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Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787

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Book Review



H-NET BOOK REVIEW

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Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. New York: Routledge, 2003. xi + 194 pp. Index. \$114.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-4151-7352-3; \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 0-4151-7353-1.

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Pan-Africanism Unbound

The increased intensity of African anti-colonial movements in the immediate post World War Two period and subsequent constitutional independence for many African countries in the 1950s and 1960s sparked a growing interest among activists and scholars in Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism is a malleable ideology that defies easy definition, but it can generally be described as seeking political, socio-economic, religious, educational, and cultural self-determination for Africans and for blacks in the African Diaspora, informed by fierce pride in African history and culture. Pan-Africanists have generally considered Africans and diasporic blacks to have broad historical similarities and common interests in combating the global color line, which manifests itself in various forms of white supremacy, including colonialism, racial capitalism, and racial segregation. C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and George Padmore's *Pan Africanism or Communism?* (1956) are important early histories of black radicalism framed within a Pan-African context. A slew of scholarly monographs and journalistic accounts; biographies of Pan-African figures like Henry Sylvester Williams, autobiographical works and memoirs by Pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah, Amy Jacques Garvey and Ras Makonnen followed in their wake well into the 1970s. The renewed interest in African Diaspora studies and transnational history that has steadily built in the last three decades has also included groundbreaking work on Pan-African individuals, ideologies and organizations by Robert A. Hill, Gerald Horne, Cedric Robinson, Robin D.G. Kelley and many others.

Yet, the very fact that there is still no comprehensive biography of the eminent Padmore, considered by some to be the father of Pan-Africanism, reminds us that much groundwork is still in order. For these reasons, we owe a deep debt to Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, both leading scholars of Pan-Africanism, for providing a vitally important resource that can be used to good effect by scholars, educators, students, and interested laypersons. *Pan African History* is both a necessary reminder of the great significance of Pan-African activity to the development of the modern world and a clarion call to researchers to fill the many gaps that still exist in this reinvigorated field. In a sense, the authors are following in the footsteps of Hill's edited *Pan-African Biography* (1987), which cast prominent figures like Ralph Bunche and W.E.B. Du Bois in a Pan-African context but also introduced many readers to lesser known Pan-African personalities like Chief Alfred Sam and Constance Cummings-John. Adi and Sherwood continue in this vein with forty concise, yet remarkably informative, biographical summaries of well known personalities like Kwame Nkrumah and lesser known figures like Nathaniel Fadipe whose political activities fall under the Pan-African rubric.

The authors aim to spotlight "women and men of African descent whose lives and work have been concerned in some way with the social and political emancipation of African peoples and those of the African Diaspora" (p. vii). They thus include both people who organized in unambiguous Pan-African activity as well as a few personalities that were, by choice or by circumstance, largely engaged in politicking within national borders, yet were inspirational symbols of black liberation among blacks worldwide. The authors begin with an economical historical overview that charts the development and varied nature of Pan-African thought, action, and organizational activity from the eighteenth century to the present before presenting the biographies. The entries, all written by either Adi or Sherwood, explain in clear, concise language the significance, activities, and larger political context of each biographical subject. Many entries feature original research by the authors, a particularly important feature given the paucity of surviving documents for many of those profiled. Geographically, there is a good balance between continental Africans and those born in the English-speaking and French-speaking parts of the Diaspora, although, as the authors acknowledge freely, there are no profiles for Latin American blacks. This omission reflects the fact that English and French were the primary languages of communication for Pan-Africanists, but also points to Latin America as a potentially new field of inquiry regarding Pan-African movements.

At first glance, the book would seem to have somewhat less importance to H-SAfrica readers. Nelson Mandela is the only South African profiled and his entry, while a potentially useful mini-introduction to newer generations of students who often know appallingly little of our beloved Madiba, will be common knowledge to a southern Africanist. Yet, the authors demonstrate clearly that many of the personalities within these pages, like Du Bois, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Ahmed Ben Bella, Claudia Jones, Martin Luther King, C.L.R. James, Harold Moody, Julius Nyerere, Nathaniel Fadipe, and Ras Makonnen, as they moved throughout the black world, engaged in the struggle against racial segregation and apartheid in South Africa. Alpheus Hunton may be unknown to some South Africanists, yet he was a prominent organizer in a variety of progressive organizations and was, along with Paul Robeson, the prime mover within the anti-

colonialist, anti-imperialist Council on African Affairs (CAA). The CAA initiated the anti-apartheid movement in the United States and provided material support to an increasingly militant ANC in the late 1940s and early 1950s and to black South Africans suffering from emergencies like famine in the late 1940s. Hunton also led pickets outside the South African consulate (thereby anticipating a rather successful tactic by anti-apartheid activists in the US and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s) and wrote prolifically on southern African affairs in his editorship of the CAA's *New Africa* (later *Spotlight on Africa*), and in several trenchant pamphlets detailing the horrors of South African apartheid, as well as American political and economic complicity in it. These writings were only part of his longstanding activism on behalf of black South Africans to the United Nations and to American elected representatives. Anti-communist witch hunts by the American government in the post World War II period prompted Hunton to leave the country, whereby he eventually arrived in Zambia, where he wrote a column in *Mayibuye*, the ANC bulletin. There are also some fascinating tidbits that add to familiar stories, such as the fact that Mazisi Kunene, working with Oliver Tambo as part of the ANC office in London, seemed to have substantial interactions with Claudia Jones, whom he proclaimed to be "one of the most dynamic and most militant fighters" in the Pan-African liberationist struggles.

As the authors note, Pan-Africanism is such a broad topic that there are bound to be some undeserving exclusions, such as Amy Jacques Garvey -- and the inclusion of only three women speaks to a gender imbalance that reflects both the marginalization of women in Pan-African activity (gender discrimination, of course, is certainly not limited to Pan-Africanism), but also points to areas where new research is urgently needed. *Pan African History*, with its detailed biographies, many of which incorporate new research, will be an important reference source for scholars of Pan-Africanism as well as African history and African Diaspora studies and for South Africanists who may find opportunities to place their work in larger global frameworks. As I have discovered recently in my current undergraduate seminar on Pan-Africanism, the book works particularly well for students. The biographical entries tend to whet the appetites of students who know little of these personalities beforehand, and the suggestions for further reading that conclude each entry are reliable guides to the leading works on the particular subject. One can only hope that successive volumes are forthcoming.

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