

BOOKS:

A Policy of Paralysis

A Review by Bruce J. Oudes

Africa for the Africans by G. Mennen Williams.
William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 218 pages. \$5.95.

The Great Powers & Africa by Waldemar A. Nielsen.
Praeger Publishers, Inc. 431 pages. \$11.95.

The High Price of Principles by Richard Hall.
Africana Publishing Corporation. 256 pages. \$7.50.

Only the most incurably naive writers persist in the dream of political change, majority rule, in far-off minority-ruled Southern Africa. To be obsessed with the metaphysics of American policy toward Southern Africa is an act of the purest faith, a sort of 20th-century Scholasticism. And Scholasticism is the correct word, for it is highly unlikely that their monkish fervor will lead to any meaningful developments in that part of Africa where white folks are still having their way.

This other Africa, consisting of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Portuguese-ruled Mozambique and Angola, and, by extension, Portuguese Guinea in West Africa is so far back on the burners of U.S. policy priorities that it is known as a situation rather than a crisis. American confusion about Southern Africa is still so widespread that most well-meaning liberals still feel that whatever atten-

tion the U.S. pays to Southern Africa should be concentrated on the linchpin Republic of South Africa. They seriously underestimate South Africa's strength, and they ignore a fundamental fact that Pretoria realized long ago: South African security is best preserved by maintaining the satellites of Southern Rhodesia, Angola, and Mozambique in white hands.

G. Mennen Williams, the symbol of the American honeymoon with African independence, was the first Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs who was a political appointee. And, at least to judge by his latest book, Waldemar Nielsen, outgoing president of the African-American Institute, has not given up hope he may someday be the second—the one to get America's Africa policy moving again, if that is possible. Both recognize the need to concentrate American efforts in the area on the South African satellites, but beyond that they have little in common.

As much as one would like to say nice things about the Michigan politician whom many in Africa remember

Bruce J. Oudes, whose "USIA, The Great Wind Machine" appeared in our June issue, is a Washington journalist.

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for his fractured French and open wallet for African sculpture, there's little positive one can say about "Soapy's" stiff, awkward, embarrassingly bland volume. It is short on personal experience, long on optimism, and—as Williams himself acknowledges—the ringing title, *Africa for the Africans*, comes from a quotation attributed to him, but one he never quite made.

Williams' perpetual optimism shines despite his preoccupation with communist penetration of Africa. On sanctions in Southern Rhodesia, he writes, "Rigidly enforced, [they] can in time make [Prime Minister Ian] Smith's supporters rethink their misguided decisions." Williams might better spend his time selling after-shave lotion in the East Village.

The book is a witness to the accuracy of the criticism that Williams was a lightweight in State Department infighting. Williams, Nielsen writes, "who swung an effective broadsword in the arena of general salesmanship and political speech-making, had neither the taste nor the talent for the fine épée work required in day-to-day internal staff debate." Nielsen confirms that in 1964 LBJ gave Averell Harriman "special responsibility" for Africa, thus effectively by-passing Williams, whose brand of innocence and old-time religion about Africa was a symbol of Kennedy-era African policy.

Nielsen, in contrast, is a cerebral liberal who has written a perceptive account of Africa's contemporary foreign relations. Tough-minded Nielsen reveals that he, like Williams, also carries the torch, although a less sanguine one.

"The issues of Southern Africa, once the Viet Nam agony is finished, are going to be the next foreign policy focus of the moral indignation of youth, the Negroes, and the American left," he writes. "A policy of passivity and compromise now—although it may seem to some a prudent course for the moment—can only reap another terrible harvest of bitter division in the United States in the future."

Nielsen's central idea is that despite its other concerns, the U.S. can take moderate steps to keep a "possibly avoidable disaster" in Southern Africa from becoming "probably inevitable."

This is not to say there isn't a good deal of what sounds like fiction in Nielsen's sober prose. He himself acknowledges this three pages from the end, confessing that "all recommendations for serious action" have "an air of unreality." As things stand now, "there is no political will in Washington and no effective political base of support for a change in the policy priority of Africa," Nielsen writes. "Until such a will and base are created, it is vain to spin out refined schemes of action." He does not bother to reconcile this with the need to keep the "possibly avoidable disaster" possibly avoidable, but then this is a measure of his despair.

