

Africa's Moment by Jean-Michael Servino and Olivier Ray



Review by: Lauren Evans

I picked up this book to learn more about a place I have never been and to gain an understanding of Africa's rich history and why it is emerging as a force to be reckoned with. Reading it gave me a fresh perspective on Africa, the world's most rapidly changing continent, as well as a positive outlook for its future. I was also able to learn a lot about Africa's geography, as the French authors take the reader on a journey around the continent and mention places I have never even heard of. In reading it, I found it helpful to have a map handy to gain a deeper understanding of the anecdotes.

Africa is a melting pot, and one of many contradictions. Tradition versus modernity; rampant poverty, violence and corruption amidst a booming middle class and economic growth; migration and the struggle for integration; population explosion against fragile social balances. Africa boasts the largest concentration of minerals in the world, but Sub-Saharan areas are very poor with little access to food, water and agricultural capabilities. But, it's ultimately these contradictions that are creating the foundation for an epic turnaround of the continent and its people, and we can all play a part in changing its course.

Africa is now in its "moment." Population growth is booming. Once strict and violent borders between countries rich in traditional and religious divides are being loosened and broken down by modernity, emigration and immigration, creating economic growth. Africa's population will double in 30 years, and two out of every three Africans today are under the age of 25. In addition, there is a mass rural exodus happening that is creating mobility, and the migration of the poor from rural to urban areas is creating prosperity. It's creating solidarity by encouraging people to work together to lift themselves out of poverty, to change their own lives, and urban areas lend themselves to resources and solutions not available in rural Africa. It was quite interesting to me that China, who is Africa's biggest trade partner, has an Africa immigrant population that has grown five-fold in the last five years. The authors state, "Globalization has strengthened the feeling of solidarity that binds them." Africa is emerging out of the state that mass media often depicts: a poor and hopeless dustbowl, and the urbanization it is experiencing is the most rapid our world has ever known.

Coincidentally, I came across an article just last week in *Business Times* called “Investors Hope to Seize on Africa’s Moment” where they note that Sub-Saharan Africa is “now ready to rival India and China as an economic success story.” The tone of the book and the stories the authors tell us definitely point to that result. But why has Africa been failing until recently? It can’t be attributed to one thing, and definitely can’t be attributed to its troubled history (quite the common myth), but I think the biggest culprit and the direct cause of its poor economic development is development aid. This “aid” is not sustainable and is detrimental to the mobility of Africa because it creates a culture of dependency and inequality. Africa has realized that and is putting its own measures in place to move from disaster to progress.

It’s easy to think that Africa’s troubled past ensures that it will face a troubled future. I am glad I read this book, because I finished it with a very positive outlook. I have hope for Africa, and I want to do what I can to play a part in its global emergence. 150 years from now, will Africa be following in Asia’s footsteps? Who knows, but I know that whatever happens, it will be exciting to watch.