

Wong's memoir will be valuable in Asian American history and journalism classes. The scale of the story is impressive, linking key moments in history and key issues in journalism. However, the nonlinear aspects of his narrative and the century-long span of the book may also present problems for teaching, as the 270-page text may not fit neatly into the structure of the semester. Shorter memoirs, such as Tung Pok Chin's 150-page *Paper Son* or Miné Okubo's graphic memoir *Citizen 13660*, focus on specific periods and may be more easily taught across two class sessions. "There's a bigger picture to consider here" in both Wong's journalism career and his memoir, "having to do with who tells our stories" (238). Wong tells the story of his hometown of Oakland's Chinatown, and of his and his father's relationship, in this memoir. And he tells it well.

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AFRICA

Jody Benjamin. *The Texture of Change: Dress, Self-Fashioning, and History in Western Africa, 1700–1850.* Ohio University Press, 2024. Pp. 268. Paper \$34.95.

The eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century witnessed transformations of the political and economic landscapes in West Africa. The Islamic reformist movement spread eastward from the Senegal River valley, establishing theocratic states. Meanwhile, the Atlantic slave trade peaked and gradually declined in response to the abolitionist movement in Western Europe and North America. Concurrently, the cash crop trade, or so-called "legitimate commerce," expanded in response to the British industrial revolution. Historians and economic historians have demonstrated that the growth of West Africa's maritime trade, whether in slaves or in other items, was intertwined with an increasing inflow of European and Indian textiles. Recent scholarship highlights the crucial role of African consumers' taste in these trades, showing that demand for textiles was deeply embedded in local production as well as social and cultural contexts. However, more research is needed to vividly illustrate how both noble and non-noble individuals consumed textiles and to analyze the political and cultural significance of their choices.

The Texture of Change contributes to this growing body of literature by exploring social and cultural contexts of textile consumption in western Africa, a region extending from Senegambia and the Cape Verde islands in the west to western Mali in the east

and to Sierra Leone in the south. The book is richly illustrated with images of clothing and visual materials depicting African cloth and garments. By addressing dress culture and the politics of clothing, Jody Benjamin challenges prevailing narratives that emphasize violence and dependency in the region's history.

This book evolved from the author's PhD dissertation, completed at Harvard in 2016. Excluding the introduction and conclusion, the main body of this book consists of six chapters, each of which includes a map at the beginning of its narrative. Chapter 1 narrates the emergence of two Bamanan states, Kaarta and Segu, in the western Sahel during the seventeenth century. The narrative mainly relied on the oral history of the Bamanan bard Djeli Kouyate, recorded by David Conrad in 1975, as well as museum objects such as the indigo-dyed cotton robe known in Maninka as *kusaaba*, housed at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. Chapter 2 examines the rise of Afro-Atlantic trade along the western African coast up to the seventeenth century, highlighting the monetary role of cloth in regional commerce. Benjamin suggests that the cloth-based accounting system was so intertwined with the Atlantic slave trade that it facilitated the conversion of gender and race into numerical terms for profit and loss assessments.

In western Africa, textile production was based on a gendered division of labor within households. Chapter 3 focuses on women's roles, particularly in indigo-dyeing, in the upper Senegal River Valley. Their handicrafts influenced consumer taste for textiles and, consequently, Afro-European trade in textiles. Chapter 4 shifts attention to the dress culture of Saint Louis, at the mouth of the Senegal River, while also providing an overview of the jihad movements at the turn of the nineteenth century. Using visual images of clothing and pattern books, the chapter highlights the role of sailors (*laptots*) and Eurafrican women (*signares*) as key figures in textile production and consumption in the region. Chapters 5 and 6 utilize accounts of contemporary eyewitnesses such as René Caillié and Théodore Canot to explore the politics of dress in the Upper Guinea region. The narrative discusses various actors, including local traders, black Loyalists, and women such as Nhara Bely.

One of the book's strengths is its accessible narrative. Through a combination of anecdotes, illustrations, and some speculations, Benjamin effectively visualizes the crucial role of textiles in shaping gender and racial dynamics in western Africa, particularly in the Sahelian interior during the Age of Revolutions. As highlighted in chapter 1, textiles functioned "not only as an important binder between historical communities of the Sahel but also as a site of struggle between them" (46). Readers will also appreciate the discussion on how the Atlantic trade in captives and textiles

influenced discourses on race and ethnicity (chap. 2). This approach provides valuable insights into the intersection of social, cultural, and economic history.

