

**Eddie Michel.** *The White House and White Africa: Presidential Policy toward Rhodesia during the UDI Era, 1965-1979.* New York: Routledge, 2018. xiii + 256 pp. \$149.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-31999-8.

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On November 11, 1965, Rhodesia, evoking the United States' 1776 Declaration of Independence, announced its independence from Great Britain in a statement known as the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). Rhodesia's status remained contested throughout the next fourteen years, a period known as the UDI era. As a white minority government Rhodesia's governing body faced questions of political legitimacy domestically. Additionally, on the international stage Rhodesia was confronted with UN sanctions and debates over recognition of UDI Rhodesia. The UDI era ended in 1979 and the following year Robert Mugabe was elected; black majority rule had been achieved. Eddie Michel's book *The White House and White Africa* traces presidential policy toward Rhodesia during four US administrations: Lyndon B. Johnson's, Richard Nixon's, Gerald R. Ford's, and Jimmy Carter's. Michel uses the Rhodesian question to illuminate some of the key challenges in conducting foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s: "[the] Cold War, economics, race relations and human rights all guided White House decision-making regarding Salisbury" (p. 2). In addition, Michel explores how ideas of morality and pragmatism influenced the way different presidential administrations addressed the issue of Rhodesia.

Each of the chapters is devoted to one of the presidential administrations, giving the book a

very clear structure to follow. In these chapters Michel analyzes foreign policy decisions and how each administration addressed questions of Rhodesia's political legitimacy, both in Rhodesia itself and on the international stage. Michel draws his evidence from multiple archives across the United States, England, and South Africa. Most of his primary sources are government documents, coming from the Department of State, the National Security Council, or the White House. Furthermore, Michel supplements these primary sources with a variety of scholarly works on southern Africa. While the book is not overly complicated, it does require some knowledge of southern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

The strengths of his work are twofold. First, the author traces US-Rhodesian relations throughout several presidential administrations, both Republican and Democratic. In doing so, he shows the ebb and flows of presidential policy, including both the similarities and differences in approaching the Rhodesian question. For example, Johnson opposed the UDI from a moral standpoint because of his commitment to racial equality. At the same time, the Johnson administration was aware of US geopolitical interests in the region and as a result opposed radical actions against Rhodesia. In contrast, the Nixon administration was primarily governed by pragmatic considerations and generally

did not question the morality of a white minority government in Rhodesia. The potential for communist expansion in southern Africa and access to Rhodesian chrome exports remained especially important for US policy toward Rhodesia throughout the Nixon administration. One similarity across all four administrations was the contested nature of the Rhodesian question. Michel emphasizes how members of Congress and the public remained divided on questions of sanctions against and US recognition of UDI Rhodesia.

The second strength of the book is the inclusion of debates about natural resources and the impact of the civil rights movement on US-Rhodesian relations during the UDI era. Michel argues that while the Cold War was an important factor, in order to fully understand US policy towards Rhodesia it is also necessary to consider other factors, such as the issue of chrome. In chapter 2, "The Luster of Chrome. President Richard M. Nixon," Michel examines access to chrome exports. Under the Nixon administration the Bryd Amendment was passed, which allowed for the importation of chrome from Rhodesia, contravening UN sanctions that were in place at the time. The passage of the Bryd amendment was a cause for celebration by the Rhodesian government and dismayed African countries. Throughout the book Michel emphasizes the importance of access to chrome as a factor in shaping presidential policy toward UDI Rhodesia.

One of the book's strengths, its range across multiple administrations, is also one of its weaknesses. As a result of covering four presidential administration, fourteen years, and a variety of players, at times the narrative seems rushed. Some aspects that could have been worthwhile to examine in more detail are the role of activists and the Congressional Black Caucus, after its founding in 1971. The author does mention George Houser and the American Committee on Africa, who had written a letter to the Democratic Party Platform Committee about Rhodesian chrome imports during the 1976

presidential campaign. Michel, however, does not expand on this. Similarly, the book touches only slightly on the role of the Black Caucus in shaping the later administrations.

*The White House and White Africa* is in conversation with several historiographies, including work that has examined the connections between the domestic civil rights movement and its impact of on foreign policy.[1] Similar to this scholarship, Michel argues for the importance of the civil rights movement and the push for racial justice in shaping foreign policy, in particular toward Africa. *The White House and White Africa* also contributes to furthering the understanding of the Cold War on the periphery and the global Cold War.[2]

In conclusion, Michel's work is a welcome addition to the field of US-Southern relations and the study of the Cold War on the periphery. It enriches the historiography by illuminating the contested nature of the Rhodesian questions across multiple presidential administrations, emphasizing the issues of natural resources and the impact of the US civil rights movement on the conduct of foreign policy toward Rhodesia, and southern Africa more broadly. Its methodological approach and multi-archival research can serve as a building block for further studies of southern Africa.

#### Notes

[1]. See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[2]. The growing scholarship on the global Cold War has been primarily influenced by 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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