



Into the Light: Reclaiming Africa's Stolen History Is a Start

W. R. Bailey

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Into the Light is an impactful social science text that challenges entrenched colonial narratives.

W. R. Bailey's brief but ambitious social science text *Into the Light* dismantles Western myths about colonial and imperialist projects.

Though concise, the book is unrelenting in combating narratives that paint Africans and other non-Europeans as in need of European "civilization." Each page flips the script on centuries of distortions. Throughout, the book draws upon a cadre of "detectives"—renowned scholars, journalists, and historians—who assert Africa's place as a cornerstone of global culture, economics, and intellect. These voices illuminate Africa's indelible impact on history and expose the weaponization of color systems as ideologies crafted to justify Europe's brutal domination and division of the continent.

The book tracks Europeans' shifting, contradictory positions toward the new cultures they encountered. Early interactions with Africans, Asians, and Indigenous North Americans brimmed with admiration, noting advanced agricultural practices, political structures, and philosophical insights. Knowledge flowed east to west, reshaping European thought and informing Greek and Roman culture. These insights add critical context to observations framing the Enlightenment and European-based civilizations as the pinnacle of human achievement. But by the early 1800s, respect had curdled into dominance. The "noble foreigner" became the "savage barbarian," a figure in need of Europe's relentless urge to reshape the world. The book spotlights the voices that drove this transformation—the theorists, policymakers, and empire builders whose ideas laid the foundation for oppression.

In its historical chapters, the book examines the Songhai Empire's vast influence, noting how Timbuktu's library rivaled Alexandria's in scale and significance. It also reframes Genghis Khan, presenting him not just as a conqueror but as a reformer who abolished torture, challenged feudal systems, and championed religious freedom. And alongside historical deconstruction, the book re-centers African achievements, countering prevailing narratives of struggle. It highlights Rwanda's economic resurgence after the genocide and Senegal's cultural renaissance, where art, music, and fashion project a global coolness. Though brief, these moments frame Africa as thriving rather than lacking. By challenging outdated discourse, the book pushes back against perspectives that still cast Africa as deficient rather than dynamic.

The book grounds its arguments in peer-reviewed sources and insights from respected scholars including Henry Louis Gates Jr., historian Michael Gomez, and S. C. Gwynne's account of Quanah Parker, the Comanche military leader turned Texas cattle rancher. However, the book sometimes leans on textual interpretation rather than primary sources, weakening its arguments. Its discussion of Genghis Khan, for instance, relies on secondary analyses rather than original research, limiting its authority.

Brevity and repetition also dilute the book's impact. Themes like colorism's colonial-era significance and its ties to India's caste system resurface often without the addition of fresh insights. Similarly, while critiquing Europe's mistaken

claims of Aryan ancestry, the book fails to fully explore how this myth evolved. And the presence of grammatical errors, extra punctuation, and inconsistent referencing creates additional distractions.

Into the Light is an impactful social science text that challenges entrenched colonial narratives while celebrating Africa's enduring successes.

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