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This book is the product of a doctoral theses presented to Ohio University, Athens, USA in 1985. It is an extensively researched and clearly written study with seven chapters. The book sets out to examine the contradictory ideals and practices of American policy towards Africa and Africa-Americans in general.

The first two chapters examine American history prior to the Truman administration. During this period, slavery, racism and imperialism characterised Africa’s relations with the rest of the capitalist world. American leaders consequently remained ambiguous in their policies towards Blacks in the Diaspora. Leaders like Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and James Monroe are noted for their racist views on slavery and civil rights for Blacks in America. Such racist trends are thought to have influenced America’s attitudes towards Africa.

However, Woodrow Wilson is depicted as one American leader who espoused an anti-imperialist stand. He believed that world peace was always undercut by conflicts emanating from colonial pursuits. Therefore by eradicating colonialism, world peace would be assured. Accordingly, he insisted on a global organization to oversee international peace. But the author does not critique Wilson’s idealism in the context of the theoretical approaches available.

Truman, after Roosevelt, inherited an African policy in which American politico-economic considerations tampered her anti-colonial ideas. Those considerations swung American policy practice and rhetoric from anti-colonialism to pro-colonialism. Thus whereas America’s foreign policy aspirations were intended to promote pro-colonial interests, her economic needs demanded an anti-colonial stand. Truman’s policy therefore wavered between anti-imperialist rhetoric and pro-colonialism especially where American economic interests counted. US accommodation of European colonialism made it “vulnerable to charges of collusion with imperialism and insensitivity to colonial grievances”; and Russia capitalised on this to front a pro-African foreign policy.

The cold war and Africa’s place in the US foreign policy between 1947-1948
are analysed in chapter four. No background information is provided for a contextualised and deeper understanding of the pre-1947 cold war jostling between the US, its allies and Russia. The author begins instantly noting the 1947 US policy shift from the earlier multilateralism and open door trade policy to a professed anti-Communist position. Without the relevant background, important events which would have informed this chapter are missed.

Nevertheless, the author argues that Washington began to view Africa in terms of its defense needs and European economic recovery, the latter as a cold war necessity. European problems in turn became American problems as Truman “picked up the whiteman’s burden ...” from the British and focused US policies on Russian communism. Russia countered this by demonstrating US involvement in colonial dealings and her failure to address racial problems at home. Such accusations disturbed Truman and influenced the Point IV Programme which was intended to counteract Russian propaganda.

Between the inauguration of Truman in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950, several forces influenced US policy options as contained in the Point IV Programme. There was an obvious US commitment to placating colonial powers for cold war reasons. This considerably watered down US’ anti-imperialist rhetoric. Munene lucidly analyses the wheelings and dealings of US policy makers intended to stop European manipulations and Russian campaigns against her.

Chapter five shows that economic factors mattered most in US political decisions. Imbued with sympathy for dependent areas, the US offered support only where her economic interests were not jeopardized. She also sought civil rights solutions at home and distanced herself from imperialist affairs. But this was short-lived given the rise of conservativism in American thought. The Point IV Programme was branded as “probably the most mischievous document that had ever been published since Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto 100 years ago”. Indeed, the outbreak of the Korean war marked the end of US commitment to an anti-imperialist stand and Truman was back to square one in his attempt to identify with the colonized people. The Korean war impelled Washington to focus more importantly on issues of military re-armament, security and defense. This again rendered the US culpable on the colonial question: the US-Belgium disagreement over Congo, the largest African uranium producer is a good example. Congo was important because uranium is a key raw material in the manufacture of atomic bombs.

Chapter 6 argues that by the 1950’s the US had riveted to pro-imperialism. Although she attempted to placate anti-colonial nations like India, colonized nations used her duplicity to justify nationalism and embrace communism. Up to the end of the Truman era, the East-West conflict was the priority over colonialism. In a nutshell, Truman always lost the opportunity of winning anti-colonialists to his side.
Nonetheless, this is a valuable book. It shows that independence for most African countries was not planned; African countries jumped from the frying pan of European colonialism to the fire of American neo-colonialism. In this respect, it illustrates that any political decision by US policy makers depended largely on that country’s economic interests. US policy towards Africa was therefore concerted essentially by the need to open the sterling area to the dollar. This study provides an important lesson in statecraft for students of diplomacy, political science, economics and history. The study however hangs in a theoretical void by being essentially empirical and avoiding controversial issues.

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