



Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities

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African Studies, contrary to some accounts, is not a separate continent in the world of American higher education. Its intellectual borders touch those of economics, literature, history, philosophy, and art; its history is the story of the world, both ancient and modern. This is the clear conclusion of *Africa and the Disciplines*, a book that addresses the question: Why should Africa be studied in the American university?

This question was put to distinguished scholars in the social sciences and humanities, prominent Africanists who are also leaders in their various disciplines. Their responses make a strong and enlightening case for the importance of research on Africa to the academy.

Paul Collier's essay, for example, shows how studies of African economies have clarified our understanding of the small open economies, and contributed to the theory of repressed inflation and to a number of areas in microeconomics as well. Art historian Suzanne Blier uses the terms and concepts that her discipline has applied to Africa to analyze the habits of mind and social practice of her own field. Christopher L. Miller describes the confounding and enriching impact of Africa on European and American literary theory. Political scientist Richard Sklar outlines Africa's contributions to the study of political modernization, pluralism, and rational choice. These essays, together with others from scholars in history, anthropology, philosophy, and comparative literature, attest to the influence of African research throughout the curriculum.

For many, knowledge from Africa seems distant and exotic. These powerful essays suggest the contrary: that such knowledge has shaped the way in which scholars in various disciplines understand their worlds. Eloquent testimony to Africa's necessary place in the mainstream of American education, this book should alter the academy's understanding of the significance of African research, its definition of core and periphery in human knowledge.

"These essays are at once exceptionally thoughtful and remarkably comprehensive. Not only do they offer an unusually interesting overview of African studies; they are also striking for the depth and freshness of their insights. This is the sort of volume from which both seasoned regional experts and students stand to learn an enormous amount."—John Comaroff, University of Chicago

"These essays provide an important perspective on the evolution of African studies and offer insights into what Africa can mean for the different humanistic and social science disciplines. Many show in ingenious and subtle ways the enormous potential that the study of Africa has for confounding the main tenets of established fields. One could only hope that the strictures expressed here would be taken to heart in the scholarly world."—Robert L. Tignor, Princeton University

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Robert H. Bates is Eaton Professor of the Science of Government in the Department of Government and Fellow of the Center for International Development at Harvard University. He has written numerous books, most recently *Open Economy Politics* (1997) and *Analytic Narratives* (1998). He has conducted extensive field research in East and Central Africa and in Columbia and Brazil.

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