

Teaching Africa: A Guide for the 21st-Century Classroom. Brandon D. Lundy and Solomon Negash. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780253008213

Teaching about Africa in the American university system can be a daunting task. Students typically arrive to campus with little knowledge of the continent, its peoples, and its histories. The limited knowledge that they do bring to the classroom is typically marred by misconceptions and oversimplifications. For educators, surmounting such hurdles in just a semester can be challenging. *Teaching Africa: A Guide for 21st-Century Classroom* promises to ease that burden.

Teaching Africa endeavors to be “a practical guide to teaching through experiential learning in and about Africa,” and it wildly succeeds in this regard. Mindful of the current academic climate, *Teaching Africa* offers not only ideas on how to better teach about Africa but also why African Studies matters to students and universities in the 21st century. The volume builds off of two key texts regarding the teaching of Africa at the university-level in America: Misty L. Bastian and Jane L. Parpart’s *Great Ideas for Teaching about Africa* (1999) and Curtis Keim’s *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (revised and republished in 2009). Both the Bastian/Parpart and Keim texts remain important, but as *Teaching Africa* points out, the Bastian and Parpart volume is now “more than a decade old” and Keim’s book primarily deals with “what Africa *is not*.” *Teaching Africa* reinvigorates the discussion on how to improve our teaching and better situate our approaches to 21st century classrooms and students.

Teaching Africa consists of three sections in addition to an introduction by Brandon Lundy, one of the volume’s co-editors, and a conclusion by Toyin Falola. The

first section, entitled “Situating Africa: Concurrent-Divergent Rubrics of Meaning,” presents innovative techniques, assignments and approaches that improve the teaching of Africa-related content inside the classroom. If one is reading *Teaching Africa* on how to better incorporate African content into his or her course, this section is perhaps the most relevant. Collectively, the “practical advice” is quite useful and thought provoking. The topics range from assignments that further students’ understanding of Africa to advice on how to move away from teaching a linear narrative history to why African history matters in American classrooms. Whether it is the “mini-quiz” offered by Jennifer E. Coleman to test her students’ knowledge and biases of Africa or Harry Nii Koney Odamtten’s emphasis on the connections between Ghanaian and American history, *Teaching Africa* articulates what works in classrooms.

Though most academics will find this section quite useful, one wishes that *Teaching Africa* included more specifics relating to the individual contributors’ techniques and assignments. When an author addresses a particular assignment, for instance, it would be useful if the reader knew more about the exercise and the usual challenges that students encounter with it. Due to space considerations, one understands why such materials could not be fully included within the text, but it could be useful to pair the text with a companion website where readers could access examples of contributors’ syllabi and assignments. Such specifics would ultimately make *Teaching Africa* an even greater resource.

One aspect that makes African Studies unique within the American academe is the true interdisciplinarity of the field. One is hard pressed to find any African history course, for instance, that relies solely on the findings of historians. Instead, various

disciplines are often included throughout a semester-long course. As such, *Teaching Africa*'s second section, entitled "African Arts: Interpreting the African 'Text'," is particularly relevant. This section provides insight on how to use "African arts" (ie. music, novels, oral traditions) to challenge and further a student's knowledge of Africa. For scholars and educators of World History and Global Studies (as most *Middle Ground* readers presumably are), this section will be particularly useful. The section's essays provide insight on a variety of topics, such as how to contextualize *Heart of Darkness* using in-class simulations, how American students engage with African music inside the classroom, what African novels have been well received by students and why, and how to use South Africa-United States comparisons in one's courses. Taken as a whole, this section pushes educators to embrace interdisciplinarity in their pedagogy.

Teaching Africa's third section centers on "experiential learning" (ie. model African Union, study abroad programs, field research schools). Though some of the chapters tackle certain "African particulars" that many *Middle Ground* readers will not ever take part in (such as leading a trip of medical students to Uganda or contributing to an Information Technology doctoral program in Ethiopia), this section offers insight into how to move "from theory to practice" in our teaching and how to get students to use the knowledge gained from the classroom. *Teaching Africa* demonstrates how expansive and diverse such "experiential" learning experiences can be, whether they be leading study abroad, guiding students' activism related to African issues, or participating in Modern African Union.

In an academic climate where faculty members are pushed to adopt new techniques and technologies, *Teaching Africa* refreshingly reminds us that certain "tried

and true” methods remain effective. Daniel J. Paracka, Jr.’s chapter, “The Kalamazoo/Fourah Bay College Partnership: A Context for Understanding Study Abroad with Africa,” espouses the success of a study abroad program that sent over 300 Kalamazoo students to Fourah Bay College in a span of three decades. Whereas shorter “Maymester” trips are often popular today, Paracka reminds us of the effectiveness of these more intimate, longer study abroad experiences (Kalamazoo students typically spent an entire academic year at Fourah Bay). The program achieved great results until being disbanded in 1994 due to mounting violence in Sierra Leone. If done with care and forethought, Paracka is optimistic that such programs can be rekindled, reconfigured and better supported in the future. If our universities and our students are to be equipped for the 21st century, it may be useful if the Kalamazoo-Fourah Bay model can be duplicated elsewhere.

Whereas Paracka’s piece tells us of what *could be* regarding study abroad programs, James Ellison’s “Teaching Culture, Health, and Political Economy in the Field” essentially offers a “how to” guide in setting up a field school for American students in Africa. Ellison’s piece is based on his experiences setting up a field school in Tanzania for his American students. He notes how the program functions, what local organizations and individuals that it partners with, where students live during the field school, and what sites the students travel to. Ellison is specific enough that the reader, irrespective of discipline, will be able to brainstorm the possibility of setting up a similar field school in other locales. In essence, academics will come away from the chapter believing that a “field-based course is possible.”

Overall, the diversity within *Teaching Africa* is commendable. The volume's contributors epitomize the diversity within those teaching about Africa in American universities today. In a collection such as this one, a reader anticipates a diversity of race, gender, country of origin, discipline, area of expertise and geographical location. *Teaching Africa* goes beyond such expectations, which enhances the volume's viability. Whereas texts pertaining to teaching about Africa written two or three decades ago typically focused on institutions with well-established African Studies programs (the Title VI or Ivy league schools come to mind), *Teaching Africa* speaks to those "engaging, promoting, and teaching African issues outside of formalized African Studies programs." As such, the volume's contributors are based at larger "research one" universities and smaller "teaching" colleges, at institutions with residential student bodies and public schools with a larger numbers of commuters, and at urban-based institutions and schools in more rural settings.

Overall, *Teaching Africa* is a text that virtually all educators at the university and college level can access and learn from, even making itself accessible to "nonspecialists hoping to incorporate more African content into their syllabi." Overall, *Teaching Africa* is a deeply informative and provocative text. It provides practical insight, advice and "know how" on how to better teach our students. Speaking from my own personal experience, this text will make any college-level educator feel more equipped, competent and confident about teaching about Africa. Our students and our teaching will only benefit from its publication.

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