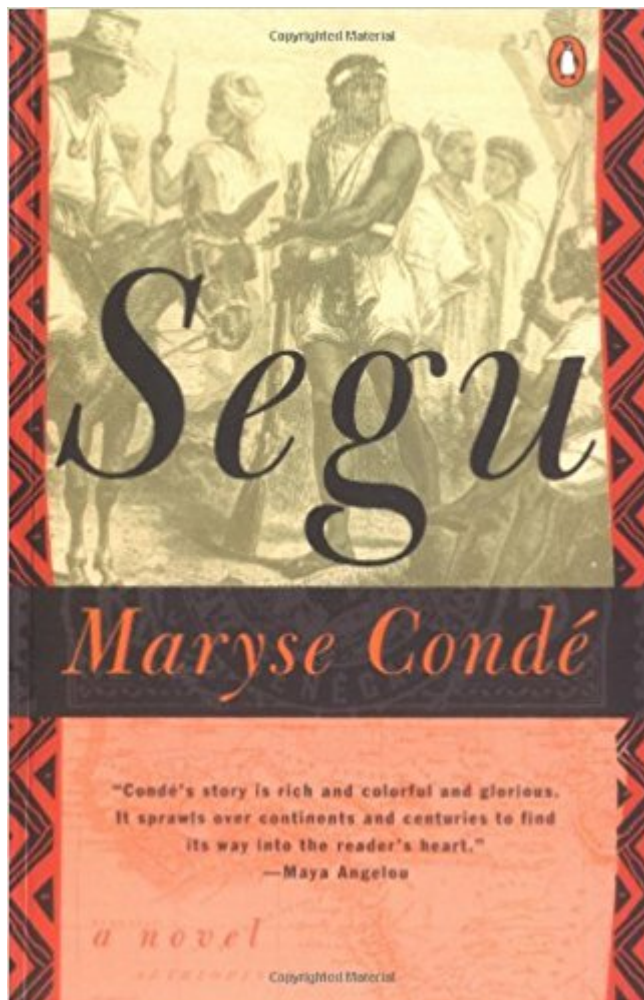


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# Segu



## Synopsis

The year is 1797, and the kingdom of Segu is flourishing, fed by the wealth of its noblemen and the power of its warriors. The people of Segu, the Bambara, are guided by their griots and priests; their lives are ruled by the elements. But even their soothsayers can only hint at the changes to come, for the battle of the soul of Africa has begun. From the east comes a new religion, Islam, and from the West, the slave trade. Segu follows the life of Dousika Traore, the king's most trusted advisor, and his four sons, whose fates embody the forces tearing at the fabric of the nation. There is Tiekoro, who renounces his people's religion and embraces Islam; Siga, who defends tradition, but becomes a merchant; Naba, who is kidnapped by slave traders; and Malobali, who becomes a mercenary and halfhearted Christian. Based on actual events, Segu transports the reader to a fascinating time in history, capturing the earthy spirituality, religious fervor, and violent nature of a people and a growing nation trying to cope with jihads, national rivalries, racism, amid the vagaries of commerce.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Set in an 18th-century African kingdom, Conde's novel examines the cultural transformations brought about by the rise of Islam and the slave trade. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"The most significant novel about black Africa published in many a year." #151; The New York

Times book Review"Condé is a born storyteller." #151; Publishers Weekly "Exotic, richly textured and detailed, this narrative, alternating between the lives of various characters, illuminates magnificently a little known historical period. Virtually every page glitters with nuggets of cultural fascination." •Howard Kaplan, Los Angeles Times "A wondrous novel about a period of African history few other writers have addressed. #133; Much of the novel's radiance comes from the lush description of a traditional life that is both exotic and violent." • Charles L. Larson, The New York Times Book Review "With the dazzling storytelling skills of an African griot, Maryse Condé has written a rich, fast-paced saga of a great kingdom during the tumultuous period of the slave trade and the coming of Islam. Segu is history as vivid and immediate as today. It has restored a part of my past that has long been missing." •Paule Marshall, author of Daughters "Segu is an overwhelming accomplishment. It injects into the density of history characters who are as alive as you and I. Passionate, lusty, greedy, they are in conflict with themselves as well as with God and Mammon. Maryse Condé has done us all a tremendous service by rendering a history so compelling and exciting. Segu is a literary masterpiece I could not put down." •Louise Meriwether "A stunning reaffirmation of Africa and its peoples as set down by others whose works have gone unnoticed. Ms. Condé not only backs them up, but provides new insights as well. #133; Segu has its own dynamic. It's a starburst." •John A. Williams "A novel of wide scope, depth and power. Condé proves herself a careful observer of human behavior as she helps the reader to understand and feel the turmoil of a confused continent. She captures a fascinating time in history with its earth spirituality, religious fervor and the violent nature of a people and their growing nation. . Brims over with intelligence and wit." •Anniston Star (Alabama) "Segu, a tale of love and intrigue, is fascinating, for the reader experiences the fervor of those tumultuous times." •Chattanooga News-Free Press

"Segu" is a very good historical novel, one of the few that are set in Africa's historical past (circa 1800-1860). The novel's protagonists are an aristocratic family in the empire of Segu (now part of Mali) swept up in the historical currents of the time: Islam, Christianity, European imperialism, and the Atlantic Slave trade. As with "Roots", the story is told from the African perspective, which is refreshing and much needed. The novel is well written and filled with abundant historical detail. There are many details here that a student might research in a library, for example: the different lifestyles of the Fulani and Bambara and relations between them; the "Brazilians" in Africa, former

slaves from South America that managed to return to Africa; the socio-economic status of Africans of mixed-(European and African) ancestry. It seems a pity that many young people are forced to read this book in school; hopefully they will return to it when they have the maturity to understand and appreciate it.

