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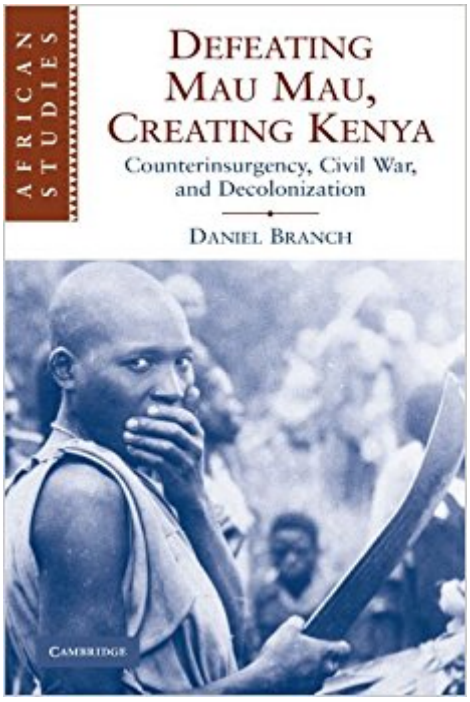
Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, And Decolonization (African Studies)



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Synopsis

This book details the devastating Mau Mau civil war fought in Kenya during the 1950s and the legacies of that conflict for the post-colonial state. As many Kikuyu fought with the colonial government as loyalists joined the Mau Mau rebellion. Focusing on the role of those loyalists, the book examines the ways in which residents of the country's Central Highlands sought to navigate a path through the bloodshed and uncertainty of civil war. It explores the instrumental use of violence, changes to allegiances, and the ways in which cleavages created by the war informed local politics for decades after the conflict's conclusion. Moreover, the book moves toward a more nuanced understanding of the realities and effects of counterinsurgency warfare. Based on archival research in Kenya and the United Kingdom and insights from literature from across the social sciences, the book reconstructs the dilemmas facing members of society at war with itself and its colonial ruler.

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Customer Reviews

"Probably more people think they know more about the Mau Mau war in the British colony of Kenya than about any other event in African history. Daniel Branch shows how wrong we all were. Mau Mau was not a war of heroic simplicity between noble nationalists and cruel colonialists. It was more complicated than that. Rebels and loyalists shared the same values, knew each other intimately, and were indeed often the same people in different contexts. And the loyalists not only won the war but were the more effective nationalists. Mau Mau was controversial enough before Branch came along. It is even more so now. This book is essential reading for any serious student of modern

African history." - John Lonsdale, Trinity College, University of Cambridge"Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya makes a radical departure from all previous accounts of the Mau Mau insurrection. It makes comprehensible the part played by the Loyalists, those of the Kikuyu who enlisted the British and took the initiative in defeating the Mau Mau insurgents in what gradually became a civil war. It is clearly written and powerfully argued. It is destined to become a classic." - Wm. Roger Louis, University of Texas at Austin"Because of its long overdue approach, the book contains a fuller and more fully contextualized analysis of the anticolonial war in Kenya that has been developed previously. No scholar has heretofore tried to understand the dynamics of the indigenous anti-Mau Mau informants and campaigners. No one has so ably explained the complex personal and intra-ethnic motivations behind those who chose to refuse oaths and risked their lives to oppose Mau Mau.... Highly recommended." - Choice"A brilliant, exciting, and elegantly written new study...it is a masterful study." - Susanne D. Mueller, Harvard University, International Journal of African Historical Studies"The book’s main strengths lie in the author’s effort to relate an overarching historical episode to the ongoing national debate about nation-building in Kenya.... This book has carved itself a place in the annals of the history of Mau Mau and Kenya." - Martin Shanguhyia, The College of William and Mary, H-Africa

This book details the devastating Mau Mau civil war fought in Kenya during the 1950s and the legacies of that conflict for the post-colonial state. Branch explores the instrumental use of violence, changes to allegiances, and the ways in which cleavages created by the war informed local politics for decades after the conflict’s conclusion, reconstructing the dilemmas facing members of society at war with itself and its colonial ruler.

