

As the twenty-first century begins, tens of millions of people participate in devotions to the spirits called Orisa. This book explores the emergence of Orisa devotion as a world religion, one of the most remarkable and compelling developments in the history of the human religious quest. Originating among the Yoruba people of West Africa, the varied traditions that comprise Orisa devotion are today found in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Australia. The African spirit proved remarkably resilient in the face of the transatlantic slave trade, inspiring the perseverance of African religion wherever its adherents settled in the New World. Among the most significant manifestations of this spirit, Yoruba religious culture persisted, adapted, and even flourished in the Americas, especially in Brazil and Cuba, where it thrives as Candomble and Lukumi/Santeria, respectively. After the end of slavery in the Americas, the free migrations of Latin American and African practitioners has further spread the religion to places like New York City and Miami. Thousands of African Americans have turned to the religion of their ancestors, as have many other spiritual seekers who are not themselves of African descent. Ifa divination in Nigeria, Candomble funerary chants in Brazil, the role of music in Yoruba revivalism in the United States, gender and representational authority in Yoruba religious culture—these are among the many subjects discussed here by experts from around the world. Approaching Orisa devotion from diverse vantage points, their collective effort makes this one of the most authoritative texts on Yoruba religion and a groundbreaking book that heralds this rich, complex, and variegated tradition as one of the world's great religions.

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