Nevertheless, the roots of Nielsen's frustration are worthy of further discussion because he has written the most important American political analysis of Southern Africa in recent years. Historians in the next century will find Nielsen must reading in order to comprehend the American agony at this stage of the development of the Southern Africa civil war. He acknowledges that his own thinking has changed substantially, and in a pessimistic direction, in the five years since he wrote *African Battleline*. The Southern Rhodesian pill in the interim was particularly bitter. *Great Powers* concentrates less on specific measures dealing with South Africa; there is less reliance on the concept of joint international effort to bring Southern Africa to its senses.

"The illusion that some *deus ex machina* in the form of international or great power intervention, is going to bestow liberation as a kind of gift . . . is fast melting," Nielsen postulates. African nationalists will have to make meaningful sacrifices "and insofar as that may be necessary, shed the blood." The moderate steps he proposes are based on a policy of

“creative tension,” deliberate financial support of the nationalist movements and the vulnerable black governments bordering on the white-ruled countries. “Does *non-intervention* by the United States on behalf of the blacks under present circumstances not in effect amount to intervention on the side of the existing regimes?” Nielsen asks.

However, since the U.S. as a responsible power cannot appear to support violence, Nielsen rules out direct military assistance to either side. As a first step he asks for a “review” of U.S. economic and military aid for Portugal, including NATO membership, as well as the spectrum of cooperation with South Africa, including uranium purchase contracts, space-tracking facilities, and the flow of U.S. private investments.

Later, however, arguing in a global context, he urges that the U.S. goal should be for Africa to become a “strategically sterile environment” for the super powers. He calls for restraint

on arms assistance and by implication a benign quota on Africa’s military strength, thereby of course discouraging meaningful African “sacrifices” for “liberation.” One must ask whether the notion of a “strategically sterile environment” isn’t itself a form of intervention on the side of the existing regimes?

Nielsen also does a slow roast in the liberal purgatory over Southern Rhodesia. Five years ago, before Ian Smith gave Harold Wilson a working over, Nielsen climbed on what appeared a sturdy limb and wrote, “In the past the U.S. has perhaps taken too dutiful and passive a stance in its dealings with Great Britain on the Rhodesian question. And if British policy should now return to a limp and permissive attitude, then the only sensible course for the United States would be to separate itself from its ally and seek an independent line of action.”

Now Nielsen terms Britain’s policy in the intervening years a “graceless

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spectacle.” He writes, “Had any one of the new African states carried out such a contradictory, vacillating, and simply imprudent sequence of diplomatic and political actions, it would have been taken by many Britons and others as proof of African immaturity and incompetence.” The U.S., he said, offered Britain advice in private, but “strong doubts have persisted as to the vigor and persistence of such attempts.”

One therefore would expect him to recommend at a minimum that the U.S. separate itself from Britain on Southern Rhodesia, but he retreats instead into vacillation. If, as expected, the British Conservatives proceed apace in their determination to sell arms to South Africa and “do a deal” with Smith’s Rhodesia, Nielsen will have yet another opportunity to revise his thinking.

Nielsen wrestles with American foreign policy toward Southern Africa and comes up with the ambivalent commitment which has been characteristic of recent Democratic Administrations—something must be done; reasoning will not suffice; intervention requires a resolution and confidence to use military force if necessary; non-intervention is best in the absence of such an awesome, arrogant resolution; yet something must be done. Current policy is much more in the era-of-negotiation vein for South Africa and the new African states, advocating hard work toward peaceful change, and is therefore more comfortable for the South Africans.

Through all the ambiguity, Nielsen calls somehow for a much more active and positive U.S. role in Africa than that forecast by Richard Hall, an expatriate journalist from Zambia now back in his native Britain. Hall’s attitude is representative of many white and black citizens of Southern Africa. He writes that American vexation over its racial issues has produced a “swing of sympathy” in the U.S. toward Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. If South Africa or her allies were to attack Zambia, Hall says, “it would be

rash to expect more from Britain and America than expressions of sympathy and speeches in the Security Council.” Were China to attack South Africa, he adds, “there is every prospect that the U.S. would give help on the other [South African] side.”