Commencing in 1797 in the kingdom of Segu in West Africa, an oblong tract of land south of Timbuktu and surrounding Bamako, now the capital of Mali, Conde's novel unearths the traditions, struggles, conflicts, and triumphs of a family and its culture over the course of a century. It portrays the Bambara people during the spread of Islam from the east, the slave trade from the west, and the introduction of trade and commerce from Europe. *Segu* (first published in 1984 in French, and published in English in 1987) is based around the patriarch of the Traore family, Dousika, and his four sons: Teikoro and Naba from his first wife, Nya; Siga, the offspring of Slave, his third wife; and Malobali from his fourth of five wives. The novel is structured in five parts: not representative of his five wives, but of his son's migratory journeys and personal growth as the cultures of West Africa fuse and interweave, rise and decline, causing the sons to question their identities. The kingdom of Segu, steeped in customary animist beliefs, and in the traditions of story-telling, oral history, and griots' singing chronicles, is changing. This is initially seen through the eyes of the eldest son, Tiekoro Traore, when he witnesses, with great fascination, a Muslim for the first time, who is penning words with a pointed stick and ink - Teikoro is seeing the "magic" of writing. Siga, the third son, notices that "in the past all a man needed was a bit of willpower to keep wives, children, and younger brothers in order. Life was a straight line drawn from the womb of a woman to the womb of the earth ... But now the menace of new ideas and values lurked everywhere." For Malobali, who had never seen a European before, "he couldn't understand their admirers, for he saw in them a danger worse than that of the Fulani and all the other Muslims combined." So, while some sons see change as exciting, others are confused by it or fear it. Conflicts are presented between family members, between different religious and cultural communities, and internally as the sons decide whether to convert to Islam or defend their traditions in which there is a sense of kinship between man and nature; whether to relinquish their power and join the traders and merchants or to remain within their aristocratic agricultural heritage; and whether to fight or succumb to slave traders. This epic tale is detailed, descriptive, historical, compelling, and transformative. The novel is beautifully written in which the landscape, characters, and cultures reveal the intersection of human reality and the divergence of their dreams. Segu is a distinct, compact kingdom, ritualistic and proud, in which the king is the custodian of knowledge and secrets. Islam undermines the king's position in which

the community is now introduced to the individual concept of the "will to truth." When forced to confront individualism due to societal and cultural changes, internal and external, the sons must reflect on their stable sense of self and their new identities within new communities. "I am Bambara from Segu" loses its sense of meaning over time. Tiekoro and Siga are contrasts in religious beliefs, for Tiekoro chooses to convert to Islam, thus starting the major conflict within the family, but their fates are similar. As Siga discovers, "Tiekoro's fate and his own were as inseparable as night and day. Or as sun and moon, for they both fill the world with light and life." Siga's idea of starting a tannery was horrific to Tiekoro, who was a true Bambara nobleman in which agriculture was the only occupation of worth and the hierarchical ownership of land the only value of a man. For Malobali, he was paid to fight, "but too often his arms had been turned against the innocent" and contemplated Christianity. Naba has an altogether different fate, dying young, followed by Malobali, confused and conflicted. The personal dilemmas are "infinitely forlorn, infinitely disturbing." Sometimes a son emerges temporarily the victor, sometimes he doesn't. When victorious over one dilemma, such as Islam, they are faced with another, such as western imperialism. All the while there is love and loss. Sometimes the changes are gradual and progressive, but mostly they are violent, impacting the kingdom and individuals in one forceful shock. In all cases, family cohesion is torn as sons are uprooted.

Bought as a gift to send to a friend. I love this book and have read it many times over the years

Segu is a good look into late 18th and early 19th century West Africa. I question Ms. Conde's motives because her point of view seems to lean heavily towards Eurocentrics. It was hard to get through with the exception of Malobali, the African obsession with everything European. I'm sure in many situations, that was the case. However I don't understand the emphasis. Also calling Moors non black. Overall it is a good tale that's easy to get lost in. She puts the reader directly in the village courts, shows indigenous religions as sophisticated, and doesn't condensed the beauty of the people.

A great story and new look at colonial Africa and slave trade from an African view point that does not include North America.

Segu is fictional in its presentation but is well researched and lends an amazing historical lens into the religious and political configuration of the African continent prior to and post the Transatlantic

slave trade. Maryse Conde illustrates the effects such actions had on all in the society, historically. She also illuminates the residual energies of such a time and the effects of that time on the present.

Amazing history of Segu. well written by a non-African and marvelously told and experienced by the author. Highly recommended.

I enjoyed reading the historical and cultural nuances within this book. There were certain passages that made me feel as if I was there with the characters. Navigating Life's Roadways: Stories of Insight from My Odyssey and Inspiration for Your Journey

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Segu

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