

Africa and the West: A Documentary History from the Slave Trade to Independence. William H. Worger, Nancy L. Clark and Edward A. Alpers, eds. Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press, 2001. 429 pp.

This hefty book really is a documentary history, rather than simply a collection of documents. The editors' comments are very minimal. The selection and organization of the documents, however, is so effective that the book provides a wonderful introduction into Africa's intersection with Europe through the words of the people who lived through it. From the era of the slave trade to the establishment of the new South Africa, Africa and the West portrays Africa as a real place full of complex and interesting people and institutions, and it emphasizes that the "Western" intersection with Africa was more than just an impact and response. People experienced, observed, critiqued, thought, planned, plotted, and dreamed.

The book's first section, "Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade," includes narratives of enslavement by Venture Smith, Olaudah Equiano, Ali Eissami and Chisi Ndjurisiye Sichayajunga. These are counterposed against documents showing what European church and state leaders thought they were doing, and vivid reports by Alexander Falconbridge and Mungo Park, Europeans observing the realities of trade in Africa. The section also incorporates documents on South Africa, instead of separating its history into a separate section, and a discussion on East African Muslim perspectives on slavery.

The next section, "From Abolition to Conquest," makes the emphasis on dialogue and conversation even more clear, as it includes exchanges over treaties with Asante and between the missionary George Champion and the Zulu king Dingaan. This section also brilliantly illustrates the problems of conquest in the British Secretary of State for the Colonies' instructions to the Niger commissioners in 1941 (pp. 133-6) and a fill-in-the-blank sample treaty for use with "African Chiefs" (pp. 137-8). The final sets of documents in the section, "voices of imperialism" and "voices of resistance" provide documents—including photos and political cartoons—that will enliven any discussion about the logic of conquest. Likewise, Edward Blyden's inaugural address as president of Liberia College provides a vivid illustration of how 19th century diaspora Africans longed for an experimental program of research, study, and development that would connect Africa's past to its present and allow Africans to "regenerate a continent" (p. 194) ravaged by the slave trade and slavery.

The editors continue to follow this pattern in the book's other sections on colonialism (and its critics) and "The Contradictions of Post-Colonial Independence." They draw heavily on Ghana and South Africa, and preferentially depict British-dominated regions. But throughout the collection, vivid documents challenge any oversimplifications students might make about colonialism, its opponents, and its end. Furthermore, documents provide insight into more than just elite politics, as they include excerpts from Casement's "Evidence of Colonial atrocities in the Belgian Congo" (pp. 239-40) and a 1909 school exam from Togo that testifies powerfully to colonial initiatives to re-shape children's minds (pp. 249-50).

For those who teach using documents, finding accessible and relevant documents that cover the range of African history has been getting gradually easier. While some classic collections of documents from specific locations (such as D.A. Low's *Mind of Buganda* or Anthony Kirk-Greene's *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria, 1966-1970*) are out of print, new collections have recently proliferated, including more manageable works from the University of Wisconsin's African Studies series, new editions of explorers' narratives, and excellent collections of colonial documents such as the PRO's British Documents on the

End of Empire series. This particular volume, like most document collections, is too expensive for students to buy as a textbook. But it would be a valuable addition to a library collections, particularly in libraries with limited Africana materials. The volume would also be good for public libraries, or secondary school libraries, as it would provide a text-based introduction to part of African history that might well stir student interest and encourage creativity.

This is potentially a quite useful book. But there are several things that it quite clearly is not. First, it is not a depiction of all of Africa, through all of time. The editors are quite explicit that their focus is on Africa and “The West”—and thus many familiar sorts of documents, such as Ibn Battuta, epic histories, or indigenous kinglists, are not included. Ethiopia (with one uninspiring document) and North Africa are also notably absent. And the sheer size of the topic means that editors had to make choices. The incorporation of South Africa here is thought-provoking, but feels sparse and thematically awkward. Documents provided here are mostly previously published, drawn from some out-of-print collections, obscure materials, or official sources. Further, for all the complexity of politics and intellectual engagement that selections demonstrate, major issues such as colonial debates over women, the politics of ethnicity, and post-colonial discussions of economics, seem left out. The post-colonial section is by far the weakest, with less coherence and a reliance on fiction by Chinua Achebe and poetry by Jack Mapanje to invoke the frustrated hopes of independence. The section lacks anything on globalization, structural adjustment, military interventions, or any of the newer ways Africa and “the West” interact.

Despite its limitations, this is an excellent book—rich in ways I have only begun to mention. Perhaps the key to its success is the editors’ willingness to include large excerpts, whole documents and interchanges. Together, the documents of this collection provide powerful evidence of the sheer level of thought, debate, struggle, and planning that went into every stage of the Africa/West experience from the first contacts between explorers and coastal peoples to the achievement of the new South Africa.

Carol Summers
University of Richmond