
Diversity And Social Complexity Of Africans Before The Atlantic Slave Trade

When looking at America's history, something that many have taken note of is the differences seen among individuals from different eras. Many have differentiated mindsets, customs, appearances, etc shaped by the values of the era they lived in and their environment. However, people tend to generalize countries/continents from certain time periods into a singular group with shared lives. Contrary to common belief, one of the most diverse continents was Africa, specifically before the Transatlantic slave trade. Because Africa is one of the biggest continents, there were many large groups of people separated by geographic barriers. This caused many advanced societies to form individually from one another. Before the transatlantic slave trade, Africa showed diversity through the abundance of individualized societies in Africa and social complexity when observing accomplishments of societies such as Timbuktu.

Timbuktu, a city controlled by Songhai and Morocco later on, was an advanced society as shown through their trading methods and well roundedness. Timbuktu was "Home to three of Africa's oldest mosques, as well as several universities, the city attracted scholars from throughout the Muslim world". These mosques were symbolic of Islamic worship, a dominant religion in this city. By promoting religious values, education, and attracting smart people from other areas, this city raised a generation of capable citizens who could contribute effectively to their society. These are the same people that can apply their knowledge to developing tools that will help Timbuktu continue to grow; gaining more power/technology at a pace faster than most cities at the time. Not only did Timbuktu gain the knowledge needed to grow but they creatively attained the resources (and ultimately power) to do this. They had developed "A trading network [which] funneled the gold along with kola, slaves, and animals products to cities like Jenne from which they were sent downriver to Timbuktu to be traded and transshipped across the Sahara". This route connected the people of Timbuktu with other societies (such as the Middle East) where people could exchange information, cultures, and new technology. Additionally, it gave them important resources to further develop their own city and ultimately become more powerful. Timbuktu had attained more gold than many cities and gained recognition from many areas for their power and resources.

Although many of these societies had become connected through trade, they were still differentiated from one another. This is shown through their strengths as a society and artistic expressions. For example, in Kush, a region containing cities close in proximity to Egypt, the Nile River was a vital resource assisting them in growing crops and attaining resources needed to trade with other societies. Due to their location, "Kushite traders passed along ivory, ebony,

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incense, and other exotic goods from the South to the Egyptians who then traded with other Mediterranean peoples". The city of Kush had developed a way to contribute to the trading system in a way that other societies could not and attain other resources needed. While many other cities would solely trade metals, the people of Kush would trade spices and resources derived from the abundance of trees surrounding them. As cities had used their unique resources to do this, they also showed diversity through their architecture and symbolic paintings as well. The Kushites did this by developing impressive temples and paintings on tomb walls. They also showed impressive skills in pottery, specifically the patterns observed on the pottery.

These temples, paintings, and pottery were created as worship to the Egyptian Gods, which was a dominant religion in Kush. By comparing the cities Timbuktu and Kush, one can see that they are very different. Timbuktu was a city that attracted scholars and had an Islamic dominant religion while Kush was a city that had mainly worshiped the Egyptian gods and was known for their detailed patterns. Additionally, while Timbuktu mainly handled gold in trades, Kushites had traded spices. These two cities had consisted of people with different value sets, artistic expression, and resources. These two cities are just one example of the differences seen between the cities and kingdoms in Africa. On a larger scale, these differences are seen between East and West Africa as well. Cities in West and East Africa had followed different religions/have different religious trends. Additionally, only West Africa had slavery and participated in the trading of gold whereas East Africa did not have slaves and participated in the trading of spices.

Through this paper, it is evident that, before the transatlantic slave trade, Africa had shown diversity and social complexity. This was examined through the accomplishments of Timbuktu and the comparison made between Timbuktu and Kush. Overall, these societies had shown to be different in every aspect of life consisting of very different people, whether it was observed through a religious, resourceful, or artistic perspective. Additionally, these cities showed to have complex systems that were constantly changing and evolving. They had raised generations of leaders such as Mansa Musa, and had complex governmental systems that had helped them reach other societies much farther away from themselves. It is important to look back at history and try to attain as accurate a picture as possible and this can only be done through the observance of details. By generalizing a country as diverse as Africa into one group, there is no way to attain an accurate picture of history and to accurately understand how they functioned. Hopefully, as society progresses, future generations will focus on correcting these common misconceptions and attaining as accurate a picture as possible on the world's history.

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