However, from an economic historian's perspective, the discussion of cloth currency may need further consideration. In chapter 2, the author assumes that the "textiles imported into western Africa increased the amount of commodity currencies already in circulation that included varieties of locally manufactured cloth" (88). This assumption seems to contradict the note made by J. S. Hogendorn and H. A. Gemery ("Continuity in West African Monetary System?," *African Economic History*, no. 17, [1980]: 127–46), who wrote that textiles imported from overseas—with the exception of *guinées*, indigo-dyed cotton cloth from India after the mid-eighteenth century—were rarely used as currency within West Africa. Additionally, Benjamin's discussion on cloth currency could benefit from engagement with recent scholarship, such as Akinobu Kuroda's works (see *A Global History of Money* [2020]). Concepts such as "complementarity between multiple currencies" and "monetary circuits" could provide useful frameworks for the discussion. However, these points are minor in the context of the book's broader contributions.

Overall, *The Texture of Change* is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on West African history and material culture. It deepens our understanding of the region's textile history and highlights the agency of diverse actors, including those often overlooked in existing narratives, as active consumers who shaped the historical trajectory of the region.

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Jacob Dlamini. *Dying for Freedom: Political Martyrdom in South Africa*. Polity Press, 2024. Pp. 180. Paper \$22.95.

Dying for Freedom is an innovative and thought-provoking study that places important conversations about death on the intellectual table. Death defined honor, dignity, heroism, loyalty, and status. Many men of South Africa's liberation struggle viewed death heroically. It represented the path to the afterworld and beyond. Dlamini uses several historical examples to support his analysis. They include the AmaXhosa cattle-killing episode (1856–57), the British invasion of the AmaZulu Kingdom (1879), and the *Mendi's* sinking (1917). Each of these historical episodes conveys different meanings about death that revolved around cosmology, cleansing rituals, and ancient sayings and Christian beliefs. Dlamini incorporates these examples to demonstrate that the political use of death in southern Africa predated apartheid. He even

asserts that freedom fighters invested in death for its use as a vehicle to manhood. In some cases, as Dlamini demonstrates, death spelled celebration as decedents entered the spiritual realm whereas in other cases, it connoted mortalization and the end of one process for another.

Five chapters—"Defying Death," "Dead and Proud," "Refusing to Die," "The Unmournable Death," and "A Dignified Corpse"—compose this monograph. Narratives of Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Jacob Dlamini (hereafter JD, to distinguish him from the author), and Phila Portia Ndwandwe situate these sections. Dlamini shows how throughout his public pronouncements, Mandela constantly alluded to death. In "Defying Death," Dlamini illuminates how Mandela always expressed his willingness to die. Mandela witnessed martyrdom rather than embodied it. In 1962, Mandela told a gathering in Addis Ababa that "numerous South African patriots, known and unknown ... [had] been sacrificed in various ways on the altar of African freedom" (28).

"Dead and Proud" focuses on Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) leader Steve Biko. Like Mandela, Biko expressed his own philosophy on death. Biko believed that death represented a political act. His own corpse supports this assertion. Biko suffered from having his head smashed into the wall, headfirst, and from hanging in crucifixion style for twenty-four hours from the bars of the security door. The assault continued. They drove him, naked and shackled on the back of a Land Rover, to Pretoria, about a thousand kilometers away (50). Biko died multiple times. Physical assaults began his twilight, or the step before sunset that began his transition to the spiritual world. The condition of the corpse emerges as a subject in both the Truth Commission's archives and Dlamini's analysis. Biko differed from Phila Portia Ndwandwe, and her death contained some elements of secrecy. The question of what she wore on the night of her abduction, torture, and subsequent execution provided the avenue for this dignified corpse to speak beyond the grave, just as Biko had done through the postmortem process.

"Refusing to Die" examines the political martyrdom of Justice Mafa Ngidi. Ngidi was an ANC operative who took the party's new oath during its implementation in 1978. He was among many who fled South Africa following the student uprising in 1976. Comrade President Oliver Tambo wanted to lessen the preponderance of informants among the ANC ranks who claimed to join the movement to escape political persecution. Ngidi rose up the ANC echelon: He operated as part of the underground while training new recruits in firearms, dead letter boxes, and clandestine communication networks (64). In 1984, the ANC sent him and others on a mission to South Africa. This highly trained insurgent faced arrest when the