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Emerging Human Rights: The African Political Economy Context

EMERGING HUMAN RIGHTS: THE AFRICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY CONTEXT; Edited by George W. Shepherd, Jr. and Mark O.C. Anikpo; Consortium on Human Rights Development; Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (1990); ISBN 0-313-26853-3; 244pp. (hardcover) Index.

The political economy approach to human rights contemplates that political decisions control the allocation of resources in society, and in turn, those political choices are dependent on economic choices. On a global scale, political economists contend that new states, their citizens and political decision-makers, are dependent on the international economy. This has led to the realization that the distribution of wealth and basic human rights are closely related to the international political system. It is from this theoretical basis that George W. Shepard and Mark O.C. Anikpo guide this collection of essays recognizing the African contribution to the emergence of new human rights in the global political economy.

The book was initiated by conferences conducted at the Port Harcourt University in Nigeria (June 7-11, 1987) and at the University of Denver (November 9-10, 1984). The intention of the conferences and the book, as indicated in the book's Acknowledgments, is to contribute to a better understanding and respect for the individual and collective rights of African peoples. The essayists in this collection advocate change within the global structure to provide for "redistributive justice in an unjust and unequal world." Africa, in the minds of these authors, is the proper forum of the twentieth century in which to apply and test political economy notions to effectuate this change.

The first five essays of the collection are concerned with the theoretical framework from which "new human rights" derive. These essays discuss topics such as the morality and justice in an existing inequitable global system, the historical formulation of basic human rights and their modern application, in the theological origins of human rights, and the African struggle in the postcolonial era for development to meet social, economic and psychological needs. Although the focus of these writings is theoretical, the authors provide concrete details of the African politics, economics and societies to illustrate the need for change.

The remaining essays in the collection illuminate myriad issues and violations of human rights in Africa. From the plight of South Africa to refugee movements to Nigerian militarism, these authors paint a vivid picture of a continent crippled by social inequalities, exploitation by Western capitalist countries, sickness and starvation, and political turmoil. From these images, the essayists propose their solutions, couched in the political economy context, to achieve justice and a global human rights consciousness.

As with any book which strives to address the problems of an entire continent, the essays contained in this collection tend to be brief and cursory, highlighting the issues and facts most useful for the conveyance of a

particular author's message. The essays range from sixteen to twenty-four pages in length, including endnotes for further research assistance. The text includes a selected bibliography, as well as an index. Although the index is short on topical headings to direct readers to particular areas of interest, it does contain many references to individuals; international and African scholars, world leaders, and most importantly, actors in the African political economy. Finally, the book ends with a summary of the essay contributors, which includes: S.O. Alubo, MARK O.C. ANikpo, Zdenek Cervenka, Osita Eze, Julious O. Ihonvbere, Stanlie James, Obed O. Mailafia, Okwudibia Nnoli, Mokwugo Okoye, Nienanya Onwu, Michael J. Schultheis, and George W. Shepherd, Jr.

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