

# H-Diplo

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Review by **Andy DeRoche**, Front Range Community College

**M**yra Burton has done an outstanding job of editing this contribution to the valuable Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series on American policy towards southern Africa from 1969 to 1976. By far the largest amount of details in this FRUS volume concern the years 1975-76, when Henry Kissinger was the key U.S. diplomat, but to a lesser extent the volume also provides revealing glimpses of the earlier Nixon years. It will be of particular use to scholars and students interested in U.S. policy toward Angola and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), but also to those focusing on relations with South Africa. Considerable evidence is presented regarding the role of black African leaders such as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Joseph Mobutu of Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo), and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Burton's admirable research reflects her careful mining of voluminous files at the National Archives, the Gerald Ford Library, the Library of Congress, and the Nixon Presidential Materials, among other places.

Burton discovered some real gems among the White House tapes which shed clear light on Richard Nixon's twisted thinking. Not entirely surprising to anyone familiar with Nixon's "jackassery," his 28 September 1971 discussion with Kissinger regarding the Byrd Amendment is nonetheless somewhat shocking and worth quoting at length.<sup>1</sup> Senator Harry Byrd was shepherding through Congress legislation that would defy UN sanctions and allow the United States to renew imports of Rhodesian chrome through Congress.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nixon himself coined the apt phrase "jackassery" in a June 1972 conversation with Bob Haldeman about the Watergate cover-up. See Stanley Kutler, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of Byrd's "skill" in undermining the UN sanctions see Andrew DeRoche, *Black, White, and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953-1998* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001), 170-194.

Opponents hoped the President would speak out against the bill, but Nixon informed Kissinger in no uncertain terms that he was “for the Byrd Amendment.” He did not like the fact that sanctions against Rhodesia had allowed the Russians to raise the price of their chrome. He did not want to let the State Department “pucker out of this” and influence U.S. foreign policy in a way that harmed the economy. He revealed his racist view of Africans when reviewing his just-concluded meeting with the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Mauritanian president Ould Daddah. Nixon had evidently spoken in a rambling and somewhat incoherent fashion during his thirty-minute talk with Daddah, but his main point had been to express his support for the Byrd Amendment and to lecture the African statesman on the realities of international relations. Kissinger observed that speaking condescendingly and unclearly to Africans was “just as well.” Nixon concurred and commented, “You see, Henry -- you see those poor, child-like Africans.” Kissinger praised Nixon’s effort, and then characterized Daddah as “almost incoherent” and his assistants as “savages.” The two architects of détente then giggled, dismissive of the fact that Daddah had earned a university degree in Paris. Reports were already filtering in that the OAU leader was thrilled about seeing the President. Nixon concluded the discussion by observing that when dealing with Africans, “patting them on the ass goes a long way.” (Document 57, pp. 144-145)

Such shocking examples of Nixon’s paternalistic view towards Africans help us understand his earlier stated intention to put relations with Africa at the absolute bottom of his priority list for foreign affairs. In a 2 March 1970 memo to his top advisors, which perhaps should have been re-published in this volume to provide background and context, Nixon spelled out in crystal clear language that he considered African issues the least important, and that he did not want to be bothered with them. Nixon stated that he did not want Kissinger spending time on Africa either, and instead would like to see those matters “farmed out” to the Departments.<sup>3</sup> With that general outlook in mind, his remarks about his conversation with OAU head Daddah are still not appropriate, but they do fit clearly in the larger pattern of dismissing the African continent as his lowest priority. They also help us understand why Nixon ranked African issues at the bottom of his agenda.