So complete is his pessimism about the U.S. that Hall wastes little space discussing the matter. Instead, he gives the most absorbing and coherent account yet written of the evolution of the Zambezi River front dividing white and black Africa. He even makes the rather dry stuff of Zambia’s economic dilemma, particularly the machinations of the copper barons, into a first-rate cliff-hanger.

Together Nielsen and Hall can give an instant education to the reader who has never been quite able to understand the ins and outs of Southern Africa. By adding Nielsen’s earlier work, *African Battleline* (Harper & Row), William Frye’s *In Whitest Africa* (Prentice Hall), David Hapgood’s *Africa: From Independence to Tomorrow* (Atheneum), and Bloke Modisane’s novel *Blame Me on History* (Dutton), the overview can deepen into a rather sound appreciation of the realities of contemporary Africa—more valid than that traditional diet of Cary, Conrad, Waugh, Greene, and Hemingway.

Followers of Southern African Scholasticism are looking forward to a book by Robert Good, former U.S. ambassador to Zambia, now at Denver University, due within the next few months. Good has told the House Africa subcommittee that he was among those in the Administration in 1965 who failed in their efforts to convince the White House that the U.S. should urge Britain to use force against the Ian Smith regime. Good’s current attitude toward Britain in Southern Africa therefore will be of much more than passing interest. One also hopes he discusses some of the questions that Nielsen skipped, most notably the implications for the world of South African nuclear weapons, which are coming. ■

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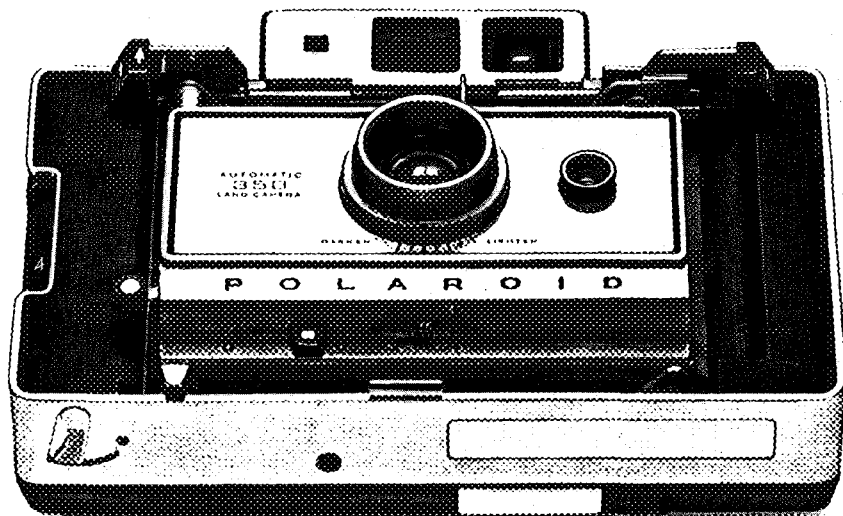
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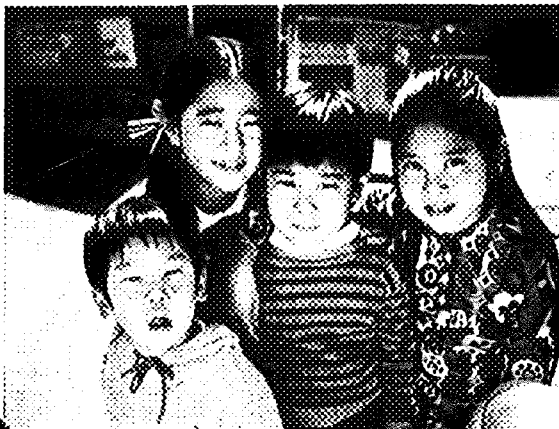
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