

December, 1971, which collapsed a little over a year later, when private transnational speculators staged repeated attacks on the dollar. One of the more sordid stories of speculative manipulation involved the banking system itself:

"Recognizing the profits to be made, some banks reportedly organized 'rings' that would secretly enter the market with large transactions intended to move an exchange rate temporarily, drawing 'greater fools' in after them, and then they would reverse the transactions and take the speculative profit."

By that time George P. Shultz, the current secretary of state, had replaced John Connally as treasury secretary. Shultz, a Chicago product and erstwhile colleague of Milton Friedman, delivered the coup de grace to Bretton Woods by moving the international monetary system to floating exchange rates. Interventions in foreign exchange markets by the Treasury and Federal Reserve were to be kept at a minimum, and then only to correct overly disordered market conditions. Market forces were to be given free rein. This is where Odell's initial rendering appears to have ended, but events marched inexorably on.

Now we have the Reagan administration

playing havoc with the international monetary system via its supply-side nostrums and the policies of Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker (who, as treasury under secretary for monetary affairs in the Nixon administration, played the key role of point man in the demise of Bretton Woods). In October, 1979, Volcker's monetarist policy of targeting monetary aggregates added floating interest rates to floating exchange rates. Thus, at a time of world depression, interest rates have soared, and so too has the dollar. At the same time, the bloated debt of such Third World countries as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil threatens to wreck the international monetary system, leading to a collapse of the world economic order on a par with the 1930s. And as unemployment rates soar worldwide, the major trading countries are moving toward beggar-they-neighbor commercial policies.

We seem to be back where we started, with few lessons learned in the process. International cooperation never has been lower in the period since World War II. The cold war is being revived with an alarming acceleration in the arms race. Round and round we go, piling one stupidity on another at the altar of laissez-faire. (WV)

or the historical tensions among them. Still, despite current troubles, a bit of historical perspective suggests that there is much life and hope on the continent and that the standard of living for the average African has improved since independence. There are some political success stories: the persistence of practicing democracies like Nigeria and Zimbabwe and a smooth transfer of political leadership in Senegal and Cameroon. And there are some economic success stories as well, as in Cameroon. In most African countries life expectancy has risen by a decade since independence; illiteracy has dropped with the rapid expansion of educational opportunities, particularly in primary education. And the creative imagination of Africans, their artistic expression, their approach to human relationships, their very ability to cope patiently and hopefully with adversity, continues to offer the rest of the world much of value and interest.

These two books focus largely on current problems. David Lamb is a journalist who spent several years traversing the continent, observing and reporting on Africa and Africans. His object here is to provide an introduction to Africa for the uninformed but interested reader, and he takes on the immensely difficult task of trying to communicate the nature of African society today, its politics and economics. At times he is clearly baffled and exasperated by the Africans he is trying to understand and explain. Yet his book is one of the few of its kind that is relatively current—though hardly anything involving contemporary Africa remains current for long.

The Africans is readable, comprehensive, and frequently insightful. However, it is marred by several problems, some unavoidable, others simply unfortunate. It is probably impossible in one volume to provide an accurate picture of an immense continent full of widely differing peoples with complex histories and cultures. The treatment is bound to be superficial and occasionally even misleading. The author attempts to describe contemporary Africa largely through a series of anecdotal impressions grounded in his own experiences. (The bibliography suggests that Lamb's reading does not go much beyond similar works by others.) Consequently, the reader is left to wonder just how representative of Africa these experiences are.

The unavoidable problem with *The Africans* is its occasional inaccuracy. For example, it is simply not true that, as Lamb asserts, half of all U.S. aid to Africa in the late 1970s went to Zaire. At its peak in 1977, U.S. economic and military assistance to Zaire was 14 per cent of the total for Africa.

THE AFRICANS

by David Lamb

(Random House; 363 pp.; \$17.95)

THE DESTRUCTION OF A CONTINENT: AFRICA AND INTERNATIONAL AID

by Karl Borgin and Kathleen Corbett

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 240 pp.; \$14.95)

Carol Lancaster

"Africa is dying," warned Edem Kodjo, executive secretary of the Organization of African Unity. He gave the warning in 1978, and since that time the political and economic crises afflicting sub-Saharan Africa have tended to worsen. There have been recurring or escalating conflicts in Chad, the Horn, and Southern Africa and coups d'état or attempted coups in Liberia and Kenya, known for their political stability, and in Ghana and Upper Volta, where democracy at last had replaced military dictatorships. Many of these countries are unable to pay their foreign debt or even the interest on that debt. Many cannot afford essential imports. In some places roads have deteriorated so badly that farmers no longer attempt to send their produce to market, and imported foodstuffs have become scarce and expensive. Meanwhile,

the prospect of improved economic conditions remains gloomy.

Yet how easy it is, particularly for Westerners, to lose perspective on Africa. Most African countries have been independent for less than twenty-five years and at independence were extremely poor in both human and material resources. Life expectancy was low, illiteracy high, educational opportunities few. Often there was only a handful of college graduates to lead the new nation. Roads, where they existed, ran from the interior to the coast, facilitating exports but not national economic and political integration.

