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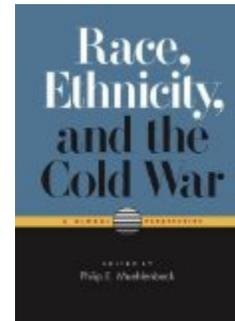


Philip E. Muehlenbeck. *Race, Ethnicity, and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012. xvii + 324 pp. \$65.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-8265-1843-9; \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8265-1844-6.

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Broadening the Cold War Color Line

The history of foreign relations has moved on a long way from the days when Charles Maier declared the field to be “languishing”; a “stepchild” within the historical discipline.[1] Today, historians of foreign relations are “an advance guard driving the bandwagon of internationalization,” revitalizing the discipline through an embrace of domestic politics, multinational sources and approaches, and global concepts of culture, identity, and race.[2] The history of Cold War foreign relations, and their intersection with the politics of race and identity, has been no exception, producing a wave of new scholarship so extensive it is, as the preface to Philip Muehlenbeck’s new edited collection tells us, “[at] the point of establishing its own subgenre” (p. vii). W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous dictum, that “The problem of the twentieth century will be the problem of the color line,” has, it seems, finally reached the history of foreign relations.[3]

However, whilst this scholarship has done much to place issues of race and identity at the center of Cold War foreign policymaking, it has not always been willing to look beyond the borders, and the archives, of the United States. This shortcoming is somewhat inimical to the explicitly transnational ethos and methodology of the new historiography to which this scholarship belongs: the idea that, as Mary Dudziak in *Cold War Civil Rights* (2000) tells us, “an event that is local is also international” (p. 17). It contradicts many of the keystone developments of the Cold War era: the emergence of a globalized world which blurred the distinctions between domestic issues

and international politics, a world shaped as much by the North-South narrative of decolonization as by that of East-West Cold War competition; the increased potency of grassroots activism and protest; the introduction of global human rights norms by new international organizations. This limitation has had the effect of reducing the impact of the politics of race and identity in the post-1945 world, a politics which affected the foreign policies of all nations.

Philip Muehlenbeck’s *Race, Ethnicity, and the Cold War* seeks to rectify these trends, bringing together a group of international scholars to provide a truly international perspective on the politics of race and ethnicity during the Cold War era. In restoring agency to numerous actors outside of the traditional Cold War bipolarity, from black migrant workers in the Panama Canal Zone to West German mercenaries in the Congo, Polish Canadian activists in Toronto to East African students at Moscow’s Friendship University, Muehlenbeck and his many contributors call upon archival collections from thirteen different countries, highlighting the fact that issues of race and ethnicity were decidedly transnational during the Cold War. In their various case studies they illustrate the fundamental ambiguity of race; its utility and its destructiveness for the causes of equality, emancipation, and self-determination, its resilience and fluidity as a political construct. And they demonstrate that many of the core themes the new scholarship on race and American foreign relations has identified can be applied to states,

actors, and interest groups from all corners of the globe.

For example, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Cold War* reveals that issues of race and ethnicity were not simply an “American dilemma” during the Cold War era.[4] Katrina Hagen’s contribution reveals how West Germans feared that revelations of the involvement of German mercenaries in atrocities during the Congolese civil war of 1964-65 recalled images of Nazi barbarism, and in the face of a concerted East German propaganda campaign, threatened to damage the country’s fledgling international recovery after the Second World War. Maxim Matusevich’s study of the treatment of black African students in the Soviet Union exposed the hollowness of Soviet claims to racial egalitarianism and what Nigeria’s *West African Pilot* observed to be, “the obvious discrepancies between what is said and what actually exists” (p. 151). Matusevich’s analysis of black students’ internationally publicized criticisms of the Soviet state and its “hypocrisy” (p. 150) parallels the treatment of African diplomats in segregated Washington highlighted recently by Renee Romano.[5]