Nixon’s 1971 encounter with Daddah takes on even more significance if scholars or students reading about it in FRUS are aware that he had famously **not** had a meeting with Daddah’s predecessor as OAU chairman, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, in October 1970. Kaunda at the time also had been the head of the Non-Aligned Movement, was considered a key statesman regarding the conflicts in southern Africa, and had been a friend of the U.S. government since Zambia’s independence in 1964. Nevertheless Nixon could not find time to see him, focusing on the mid-term congressional campaign instead. Kaunda was forced to express his views on southern Africa through a letter to Nixon in November 1970, which was surprisingly diplomatic considering that he had just been snubbed. This volume of

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<sup>3</sup> Memorandum from Nixon to Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Kissinger, 2 March 1970, in Joseph Hilts and David Humphrey, editors, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976: Volume E-5, Documents on Africa, 1969-1972* (U.S. Department of State, 2005), accessed at [www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e5](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e5) on 10 December 2006.

FRUS does include Nixon's vague response to Kaunda, which was sent two months later on 21 January 1971. (Document 43, p. 121) It would have been helpful, however, to have also published Kaunda's November letter and secretary of state William Roger's suggestion in early December that Nixon respond with a prompt and friendly reply (the reply was not prompt, and it was so vague that it was more insulting than friendly). It would also have been helpful to have included Nixon's brief apology to the Zambian ambassador on 21 December for not meeting Kaunda.<sup>4</sup> Finally, perhaps the editor could have discussed the controversy around the non-meeting in the footnotes.<sup>5</sup> When readers of *FRUS* see only Nixon's letter they get the impression that he was making southern African issues a high priority, which he definitely was not. At the same time, given the disrespectful way that Nixon interacted with Daddah and later laughed about it with Kissinger, maybe Kaunda was better off not meeting Tricky Dick.<sup>6</sup>

Several of the documents that Burton has included, particularly excerpts from the White House tapes, make it clear that such a meeting would not have been very productive for the Zambian president. During another talk with Kissinger about the pending Byrd Amendment on 6 October 1971, Nixon commented that "You don't gain any votes from the blacks who give a shit what happens in Zambia." He added that it was not "worth our while to do something for the Africans that's against the British." Furthermore, he did not appreciate being criticized after he had "wasted" forty minutes of his time talking with an African leader. (Document 59, p. 149) In mid-November, Nixon signed the law which included the Byrd Amendment. When the UN General Assembly responded with a resolution criticizing the amendment, Nixon asked Kissinger "what in the name of God does that damn United Nations mean on that Rhodesian chrome thing?" He then told his National Security Advisor that he did not want to support the UN any more. He wanted Kissinger to call the British Prime Minister and tell him that the White House was taking "a hard line" on Rhodesian chrome. He concluded the conversation by expressing his hope that the British would reach a settlement in Rhodesia so that all the sanctions would be lifted and "then we can tell those goddamn Africans to go to hell." (Document 62, pp. 155-157)

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<sup>4</sup> Kaunda to Nixon, 16 November 1970, Rogers to Nixon 8 December 1970, and memo of Nixon's conversation with ambassador Mutemba, 21 December 1970, in folder "Pol 15 Zambia," box 2843, Record Group 59, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. In his brief exchange with Ambassador Mutemba the president disingenuously claimed that "he had regretted that he and President Kaunda had not been able to meet."

<sup>5</sup> For the details of the non-meeting and subsequent controversy see Andy DeRoche, "KK, the Godfather, and the Duke: Maintaining Positive Relations between Zambia and the USA in Spite of Nixon's Other Priorities," *Safundi* (January 2011), 97-121, especially 101-104.

<sup>6</sup> Kaunda visited six out of the seven presidents from Kennedy to Bush in the Oval Office, with Nixon being the only exception. Perhaps this is fitting given Nixon's views on Africa. It also raises the question of why Kaunda was in office so long.

