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### Title

Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann. *The United States and Africa: A History*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1984. xiv + 450 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography and index. \$29.95 (cloth).

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Peer reviewed

*European Naval and Maritime History* synthesizes the work of many scholars and addresses a more popular audience. In a work of this brevity it is tempting to criticize elements of the book. The treatment of all these maritime powers is admittedly superficial, and one would have liked to see further elaboration on some of the features of naval warfare. For example, we are informed that "the use of crossbows and various kinds of catapults with which these early ships were equipped anticipates the way cannon and small arms were later employed" (p. 164). While much has already been written on the use of cannon on ships, very little has been done on the use of the trebuchet on naval ships. We have many Muslim accounts which describe Crusader ships and the weapons on board. This book would have done the field a great service had it discussed further the use of bows and trebuchets. But the virtues of this work far outweigh its shortcomings. It is an important contribution and a welcome addition to the field of maritime history.

These three books help to show us the new direction in naval history. The concern is no longer with battles and military tactics. Increasingly, naval historians are realizing that there is a close relationship—especially during the Middle Ages—between commerce and war, and that the line which divides maritime power from naval might is very fluid indeed. Today the issues naval scholars address must be placed within the sociopolitical and international framework in which they occurred. Symonds relates to us David Trask's keynote speech and his comment that this new group of historians, "If we do not yet constitute a school, we are at least a kindergarten." There were profound differences between the various maritime peoples to be sure, but one cannot help but be struck by the similarities in the concerns they faced. By looking at the medieval and Renaissance maritime powers we can truly gain a greater appreciation for the old dictum that land divides and the sea unites.

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Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann. *The United States and Africa: A History*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1984. xiv + 450 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography and index. \$29.95 (cloth).

In their book, Duignan and Gann attempt to demonstrate that there has been a "reciprocal relationship" between Africa and the United States over the past four centuries. In so doing, the authors depart from the traditional colonial historiography that has tended to emphasize the role of the European powers in shaping the destiny of Africa. In the same vein, the authors try

to show the impact made by Africa on the United States through trade and immigration, enforced and voluntary, and through the influence of Africans on the arts, agriculture, and many other facets of American life.

Divided into five parts, the first part of the book describes the slave trade—its growth, final abolition and effects. Part two deals with other links between Africa and the United States before 1865 - “legitimate” trade, missionary and colonization societies, explorers, and other “agents of change.” Part three covers the period 1865 to 1900, that is to say, the era of colonial expansion. Part four tackles developments until the eruption of World War II, the apogee of empire. Part five narrates the story up to the present.

In twenty-four chapters, the authors emphasize the development of U. S. policy toward Africa, the impact of private enterprise, the operation of governmental lobbies, the administration of foreign aid, and the involvement of Africa in the cold war. Black American interest in and impact on Africa are dealt with from Paul Cuffee’s first back-to-Africa movement in the 1800s to the present.

Clearly, there is as yet no work of comparable scope in the literature on Africa. Whereas it is an historical synthesis, this book also breaks new ground.

Unfortunately, there are several serious problems with the book. In the first place, the book is too descriptive, in some parts too simplistic, and overall, it is an unnecessarily voluminous book that could have been considerably condensed. The language used by the authors becomes skimpy in most parts of the book—the usage of racist, backward and anachronistic terms like “native,” “tribe,” “Negro,” etc., is maintained almost throughout the book. In other words, the authors’ interpretation of U.S.-Africa relations is clearly based on what can be called an imperialist and Christian school of thought which views such relations as being beneficial to Africa; that the European slave traders who kidnapped and shipped millions of able-bodied Africans to the Americas did it for Africa’s benefit; that U.S. missionaries had a “humanitarian” mission to “civilize” the so-called “savages of the Dark Continent;” that the U.S. has a “positive” role to play in Africa’s development; that “Americans...are easily the most generous in the world” (p. 314); etc.

It must however be clearly understood that the historical economic links between Africa and the U.S. have not been reciprocal. The slave trade was the cutting edge of Africa’s “peripherisation;” it was crucial to the process of the continent’s underdevelopment during both the mercantilist period, and the early phase of the competitive capitalist period thereafter. The beneficiaries of the so-called aid and development projects have not been the masses of the Africans; they have been the forces of international capitalism which the U.S. represents.

Whereas the contribution of black Americans to African nationalism cannot be denied, the authors tend to exaggerate this influence. This influence

was peripheral and a non factor in the struggle for independence in Africa which struggle was waged by the Africans themselves. Most important is the fact that ideas about African solidarity, independence, and personality existed in Africa independent of the influence from America in the nineteenth century and even much earlier.

In chapter twenty, the authors expose themselves as defenders of U.S. policy in Africa. They support Reagan's disastrous policy of "Constructive Engagement" in southern Africa, and they reiterate for instance, that the U.S. "should consider recognition of Angola only after all foreign troops - Cuban and East German - and Soviet military experts have left;" that "Such a withdrawal should be a necessary condition for U.S. recognition." Who cares whether the U.S. recognizes Angola or not? The question of foreign troops in Angola is the internal matter of that country. In Africa, instead of discouraging "Soviet domination" as the authors recommend, Soviet presence there should be encouraged, if because the Soviet Union is the other super power that can counter U.S. imperialism in that part of the world.

The last two chapters of the book, like the others, bear certain false statements that must be corrected. In discussing "The American academic and philanthropic response" (pp. 325-338), and "The Peace Corps and other programs" (pp. 354-358), the authors give the impression that these groups were/are in Africa for the benefit of that continent. Far from the reality, this response has been an act of U.S. cultural imperialism geared toward corrupting the social sciences to serve the interests of international capitalism. The authors also distort that "Scholars, journalists, and pastors can travel about South Africa more easily than they can through most African countries" (p. 333). This could only be true if the concerned persons are found to be acceptable to the authorities in that country. By making such a statement, the authors come out clearly as defenders of apartheid.

Although the authors give a lot of credit to the Peace Corps, these Peace Corps have been found out by most African governments to be a group of ignorant and uneducated youths in the payroll of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Like the missionaries, they have been the vehicle of U.S. neo-colonialism in Africa.

Overall, *The United States and Africa: A History* should prove of interest to students and specialists concerned with African affairs and with the history and politics of the United States, only because it provokes an intellectual war that should make progressive scholars set out to fight so as to set the record straight.

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