

The Truman Administration and the Decolonisation of sub-Saharan Africa

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Preface

The history of relations between United States of America and Africa is virtually unexplored. Africa, compared to Europe, has rarely been considered a priority area because of the eurocentric orientation of most policy makers and historians in America. This orientation has given rise to two erroneous assumptions: first, that America has no interest or interests in Africa and therefore could not have had a policy towards that continent; and second, that information does not exist to warrant studying the subject. Books on US-Africa relations, with a few exceptions, tend to be superficial, episode-oriented and unscholarly. But the reality is that the United States has had a long interest in the African continent. Her policies and personnel have influenced, and continue to influence, events in Africa. And, although Africa has rarely been a priority area, it has not been completely ignored.

In this study, I have attempted to explain one aspect of US-Africa relations as it pertains to decolonisation, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. I have, however, also made reference to places like Libya, whose fate was closely tied to that of Somaliland and Eritrea. Since the Africans' main political preoccupation after World War II was decolonisation, American anti-colonialism, which received a lot of publicity during the War, was of particular interest to African nationalists. Leading nationalists knew of the American Declaration of Independence, had studied Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and had welcomed Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms. They noted how the United States had opposed European colonialism in Asia and Africa, and expected American anti-colonialism to continue. The United States' failure to live up to these expectations disillusioned many anti-colonialists, not just in Africa, but elsewhere as well, and even within the United States.

The United States confrontation with the former Soviet Union, which had been growing during World War II, forced Americans to

ignore other issues and to tolerate the continuation of colonialism in South Africa. Their emphasis on containing communism at the expense of the elimination of colonialism created the impression among the colonised peoples in Africa that the United States opposed their aspiration to independence. Although American officials frequently denied that this was the case, critics noted how often the United States sided with Britain or France or Belgium against the demands of their colonial subjects.

The contradictions between American officials' claim of what the United States stands for, and what is actually perceived to be happening, has always been a puzzle. One learns about the professed American ideals from the media, government-operated information services abroad, and simply by taking classes in history and political science. At the same time, one is confronted with the reality of many shortcomings in the application of those ideals, especially where non-Europeans are involved. Those shortcomings are particularly visible in Africa.

My curiosity in the study of US-African relations was in part aroused by revelations of American involvement in the overthrow of Congo Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, revelations which confirmed, mainly to Americans, what Africans had long suspected and claimed to be factual.

My effort to learn about the United States and its relations with Africa and eventually to produce this book was facilitated by many people and institutions. Distinguished scholars at Ohio University taught me political science and political economy, economics and, most important, history. Special thanks go to the Department of History, Ohio University and particularly to John Lewis Gaddis, my PhD supervisor. Numerous libraries and research institutions opened their doors to me and I am especially grateful to the Harry S. Truman Library at Independence, Missouri, which awarded me a research grant. My friends, relatives and colleagues in East Africa encouraged me to work for the publication of this book. P. Godfrey Okoth of Makerere

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