

BOOK REVIEW

Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioke Njoku. *United States and Africa Relations, 1400s to the Present*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. 416 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0300234831.

Within the last two decades, an increasing body of literature has been produced on the role of Africa in the making of the Atlantic World. The trans-Atlantic Slave Trade created the foundations of the economic base, which transformed the region. Slave labor produced raw materials which developed the entire Atlantic World except for Africa. The creations of slaves enriched the economic and cultural landscape of the West, while simultaneously slavery depopulated and destabilized Africa, cementing racial arguments that have been used to marginalize Black people throughout the last four hundred years. Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioke Njoku's *United States and Africa Relations: 1400s to the Present* fits within this literature. Based on extensive published and unpublished primary and secondary sources, the book traces the development of US-Africa relations from the beginnings of slavery in the fifteenth century to the present. It contextualizes Africa and the US within the Atlantic World, examining the various forces and groups in existence at the time of the birth of the American nation. The authors argue that US-African relations originated within that milieu, and despite changing times, the US always maintained an upper-class position.

The book covers a broad sweep of topics including the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, the making of the African diaspora, Marcus Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement, Pan-Africanism, cultural exchanges, China in Africa, and many more. While much of what is in the book is familiar to practitioners in the field, its most significant contribution is the ability to use those topics to weave together a synthesis that calls on academicians to rethink the contours of US-African relations. Slavery and everything it embodied created a global system which marginalized Africa, yet the "strong spirit" of the slaves created the "foundation of the resilient bonds between Africa and the United States" (44). The book is particularly persuasive in showing how Africans and African Americans have cooperated, assisted, and promoted each other over time. A crucial part of their nationalism was to uplift the black race, and they did so in many ways. Whether in the colonies of Sierra Leone or Liberia, they

promoted the black person's interest. The authors note, "The US colonization venture in West Africa helped build some measure of self-image and hope for the black race on both sides of the Atlantic" (103). Liberia's constitution, they added, was a "rebuke of white nationalism in the United States which prevented African Americans from participation in government" (103).

The Pan-African Movement existed in the same spirit to uplift the black race and bring freedom to blacks. Marcus Garvey's black consciousness message was consistent with the earlier nationalist pronouncements of Henry Turner and Paul Cuffee. Despite problems and disagreements among leading Pan-Africanists, especially W.E.B. DuBois and Garvey, all espoused black uplift ideology. Their initiatives and actions pushed America to confront anti-black racism. After the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. returned from Ghana's independence celebration, which was his first trip to Africa, he underscored the importance of Africa and African American cooperation. The book is particularly convincing in its discussion of Africa's involvement in the US Civil rights movement. Newspapers including the *Nigerian Daily Express*, *Ghanaian Times* and *Cameroon Times* repeatedly carried stories about the African American struggle, and called on the American government to act. The book will stimulate research on topics such as changing relations between Africans and African Americans, African American missionaries in Africa, and the impact of independent movements in Africa on the Civil Rights movement in the US.

This is a thoughtful and well-written volume, and it makes a significant contribution to the field of Africana Studies and American foreign relations. Despite the strengths of the book, there are some issues. While American foreign policy ideology toward Africa remained largely unchanged, it is surprising that the authors largely dismissed the efforts of President John F. Kennedy to bring about change. Though he was a Cold Warrior, Kennedy's pro-African pronouncements and initiatives drew much criticism from European colonial nations. African leaders including Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadou Ahidjo, Leopold Senghor, and many others wrote of the deep appreciation they had for Kennedy's attempts to reset the direction of US-African relations. In addition, while Africans generally saw Obama's African policy as weak, the ideas which emanated from his United States–Africa Leaders Summit may turn out to be the wave of the future in US-African relations. Speaking in Senegal in 2021, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, "I believe Africa will shape the future, and not just the future of the African people, but of the world." However, those minor quibbles should not undermine the overall importance of this fine book.

Julius A. Amin 

University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio, USA

jamin1@udayton.edu

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