

This is the first published account of the role played by ideas of honour in African history from the fourteenth century to the present day. It argues that appreciation of these ideas is essential to an understanding of past and present African behaviour. Before European conquest, many African men cultivated heroic honour, others admired the civic virtues of the patriarchal householder, and women honoured one another for industry, endurance, and devotion to their families. These values both conflicted and blended with Islamic and Christian teachings. Colonial conquest fragmented heroic cultures, but inherited ideas of honour found new expression in regimental loyalty, respectability, professionalism, working-class masculinity, the changing gender relationships of the colonial order, and the nationalist movements which overthrew the old order. Today, the same inherited notions obstruct democracy, inspire resistance to tyranny, and motivate the defence of dignity in the face of AIDS.