

photograph of Kimberley diamond mining, and a letter from the Ethiopian monarch Tewodros II to Queen Victoria. While the set-up contextualizes each source, the deconstruction of 'International Networks' is left to a few meager sentences about the racial principles that eventually operated as justification for colonization. This section and others would require intensive unpacking in the classroom to help undergraduates comprehend complex meanings and nuanced connections among the diverse places and subject matter involved.

The inclusion of 45 maps and illustrations is a welcome feature, but the production quality of some of the black and white photographs is disappointing. The small black-and-white reproduction of a vibrantly colorful Ethiopian painting does not allow the reader to discern the symbolism of stylistic features discussed in its commentary, let alone identify its subject matter of European and Ethiopian faces. Similarly, the reader must rely almost entirely on the text's description for the Kimberley mine photograph in which features described as 'supply lines' might easily have been scratches on the negative.

Another section, 'Traditions and Tribes' uses terms that many historians will find problematic. The persistent use of 'tribe' and 'tribalism' without reference to their misuse as concepts that have shaped the public perceptions of a 'Dark Continent' seems a puzzling choice. Whereas 'tribe' has connoted confusion when used as a derogatory code for a 'primitive' society or to name a level of political organization, 'tradition' has been a trope for the ahistorical, unchanging character of African cultural backwardness promoted by popular media. Both words should catalyze classroom opportunities to address the selectivity of language and scholarly discourse in both the past and present.

These are small quibbles about a valuable classroom resource. The compiled sources themselves reflect continental breadth and a fully diverse range of perspectives, including the compilation's refreshing attention to issues of race, class, and gender. They bring new voices together and in so doing, they will alter the chorus of the African colonial past. The classroom use of many of these primary sources will help students see how Africans constructed their social lives, how individuals engaged with ideas, technology, religion, politics, and economic opportunities. Together, the sources allow the reader to comprehend Africa's place in the world.

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UNFETTERED AFRO-OPTIMISM

Africa, Fourth Edition.

Edited by Maria Grosz-Ngaté, John H. Hanson, and Patrick O'Meara.

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This book sparked a multi-day feud in my house centered on a few basic questions: first, how optimistic should one be when introducing students to the academic study of the

African continent? And second, what topics do you cover if that introduction must be limited to roughly 350 pages? The editors, Maria Grosz-Ngaté, John H. Hanson, and Patrick O'Meara, have put together this revised volume with a strong point of view, which is clearly stated on page one: 'Africa has moved dynamically into the twenty-first century.' The paragraph continues with a list of figures meant to give a sense of this dynamism: the number of mobile phone users; increased rates of urbanization; dips in infant mortality; and, increased voting rates. Africans are 'finding solutions to problems' and the volume is meant to introduce students to 'Africans and their energy, and the continent's challenges and potential' (p. 1). Throughout the book, a lot of evidence is provided on the accomplishments side; African agency is laid on heavy. But is this Afro-optimism appropriate or the right introduction for students? Clearly the authors are working against hoary, albeit common, stereotypes of a continent riddled by poverty, dictators, civil wars, and the odd Ebola epidemic. Perhaps if students are going to come away believing Africa has potential, their introduction must be a bit heavy handed?

Over 360 pages, the book is organized into 14 chapters plus an introduction and a final chapter on print and electronic resources. Those thematic chapters include good overviews of the continent's geography, social relationships and kinship patterns, 'livelihoods', religion, urbanization, and health, illness, and healing. Each of these chapters is more than functional: they are crisply written, provide a coherent introduction appropriate for an undergraduate, and end with a well-curated list of additional readings. As a historian, I balked at the single chapter explicitly dedicated to history – just five pages on precolonial societies and fewer than five pages on colonialism. This felt a bit truncated.

What the editors have done extremely well is to cover the arts, with a chapter each on visual arts, music, literature, and film. These chapters are excellent: lively, interesting, and accessible to undergraduates. Particularly good was 'Visual Arts in Africa' which includes 26 full-color plates to complement the written text. The chapter presents categories of traditional art, popular art, and fine art while also explaining why those categories are problematic. I imagined a lively classroom activity looking at the plates and making arguments for one category or another. Together, these four chapters are arguably the best in the book. But despite their excellence, I was left mulling whether 25 per cent of a book about the African continent ought to be devoted to art? What about the slave trade, or the AIDS epidemic, or recent political and humanitarian crises in Darfur, South Sudan, and North Africa?

The chapter I was most hopeful about, 'Development in Africa: Tempered Hope' turned out to be the most problematic. I was looking for something that would fulfill the editors' own goal of producing an 'introductory text that seeks to avoid academic arguments in favor of clear statements about major issues' (p. 5). In defense of the authors, writing an accessible and accurate chapter about development may be nearly impossible. As is, the chapter is full of seemingly contradictory statements that an undergraduate is unlikely to be able to sort out. The authors begin by noting that sub-Saharan Africa 'is the least-developed continent in the world'; has low levels of industrialization and urbanization; government is weak and democracies are fragile; and, life expectancy, literacy rates, and access to health care and education are all low (p. 275). Sounds bad. Yet just a few paragraphs below, the student is left to contend with the fact that 'there have been remarkable strides' in terms of investment climate, reduction of inflation, and the stabilization of

exchange rates (p. 275). What does that mean? Do those 'strides' have anything to do with the markers of under development listed previously? Constantly trying to balance the negative with something positive leads to an inaccurate sense that these things have some bearing on each other; if there is any link between reduction of inflation and life expectancy, it is a tenuous one.

In the end, I am uncertain whether I would assign the whole book to an introductory class. Parts of this volume are excellent, parts of it are very good, but the chapters on economics, politics, and human rights were unsatisfying in terms of content and often felt frustratingly optimistic. The book is never inaccurate, and the authors are not quiet about their intentions of stressing African agency while maintaining a hopeful tone. It is just a matter of whether you agree with them that this is the best way to introduce students to the continent.

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