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Good Second Class: Memories of a Generalist Overseas
Administrator (review)

Michael Vickers

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(Review)

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Africans into civilized Christians, although Seymour shows more tolerance for African customs than the other two. Of the three, Benjamin Anderson might best be compared to European explorers of the time.

All of them, however, note their obligation and duty to Africa, stressing the need for Americo-Liberian cooperation with indigenous Africans. Sadly, those who followed did not heed this advice, as the subsequent history of Liberia would show. This interesting book is of value to those interested in the history of Liberia and West Africa, and it illuminates the often tragic history of an enterprise that began with such hope.

Nemata Blyden
George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

Trevor Clark. *Good Second Class: Memories of a Generalist Overseas Administrator*. Stanhope, U.K.: The Memoir Club, 2004. xiv + 303 pp. Photographs. Map. £17:50. Cloth.

Having recently reviewed for this journal Trevor Clark's excellent compendium, *The Last Generation of Nigeria's Turawa* (Bristol, 2002), I was keen to cast an eye over his memoirs. I relaxed and dug in, expecting a bright and breezy romp. It turned out to be anything but. Indeed, it was hard and heavy going and required two attentive readings. Having been buffeted in the course of my first reading by a curious, heavily congested, quasi-telegraphic, almost shorthand style, albeit packed with informative detail, I was baffled. Then gradually the light dawned. Clark had produced what in fact he had been doing with great efficiency and economy all his working life as a colonial administrator: an extended, if in this instance somewhat randomly organized, "minute." Having deduced this, translated the vast assortment of acronyms and shorthand identities, and then pondered the meanings to be derived from the content, I had a second go. This time I fared better.

What now was revealed was a fascinating tale that provides an honest and penetrating account detailing much more than the mere activities (exhaustive and exhausting as these were) of a skilled, dedicated, and loyal administrator who served in three of Britain's last-remaining colonial possessions: Northern Nigeria, Hong Kong, and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Clark is of that not-so-small band of "committed improvers" who sought to bring a glimmer of light into the darker reaches of colonial administration. That this was not always appreciated by his superiors in the field and in Whitehall, particularly during this downbeat period of colonial disengagement, is amply demonstrated.

Still, distressing and depressing as, inevitably, Clark's tale is, his tenacious hold on practical, commonsense human values, his caring, his humor, and his determination to maintain these values and this outlook when confronted with bleak prospects and unrelenting pressure "from

above" do credit not only to Clark, but indeed to the best of that common heritage left by Britain's colonial civil servants. Clark *cared* for "his people," and he worked skillfully and incredibly hard for them. The problem was that time had moved on. All too often what his superiors, under hasty, often ill-informed, and politically motivated orders from Whitehall, required of him was—not to put too fine a point on it—two-timing, misrepresentation, and betrayal. Clark had to swallow hard to comply with these orders. And before doing so he often spoke his mind to the superior concerned. This did not make him popular with the local colonial establishments.

In Northern Nigeria, where he served for twelve years (1948–60), this apparently resulted in his banishment from the Kaduna secretariat after, among other things, he gave some frank, unprejudiced advice to the latter's Whitehall replacement, Gawain-Bell, whose job was to get the North to accept independence, by whatever means. As one of Clark's colleagues put it, "Tinkerbell has cast himself in the role of Mountbatten [the outgoing British Viceroy of India], and he's playing it to perfection" (150). Clark's last tour was at Okene, regarded by most as a "punishment station" (151).

In Hong Kong Clark's "African populist" approach to policy and practice seemed to inspire something between bemusement and contempt among the British Mandarins. "One might think," said Clark, "we were there to make the world safe for shippers and bankers—the grocers on whose advice, and by whose consent, the Ordinances were made that the Secretariat concocted and the legal department drafted" (164). The last thing in the minds of HK and Whitehall proconsuls who governed this "Pearl of the Orient" was to introduce anything more than a superficial covering of freedom and democracy, or indeed anything that might lead to greater consideration, protection, and involvement of ordinary Chinese in government.

Stifled by the claustrophobia of HK, Clark made his final move to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP). Here, for the last five years of his career, he found rather more than a demanding challenge. It was a situation not unlike the one he had confronted in Northern Nigeria, only in microcosm and in extremis. During the 1970s Whitehall became increasingly desperate to rid itself of the islands. They were absorbing much revenue from the U.K. exchequer and producing little—an unacceptable reversal of the traditional mantra that each colony must support itself. In seeking to achieve some semblance of this objective, Clark, elevated to acting governor, appeared to be making slow progress. As in Northern Nigeria, he knew that people and institutions needed time to experiment and adapt. Time, however, was not available. Whitehall proceeded with a hatchet job on the Solomons which, by comparison, made colonial disengagement in Nigeria look like a gentlemanly affair. In the fallout, Clark was forced to leave, and retirement from the Colonial Service soon followed. The year was 1977. Clark was 53.

For the informed and persistent there is a fascinating, poignant, indeed reassuring and very human life story here. From the viewpoint of the Africanist, not only does it provide useful information and confirmatory reflections on all the standard Northern Nigerian and indeed broader late colonial contentions, it also provides a strong impressionistic portrait of “conceptual carry-over.” We are able to see and appreciate how informed, usefully adapted initiatives by this old Africa hand contributed, even if only in a small way, to the governance of other “twilight” imperial territories. Indeed the British colonies benefited from many of these cross-fertilizations, by many of its servants, over a very long period. Clark was one of its last carriers.

Michael Vickers
Sussex, England

John M. Chernoff. *Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. xv + 480 pp. Glossary. \$22.50. Paper.

Hustling Is Not Stealing is the first volume of stories told to John Chernoff by a Ghanaian/Haute Voltaïque prostitute/bar girl about her experiences in the 1970s. (The second volume, also from the University of Chicago Press and equally lengthy, is called *Exchange Is Not Robbery*.) As such, it has a certain picaresque flavor deriving from the adventures of “Hawa” (a name given to her by Chernoff to conceal her real name) in several West African countries: Ghana, where she grew up and worked; Togo, where she worked for a time; and Upper Volta as it was called then, where her family came from and where she also worked.

In some ways the stories are predictable. Hawa tells of constant efforts to assert her autonomy by fleeing the control of her husband, her father, her cowives and senior female relatives, as well as certain friends, male and female, European and African—to say nothing of the state in the form of the police. Her goals are to maintain her independence and support herself, to obtain certain prestigious consumer goods, to avoid menial work for others, to sleep late, and to indulge her addictions to alcohol and marijuana. Along the way she helps her family and friends when possible but not without complaint, demonstrates kindness to sister workers on occasion, and charms a variety of men who support her in various ways and help her to circumvent the law. They also embroil her in some risky ventures.

Many of the tales she recounts are complicated, and all vividly illustrate the perils of a life led at the boundaries of cultures (she has many liaisons with Europeans) and laws. Some of her stories are funny, some pathetic. One that shows the tragic-comic nature of many of them concerns a porn scandal in Togo in which a Swiss man photographed young girls in sexually explicit positions and sold the pictures. This landed him, along with his business associates and their local girlfriends, afoul of the law. The upshot