Davidson's "The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State", "Modern Africa: A Social and Political History", and "Africa in History: Themes and Outlines".

The Companion Volume to the PBS Television Series *Wonders of the African World* is an exuberant, visually stunning journey across Africa and through the history of its glorious but forgotten civilizations. Traveling by camel, by dhow, by Land Cruiser, and on foot, the renowned scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., takes us to twelve countries in search of Africa's magnificent past, the now neglected civilizations that in their day were as grand and sophisticated as any on the face of the earth. From Nubia's ancient empire, which for a time ruled Egypt and centuries before had established the earliest known African city, to the fabled town of Timbuktu, where during the medieval period there thrived a center of scholars that rivaled any in Europe and where books were as prized as gold, to Ethiopia's Christian kingdom, where the Lost Ark of the Covenant is said to reside under perpetual vigil, Gates reveals an Africa little known to Westerners. And as he shows us the achievements that exploiters of the continent have ignored or denied for centuries, he introduces us as well to the fascinating variety of modern-day Africans, many of whom are descended from the great peoples who built Africa's most formidable cultures, including the Asante, the Swahili, the Tuareg, and the Shona. As Gates's compelling narrative shows, the continent's past continues to be felt in the lives of many Africans today. And in America for the descendants of those brought here as slaves, that past has been a controversial inheritance, passionately embraced by some, fiercely rejected by others. For this reason, Gates's deeply personal account of discovery is charged throughout by a question posed by Countee Cullen in his 1925 poem "Heritage" and perennially asked by African Americans: What is Africa to me? Finally, though, it is the wisdom of this book that the legacy of Africa, no less than that of Greece or Rome, belongs to all the world's civilized peoples. Illustrated with spectacular full-page photographs specially commissioned from the internationally acclaimed Lynn Davis, *Wonders of the African World* is Africa as we have never known or seen it before. With 66 photographs by Lynn Davis, 132 illustrations in black-and-white and full color, and 7 full-color maps

.com In the 1920s, Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen asked, "What is Africa to me?" *Wonders of the African World*, a stunning African travelogue by Harvard's Henry Louis Gates Jr. (arguably America's most public and prolific black intellectual), takes up that question for a new generation. A beautifully illustrated, literary companion to a PBS documentary series, *Wonders* traces Gates's 10-month sojourn through the African motherland, from the haunting pyramids of the Egyptian/Nubian empire in Sudan and the ancient Christian heritage of Ethiopia to the lost city of Timbuktu and the fabled University of Sankore. Erudite scholar that he is, Gates uses his trip to investigate the promise and perils of contemporary Africa, considering, among other issues, the unifying potential of the Swahili language and black complicity in the slave trade. Gates also takes aim at the Enlightenment, the subsequent colonialist occupations by European nations, and the worst aspects of Afrocentrism. Ultimately, he reveals an unbreakable, albeit ill-defined, relationship between Afro-Americans and Africans: "I have learned that I am neither Fon nor Beninian, Asante nor Ghanaian, Swahili nor Kenyan, Nubian or Sudanese," Gates writes. Though not a member of any one of these great peoples in particular, I am, as a descendant of a West African slave and of ex-slaves, the product of a truly Pan-African new world culture forged out of the crucible of slavery." --Eugene Holley Jr. From *Publishers Weekly* "I knew that any meaningful explanation of what Africa was to me would depend on discovering what Africa was, and is, both to Africans and to all of us." That imperative led Harvard professor Gates (*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*) on a journey through a dozen countries in an attempt to learn "who 'the African people' were and what, in fact, they had contributed to civilization." Its fruit Aa thoughtful, copiously illustrated survey of 22 outstanding sites that is the companion book to an upcoming PBS series A will open a new world to readers of all stripes. In Ethiopia, Gates visits Axum, where the practice of Christianity is older than in any Western European country and where the Ark of the Covenant may reside. In Mali, Gates explores Timbuktu, which was once "the site of black Africa's most important center of scholarship and learning... rivaling Europe's emerging universities." His excursions into Ghana and Benin provide the backdrop for an unflinching look at the role Africans played in the slave trade. In South Africa, he refutes the main tenet of apartheid's "counterfeit" history A that the land was uninhabited until the first white settler arrived in 1652 A by journeying to the lost cities of the Shona kingdom. The author scrupulously distinguishes proven facts from hopeful conjecture, and the text is lightened by numerous humorous anecdotes. Though the book's rapid switches between present and past are occasionally awkward, the structure allows Gates to fuse his scholarship with

candid accounts of his own longing for, and later discovery of, the richness of African history. The result is a marvel all its own: a book that celebrates the continent's neglected achievements. BOMC and Doubleday Natural Science Book Club selections. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal This account of discovery by Harvard University professor Gates offers, said LJ's reviewer, a "12-nation reprise of the magnificence of ancient African civilizations." It belongs in "every library serious about Africa or world civilizations, and it will grace both coffee tables and scholars' desks." (LJ 10/15/99) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.