

BOOK REVIEW

ETHIOPIA AND THE UNITED STATES HISTORY, DIPLOMACY AND ANALYSIS

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Since its establishment, the United States has maintained a unique relationship with Ethiopia. Long regarded by Americans as the most important nation in Africa, Ethiopia has also played a pivotal role in American-African affairs. Ethiopia's influence grew at the end of the nineteenth century when it rejected colonizers and further during the twentieth century as its ruler appealed to the League of Nations for an end to colonization. Americans of African heritage embraced Ethiopia as the "motherland" and a symbol of pride that many were willing to sacrifice their lives to protect. And, in many respects, Ethiopia was equally regarded as the philosophical birthplace of Negritude and Pan-Africanism as African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans made the nation the site of their philanthropy and capitalistic investment.

Yet, while numerous historians have looked across the Atlantic to this idealized African nation, the reverse analysis has not been given the same attention. The Ethiopian perspective of this long relationship is what makes *Ethiopia and the United States* so interesting. Getachew Metaferia has skillfully placed his examination within the twentieth century to examine American and Ethiopian relationships during America's rise to a world power. By viewing Ethiopia from the lens of colonization, World Wars, and the Cold War, Metaferia, in essence, has written an unknown history full of complexities typically not considered by western scholars.

Ethiopia's long history is not solely defined by what happens in 1896, but it is a good place to begin an examination of national relations through a global racial perspective. By 1890, Europeans had already deemed people of color inferior to themselves. Their scramble for land in Africa and Asia promoted extreme cases of social Darwinism and racism. Europeans were pitted against each other and it came to a climax before the end of the century. The Italians, who are fighting to establish themselves in an European image of whiteness, failed to defeat the Ethiopians, who were depicted as an African representation of blackness, at Adowa in 1896. The defeat changed the course of European history as white men lost their aura of invincibility.

Working backwards from Adowa, Metaferia is able to reshape the Ethiopian identity. In establishing Ethiopia's two thousand year history, he explains why it is one of the special countries in the world and why America, a non-colonial power, would seek an alliance with it.

From this vantage point Metaferia begins his analysis over fifteen chapters and eight appendices. After two introductory sections, he moves to the development of a relationship that initiates in 1900. At that time, Robert Skinner, an American Consul in France, appeals to President McKinley for a delegation to go to Ethiopia believing that it will be "a country destined to play a large part in the future of Africa." Three years later, the State Department and President Roosevelt approve of the trip and dispatch Skinner and a delegation to Ethiopia. The mission culminates in an agreement between Skinner and Emperor Menelik that grants Ethiopia most favored nation status.

This event marks the beginning of a century of diplomatic relations that characterizes this book. Metaferia weaves his account from the Ethiopian perspective but provides enough information so that non-Africanist centered readers can feel comfortable. He reveals how Menelik

improved the relationship over time by enhancing the status of American diplomats and expanding trade.

The Ethiopian government equally sends representatives to the United States. One particular delegation, a goodwill mission in 1919, is featured in chapter four. This group visits New York, Chicago, Detroit, Washington and San Francisco. Metaferia reveals that this visit enables members of the party to see America and bring western innovations back to Ethiopia, but also exposes them to the extent of American racism. Although the State Department went to great lengths to ensure that the travelers were not victims of discrimination, they could not stop them from seeing aspects of segregation and inequality. Subsequent Ethiopian visitors would not be as lucky and will experience racism first-hand.

Racism was one of the reasons that the United States abandoned Ethiopia from late 1935 to 1941. Rather than denounce Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, the Americans withdrew military support and suspended trade. American officials were critical of the Italian aggression and massive slaughter of innocents, but following the lead of the British, America refused to push for the indictment of Italian leaders for war crimes. And after 1941, rather than to reject the neo-colonial impulse, the United States supported quasi-British control of Ethiopian assets.

