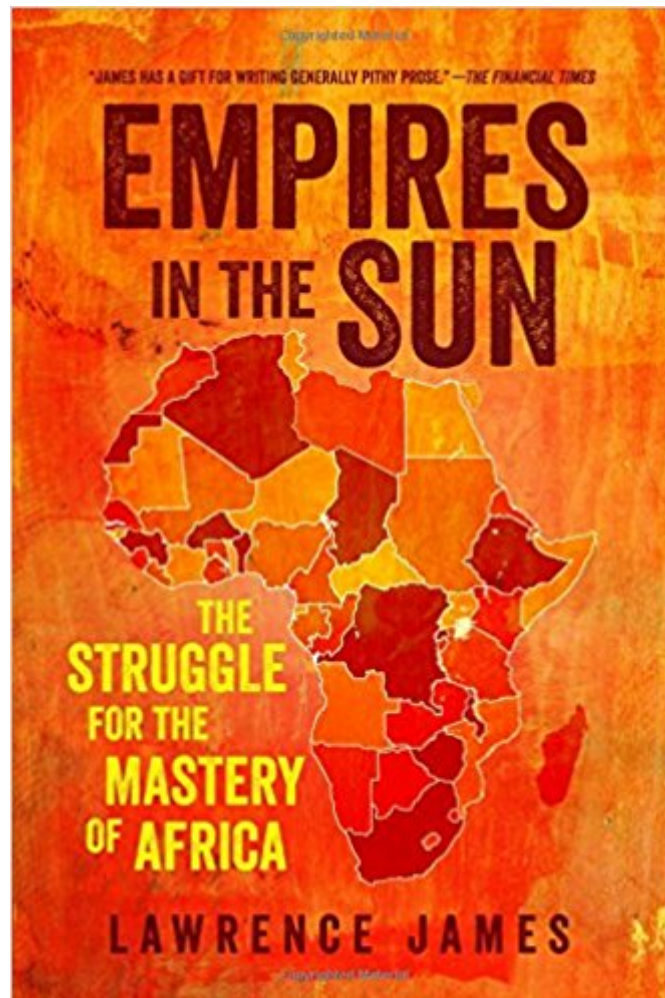




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Empires In The Sun: The Struggle For The Mastery Of Africa



Synopsis

The one hundred year history of how Europe coerced the African continent into its various empires – and the resulting story of how Africa succeeded in decolonization. In this dramatic (and often tragic) story of an era that radically changed the course of world history, Lawrence James investigates how, within one hundred years, Europeans persuaded and coerced Africa into becoming a subordinate part of the modern world. His narrative is laced with the experiences of participants and onlookers and introduces the men and women who, for better or worse, stamped their wills on Africa. The continent was a magnet for the high-minded, the adventurous, the philanthropic, the unscrupulous. Visionary pro-consuls rubbed shoulders with missionaries, explorers, soldiers, big-game hunters, entrepreneurs, and physicians. Between 1830 and 1945, Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Italy and the United States exported their languages, laws, culture, religions, scientific and technical knowledge and economic systems to Africa. The colonial powers imposed administrations designed to bring stability and peace to a continent that appeared to lack both. The justification for occupation was emancipation from slavery – and the common assumption that late nineteenth-century Europe was the summit of civilization. By 1945 a transformed continent was preparing to take charge of its own affairs, a process of decolonization that took a quick twenty years. This magnificent history also pauses to ask: what did not happen and why?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“James’s thorough, country-by-country examination provides a fresh and comprehensive understanding of how modern Africa was formed.” - Booklist
“This is history written in the grand narrative style. James takes on a massive subject and addresses it in sweeping, muscular prose.” - Kirkus Reviews
“James’s book covers a vast amount of territory. This is a solid work with little in the way of fluff.” - Publishers Weekly
“James succeeds in concisely telling this history up until the end of apartheid and the fall of the Soviet Union. For all readers interested in a better understanding of modern Africa.” - Library Journal
“A panoramic survey of imperial and then neo-colonial subjugation of the African continent between 1830 and 1990. A timely reminder of the devastating consequences of chauvinistic nationalism and expansionism. Remarkable.” - The Spectator
“A brisk, well-written and jaunty account of European empire-building in Africa. A timely reminder of the complexity of international politics, and the nuanced balance of forces that have shaped our modern world.” - The Times (UK)

Lawrence James was a founding member of the University of York and then took a research degree at Merton College, Oxford. After a distinguished teaching career he became a full-time writer in 1985 and has emerged as one of the outstanding narrative historians on the subject of the British empire, including *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* and *Churchill and Empire: Portrait of an Imperialist*. He lives in England.

This book does a great job at giving a high-level overview of colonialism in Africa.

It’s a lot to cover, but the author’s style is so engaging, that it’s a pretty easy read. One possible drawback to that approach, though, is that not every topic will get covered or at least covered in any great depth. Just as an example, there’s only one mention of Biafra. Instead, the author focuses his attention on Kitanga instead. Same rough situation, but still. And that gets into another drawback of this approach doesn’t always allow time for a thorough analysis. In the example above, the book really doesn’t get into great detail on the problem of the arbitrary borders of the colonies and how those affected what happened after independence. Kitanga’s a great example, but ... At the same time, though, I really did like his analysis of how similar the colonial and Cold War eras were when it came to ruthlessly exploiting the continent on the part of the major powers (with the US and USSR basically taking on the roles of the former colonial powers). The author also talks about the lack of preparation

for independence in the Belgian Congo, and how that contributed to the chaos that ensued there after independence. An interesting contrast with that might be some of the former British colonies, which tended to be better prepared and thus more successful in their transitions.

It's just something the author barely touches on though. All that said, I still really liked the book. It filled in a lot of holes for me, and also gave me a really good feel for the sweep of this period and time. And honestly, if it had gotten into all the detail, it probably would be a 1000 pages which would have been way too intimidating for me to ever pick up!

Lawrence James's *Empires of the Sun* is an outstanding book. It covers the history of Africa from 1830 (beginning of modern colonization) to 1994 (the end of white rule in South Africa). That is a lot of history to pack into 329 pages. James however does an excellent job of having the narrative reads like a "narrative" and not just a recitation of facts and dates. James tells the story without agenda. The history of colonial Africa is combination of many factors: Economic interests, military interests, moral factors (e.g. Britain's opposition to slavery) and religious zeal (e.g. missionaries). A good history book would do well to focus on just one aspect of history. A great book like James's covers them all. Despite the excellent writing, because *Empire of the Sun* is not a book that would be of interest to the general reader this reviewer hesitated to give *Empires of the Sun* five stars. However, if you are reading this review, you must be open minded about purchasing this book for yourself or a loved one. With that in mind I give *Empires of the Sun* five stars. Just for the record, this is genuine review, I paid full price for my copy. Further, I have never met or communicated with the author. *Empires of the Sun* is just simply a five star book.

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