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The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa

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Ronald Segal, 1995. The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York. vii + 477 pp. Notes and index. \$27.50 (cloth).

Ronald Segal explores the African, or as he calls it, "the black diaspora," and attempts to provide with a comprehensive narrative tracing African and African-American political, economic, and cultural history over the past five centuries. This is a project of synthesis, and, as such, Segal draws upon the research of other scholars in an attempt to create one grand narrative of the diaspora. Thus, while providing no new historical data, *The Black Diaspora* is useful for the attention it brings to the basic link between peoples of African descent, slavery, and the development of the modern world. The experiences of African peoples is put into the context of global history.

The volume is divided into five sections. The first section, "From Africa to Slavery," looks specifically at the effect of the Atlantic slave trade on the development of the global economic system. Segal discusses the racialization of trade and how it was that African people and (as the institution of slavery continued into the 19th century) people of African descent, continued to be understood as a species, rather than as human beings.

The second section, "The Insurgent Spirit," provides us with a detailed survey of slave resistance in the New World. Segal notes that racial demographics had considerable effect on the form and effectiveness of slave resistance.

"Chains of Emancipation," the third section, examines the contemporary political state of former slave societies. Segal argues that the political instability, government ineffectualness, and consequent military rule of former slave states results from their inability to develop diversified and sound economies.

The fourth section, "Travels in the Historic Present," changes its narrative voice, taking on the role of cultural critic through explanation of his experiences in the countries studied. Here Segal focuses on the people of these countries and the effects of the slave past on contemporary cultural production in Jamaica, the dilemma of identity in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the mulatto elites of Haiti, and culture of color in Brazil.

In the final section of the book, "Selections from an Anatomy of Achievement," Segal focuses on what he calls the "soul" of the diaspora, to explore what it is that connects the various cultures of the diaspora. Starting with music (which he suggests is perhaps the one thing which dispersed and enslaved Africans did not lose and which continues to connect the people of the diaspora), he then moves very quickly through the visual arts, literature, sports, to end with religion. His treatment collapses culture

and politics and produces less than compelling interpretations of the meaning of contemporary African-American cultural production and practice

While this volume makes an important argument concerning the significance of race and the historical legacy of slavery to contemporary political, economic, and social situations on a global scale, it is less than successful in integrating the cultural history of African people in the diaspora. The substantive nature of the diaspora and the importance of social and cultural identities in it remain open issues to which archaeologists might contribute.