

“Landing on the Moon:” The African American Students Foundation Exchange Program, 1959-1961

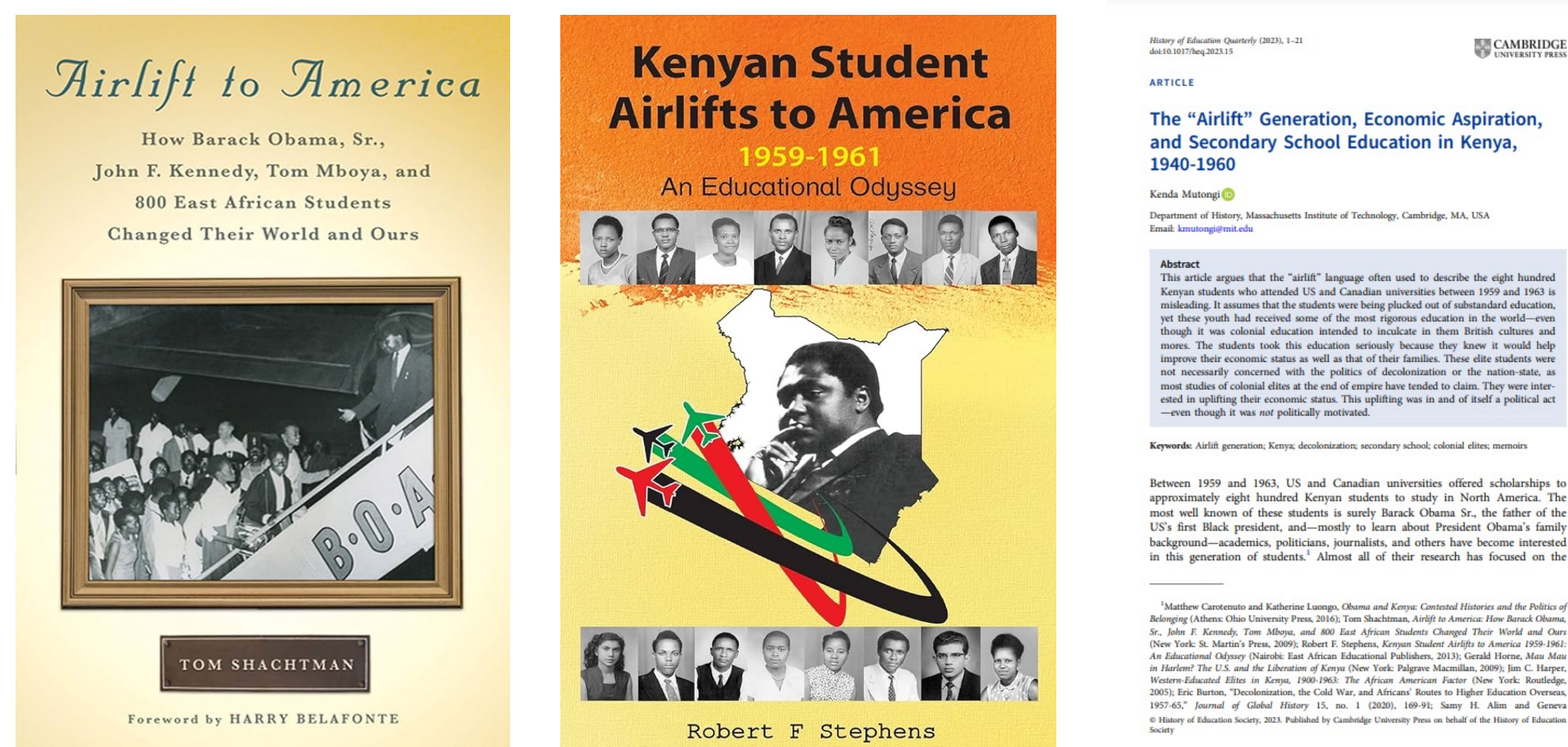
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INTRODUCTION: The Moon

- In 1960, Wangari Maathai, who later became a renowned Kenyan environmental activist, described arriving to New York as “landing on the Moon.”
- Maathai arrived to NYC as a student on the African American Students Foundation (AASF) 1960 exchange that brought hundreds of Kenyan students to American universities
- While Maathai clearly meant that New York was foreign to her, the Moon landing nearly a decade later shared similar aspirational figures, Cold War politics, and monumentality as the AASF exchange



HISTORIOGRAPHY



- This project was developed because of existing scholarship, or historiography
- This projects seeks to walk the line between prior “top-down” and more current “bottom-up” histories of the Cold War
- In addition, prior scholarship on the AASF exchanges were often celebratory books that did not explore the exchange with nuance and neglected the students as an actor
- The AASF united American businessmen, Kenyan and American politicians, and the students as each actor hoped to use the program to fulfill their aspirations

