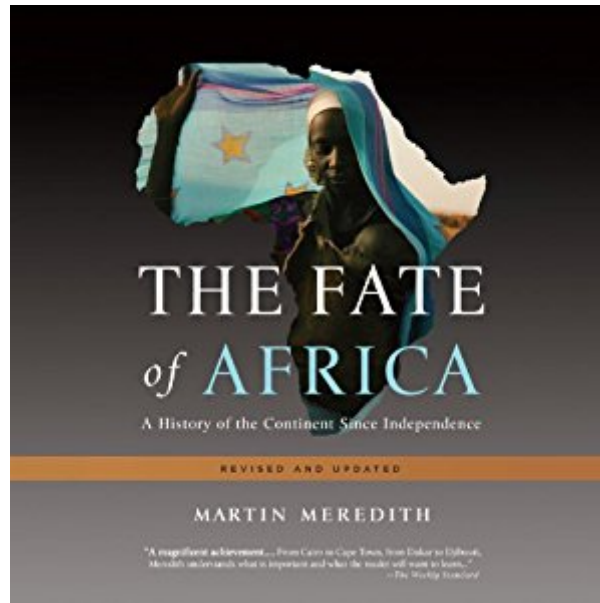


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The Fate Of Africa: A History Of The Continent Since Independence



Synopsis

Martin Meredith has revised this classic history to incorporate important recent developments, including the Darfur crisis in Sudan, Robert Mugabe's continued destructive rule in Zimbabwe, controversies over Western aid and exploitation of Africa's resources, the growing importance and influence of China, and the democratic movement roiling the North African countries of Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book provides an outstanding survey of the brutal dictators and frequent wars that have plagued Africa since independence. I have nothing to add to the already comprehensive reviews here except to note three possible negatives of the book. Despite these, I still give the book 4 1/2 stars, as my points are mainly about scope, not execution.1) This is a history in the "old-school" sense. Like earlier histories of Europe that included only the deeds of kings, heroes, and warriors, there is no attempt to convey anything about the daily experience of the ordinary people of Africa. It is a history of the movers and the shakers. In the past several decades, historians have redefined their field to include the actions and experiences of those who are not in the seats of power. If you're looking for this newer kind of history, then this is not the book on Africa for you.2) Excellent coverage is provided through each decade of the twentieth century, but coverage of the last ten years seemed a little thin in comparison.3) And finally, after 700 pages of corrupt dictators, I was hoping for at least a little analysis. Why has all this happened over the last 50 years? Why do these

corrupt men keep gaining power, and why does the violence persist? I understand that Meredith's intended purpose is merely to report and not to become political, but by the very act of selecting certain aspects of Africa's history and excluding others, he makes a statement. I was hoping, then, for some more explicit exploration of the causes of this long nightmare.

If you are working in or simply fascinated by Africa this is a great start point and I would definitely recommend this book for your library. I constantly go back to this book to refresh myself on regional and country specific GENERAL issues and history. As an overview of quite possibly one of the most complex socio-political environments in the world, the author does an incredible job. What is often missing is the outside influence on the story and/or the deeper regional dynamics. The author could have focused a little bit more on some of the developmental disasters caused by the very organizations that set out to fix the internal problems prevalent in the continent. This economic experimentation as well as the external security regime are two topics that would have resonated throughout the book. Still, I would not give up my copy and, recognizing that no one can do justice to an entire continent in one book, this is a must have for your Africa shelf.

Martin Meredith's history of Africa since independence provides a critical service to the general reader -- telling clearly and comprehensively what has happened in Africa since 1960. In so doing, he covers an vast amount of material. There are at present over 50 African states, and they vary enormously, in terms of culture, resources, history, and on and on. Meredith discusses all of the major and most of the minor countries individually, moving forward through time in what is a triumph of organization. If I want in future to review the recent history of one or another African country -- or of some cross-border phenomena -- I shall know where to turn. It is probably too much to expect an explanation at the end of this chronicle. Mr. Meredith's history presents a harrowing account of war after war, dictator after dictator, famine after famine, and mass murder after mass murder. They differ from country to country, of course, but the pattern of kleptocracy combined with monomania emerges again and again. At the end, one has to wonder why, and Mr. Meredith does not really present many answers. It may not be possible to do so, but I wish he had tried. Upon finishing this book, I went back to to see if there is another on the same topic -- is Africa's history since independence really so totally hopeless? I didn't find anything of anything like Mr. Meredith's level of seriousness that presented a less pessimistic view, at least not based on writeups and reviews. For now, I remain stunned, and curious.

The three Cs dominate reportage on Africa, and that's mostly what we find here. This long book reflects an internalist view: Africans, especially leaders, are to blame for Africa's problems; external factors like neo/colonialism get short shrift. TFOA has several virtues: factual accuracy (but with bibliographic errors); geographical balance; refreshing style; and sympathy for ordinary folks. But focus on public events conveys little of the actual feel of living in admittedly troubled lands, impeding a proper grasp of Africa's situation. Take Zambia: poor but relatively stable and free of ethnic conflict, it's under the radar apart from short passages on Kenneth Kaunda. Meredith's harsh view of Ghana, justified til recent years, neglects its currently flourishing economy, civil society and popularity with visitors. His sources reveal the problems he cites, but what about widespread spirited efforts to cope creatively with daily struggles? Kinship and ethnicity are not just problems, but resources deployed in pragmatic coping strategies. L. Cliggett, "Grains From Grass" and K.T. Hansen, "Salaula" help explain current life in Zambia, while S. Nzenza-Shand, "Songs to an African Sunset" nicely evokes a stable Zimbabwe before it succumbed to corruption and paranoia. Without such insights, especially from Africans themselves, TFOA misses the resilience, humor, courtesy and sheer joie de vivre found throughout the continent.

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