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Out: Robert O. Collins . African. A brief history. Markus Wiener Publishing, 2005. 250 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$68.95. \$24.95 of paper. Looking at the one-volume history of Africa, one has to resist the awe of the courageous spirit that began such a feat. Here, Robert O. Collins, already known for his problems with African history (Markus Wiener, 1992) and documents from the African Past (Markus Wiener, 2001), has presented us with an elegantly written narrative that takes us to the prehistoric times of modern Africa in less than 250 pages. Needless to say, the text is short and it is precisely because of its brevity that it is important for the reader to understand what Collins has achieved in this work. The author gives us few clues as to who he imagines as his main audience. However, single-volume histos often fall into one of two categories. Some of them are intended as an introduction to the uninitiated and can be useful for casual readers, teachers and students. Others are designed as synthesis works that seek to establish innovative interpretive connections. The latter tend to be better appreciated by readers who already have a background theme at hand, in this case professional historians and postgraduate students. Collins' book is between these two groups. Both readers who have no previous knowledge of African history and experienced historians will find useful elements in this text, although they are likely to do different things. Uninitiated readers find that the text often lacks referencing and framing issues that would help them follow what is inevitably a complex narrative. For example, the author often writes about the demographic changes experienced on the African continent, but it's not until the end of the book that he explains why demographics are an important topic in African history. Similarly, when the author refers to Kush as a corridor to Africa, he does not explain the importance of the metaphor. On the other hand, there are parts of the book where the questions are formulated more clearly and where the narrative seems to flow less arbitrarily. I especially found a chapter titled European Conquest and Colonization quite gripping because it began as a well-defined and identifiable issue and developed it consistently throughout the text. The sections on the slave trade are also very useful, as Collins is not limited to transatlantic trade, but also briefly examines the systems that existed in the Sahara, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It was a little disturbing that the author would choose to discuss the main themes of his narrative at the very end, rather than present them at the beginning of the book. In my opinion, they would have helped enormously those readers who are approaching African history for the first time. The book works better than synthesis for the reader, who has some knowledge of African history. Professional historians of Africa, educated [End Page 161] readers and advanced graduate students can follow a well-crafted work of synthesis, though not one that intends to present an innovative general interpretation. However, there are points that I think are particularly stimulating. The study of African slavery and the assessment of the role of the African middle classes in post-Independence Africa have led me to reformulate some of the issues and force me to re-review some of the literature in these areas. Given its characteristics, this book is a valuable tool for teachers and graduate students. Some chapters may also be useful for reading courses in introductory courses, although they must be carefully selected. Finally, African historians will also benefit from reading this text. Like any good synthesis work, it promotes re-concept and re-evaluation and thus contributes to the study of old and new issues. Esperanza Brizuela-García of Montclair State University in Upper Montclair, New Jersey Copyright © 2007 African Studies Association of Africa: A Brief History of Robert O. Collins (University of California) is an informative and interesting collection of stories and historical events in Africa since the year of African independence in the 1960s. As for the very well-documented description and detailed history of Africa and the many difficulties he has experienced in recent centuries, Africa: A Brief History reveals to the reader many unknown or disavowed pieces of [the continent's] past. Africa: A brief history is strongly recommended for all non-specialized general readers interested in intercultural studies, as well as students of historical African and colonial rule. - Midwest Book Review Robert O. Collins, already known for his problems with African history (Markus Wiener, 1992) and documents from the African Past (Markus Wiener, 2001), has presented us with an elegantly written narrative that takes us to the prehistoric times of modern Africa in less than 250 pages. Needless to say, the text is short, and it is precisely in its brevity that it is important for readers to understand what Collins has achieved in this work ... Given its characteristics, this book is a valuable tool for teachers and graduate students. Certain chapters can also be useful for reading courses in introductory courses. Finally, African historians will also benefit from reading this text. As with any good work synthesis it promotes rethinking and re-evaluation and thus contributes to the exploration of old and new issues. - The African Studies Review Emergency, which repeatedly comes across modern policy studies in higher education, is that top professors in almost all disciplines spend too much time doing research on increasingly narrow, specialized subjects, denying undergraduates a student and general reader their erudition on the wider subjects of these disciplines. This is not the case with Robert Collins, professor emeritus of African history at the University of California Santa Barbara and a prominent expert on the history of South Sudan. Collins's