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# Books: Africa and the Afro-American Experience: Eight Essays

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## Books

### **Africa and The Afro-American Experience: Eight Essays**

Edited by Lorraine A. Williams; Howard University Press, Washington, D. C., 205 pp. \$8.95.

*Reviewed by Paula L. Jewell*

Coming at a time when Black Americans are getting increasingly interested in their African roots, this book of essays builds linkages from an historical point of view between the struggle for full civil rights in the United States and the effort for Black liberation throughout the world.

In the first of eight essays in the collection, "Africana at Nsukka," William Leo Hansberry describes the unique characteristics that have enabled the University of Nigeria to train students to serve Nigeria, and to represent African interests in the broader arena of world affairs.

Much of what Hansberry talks about has positive applicability to American educational institutions, particularly those which are predominantly Black, where students are taught about the positive aspects of the African heritage and about the potentials of a continent whose wealth has yet to be fully tapped.

In the second essay in the collection, the focus shifts from education to religion. Clifton Brown, in "The Conversion Experience in Axum During the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," documents the conversion of the Ethiopian people to Christianity during the fourth and fifth centuries.

Judaism was introduced into Axum even before Christianity and the introduction of that religion is attributed to Makeda, Queen of Sheba. Hellenic culture and the Greek deities also played a role in pre-Christian Axum.

Christian conversion in Axum differed

from conversion in the Roman Empire in major respects. Initial converts in the Roman Empire came from the lower socioeconomic levels, while in Axum conversion began with the ruling family.

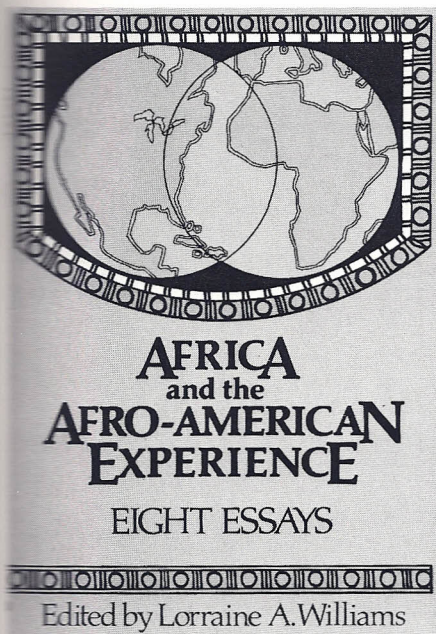
John Hope Franklin, in "George Washington Williams and Africa," deals with changing perceptions of Africa by Black Americans. Black scholars, such as John Russworm and Martin Delaney, have historically been interested in Africa. Nevertheless, the majority of Blacks did not share their views. As early as 1937, Carter Woodson spoke reproachfully about Blacks who accept as a compliment the theory of complete cultural break with Africa, for above all things, they do not care to be known as resembling in any way those "terrible Africans." In recent years, however, the interest in Africa has spread to all segments of the Black community.

Franklin cites Williams as the best example of the early interest (by Black Americans) in Africa. Williams was a true Renaissance man whose interests included history, religion, law and business, in addition to African affairs. His travels took him to all corners of the African continent.

In the essay, "We the Children of Africa in This Land: Alexander Crummel," Otey M. Scruggs tells us about another Black American who had a special interest in Africa.

Born in New York City, Crummel emigrated to Liberia, where he worked for 20 years as a missionary with the Episcopal Church, and as a college and high school teacher.

Of all the issues associated with Africa that concern Black Americans today, there has been none which has assumed greater magnitude than the South Africa question. Consequently, the inclusion of Okon Edet Uya's essay, "Prelude to Disaster: An Analysis of the Racial Policies of Boer and British Settlers in



Africa before 1910," in this collection enhances the work. Uya discusses the historical development of apartheid as a government policy, and asserts that the theory of racial superiority was developed by the settlers as a means of establishing a position of authority over native Africans. He argues that the racial policies of the British and the Boers were not significantly different—both were based on economic considerations.

Rayford W. Logan compares and contrasts two major Black leaders in his essay, "Two Bronze Titans—Frederick Douglass and William Edward Burghardt DuBois." He eloquently explains DuBois' "plate glass theory" of caste segregation and its full implications. DuBois spoke like a prophet of the urban riots of the late 1960s, when he said in 1940: "They [the entombed souls] may even here and there, break through in blood and disfigurement and find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable and quite overwhelming, mob of people frightened for their own existence." This essay deals with a theme which appears throughout the book—the question of justice as it relates not only to Blacks, Indians and the poor in this country, but also to the people of Third World countries—Haiti, South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

The white man's stereotype of the Black man are described in "Sambos and Rebels: The Character of the Southern Slave," by John W. Blassingame. According to him, White writers often portray Black men as faithful and docile clowns or as treacherous and savage runaways and ravagers. The basis for these portrayals is traced back to the African heritage and the slave's resistance to bondage. This essay, too, has an international focus. It discusses the difference between conditions in Latin America and the South, which resulted in large scale slave rebellions in the United States but not among our Latin

neighbors.

This book ends on a most fitting note with the essay, "Black History's Diversified Clientele," by Benjamin A. Quarles, who believes that Black history now serves a variety of customers—the Black rank and file, the Black revolutionary nationalists, the Black academicians and the white world.

This collection of essays adds depth to the public's understanding of those institutions which have shaped the destiny of Black people. It deals in a very realistic fashion with many of the psychological problems which have plagued Black people for decades.

*Africa and the Afro-American Experience*, edited by Lorraine Williams, can do a great deal to build positive self-images and can give white Americans a greater understanding of their Black counterparts. As DuBois once said:

*"that the past is present; that without what was, nothing is."* □

*The reviewer is a special assistant to the president of Howard University.*