



John Munro. *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonisation, 1945-1960.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 354 pp. \$39.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-18805-1.

Reviewed by Gregg French (Saint Mary's University)

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An Anticolonial Opposition to the Imperial State

The field of transnational history emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century. Led by Ian Tyrrell, and later developed by the likes of Akira Iriye, Pierre-Yves Saunier, Thomas Bender, and Daniel T. Rodgers, the broadly defined area of study challenged nationally focused approaches to the past by exploring the nearly infinite ways that the global has influenced the domestic. Since its inception, countless social and cultural historians have adopted a transnational lens. This method of investigation has enabled these historians to unearth the connections that existed between globally situated, non-state actors as well as how their ideas and beliefs circulated across national borders. Transnational understandings of the past have also expanded into, most notably, the fields of both imperial and diplomatic history, as well as American studies. This proliferation has prompted scholars to de-exceptionalize the monolithic American experience and has brought to light the continued existence of the US empire in its many interconnected, hegemonic forms.

In *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization, 1945–1960*, historian John Munro adopts an intersectional, transnational approach to the study of

the African American freedom movements that influenced the postwar era in the United States by connecting them with anticolonial independence efforts that emerged throughout Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. By illustrating the shared struggles for justice that linked African Americans with people of color throughout the colonial world, Munro presents the white supremacist American state as an imperial power on a par with its European counterparts. Against the backdrop of the bipolarity of the early Cold War era, Munro also persuasively argues that anticommunism was used as a powerful tool by the American state and its supporters to counteract Black radicals from the Left. This created a narrative that furthered the “othering” process of African Americans within a race-based capitalist state and advanced the construction of a broad-based, interconnected, global anticolonial front.

Rather than presenting the early Cold War era, global imperialism, decolonization, the Old and New Left, the long civil rights movement, neo-colonialism, and neoliberalism as separate movements, periods, or entities, Munro challenges the reader’s preconceived understanding of liberalism and empire during the middle portion of the twen-

tieth century. He does this by “presenting an untidy and uneven picture that includes elements of capitulation, criticism, and unintended subversion,” and by doing so, successfully positions *The Anticolonial Front* at the vanguard of transnational historiographies that examine race in America, the global civil rights movement, imperialism, and decolonization (pp. 10-11). Take for example, as Munro suggests, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The organization was formed in 1909 and one of its early leaders was W. E. B. Du Bois. By the post-World War II era, Du Bois had shifted further to the left on the political spectrum and firmly believed that racial capitalism caused injustices throughout the colonial world, including the United States. Within the framework of the global Cold War, the NAACP was more than willing to oppose European imperialism, but as Munro contends, the organization became a “political path that, although not subsumed by the official US position of the day [anti-communism], loyally adjoined with it” (p. 11). This submission to the state did not sit well with Du Bois and in turn, he resigned in 1948. This example, as well as many others throughout the work, illustrates that elements of imperialism, decolonization, race, anticommunism, and the broadly defined popular front influenced perceptions, understandings, and decisions in the early Cold War era.

Made up of eight chapters, as well as an introduction and an epilogue, Munro’s book ushers the reader from the prewar era in the United States through the decade and a half following World War II and concludes with a critique of the cultural legacies associated with the rise of both neocolonialism and neoliberalism. Throughout this journey, Munro maintains his focus on the role of non-state actors—more specifically, the activists, intellectuals, artists, writers, and state-viewed criminals who, in various ways, formed an international network in opposition to the social injustices they experienced at the hands of an imperial overseer. Munro explores the connections, feelings, and de-

sires of these non-state actors by examining the official records of several organizations that spoke out against inequalities; personal papers; novels; magazines; newspapers; and journals of the period. All of this was done with the intention of providing agency to these individuals and challenging the far-too-common trend of the state being taken to represent the monolithic voice of its people.

