



Social Sciences

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Shachtman, Tom. **Airlift to America: How Barack Obama Sr., John F. Kennedy, Tom Mboya, and 800 East African Students Changed Their World and Ours**. St. Martin's. Sept. 2009. c.288p. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-312-57075-0. \$24.99. AUTOBIOG

A Kenyan student, one among a large group of students airlifted to the United States in 1959 by the African American Students Foundation, has a son who, 50 years later, becomes the President of the United States. It is upon that stunning truth that Schachtman (*Rumspringa: To Be or Not To Be Amish*) builds his premise: the **airlift**, which brought hundreds of Kenyan students to American colleges and universities, changed the face not only of America but of American politics. Central to this story is Kenyan Tom Mboya, here portrayed as a heroic figure fighting the colonial powers that still ruled Kenya in the 1950s and 1960s. His rising international prominence enabled him to meet notables, such as Harry Belafonte, who would help him fund the airlifts, and he used the presidential election of 1960 as leverage to finesse funding from John F. Kennedy's family foundation. Whether that affected Kennedy's election, as Schachtman posits, is not so clear. But this little-known period of African and American history ultimately had a profound effect on American life, especially in race relations and politics. **VERDICT** A well-written and fascinating account that all students of history will appreciate.—**Jane B. Marino, Great Neck Lib., NY**