various publications, including this brief history, are proof of his ability to write insightfully - over a career that spans more than forty-five years - both in general and on highly specialized subjects. Professor Collins established his reputation in South Sudan from 1883 to 1898: Fighting for Control (1962), his revised Yale doctoral thesis, and confirmed it with the Shadows in the Grass: Great Britain in South Sudan, 1918-1956 (1963). Alone or with collaborators, Collins has also written or compiled several volumes intended for undergraduate study courses in African history, especially his problems with African history: Precolonial Centuries, now in its third edition. Professor Collins must have had his problems with the book in mind when structuring this volume. He presents African history in a sidng way - from the dawn of mankind to the present day - only on 232 pages, alternately between detailed descriptions of key questions, followed by extensive generalisations leading to more detailed descriptions and then more general descriptions. This repetitive pattern begins with a brief introduction and runs through six chapters covering (i) prehistoric Africa; (ii) Ancient and medieval Africa; (iii) Islam, trade and countries; (iv) Europeans, slavery and the slave trade; (v) conquest and colonisation of sub-Saharan Africa; and (vi) Independent Africa. Introduction and 1. Collins argues that, together with the use of written records and inputs into anthropology, archaeology and linguistics, the rich cultural heritage of Africans and its development during a period of time with the techniques of collecting and interpreting oral traditions are well-used. Africa, adds Collins, is the mother of both continents and humanity. He introduces reader geography, climate and the main physical characteristics of the continent and completes a chapter on the brief origins of animal husbandry, agriculture and iron melting in Africa. In the latter case, Collins refers to the likely anatol origin of iron melting, while specifying that there is evidence of independent development of ironwork in East and West Africa (17). Chapter 2 is particularly detailed in relation to the history of ancient Egypt and Kush, referring to the latter as a corridor in Africa (25). Collins is careful to draw attention to the isolation of Egypt and Kush/Nubia, especially from a linguistic point of view, but also from a history of inter-intrusion. At the same time, he emphasizes Egypt's afroism. In Chapter 3 the rise and fall of representative and mainly first-generation African national systems. He starts in Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Kanem-Bornu in western Sudan, and then shifts to countries off the coast of East Africa, highlighting the role of agriculture, distance trade and Islam. Surprisingly, he does not mention the states of Hausa in this context. He compares the trading states of the Niger Delta to the towns and cities of Swahili. Collins then quickly describes the activities of rebuilding the cwez, hima and bito countries in the interior of East Africa and the formation of the state in the West African forest zone, highlighting the origins of Oyo, Benin and Ashanti. Then, going back to South Central Africa, he introduces the state formations of Luba, Lunda and Loz, as well as Congo, Ndongo, Mapungubwed, Zimbabwe and Mutapa. Chapter 4 focuses on Portuguese, the first (modern) Europeans to involve themselves in sub-Saharan Africa. Collins stresses the importance of early Portuguese exploration expeditions and Portuguese imports into Africa of American food crops such as cassava and Indian corn, the adoption of which was initiated by Africa's first green revolution. Since the Portuguese also opened up the Atlantic slave trade, Collins devotes the rest of the chapter to a thorough study of slavery in Africa and to the slave trade from Africa to Europe, the Americas, Asia, the Indian Ocean islands and Africa itself. In Chapter 5, Collins explains the abrupt introduction of nineteenth-century European and colonial power across the continent, which stems from a decisive approach to different trends and events. These included the eighteenth-century evangelical movement in Britain, the British-led European anti-slavery crusade, europe's stimulated legal trade conflicts in nineteenth-century Africa, European technological and medical advances, the colonial greed of King Leopold II of Belgium and the 19th-century architecture of the 19th century. Collins explains the same sudden collapse of colonial power, citing the devastating effects of two twentieth-century world wars in Europe, educational and material advances in colonialism in parts of Africa, and the opposition of Africans themselves to colonial power - often expressed in the rhetoric of European nationalism. Collins sees South Africa as a form of internal colonialism of apartheid that did not end until 1990. While the final chapter of post-colonialism-Africa must be every force, causing problems of poverty, economic stagnation, mismanagement, military coups, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, environmental degradation and neocolonialism, Collins ends with a note of optimism for more than twenty African countries that are quietly and purposefully citizens' lives(231). Professor Collins has written an extremely perceptive introduction to the main themes of African history. Africa: A brief history serves as an excellent basic textbook for the use of the sort of one-semester studies of African history and civilization that are often offered by American community colleges and the lower-level general education components of many four-year colleges. However, this should be complemented by the volume of the margin readings produced by Collins and his associates themselves, in addition to some internet links. Students who wish to read further will find many standard works in African history listed in the Selected Readings

section, which completes volume. - World History Bulletin

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