The work begins in the decade preceding the outbreak of World War II as the popular front intersected with the anticolonial Black freedom struggle in the United States. In this chapter, Munro appropriately adds nuance to the preexisting narrative by arguing that the popular front “subordinated anticapitalism, antiracism, and anticolonialism to secure greater unity against fascist danger,” in much the same way that the NAACP and other leftward-learning groups would accept colonialism at home but oppose it abroad during the Cold War era (p. 16). By challenging this narrative, Munro is informing the reader that even the Old Left in the United States was not a united group and in reality, often held diverging opinions on both domestic and global events, as well as on race and their understanding of the US imperial state.

The book then shifts to the postwar era and the international networks that were renewed between colonial peoples throughout what would be later referred to as the Third and Fourth Worlds, as well as the United States. These networks were strengthened by the Manchester Pan-African Congress of 1945 (chapter 2) and the Southern Negro Youth Congress (chapter 3), which was held in Columbia, South Carolina, during the following year. At these events, the ideas and beliefs of Du Bois, George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Esther Cooper, and Paul Robeson furthered transnational linkages that challenged imperial manifestations that were based on white supremacy and gender inequality, all of which were predicated and pro-

moted by the capitalist system. The anticolonial rhetoric that came out of these conferences was spread by several publications throughout the 1940s and 1950s. These publications make up the focus of chapter 4. Although these outlets varied in their views toward anticolonialism, they undeniably disseminated valuable information and enabled a dispersed group of individuals to remain connected.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 position the proponents of anticolonialism within the context of the early Cold War era in both the United States and abroad. Chapter 5 details events in the United States, where the Smith Act, McCarthyism, and the Red Scare combined to strengthen the power of the capitalist state under the umbrella of anticommunism. This demonized various individuals and groups on the left, such as the Communists, fellow travelers, and independent leftists, and in doing so, weakened their calls for justice and equality. Chapters 6 and 7 once again shift the focus of the work to the international theater. In chapter 6, Munro maintains that the anticolonial unity that was established in Manchester and Columbia continued to be on display at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 and the First World Congress of Black Writers and Artists, which was held in Paris in 1956. At these conferences, the supporters of anticolonialism attempted to navigate the bipolarity of the early Cold War era and their own desires for independence by attempting to present a level of solidarity. Chapter 7 explores Ghana's independence in 1957. Here, Munro reinforces the importance of the anticolonial transnational networks that existed throughout the postwar era but also astutely points out that the independence that was established by Kwame Nkrumah and his followers did not mean freedom from the "bonds of empire" or "racial capitalism" (p. 247), arguing that decolonization was occurring but that the neocolonial reality was also setting in throughout the once colonized world (p. 270).

The book comes to a close with an examination of the transnationally linked freedom movements that emerged in the 1960s; how neocolonialism undermined many of the goals of these movements for equality; and finally, the rise of an even "deadlier weapon," neoliberalism (p. 311). In chapter 8, Munro reinforces the importance of the often overlooked anticolonial front during the early Cold War era by arguing that a "new wave of antiracist and anticolonial struggle[s]" emerged out of the "anticolonial thought and action of the 1945–1960 period" (p. 280). The work concludes with the epilogue, which not only addresses both the development of neocolonialism and neoliberalism but also how these hegemonic imperial structures continue to reinforce the power of the state in the present. Here, Munro accentuates the importance of the work by drawing connections between the Black radicals of the postwar era and the present-day Black Lives Matter movement, specifically, their opposition to the power of the gendered, racial capitalism of the state.

The Anticolonial Front presents the complex transnational connections that existed between often marginalized non-state actors in the early Cold War era as they found both commonalities and differences in their drives for justice throughout the colonized world, including the United States. The work is at its best when addressing the shared commonalities that existed between African Americans and people of color throughout the colonial world, illustrating the power of the US imperial state and its European counterparts in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The work would be a worthwhile addition to an upper-year undergraduate or graduate seminar course that explores US imperial history, race and colonialism, or the global civil rights movement from an intersectional approach. Additionally, the book serves as an important reminder of how settler-colonial states and various international organizations continue to "conceal colonialism" in the present (p. 313).

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