More than two-thirds of this *FRUS* volume covers events from the years 1975-76, when Ford was president and Kissinger had considerable control of foreign policy. This is fitting given the extremely low priority placed on Africa during the Nixon era. As with the excellent use of the White House tapes to provide insight on relevant factors in the early period, Burton includes revealing documents from the Kissinger Papers in the Library of Congress and various collections in the Ford Library for this later period. Verbatim records of discussions in Washington about Angola, or from meetings in Lusaka and elsewhere regarding Rhodesia, are particularly rich. A 25 July 1975 conversation about American efforts to ship weapons to various factions in the Angolan civil war provides a powerful glimpse into Kissinger's conniving, as well as more proof of his negative view of the African Bureau. (Document 121, p. 290) Even more revealing are Kissinger's 8 August 1975 comments to CIA director William Colby about working with Kaunda to provide arms to the forces of Jonas Savimbi. In Kissinger's way of thinking, it would be helpful to get Kaunda involved in the operation, at least partly because it would implicate him and thus force some of the African Bureau diplomats who were opposed to Kissinger's efforts to provide weapons to back off and stop harping that Kaunda was against escalation. In Kissinger's creative phrasing, he wanted to "make Kaunda a little more pregnant." (Document 123, p. 295)

The material included in this publication provides a thorough look at the Ford administration's Angola policy in 1975, and clearly demonstrates the extent to which Kissinger was willing to go to oppose the spread of communism into southern Africa. His concern was mostly not allowing the Soviet Union to be successful. For a more comprehensive analysis of the international relations surrounding the Angolan civil war in 1975, however, it is necessary to consider the actions of Cuba. While doing so would be beyond the scope of a *FRUS* volume, interested historians should consult the superb monograph by Piero Gleijeses.<sup>7</sup> The Angola section concludes with some fascinating examples from February and March 1976 which demonstrate how Kissinger and new CIA Director George H. W. Bush struggled, in the aftermath of the congressional action banning any additional money in future budgets, to spend all of the remaining funds that had been allotted to Angola during the previous year.

In late April 1976 the Secretary of State launched a major initiative regarding southern Africa, visiting several nations including Tanzania and Zambia. The transcripts of his discussions with Nyerere and Kaunda provide extremely powerful evidence of Kissinger's thinking and modus operandi in private. As powerful and important, though not included in this volume, was the Secretary's landmark speech on 27 April in Lusaka, in which he laid out his goals for U.S. policy in the region in language that sounded like a cross between Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> For his speech in its entirety see Hanes Walton, Robert Stevenson, and James Rosser, editors, *The African Foreign Policy of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: A Documentary Analysis* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 121-130.

success of Kissinger's first official visit to Africa and the power of his oratory are all the more remarkable when contrasted with his complete ignorance of even the most basic regional geography a few years before. In a fascinating conversation with Portugal's leader, Marcello Caetano, in December 1973, Kissinger had admitted that he did not even know that Angola was a neighbor of Zambia.<sup>9</sup> It is an extremely important and long border, in fact, and so it was as if a foreign minister visiting Washington admitted not knowing that the United States touched Mexico. Including such a document in the volume would have provided some useful perspective on how far Kissinger had travelled since 1973, literally and figuratively.

Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in search of a settlement for Rhodesia stretched through the summer of 1976 and included a return trip to southern Africa in September. One of the most interesting pieces of evidence from his second official trip is the record of his conversation with Kaunda on 16 September 1976 (Document 205, pp. 562-573) Although he did not bring about peace and majority rule in the short run, his efforts did start the diplomatic process that the Carter administration would see through to completion a few years later. In the 239<sup>th</sup> and final document in this extremely interesting and useful *FRUS* volume, we are treated to a 19 January 1977 discussion between Kissinger and officials from the incoming Carter administration such as Cyrus Vance and Andrew Young. Although historians (including me) have underscored the difference between the approaches of Kissinger and Young, this detailed document demonstrates that there were also a lot of similarities.