Ethiopia and the United States constantly exposes and refutes western racism. It pinpoints how America regarded Ethiopia as an important nation, but still violated its treaties with the African nation to further its own agenda during World War II and the Cold War.

As a result, Haile Selassie, and not an American leader, emerges as the greatest statesmen in the relationship between the two nations. Activities during his reign span five chapters. Metaferia reveals that Haile Selassie secretly met President Roosevelt after Yalta to ask for more technological and political support. The emperor wanted Roosevelt to go

against British dominance in the Horn of Africa. Over the ensuing years Haile Selassie communicated with American presidents asking for greater economic ties and military support. New agreements, treaties and arrangements followed. In return, Ethiopia emerged as the chief American partner in Africa in the fight against communism. Ethiopia sent troops to Korea, supported UN missions in Africa, and developed alliances with Israel. It adopted American style education systems and used American practices in farming and business. From 1941 to 1974, Ethiopia became the foci of American expectations for African nations.

This relationship was brought to an abrupt end by the fall of the emperor in 1974. However, it is important to note that Haile Selassie fearing attacks from Somalia asked Washington for military aid in 1973. The refusal of the Nixon Administration to help pushed Selassie and future Ethiopian leaders to seek assistance from the Soviet Union.

Chapters eight, nine and ten focus on the fall of the emperor and the years of military rule. In many respects they are the best sections of the book. Here Metaferia provides details that reveal an insider's perspective. He shows the growing differences between the Ethiopian monarchy, soldiers, governmental officials, students, and American advisors. His analysis suggests that American officials mis-read the increasing cry for reforms that were born in the 1960s and came of age in the early 1970s. Unfortunately, the United States placed unwavering confidence in Haile Selassie and apparently did not develop alliances with others within the empire.

Refusing to act on the demands of students placed the emperor and his American supporters in conflict with an increasing number of disaffected citizens. The military coup caught the United States by surprise. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam's anti-west stance created problems

for the Ford and Carter administrations, and encouraged the Reagan and Bush administrations to deny Ethiopia economic and military support.

While American historians consistently blame the fall of Haile Selassie on the military, Ethiopian scholars suggest that the soldiers were only the most powerful group responsible for the coup. Dissatisfaction was widespread and Ethiopian-wanted modernization in many ways threatened the concept of a feudal empire.

Metaferia argues that America lost the Cold War not only in Ethiopia, but throughout Africa. Rather than accept the military government, the United States committed all of its resources to destroy it and attempt to return Haile Selassie to the throne. Even when it was confirmed that the emperor was dead, American statesmen still wanted to topple the regime by any means necessary. Its covert actions often hurt the Ethiopian people. Suspicious of American intentions, the regime executed members of the monarchy and Selassie loyalists. Officials resigned and some sought asylum. American refusal to grant financial and food support contributed to economic problems and famine. And in response, the *Derg* reduced the number of American diplomats further alienating the two nations and supporting the government's claims that America was not a friend of the Ethiopian people.

Soviet support for the *Derg* changed the balance of power in the Horn of Africa, forcing American leaders unable to regain Ethiopian favors, to look towards Eritrea and Somalia for new allies. These actions led to new military conflicts that pitted the United States against its former friend and ultimately disrupted the balance of African states long after the demise of the Soviet Union.

The final chapters analyze the post-military regime (1991 to the present) and the restoration of U.S.-Ethiopian relations. Although Ethiopia has supported a significant number of recent American efforts, a great deal

of damage has been done. The conflicts in Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia reveal that American interests may be contradictory to the principles of democracy and freedom. The United States destroyed a longstanding mutual partnership and now, in many respects, has pitted Ethiopia against the best interests of the Horn of Africa, and consequently, itself.

Ethiopia and the United States is a masterful examination of African history. Through the use of key documents and personal insights, what might have seemed to be an ambitious work was actually simplified and perfected through Getachew Metaferia's detailed framework and style. *Ethiopia and the United States* should be required reading for all students of diplomacy and American-African relations.

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