A review by Carroll Quigley in The Washington Xxxxx Star, 25 February 1966,

of a book:

AFRICA'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY,

by Victor C. Ferkiss.

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"The Dark Continent's Dilemma"

By CARROLL QUIGLEY

AFRICA'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY.

By Victor C. Ferkiss. Brazillier. 346 pages. $6.50.

For a number of years I have been lecturing on Africa to a variety of audiences, chiefly at the Foreign Service Institute and the Brookings Institution. Invariably I have been asked to recommend a book on the subject which would provide a picture of Africa which was not either journalistic superficiality nor myopic specialization. There had been no such book. But now there is. This new volume by Victor Ferkiss, professor of political science at Georgetown University, is the best single volume now available on Africa.

Such high praise must be justified. In any such book as this, presenting Africa to the well-informed general reader, we should expect four qualities: It should be based on broad knowledge; it should display deep understanding of the relationships between facts; it should be written in a sufficiently attractive style to make its reading a pleasure rather than a chore; and it should have broad perspective, both in time and in social analysis, to give real meaning to the subject.

"Africa's Search for Identity" has all four of these qualities in a high degree. Anyone familiar with the subject will recognize that each of Ferkiss' lucid sentences is based on a thorough understanding of recent research and recent debates by experts on the subject. In each case Ferkiss explains the issues in a few words, unambiguously takes a stand, and defends it with a nice combination of erudition and commonsense. And in doing this, he shows a combination of historical understanding, of basic economic
understanding, of sociological perspective, of the nature of power, and of the complexities of anthropological investigation to be found in no other book on Africa known to me. Best of all, his presentation is written in a very attractive style, which is clear, succinct, and rather wry.

The volume is organized in a roughly chronological order. An introduction on the basic facts of geography, race, and language, is followed by chapters on early history, the European penetration, the imperialist scramble; the movement toward independence, and the present period of growing problems and disillusionment. The whole process leads to the problem expressed in the book's title: Africa, with its old patterns of life now shattered and quite alien ones being thrust upon it, is confused and frustrated and seeks to discover its real identity, in a fashion even more frantic than we see in our own adolescence. The story, as told by Ferkiss, is a convincing and tragic one. He has the ability to see the real meaning behind the words, slogans, and propaganda devices which have so confused African studies, and has, as well, the unusual capacity to see many of the problems through African eyes. He shows clearly how the old Africa was held together, even in its most chaotic periods, by kinship, social reciprocity, and religious feelings. The destruction of these and the effort to create a "modern" Africa based on Europe's patterns of weapon-control, impersonal legal and constitutional behavior, on the mechanism of an atomistic economic market, all governed by abstract laws, scientific rules, and alien points of view has simply destroyed the old patterns without putting any satisfying new ones in their place.

Ferkiss is especially good at cutting through the misunderstandings which have hounded our relations with Africa from the beginning. He shows, for example, bow the African tribal leader and African ideas of land-ownership were completely different from those of Europeans, resulting in utter confusion when the intruding Europeans insisted in acting as if they were the same. Tribal chiefs were not despot but were the spokesmen for a consensus reached by lengthy, informal discussion; land was not owned at all in our sense, and did not become a basis of economic and political power as it did in Europe, with the result that conquering African tribes, while enserfing men, usually left land-ownership to the conquered. Both chief and land had strong religious, or at least spiritual, aspects which were unrecognized by modern Europeans, and the individualistic assumptions of these latter were completely alien to the African inability to conceive of the individual apart from his kinship group.

On issue after issue of this kind Ferkiss shows how the European and Islamic intrusions, by breaking down the old ways and forcing upon the African completely new (and usually incomprehensible) alien ways have almost totally shattered African lives, have made it almost impossible for them to satisfy their less material needs, or even to retain their self-respect, and have set them off into a frantic search for identity.

Please email the editors (editors@carrollquigley.net) with corrections, questions, or if you have other works by Professor Quigley you would like to see posted.