Forming a nation was (and still is) an enormous challenge, since the boundaries of African states had been drawn up in Europe with little consideration for the boundaries of African ethnic or religious groups

When there are mistakes in reporting such easily verifiable facts, one is far less ready to accept the more sensational statistics Lamb offers—for example, that 30 per cent of the female population in Gabon has venereal disease. Indeed, given the difficulty in obtaining accurate data, almost any health statistic for Africa is open to question. What is more, since the author does not provide references for many such statements, not only the factual accuracy but some of the book's general conclusions are called into question.

More serious yet, one comes away from *The Africans* with some of the same confused and negative impressions one draws from the writings of many early European explorers: Why do these people behave in such unpredictable and bizarre fashion? Human behavior seldom seems unpredictable or bizarre when one understands the values and visions that motivate it. But it takes a great deal of time and effort to understand these values; and in Africa, as elsewhere, they vary widely from people to people.

The Destruction of a Continent also deals with current crises, mainly the nature and causes of (but not solutions for) the economic crisis. The book is one of the worst examples of its genre, a combination of emotion, ignorance, and perpetuation of vague conspiracy theories.

Borgin, a chemist who has done research and taught in Africa, and Corbett, who has worked there as a photographer, contend that Africa is facing imminent catastrophe, for which the bureaucrats of international aid are responsible. The exact nature of the catastrophe is not spelled out, but the reader is given to understand that its arrival is imminent unless immediate and substantial changes are made. Changes in what? This too is a bit unclear. The authors feel that international aid, and particularly international aid bureaucrats (an ill-defined but clearly pejorative term that, according to the authors, includes former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, who had very little to do with aid), is ruining the continent by imposing ill-conceived development models on reluctant Africans.

The authors reject both capitalist and socialist economic models for Africa, asserting that the Africans must develop their own. What these might be is not described, but Borgin and Corbett assume they are there to be discovered, if only the Africans were left alone. The authors object particularly to the Brandt Commission recommendations for increased international aid to assist development. They also object to

the New International Economic Order, though this is a set of policies that would fundamentally restructure international economic relations to favor the poorer countries and is favored by such countries, including those in Africa.

These two *bêtes noires* reflect the confusion that permeates the book. Who is actually to blame for Africa's current economic difficulties: the former colonialists, the Africans themselves through their own feckless economic management, or those pernicious international aid bureaucrats, led by Kurt Waldheim?

Of course the world is not a simple place, and Africa's economic problems have neither simple causes nor solutions. If African governments have aspired to economic progress for their people, they often have failed in its achievement—through their own shortcomings as well as through their dependence on an international economy that is unstable at best and which, in recession, adversely affects countries that rely on export earnings to pay for essential imports.

International aid and aid bureaucrats have certainly been a substantial presence in African economies, but it is an open question whether they have played a significant role in African development. Aid has remained a relatively small part of the total resources, domestic and international, that are available to African governments to promote development. Moreover, the Africans have not been passive actors in the development process. It is both patronizing and inaccurate to assume that they simply have accepted the suggestions (or commands) of aid donors as the price for obtaining aid or because they were too weak or intimidated to do otherwise. Africans have not been afraid to reject aid proposals that did not fit their priorities or to refashion them to their liking. They have proven they seldom need to be protected from Westerners. In any event, they hardly need the sort of protection Borgin and Corbett would offer. [WV]

SONS OF THE WIND: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN SPANISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

by Braulio Munoz
(Rutgers University Press; 318 pp.; \$27.50/\$12.95)

Holly Myers

Munoz, a Swarthmore sociologist originally from Peru, has provided a valuable prism through which to view the soul of Spanish America, as well as an interesting

insight into the modern Latin American novel. Spanish American social thought, he argues, achieved its twentieth-century maturity in the development of the *indigenista* literary movement and its accompanying social movement, *indigenismo*. *Indigenista* authors—most of them nonprofessional, for a formal Spanish American literature had yet to define itself—spent the first half of the twentieth century wrestling with the "Indian question," which up to that time had been more or less ignored. To a great degree their writing was in expiation for the unending suffering of the Indian people in colonial and postcolonial times. But if their intent was to liberate the Indian, their conclusions, ironically, required the sacrifice of the Indian in favor of the new Spanish American *mestizo*. Munoz traces the long and, to a tragic extent, lost literary tradition of the indigenous peoples and provides both social and historical background for the development of Spanish American literature in three principal regions: the Andes, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Munoz sees the role of the modern Spanish American writer foreshadowed in the Aztec concept of the wise *tlamatini*, "he who knows something," and also in the 1609 witness to injustice, the *Comentarios Reales*, of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Under colonialism, the development of the Spanish American novel was retarded, but, coincident with the struggle toward liberation, the novel became the "tool par excellence of the Spanish American critical mind."

First attempts of Andean writers to deal with the Indian, in the late 1800s, could only romanticize him. Though he had played a significant role as a soldier in the Andean struggle for independence, he was still seen according to an old and alien European image of the "savage." Finally, in 1889, an important transitional novel, *Aves Sin Nido* (Birds Without Nests), by the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner, presaged the realism of the twentieth century. Matto's pessimistic vision was derived from Gonzales Prada, a Peruvian intellectual who characterized the situation of the Indian as exploitation by a "trinity of terror": the landlord, the priest, and the government representative. For Matto the Indian's only options were charity or death.

One of the important ingredients of *indigenismo* was the strong, increasingly radical student movement that was greatly influenced by both the Russian and the Mexican revolutions. The Russian Revolution provided an example of ideological purity and the Mexican Revolution provided a Spanish American model for action.