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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Sargasso Bridge: America Speaks, Africa Answers

Kofi J. Roberts
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Whether your term for the watery divide between America and Africa is the Sargasso Sea, the Atlantic Ocean or the Sea without Shores, depends on your sense of geography and culture. Similarly, your background and cultural views will impact your feelings about the problem of African economic development. In this thought-provoking work by Kofi J. Roberts, a Ghana-born writer now living in Georgia, readers look at the history of Africa, its decline under European colonialism, movies that illustrate truths or misperceptions, and ideas for change. Although it's been over fifty years since the majority of African countries gained their independence, Roberts believes there is still no "courageous, comprehensive, actionable plan designed to transform hope into long-term economic and political gains for Africans, at home or abroad."

America too, is not without its problems. According to the author: "America is no longer the leader of the free world. America is the leader of the world until China, Russia, and India catch up…"

In the final chapters of the book, Roberts shows readers how America and Africa could help each other. But not in the one-sided spirit of the past, with aid packages that leave African recipients poorer and unable to meet even the ordinary needs of their populations. For an American-to-American example we need only to look at how outsized student loans are referred to as "financial aid" when they can be, in fact, poverty traps for the unwary. Aid to Africa must come with new thinking.

Roberts illustrates that it is time to place the raw capitalism of Ayn Rand and the dismissive philosophy of Hegel on the dusty bookshelves of history where they belong. While he admits that "Africans have not yet recognized themselves as the main, if not the only, obstacle to their progress…" He firmly rebuts the negative stereotypes of Africans propagated by early European explorers. Indeed, he shows how the perceptions of Africans as lazy and incompetent would have been fueled by the winds of racism and intolerance of bygone days.

The genius of Roberts' book lies in making ordinary Americans part of the answer—church to church, individual to individual. Why Americans? Why should we form half of the bridge? As a nation, Americans are both amazingly generous and avowedly Christian. In addition, America is uniquely positioned within the African diaspora as the preeminent beacon of hope for a better life. African-Americans could follow the Asian example and support and promote African-owned business which will then give back to Africa.

While the book misses at least one critical argument against one of its propositions, namely that Japan's isolationism caused its post World War II economic prosperity (it seems obvious that both Japan's dominance of its neighbors and its rebuilding by the Allied powers were partially responsible), nonetheless, the pros and cons are, for the most part, examined from all sides. With the exceptional clarity of Sargasso Sea surface water, this book allows a light to pass through the murky seaweed of Africa's problems to show how, in making the world a better place to live, we can better everyone's lives.

Dr. Kofi Roberts was born in Ghana and moved to the U.S. in the late 1960's. He holds a pharmacy degree from the University of Georgia. He and his wife and children live in Georgia.

HOLLY WILLIAMS (September 28, 2010)

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