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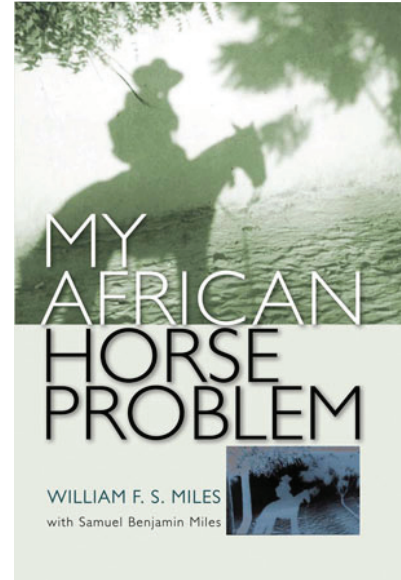
#### *My African Horse Problem*

By William F. S. Miles with Samuel B. Miles

In February 2000, William Miles set off from Massachusetts for a Muslim village in West Africa with his ten-year-old son Samuel to settle an inheritance dispute over a horse. National Public Radio was so intrigued with this story that *All Things Considered* broadcast his pre-departure testament, as well as a follow-up commentary on what actually happened.

*My African Horse Problem* recounts the intricacies of this unusual father-son expedition, a sometimes harrowing two-week trip that Samuel joined as “true heir” to the disputed stallion. It relates the circumstances leading up to the dispute and describes the intimacy of a relationship spanning a quarter century between William Miles and the custodians of his family horse—Islamic village friends eking out a precarious existence along the remote sub-Saharan borderline between Nigeria and Niger.

*My African Horse Problem* is a multi-layered narrative—part memoir, part ethnography—reaching back to Miles’s days as a Peace Corps volunteer in Niger in the 1970s and a Fulbright scholar in the 1980s. At a deeper level, the story juxtaposes the idealistic and sometimes irresponsible tendencies of a young university graduate with the parental concerns of a middle-aged, tenured professor. Miles wonders if he was justified in exposing Sam to some of the worst health risks on earth, mainly to restore tenuous ties with long-ago friends in the African bush. Was it reckless to make his son illegally cross international boundaries, in a quixotic quest for justice and family honor? *My African Horse Problem* is more than an adventurer’s tale with a unique story line: it is a father-son travel rumination, leavened by Sam’s journal entries that help his father see Africa anew through a child’s fresh eyes. In this era of religious and racial tensions, it is also a reaffirmation—within a black Muslim context—of the basic human imperative of trust.



“A highly accessible memoir that students and professors of anthropology, sociology, and African studies will find both entrancing and informative. . . . Miles uses elements of his life in Hausaland to ponder such larger social issues as the nature of identity, the importance of trust in human relations, and the impact of honor and shame on how we interact. His narrative also wonderfully underscores the deep humanity and practical wisdom of African peoples.”—Paul Stoller, author of *Stranger in the Village of the Sick: A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery, and Healing*

**WILLIAM F. S. MILES** is professor of political science at Northeastern University and author of numerous books, including *Hausaland Divided: Colonialism and Independence in Nigeria and Niger*. **SAMUEL B. MILES** is currently an undergraduate at Yale University.

African Studies / Memoir

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