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Richard Lentz, Karla K. Gower. *The Opinions of Mankind: Racial Issues, Press, and Progaganda in the Cold War.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010. vi + 349 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-1908-4.

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Race Relations and U.S. Reputation at the Beginning of the Cold War

In summer 1951, riots engulfed Cicero, Illinois, after a bus driver moved his African American family to the white Chicago suburb. News and condemnation of the violence spread so rapidly across the world that Thomas Dewey, the governor of New York then visiting Singapore, felt compelled in a speech to question "why Cicero, 'an incident of racial prejudice involving a few hundred people out of a nation of 150 million people,' merited a four-column photograph on page one of the *Straits Times* (Singapore)" (p. 61). Through exhaustive primary research unearthing myriad episodes, such as the one above, Richard Lentz and Karla K. Gower's *The Opinions of Mankind* significantly adds to our understanding of race relations as the Achilles' heel of America's ideological fight against Communism. As Washington was locked in a battle for the world's hearts and minds with Moscow in the crucial first two decades of the Cold War, its image was repeatedly tarnished by news of domestic racist mayhem. In telling this story in great depth, the authors add to the growing body of literature that links media history to global developments, helping to internationalize and revive the political relevance of communication history studies.

Other scholars, such as Mary Dudziak in *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000), have detailed the damage such incidents did to U.S. reputation, especially in the developing world that was then rapidly decolonizing and through Soviet propaganda that used each episode for maximum publicity. In contrast, Lentz and Gower focus on the role that U.S. media played in both spreading and countering images of race relations. A central claim to their book is that the world learned about riots and violence even in remote parts of the United States largely from U.S. media, especially the wire services. But the same media then alerted their American readers to the tarnishing of U.S. image, helping to raise awareness and to make Washington's counterargument that the majority of Americans repudiated racism. The authors argue that the "press was much better equipped than the government to inform Americans about what their country had at stake overseas because of bigotry" (p. 7).

The book treats the interplay of press coverage of racial violence and of global reactions to it chronologically, beginning with 1946 and ending in 1965, when the landmark Voting Rights Act passed. (Radio and television news are largely excluded.) Throughout, textual analysis of media articles shows that U.S. journalists, even as they reported on racist mobs across the country, also emphasized themes of progress, prodded readers to take a stance against those who were so brutally demolishing American ideals in the world's eyes, and took a few pointed jabs at foreign critics.

The volume is particularly strong in its discussion of how foreign media reacted to racial violence, from Moscow's *New Times*'s coverage of the lynching of two African American couples in rural Georgia in 1946 to Beijing's *Peking Review*'s caustic commentary on the Watts riots in 1965. The vast majority of incidents pitted white against black Americans, though three chapters explore how the Soviet-aligned press recounted discrimination against natives of countries where American servicemen were stationed, as well as Native Americans and Latinos, particularly Mexicans. Time after time, the foreign press–especially Communist organs, but also media in newly independent African countries and postwar Europe–lambasted the United States for oppressing racial minorities, leaving the American media to bemoan, as the *New Republic* did in the wake of the shooting of two black prisoners in 1951, that "once again southern justice … had given 'Radio Moscow' … ample propaganda fodder" (p. 62).

A turning point came in 1954 with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision that ended segregation in

public education, which the U.S. government immediately used as a global goodwill tool. But the authors argue that images of U.S. troops trying to enforce desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, schools against screaming mobs three years later were as damaging to Washington as the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik soon afterward. Into the early 1960s, the *New York Times* published some ten items on foreign reaction to the sit-in movement spreading across the South, while *U.S. News* blasted other nations for their own racist riots even as they continued to mar U.S. cities after passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The major weakness of the book is that the authors use circumstantial evidence, but never quite document exhaustively the crucial point at which the world learned of American race relations from the U.S. media. Surely, there would have been few if any foreign correspondents in places like Cicero or Little Rock or Montgomery, Alabama, so it is perfectly plausible that the first alarm bell was rung by U.S. newspapers and wire services, such as the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI). But the authors seem too quick to dismiss international sources and overplay U.S. ones. For example, they relate that journalists from U.S., European, and Asian media covered Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, but they add that "the press overseas probably relied on the news agencies for articles and especially pictures," citing as examples government reports that the AP photo of a police dog on a leash biting a demonstrator was widely republished (p. 158). Since the U.S. media role is a central argument in the book, one wishes that the authors had given more room to a discussion of how American news circulated globally at the time instead of repeatedly brushing it aside as something that "doubtless" happened.

The book's lasting contribution, however, is in its exploration of how U.S. media made Americans aware of how they were being looked upon overseas, particularly in the take-no-prisoners context of the Cold War. For scholars, it is a useful addition to the study of media, race, and foreign relations. For the general reader, it is eerily relevant history to contemplate today, when U.S. actions in the "war on terrorism" continue to raise the specter of race in much of the world's media.

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