The book also illustrates the increased primacy of race as a means of group identity during the Cold War era, often supplanting identities of class, religion, or region. Cold War politics was often central to this process of identity construction. Henley Adams’s contribution illustrates how the purportedly colorblind communist government of Fidel Castro used racial rather than ideological struggle as a means of legitimizing Cuban intervention in the Angolan civil war in 1975-76, even using race in its deployment of mainly black Cuban troops. Such a shift, Adams argues, was instrumental in giving the Cuban presence in Africa a legitimacy other foreign interventions lacked, and reimagining the Cuban national identity as the “hybrid Latin-African nation” (p. 205), even while it continued to neglect racial inequality at home. Likewise, David Webster’s study of the Papuan drive for independence from Indonesia during the 1950s and early 1960s shows how Papuan elites used race as a “diplomatic asset” (pp. 91-92), asserting their racial difference from Indonesians and racial similarity to black Africans as they developed an international advocacy campaign for their independence, exactly as the “Wind of Change” was sweeping through Africa. In this context, race, and in particular racial blackness, could be used to build support amongst newly independent African states for Papuan independence. But it could also be destructive, identifying Papuans pejoratively with entrenched notions of primitiveness and instability among Western policymakers at the United Nations and in the U.S. State

Department, notions which eventually proved fatal to the Papuan independence struggle.

Related to this, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Cold War* also illustrates the importance of new, transnational forms of racial and ethnic association which emerged during the Cold War era. Thanks to the work of Penny Von Eschen, James Meriwether, and Francis Nesbitt, amongst others, we know that the Cold War acted as both a catalyst and an obstacle to black internationalism.[6] But again, similar patterns are identifiable outside the United States. Ryan Irwin’s chapter on the impact of African independence on white minority South Africa underscores the importance of apartheid in fostering feelings of Pan-Africanism. As Irwin tells us, “Apartheid was not just an assault against blacks in South Africa; it was an attack on Africa as a whole” (p. 44). The book’s later chapters on ethnicity and the Cold War, especially Eric Payseur’s study of Polish Canadian activism during the 1980s on behalf of the Solidarity movement, go beyond traditional narratives of “captive nations” politics to show how a sense of ethnic internationalism could stir previously dormant, presumed-assimilated ethnic groups into often radical forms of activism and protest on a scale previously unimagined, and build lasting political coalitions.

Finally, and most significantly, *Race, Ethnicity and the Cold War* illuminates the persistent debate which lies at the heart of much of this new scholarship on race and the Cold War era, and which is drawn out in both Nico Slate’s introduction to the book and Michael Krenn’s foregrounding chapter: the ambiguous legacy of the Cold War for processes of racial progress, reform, and change. Again, international developments highlighted in the book’s various contributions mirror those taking place contemporaneously in the United States. For example, the Cold War era could be emancipatory and transformative, as it was at times for the African American freedom struggle, giving voice to liberation movements such as the Papuans and presenting a decisive challenge to long-held ideas of white racial supremacy, not least in the power of what Irwin calls “the postcolonial moment” (p. 33) of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Irwin demonstrates how apartheid South Africa increasingly found itself internationally isolated as African nationalists warned that racial tyranny, not Marxist-Leninism or nuclear weapons, presented the most significant challenge to global peace and security. Luis Nuno Rodrigues’s contribution on Portuguese attempts to win “hearts and minds” and pursue “progressive autonomy” (p. 119) in colonial Guinea reveals how the traditional norms of colonial governance were completely upended

by the transformative impact of black liberation movements on the continent.

However, the Cold War could often limit racial reform and change, proving repressive, discriminatory, and even conducive to the persistence of white supremacy and racism. Just as Gerald Horne and Robert Korstad have shown in the postwar United States, a Cold War clampdown on labor activism and the political Left—both causes long synonymous with civil rights struggles—had destructive consequences for racial equality.[7] This was not just an American phenomenon but a global one, notably in Panama, where Michael Donoghue shows how union organizing and attempts at racial and labor reform of United Public Workers of America (UPW) Local 713 ran aground on Cold War concerns over Soviet subversion in the Canal Zone, resulting in a Red Scare-style purge of labor unions and the restoration of racial segregation by U.S. administrators in the interests of regional “security” (p. 64). Likewise, the contributions from Rodrigues, Irwin, and Krenn each reveal how racism and notions of white supremacy demonstrated what the latter calls an “amazing resiliency” by attaching themselves to Cold War modernization theories popular amongst Western officials. These scholars show us how, in the hands of Portuguese, South African, and American policymakers, modernization theory was utilized almost as a twentieth-century equivalent of the “white man’s burden,” a justification for the persistence of white minority rule and the incorporation of apartheid South Africa into the international capitalist community.