One final criticism of this book, which is excellent overall, is that it does not illuminate the role of Jean Wilkowski, the U.S. ambassador to Zambia from 1972-76, nor does it shed light on her ongoing conflict with Kissinger. Wilkowski was a key player in the formulation of US policy toward Angola in 1975 and Rhodesia in 1976, but she and Kissinger had several severe run-ins. For example, the secretary blamed her for the critical tone of a speech by Kaunda at the White House in 1975, and even insinuated that it was her fault that he did not see any hippos during his cruise on the Zambezi in 1976.<sup>10</sup> Their conflict was partly related to their disagreement over policy, perhaps, but was also indicative of sexism on the part of the Secretary of State. A memo that could have been included in the volume in order to illustrate the Wilkowski/Kissinger conflict and the Secretary's sexism is a 5 March 1976 staff meeting at the State Department during which twenty-one other men sat around and laughed as Kissinger brutally critiqued ambassador Wilkowski with a tirade of insulting verbiage, including his statement that "she's going to be hung" if she did not carry out his order to talk with Kaunda about weapons within twenty-four hours. He seemed hell-bent on embarrassing her. He even seemed intent on recalling her to Washington and firing

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<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Caetano, Lisbon, Portugal, 17 December 1973, *Kissinger Transcripts* (Washington: National Security Archive, 2006), document 00961, accessed via the Digital National Security Archive.

<sup>10</sup> For her version of the conflict see Jean Wilkowski, *Abroad for Her Country: Tales of a Pioneer Woman in the U.S. Foreign Service* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2008), 287-295.

her.<sup>11</sup> He thought the better of it and she remained in Lusaka for an unusually long 4-year stint, in spite of the hostility from Kissinger. As the first American women to serve as an ambassador to an African nation, she opened doors for future female diplomats.<sup>12</sup>

My first exposure to *FRUS* came in a seminar on the history of U.S. foreign relations at the University of Maine in 1991, in which the late Howard Schonberger wisely required us to look at an early volume dealing with Nicaragua. Immediately I was impressed by the series, and then my respect increased when researching U.S. policy toward the Rhodesian Federation in a seminar led by Robert Schulzinger at the University of Colorado in 1993. It was during Schulzinger's seminar that my future course as a specialist in U.S./Africa relations was set, and the wealth of material in *FRUS* helped me get started down that path.<sup>13</sup> Upon completion of my Ph.D. in 1997, at Schulzinger's urging, I applied for a job with the Historian's Office in the Department of State. I went quite deep into the process, even going to DC for interviews and being granted Full Field Top Secret Security Clearance, which still makes me chuckle and feel a bit like either James Bond or Austin Powers. Luckily, in my opinion, Front Range Community College in Boulder County offered me a teaching position in the summer of 1998 and I was able to remain in Colorado and continue doing what I love—teaching. Had I gotten the job at State, this *FRUS* Volume very well might have been my project. I am certain, given the mountains of materials from the Nixon and Ford years that needed to be examined for this topic, that I could not have done a better job than Myra Burton has done. All of us in the field of foreign relations should be thankful for the great work that she and her colleagues in the Historian's Office continue to carry out.

**Andy DeRoche** is an Africa editor for H-Diplo. He received his PhD from Colorado in 1997, and since 1998 has been teaching history at Front Range Community College. His major publications include *Black, White, and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953-1998* (2001) and *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador* (2003). He is currently writing a book about Zambia/USA relations, and hopes to have it finished in 2013.

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<sup>11</sup> Memorandum of Kissinger's staff meeting, 5 March 1976, Washington, DC, *Kissinger Transcripts*, document 01904.

<sup>12</sup> A few of the key women who followed in Wilkowski's footsteps and have crafted top-level US/Africa policy during the past two decades are Madeleine Albright, Susan Rice, Barbara Lee, Condi Rice, Hillary Clinton, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

<sup>13</sup> Among the names that appeared frequently in the *FRUS* volume for Africa during the 1950s was Margaret Tibbetts. Puzzled by its familiarity, I called my aunt in Maine and asked if I should know this name. She told me that I probably should, since Margaret was her neighbor! I interviewed Tibbetts that year, included a little bit of evidence about her contribution to U.S./Federation relations in my dissertation, and promised myself to write more about her career later. Nearly twenty years later I did. See Andy DeRoche, "Frances Bolton, Margaret Tibbetts, and the US Relations with the Rhodesian Federation, 1950-1960," in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola, editors, *Living the End of Empire: Politics and Society in Late Colonial Zambia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 297-325.

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