



# Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa

*Lamin Sanneh*

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In 1792, nearly 1,200 freed American slaves crossed the Atlantic and established themselves in Freetown, West Africa, a community dedicated to anti-slavery and opposed to the African chieftain hierarchy that was tied to slavery. Thus began an unprecedented movement with critical long-term effects on the evolution of social, religious, and political institutions in modern Africa.

Lamin Sanneh's engrossing book narrates the story of freed slaves who led efforts to abolish the slave trade by attacking its base operation: the capture and sale of people by African chiefs. Sanneh's protagonists set out to establish in West Africa colonies founded on equal rights and opportunity for personal enterprise, communities that would be havens for ex-slaves and an example to the rest of Africa. Among the most striking of these leaders is the Nigerian Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a recaptured slave who joined a colony in Sierra Leone and subsequently established satellite communities in Nigeria. The ex-slave repatriates brought with them an evangelical Christianity that encouraged individual spirituality--a revolutionary vision in a land where European missionaries had long assumed they could Christianize the whole society by converting chiefs and rulers.

Tracking this potent African American anti-slavery and democratizing movement through the nineteenth century, Lamin Sanneh draws a clear picture of the religious grounding of its conflict with the traditional chieftain authorities. His study recounts a crucial development in the history of West Africa.

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