Despite its significant achievements in broadening the scope of analysis on race and the Cold War, Muehlenbeck’s book is not without some weaknesses. The latter part of the book, which details the interplay between ethnicity and domestic and international politics, arguably lacks the coherence and conviction of earlier sections. Whilst *Race, Ethnicity and the Cold War* makes a strong case for the interrelationship between international diplomacy and the domestic politics of race, the studies of Greek Americans and Polish Canadians rather downplay the significance of domestic and cultural factors—notably the revival of ethnic identity politics among white European “ethnics” in North America during the 1960s and 1970s, and the shattering cultural impact of Black Power—in crystallizing the increased ethnic activism and consciousness of these groups. Likewise, outside of the chapters by Donoghue and Matusevich, the interplay between issues of race, sex, and gender receives relatively little attention in the book. As scholars such as Michelle Mart and Andrew Rotter have demon-

strated, highly gendered perceptions of states and individual actors often shaped American foreign relations during the formative years of the Cold War, while anxieties over miscegenation and sexually predatory blacks often shaped its responses to diplomatic crises, notably in the Congo.[8] Did other nations respond similarly during the Cold War?

The book also reveals that we have a long way to go before we achieve a truly global perspective on the politics of race and ethnicity during the Cold War. My own students often want to know more about the Soviet and Chinese governments’ responses to their own difficulties of race. Why, they ask, do the Americans get such a raw deal? Equally, we could do with discovering more about how state officials in these nations developed their awareness of racial inequality in the Western world, and in doing so how they advocated the utility of Cold War appeals to race and ethnicity within the ideological structures of the communist state. Presuming scholars can gain access to such source material, research in these areas would add much to our understanding of the significance of issues of race and ethnicity on both sides of the Cold War. Equally, the agency of India and its attempts to present itself as the putative leader of the non-white, postcolonial world, leading the condemnation of apartheid South Africa at the UN and convening the Bandung conference, goes underexplored here. And Panama aside, the role of racial constructs in Cold War foreign policy towards Latin America warrants greater historical attention than it receives here.

Nonetheless, *Race, Ethnicity and the Cold War* is an important book, and will be of considerable use to scholars and students working on post-1945 international history. It makes a significant contribution to our understanding of what is now generally regarded as the “global Cold War,” and in particular the complex and often contradictory role played by concepts of ethnicity and race in this period.[9] Such concepts and identities were often interpreted very differently by states, organizations, and individuals during the Cold War, often depending upon their ideological persuasion, historical experience, or position in the global diplomatic hierarchy. But, as the book reminds us, ethnicity and race were of great importance to all Cold War actors, including those beyond the traditional East-West bipolarity, and deserve a central place in any history of foreign relations during this transformative period.

Notes

- [1]. Charles Maier, “Marking Time: The Historiogr-

raphy of International Relations,” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 356.

[2]. Thomas Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 1053.

[3]. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1903]), 3.

[4]. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1944).

[5]. Renee Romano, “No Diplomatic Immunity: African American Diplomats and the Dilemma of American Racism during the Cold War, 1961-1964,” *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 546-579.

[6]. See Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions:*

African Americans Against Apartheid, 1945-1994 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[7]. Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988); Robert Korstad, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 800-804; Kenneth Janken, “From Colonial Liberation to Cold War Liberalism: Walter White, the NAACP and Foreign Affairs, 1941-1955,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (November 1998): 1074-1095.

[8]. Michelle Mart, “Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel, 1948-1960,” *Diplomatic History* 20 (Summer 1996): 357-380; Andrew Rotter, “Gender Relations, Foreign Relations: The United States and South Asia, 1947-1964,” *Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 518-542; Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 130.

[9]. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

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