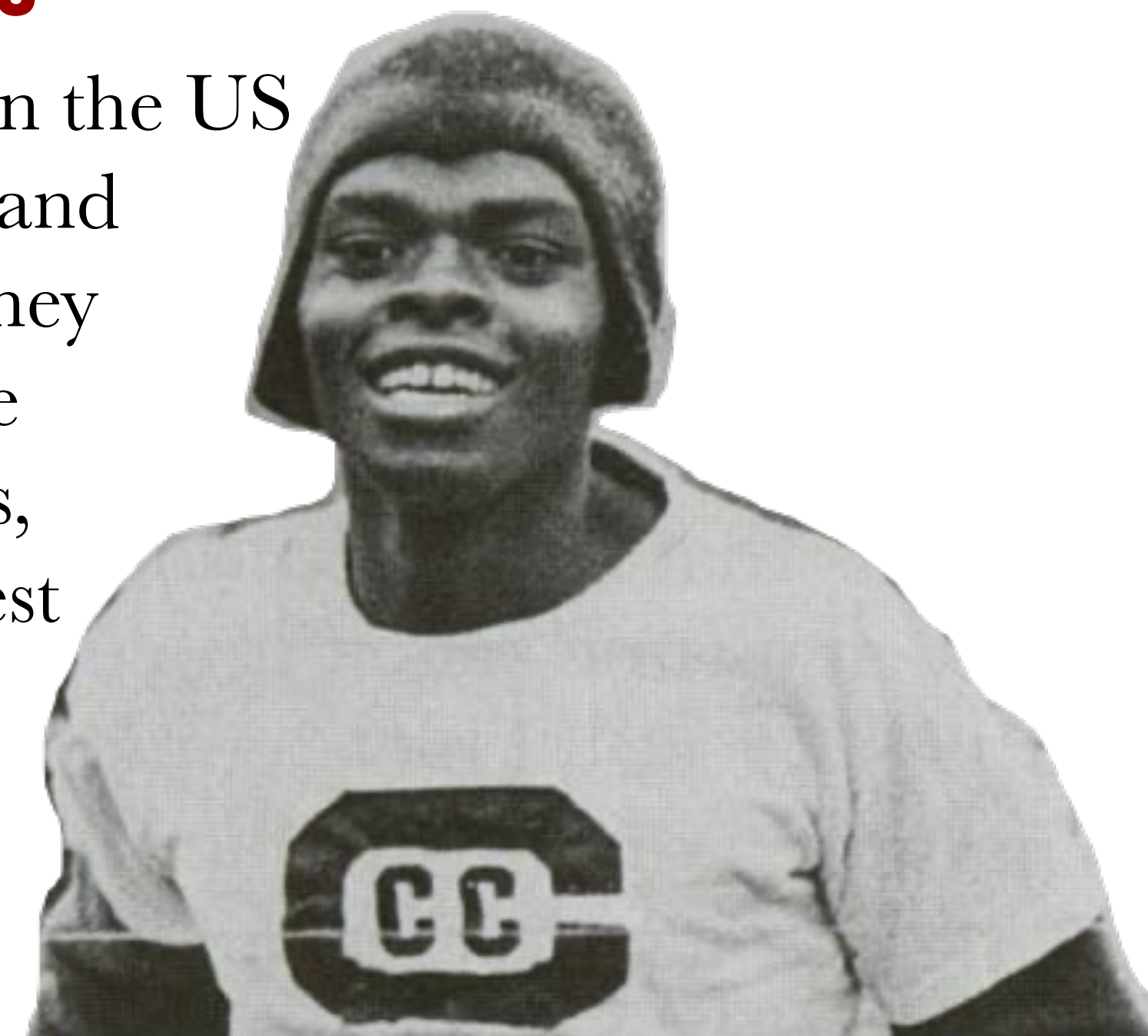
CHAPTER ONE: Takeoff from Nairobi

- The program was created because of a partnership between Kenyan politician; Tom Mboya, American businessman; Bill Scheinman, and a trio of civil rights leaders; Jackie Robinson, Harry Belafonte, and Sidney Poitier
- Bill Scheinman and Tom Mboya were united through a fissure in an international trade union led the moderate Mboya to ally with the US-aligned ICFTU after financial support for the Kenyan Federation of Labor (KFL)
- As Mboya raised support for the KFL he had inquired about scholarships for Kenyan students. This later led to the creation of the AASF and the trio of Robinson, Belafonte, and Poitier to fundraise for the inaugural program



CHAPTER TWO: Crossing the Finish Line

- When students arrived in the US they often faced racism and financial hardship, yet they still found ways to create communities on campus, always acting in their best interest
- Students often chose institutions that were the cheapest options, in turn, students often attended wide variety of institutions across the U.S.
- To alleviate poor conditions, many students transferred to different schools
- AASF students carved out communities on their campuses and off; creating clubs, hosting events, participating in athletics, finding a job, etc.
- Despite hardships, they found ways to succeed



Stephen Machooka of Cornell finishes a race in 1961.

CHAPTER THREE: Senate Halls

- After the exchange was deemed a success because of the students’ desire to continue their education which was not possible in Kenya
- At the time many Black Americans felt a connection with the African continent
- In 1960, with an upcoming presidential election and the civil rights movement nearing its peak, both candidates, Kennedy and Nixon, sought to capitalize
- Yet, neither candidate wanted to fully endorse civil rights, which later led to the Kennedy Foundation funding the AASF program
- This was not without controversy. After this funding occurred, the State Dept reversed its denial of funds to the AASF. This was the result of the actions of a Nixon campaign aide



John F. Kennedy and Tom Mboya in 1960

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CONTACT INFO



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