

ASR FORUM: THE 2012 U.S. ELECTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S.–AFRICA POLICY

Introduction

Elizabeth Schmidt, Guest Editor

The November 2008 election of Barack Hussein Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States raised hopes among many that new U.S.–Africa policies based on mutual respect and multilateral collaboration might result. One year after the election of the first American president of African descent, the African Studies Association organized a plenary session to consider the implications of the Obama presidency for Africa. Three panelists at that session contributed summaries of their remarks to the September 2010 *ASR* Forum titled “Africa in the Age of Obama” (*African Studies Review* 53.2). In the wake of President Obama’s reelection in November 2012, the African Studies Association and the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars organized a joint plenary session to assess the evolution of U.S.–Africa policies during Obama’s first term and to anticipate future trajectories based on what we now know. Three panelists at that session,

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Elizabeth Schmidt is a professor of history at Loyola University Maryland. She is the author of *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958* (Ohio University Press, 2007); *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958* (Heinemann, 2005); *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (Heinemann, 1992); and *Decoding Corporate Camouflage: U.S. Business Support for Apartheid* (Institute for Policy Studies, 1980). Schmidt serves on the board of directors of the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars (ACAS) and is a past board member of the African Studies Association. E-mail: eschmidt@loyola.edu

“The 2012 American Elections and Their Implications for U.S.–Africa Policy,” have contributed their remarks to this *ASR* Forum.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (165–78) contrasts the euphoria that greeted Obama’s first election with the disillusionment that emerged as it became clear that inconsistencies and hypocrisies in U.S.–Africa policies would continue as long as those policies were rooted in imperial power and the paramouncy of U.S. interests. His article focuses on three central themes: (1) African expectations of the first Obama presidency; (2) structural constraints impeding an enlightened U.S.–Africa policy; and (3) how African states might promote their interests during the second Obama administration.

Abdi Samatar (179–83) notes that much of the euphoria that emerged from the 2008 presidential election was misplaced. He argues that Obama’s inherited economic depression and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan severely limited his ability to enact progressive Africa policies. However, three other factors were equally critical: (1) America’s determination to gain unbridled access to African oil; (2) the American “war on terror” in the Horn and the Sahara; and (3) the vision and values of Obama’s Africa policy team.

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja (185–91) criticizes the Obama administration’s hypocrisy and double standards when dealing with Africa and its failure to support democratic forces on the continent. He focuses especially on the implications of the second Obama administration on the Great Lakes Region, where U.S. support for Rwanda and Uganda—as allies in the “war on terror”—continues, despite crimes committed by these countries in eastern Congo.