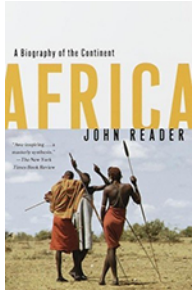
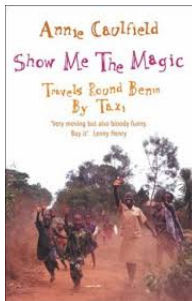


## Prepping for your Trip: A Reading List on Benin

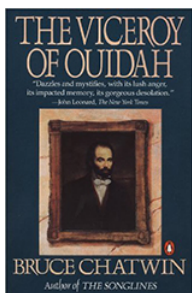
The Tamlyn-Serpa “country” reading list had its genesis in N’Djamena, Chad. We had been there for a year or so, when Jorge came across an old Embassy’s newsletter with a recommended reading list for Africa put together by my predecessor, Cheryl “Casey” Casebeer. We loved the idea so much that we copied it, and soon we were working on our very own list, based on books that we had read and found interesting about Chad. Ten years later, here is our Benin version of that list. Enjoy!



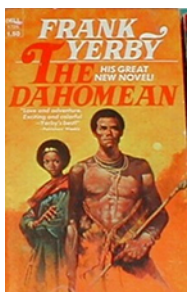
**Africa: a Biography of the Continent** - Should be mandatory reading for anyone minimally interested in Africa, period! John Reader, an accomplished author and journalist (and recently an Honorary Research Fellow at the University College London) tells the “life story” of the continent, from the very beginnings of Planet Earth billions of years ago, to our days. Beautifully and engagingly written, the book covers all pertinent fields, from geology to geography, anthropology, history, you name it!



**Show Me the Magic: Travels Round Benin by Taxi** - Sent to Benin to do advance work for the British pop group The Spice Girls, author Annie Caulfield ended up writing a charming book about her adventures with trusty taxi driver Isidore all across the country. Funny and informative - not your usual travelogue!



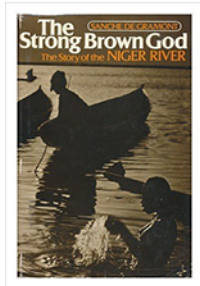
**The Viceroy of Ouidah** - British travel writer Bruce Chatwin improbably ended up in Dahomey in the 70s to research the life of Brazilian slave trader Francisco de Souza, from whom many Beninese afro-Brazilians still proudly trace their heritage. Dark and intense: Werner Herzog turned it into a movie. Enough said!



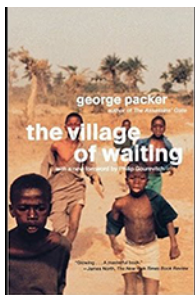
**The Dahomean** - The life of a 19th century Dahomean who rises to wealth and position only to end up being sold as a slave. While the story has some odd twists and turns it is clear that the author, Frank Yerby, delved deep into Dahomean history and anthropology and the results are fascinating. Yerby was a successful mid-20th century African-American novelist who specialized in historical fiction; some of his books were also turned in to movies.



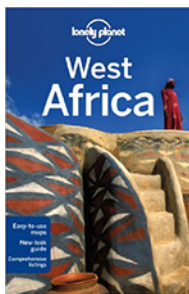
**Snares Without End** - A bit "Camus meets Soyinka," this work by noted Beninese author Olympe Bhely Quenum offers a vivid description of village life and social mores in pre-independence Dahomey, and an unflinching look at the colonial administration. One of the few works of Beninese literature translated into English.



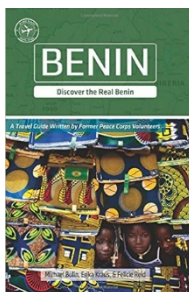
**The Strong Brown God: The Story of the Niger River** - the stories of the heroes and dreamers (and their tribulations) who “discovered” the course of the Niger River. Written by the prolific French/American author Sanche de Gramont (who later changed his name to Ted Morgan), this book gives a good overview of the 19th century "scramble for Africa" for this region.



**The Village of Waiting** - Although not set in Benin, there is much to recognize in the Togolese village where Peace Corps volunteer George Packer (now a well-known journalist and author) spent a memorable two years in the 80s.

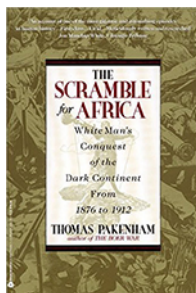


**Lonely Planet West Africa & Petit Futé Benin** - Travel guides! If you read nothing else, look at a travel guide: Lonely Planet's has a nice section on Benin; for French speakers, your bible should be the one by Petit Futé (240 pages of history, culture, things to do, places to go, and adventures to have).

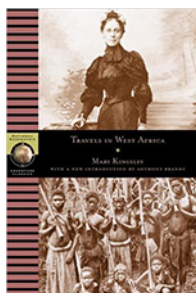


**Benin (Other Places Travel Guide)** - Yet another travel guide, this one by three former Peace Corps Volunteers (Michael Bolin, Erika Kraus, & Felicie Reid). Very detailed and packed with useful but little known tips (as expected, given the authors' two-year in-country experience). Now on its second edition.

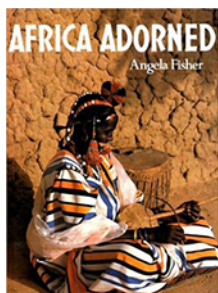
A few more jewels from Casey's original "Africa" list (with her own original comments as well):



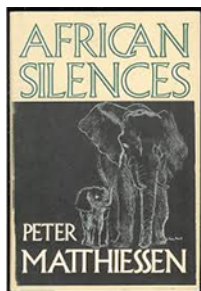
**The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912** (by T. Pakenham) - The 19th and 20th century saw Europe carving up Africa for European political reasons. The arbitrary national boundaries, dependency, and loss of identity that resulted are still causing trouble today.



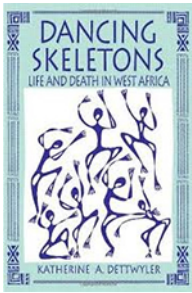
**Travels in West Africa** (by M. Kingsley) - The journal of an unusual 30 year-old Victorian lady explorer. You may also want to read her biography, **A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley**, by K. Frank.



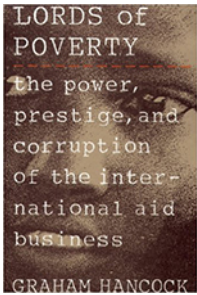
**Africa Adorned** (by A. Fisher) - Africa is not just a place, it is a way of living. Photos of people wearing and using artifacts that are part of their traditions.



**Africa Silences** (by P. Matthiessen) - Do not forget that the continent is one of the greatest remaining reservoirs of species diversity ... for a while yet.

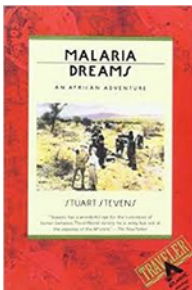


**Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa** (by K. Dettwyler) – Not for what you learn about West Africa but for the compassion with which she explains daily life outside the cities.



**Lords of Poverty: The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business** (by G. Hancock) - Have you noticed that humanitarian aid became an industry somewhere along the line? If you want to be part of the solution in Africa, read this first.

Lastly, one more on Africa in general from Jorge. For all you adventurous over-landers out there!



**Malaria Dreams: An African Adventure** (by Stuart Stevens) - A funny and irreverent account of travels through Central and West Africa. ...because you just can't be serious all the time!!!