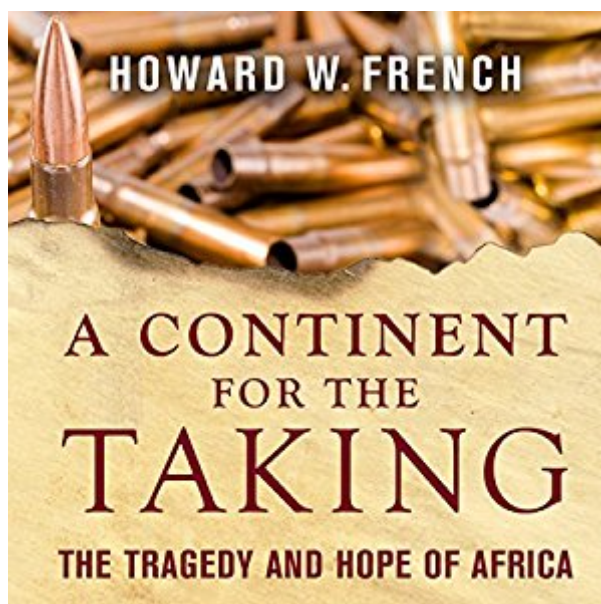


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A Continent For The Taking: The Tragedy And Hope Of Africa



Synopsis

In *A Continent for the Taking*, Howard W. French, a veteran correspondent for The New York Times, gives a compelling firsthand account of some of Africa's most devastating recent history - from the fall of Mobutu Sese Seko, to Charles Taylor's arrival in Monrovia, to the genocide in Rwanda and the Congo that left millions dead. Blending eyewitness reportage with rich historical insight, French searches deeply into the causes of today's events, illuminating the debilitating legacy of colonization and the abiding hypocrisy and inhumanity of both Western and African political leaders. While he captures the tragedies that have repeatedly befallen Africa's peoples, French also opens our eyes to the immense possibility that lies in Africa's complexity, diversity, and myriad cultural strengths. The culmination of 25 years of passionate exploration and understanding, this is a powerful and ultimately hopeful book about a fascinating and misunderstood continent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reporting from the ground in several trouble-prone nations, Howard French explains how sub-Saharan Africa is still being subjected to the whims of the outside world. Former rounds of slavery and colonialism are simply continuing under a new form of domination based on facilitating far-off political games, and enriching multinational corporations through the shameless appropriation of natural resources. All the while, the people of Africa continue to be exploited and forgotten by the rest of the world. French does find one (partially) happy success story in Mali, whose hardworking people have started a homegrown move toward democracy with nonexistent interest or support from outside. However, much of this book covers the violence and mayhem that still afflict much of

Africa, displaying the lingering legacies of colonialism and economic exploitation. Included here are quick examinations of the relentless political corruption in the potentially successful Nigeria, which has a strong population and political culture but also the corrupting influence of Western corporate profiteering; and the sorry subversion of democratic progress by violent local warlords in sleepy Congo-Brazzaville. French writes many pages on the catastrophic civil war in Liberia, fueled by drug-addicted teenage soldiers and genocidal competing dictators. In the process French devastatingly debunks the rebel leader Charles Taylor, who has become a supposed American poster boy for democratic reform. The greatest part of the book is based on French's knowledge of events in Congo (formerly Zaire), including stirring eyewitness accounts of the 1997 insurrection that toppled the despicable lifetime dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who had also been an American favorite.

It would have been a gigantic undertaking to write Howard W. French's kind of book about all of Africa. Africa is, after all, a large continent with the greatest diversity in species, ecosystems, peoples, languages and histories. French does not attempt such a challenge. His primary focus is the part of Africa that he knows best, Central Africa, and its complex history since independence. While he draws some general conclusions for Africa, resulting from the colonial carving up of the continent, his concern are the events in "the heart of Africa". Given the common misconception that Africa can be regarded as one unitary region, the title "A Continent for the Taking" strikes me as somewhat unsuitable and the subtitle as misleading. Only a few chapters relate French's travels in other countries, all in West Africa, and almost all struggling with their own post-colonial catastrophes such as Sierra Leone and Liberia. One notable exception is Mali where recent history has demonstrated that democratic development is possible despite political, environmental challenges and severe poverty of the vast majority of the population. Here, French finds some of hope among the tragedies. French feels privileged for his position given his personal background and family connections in and to the region. As West Africa representative for the New York Times between 1994 and 1998, he traveled extensively in the region. The book records one major political crisis after another: most of those happened to occur in Zaire in the last years of Mobutu's reign. French complements his current affairs coverage with reflections on the impacts of colonial history and political power play during the Cold War.

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