

Ch 1 Section 3 West African Societies Around 1492

West Africa Connects with the Wider World

The Sahara Highway

- Trading network connects West Africa to North Africa, Europe, Asia
- Traders bring **Islam**; by 1200s court religion of Mali, later Songhai

The Portuguese Arrive

- By 1470s, Portuguese have coastal outpost near Akan goldfields
- Direct trade creates closer relations with Europe
- Portuguese begin European trade in West African slaves
- First slaves work on **plantation**—large farm with single crop

Three African Kingdoms Flourish by controlling trade

Songhai

- In mid-1400s, **Songhai** controls Sahara trade; gains wealth, power
- Sunni Ali rules 1464–1492, conquers largest empire in area's history
- Askia Muhammad is master organizer, devout Muslim, scholar
- Timbuktu again becomes great center of Islamic learning
- Songhai control **savanna** (dry grasslands) but not forest area
- Other kingdoms thrive in coastal rain forest

Benin

- Forest kingdoms trade with Songhai, North Africa, Portugal
- **Benin** dominates large area around Niger Delta
- Oba, or ruler, controls trade, district chiefs, metal work

Kongo

- **Kongo**—many small kingdoms in rain forest, lower Zaire (Congo) River
- Manikongo, or ruler, oversees empire of over 4 million people
- Kongo system of government very similar to that of European nations

West African Culture

Family and Government

- **Lineage**—common descent—decides loyalty, inheritance, marriage
- Oldest relative controls family, represents family in group councils
- Group shares language, history, often territory; has one chief

Religion

- All things have spirits; ancestor spirits visit elders in dreams
- Most cultures believe in single creator; spirits do his work
- Christian, Muslim rule of not worshipping spirits source of conflict

Livelihood

- Make living from farming, herding, hunting, fishing, mining, trading
- Land owned by family or village; individuals farm plots

Use of Slave Labor

- Slaves are lowest social group; slavery not inherited or permanent
- Slaves freed through adoption by owners, marriage, other means