



African Independence: How Africa Shapes the World

By Tukufu Zuberi, *PBS History Detectives*



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African Independence highlights the important role Africa has played in recent history and the significant role it will continue to play in the future of America and the globe. In a world where much of the power and wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a very few people, this book looks at how the history of African independence has touched all people—from refugees to heads of state.

Author Tukufu Zuberi weaves exclusive interview excerpts and stories from many Africans he has met with old newsreels, current news and reports, and research into a larger narrative that takes readers through key events in African history and shows their importance today. The book provides context for understanding connections between events in Africa and the world, such as Nigeria’s Boko Haram acts of war against the citizens of Nigeria and neighboring states, China’s rise as the main superpower with the largest financial connections to the African continent, and the so-called war against terrorism.

Zuberi is also the director of the documentary *African Independence*, which has won awards including Best Director and Best Documentary at the San Diego Black Film Festival, Best Director at The People’s Film Festival, Best African Film at the San Diego Black Film Festival, and more. Both alone and together, the book and film offer a deeper understanding of Africa’s central role in world affairs.

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Editorial Review

Review

In this pleasant and accessible study, Zuberi, an academic and host of the PBS series History Detectives, guides readers through the historical and current straits of the vast continent of Africa. Zuberi documents the decisive role played by African soldiers in WWII and argues that the war's savagery exposed 'the myth of civilized Europe and barbaric Africa.' Though the Allied victory was 'forged with considerable African sacrifice,' much of the continent remained in European imperial hands. However, African participation in the defeat of the Axis powers rekindled anti-colonial aspirations, resulting in a series of uprisings and growing international support for decolonization. Regrettably, the Cold War derailed national independence movements and the continent again became 'locked in a death grip' by brutal military dictatorships supported by either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. The era of globalization witnessed progress in such countries as South Africa, but lingering ethnic tensions stoked by colonial authorities and ruling elites erupted in bloodshed in Rwanda and Kenya. With appearances by a long roster of 'history makers'—including activists, leaders, and freedom fighters—Zuberi's work is a well-researched and informed, if selective, story of the making of modern Africa, and constitutes an impassioned plea to recognize the continent for more than the trouble it has endured. Maps and photos. (*Publishers Weekly*)

Professor Zuberi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, has written an easy to read, absorbing and welcomed history of the African continent. He recounts how, over a long period of time, the wealth of this continent has been, in a sense, stolen for European usage rather than for the benefit of the local inhabitants. In a straight forward tone he further underscores the abuse of the peoples both socially and economically and questions whether equal value was gained by Africa for their contribution to the other parts of the world. . . .I am pleased to have read this book. (*ImagineMag!: A South African Arts & Culture Magazine*)

Although Africa is often portrayed as a remote and impoverished area, remembered for the suffering of its people, it has played an important role in world history that is critical for understanding global events today. Zuberi walks audiences and readers through the years of African independence through the present, including colonialism, the impact of the world wars, independence movements, the Cold War, ethnic conflict, terrorism and the health crisis. Combining newsreels, archival sources, and visits to African memorials and monuments, Dr. Zuberi helps viewers understand the human experience in Africa and how Africans were able to change their lives in the recent past. (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*)

In his new book, Zuberi mainly explores the African Independence Movements of five separate republics: Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, and South Africa. Through these republics, he attempts to make an argument on what independence means to the world, as well as what independence holds for the future. Comprehensive yet brief, the book is split into four chapters, each exploring Africa in relation to a watershed event: Africa and World War II, Africa and the end of colonialism, Africa and the Cold War, and, finally, Africa and the 21st century. As a historian, Zuberi's strength is not so much in chronicling and explaining history as it is in immersing himself in the lives of those who lived it. To write *African Independence*, the author spent years researching and traveling in Africa, interviewing everyone from political leaders to taxi drivers. (*The Wesleyan Argus*)

The main strength of this book lies in the author's ability to conduct oral interviews with leading African political figures, mostly from his *African Independence* documentary series. . . .I would recommend this

book to the general reader interested in the history of postcolonial Africa, especially those interested in international relations and the challenges faced by the African postcolonial state. (*African Studies Quarterly*)

My dear friend, former Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga, often quotes a familiar African proverb: ‘Until the lion speaks, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.’ In *African Independence*, not only does one of Africa's lions speak, but he roars. Zuberi demands our attention by forcing us to see formerly obscured realities, and, in doing so, positions us to better understand Africa's future. This book is eminently helpful in putting Africa's past, present, and future in proper perspective. (Ambassador Charles R. Stith, US Ambassador to Tanzania (1998–2001); founder and director, African Presidential Center at Boston University)

In this engaging and bold analysis of African independence, Tukufu Zuberi uses interviews, newsreels, and archival sources to understand the human experience in Africa and how Africans turned those experiences into struggles that changed their lives. The invasion of Ethiopia by Italy, as well as the exploitation of Africa by colonial powers for material and human capital for the war effort placed Africa well within the global currents of the twentieth century. Zuberi critiques the failure of U.S. humanitarian policies toward Africa and Africa's current partnerships with countries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. A film completes this critically important study of Africa in the modern world. (Tiffany Ruby Patterson, Vanderbilt University)

African Independence and its accompanying documentary film are indispensable for anyone who desires to be a truly well-educated twenty-first-century citizen. With critical sociological insight and rigorous historical excavation through time—from World War II to the Cold War and beyond—and across the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa, Zuberi introduces us to the heroes and heroines of pan-Africanism and Africa's independence movements. This meticulously researched book reveals the contradictions that continue to obstruct aspirations for African liberation. Indeed, the evidence presented shows that Africa is ‘once again locked in a death grip’ of post-colonial and post-independence manipulations. This book illuminates not only how we are all implicated but that our own humanity depends on how Africa shapes the world in this century. (Dr. Joyce King, Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Professor, Georgia State University)

African Independence reveals that the modern world cannot be understood without understanding Africa. Zuberi's remarkable access to African premier leaders is what makes *African Independence* a special book; it enables readers to view Africa and the rest of the world in a new and intelligent light. This book should be read by anyone wishing to understand the modern world and what its future is likely to hold. (Aldon Morris, Northwestern University; author of *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*)

With interviews of key activists and statespeople as well as close-ups of daily life in several locales, Tukufu Zuberi's *African Independence* frames decolonization and formal sovereignty as both an era and a sensibility, encouraging readers to define for themselves what ‘African independence’ actually means for the continent and the world as a whole. This book and its accompanying film provide a valuable record of the aspirations, conflicts, and confluences among a diverse array of actors, providing an opportunity to consider the vast changes of both Africa and the world from the latter half of the twentieth century to the twenty-first. (Michael Hanchard, Johns Hopkins University)

About the Author

Tukufu Zuberi is the Lasry Family Professor of Race Relations and professor of sociology and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He writes and speaks widely about race, both in the United States and internationally. He is a host on the hit PBS series *History Detectives* and has been interviewed on NPR and other media all over the world.

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