Congratulations to Daniel Branch on his efforts to seek out the true facts and discuss them without enhancements. He avoids resorting to questionable statistics and the efforts of former Mau Mau seeking to re-invent themselves. He has also avoided extrapolating incidents from, one place and applying them across the board. No event since WWII has attracted so many writers than the subject of the Mau Mau. There have been various takes on the subject and Branch has, at times, had difficulty in separating out the truth. It seems that truth in history is lost because when truth emerges it won’t be believed. The best sellers written fifty or sixty years after the events will be the preferred versions.These books, no doubt, have their origins in entrenched American anti-colonialism that dates back to their own colonial days. The US part in ensuring rapid de-colonisation post WWII left many African countries to revert back to tribal situations far worse

than Mau Mau. Sadly, there were no colonial powers to race to their rescue. The new World Power has been unable to provide a workable substitute for colonialism and its problems. When attempted, the results have been catastrophic and unproductive. I applaud Branch's integrity and desire for truth.I do have an advantage over many: I was there, a young Kenya Police Inspector, one of many recruited from Britain in mid 1953. Thus we were not part of the status quo. Most of us were stationed throughout the Kikuyu Reserve. We were told very clearly that our job was to protect the people and do our utmost to rid the locations of the Mau Mau threat. It is most fascinating to see "history????" being written up 50 plus years after the events. I suppose I should now duck for cover. Before doing so, I will make a few points:Branch quotes Kiritu's meaning of "Mau Mau" according to the Kikuyu language. They were greedy and impatient and therefore sought to spread their doctrines quickly. They used forced recruiting and oath taking. "Join or die a horrible death" They made an appalling impression on both their own people and on all the other tribes of Kenya. If Mau Mau had succeeded, an extremely repressive and bloody regime would have resulted. In no way could Mau Mau be called "freedom fighters" The first President, Jomo Kenyatta didn't think so either.Branch correctly states that Mau Mau was a civil war within the Kikuyu tribe. It started with the murderous recruitment tactics of Mau Mau causing the rest of the Kikuyu tribe to go on the defensive before moving into the offensive and defeat of the Mau Mau. Mau Mau was not the Kikuyu tribe. It was an aberration of the tribe. Elsewhere I have read fanciful "role reversals" where the Mau Mau terrorists become heroes and the rest of the tribe, minimised in number, become "traitors" apparently this is because of their presumed loyalty to the Colonial Government.Branch does not fall into this trap, however the constant use of the term "Loyalist" would be misleading. At the time, I heard this term occasionally and it was not used often. The people were simply referred to as "Kikuyu"Moving people into villages has been strongly condemned. This was in fact very necessary. Traditionally the Kikuyu lived in scattered housing within their plot of land. This made them very vulnerable to Mau Mau attack and murder, particularly at night. Large numbers died horrific deaths. This was greatly reduced when the people were moved into protective villages. Another effect was to restrict the supply of food and information to the Mau Mau. For some of the suppliers, this was a welcome relief from something that they had been forced to do. For hard core Mau Mau it made life very difficult and they would have been the ones who complained the most. These villages were protected only by their own men folk who were provided with firearms by the Government. Kenya Police were on call if needed.The story tellers look to support their "freedom fighter" theory by the use of faulty statistics and by minimizing the number of Kikuyu murdered by MM. Elkin used extravagant figures that have been rightly challenged. It has even been suggested

that it was the victims own fault. I don’t believe that proper figures were ever kept. It is common today to make statements supported by spurious statistics. "There are lies, dammed lies and there are statistics. Branch quotes a figure for Kikuyu people murdered which is far too low. I personally dealt with between 50 - 100 murders. There were as many as 10 murders in my area in one night. This was repeated in many other police station areas. Add to this a large number of murders committed in the early stages. I estimate a total in excess of 3,000.

This book is excellent in its own right in focusing on "loyalists", however loaded that term is, caught up in what Branch clearly identifies as a civil war, and also as a counterpoint to David Anderson’s "History of the Hanged". Although Anderson’s book is good on its own main theme, I think that it minimised two important aspects of the conflict: the practice of taking oaths and the details of the access to land that the haves and have-nots in Kikuyu society had. Branch’s book makes up for these deficiencies very well.Branch shows that loyalists have often been portrayed as a small group of backward-looking collaborators, but his more nuanced view is that they were as diverse a group as the insurgents and as authentic (and more effective) nationalists. His summary of the situation of ex-Mau Mau and loyalists before and after independence is important to an understanding of modern Kenya.The book is generally well-written, free of excessive jargon and clearly well researched. It redresses the oversimplified polemics of Caroline Elkins amonst others and I would recommend it

There was no civil war in Kenya, the Mau Mau were freedom fighters looking to kick out the mighty British and guess what, they succeeded

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