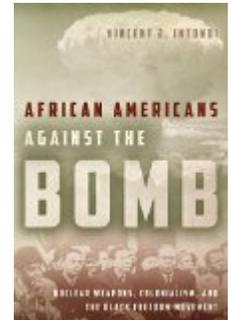


Vincent J. Intondi. *African Americans against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement.* Stanford Nuclear Age Series. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 224 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-8942-4.



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In this concise and informative book, Vincent J. Intondi argues persuasively that African Americans made considerable contributions to the nuclear disarmament movement: starting in their immediate reaction to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then later especially courageously during the McCarthy era when such activity became risky, and up to the present. His main thesis throughout is that African Americans have been especially prominent among activists insisting on coupling the antinuclear cause and the struggle for civil rights. The book presents examples of how this played out, not only in the United States but also worldwide in opposition to colonialism and its vestiges in Africa and Asia. The most conspicuous actors in this story were peace activists, clergy, leftists, performing artists, and journalists, along with ordinary citizens in the black community. Examining the activities of leading figures, such as Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Robeson, and Harry Belafonte, and making a special effort to acknowledge the neglected role of black women in the movement, Intondi illustrates

the various linkages he sees between advocacy for a world peace that is free of nuclear weapons and social justice. He ends the narrative of African American involvement with a chapter detailing President Barack Obama's highly contested efforts toward global nuclear disarmament. Throughout the book, he simultaneously reinforces his assertion that African Americans had important roles and highlights the strongest advocates of the inseparability of social justice and elimination of nuclear weapons. Drawing heavily on the records of pertinent organizations, Federal Bureau of Investigation files, and contemporary periodicals, this study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the subject by displaying the richness of the materials available on African American activists that have tended to be overlooked in earlier publications on antinuclear activism.

While focused on opposition to the bomb, this book also provides interesting insights on broader, related concerns among African Americans, such as racism and the civil rights movement of

the late twentieth century. In recounting the immediate reaction from Americans in general to the two bombings in Japan, Intondi admits that they were highly influenced by the depth of hatred for the Japanese engendered by the terrible war Japan had initiated. However, he cites John Dower and Ronald Takaki, leading historians recognized as authorities on the subject, in observing that this was further augmented by an unmistakable element of racism. As additional evidence, he points out the absence of any sort of treatment of Germans comparable to the internment of Japanese Americans. He also shows how seriously US leaders considered using the bomb in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, other Asian theaters. The American and French governments' choice of Pacific Islands and the Sahara for much of their early nuclear testing further evoked the lingering specter of colonialism and its inherent attitudes. Intondi also points out that for African Americans racism was double-edged, in that they simultaneously suffered from it themselves within the peace and antinuclear movements. This finding will be of interest to those who have been struck by this same paradox in studying the experience of blacks in other benevolent movements, such as American and international communism. Meredith L. Roman's discussion of this in *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (2012) is very instructive on this point.

Another dimension of Intondi's study concerns how differences on nuclear policies divided the black community internally, perhaps best epitomized by the majority of black public figures criticizing King's bold statements against the Vietnam War, despite the validation of his work's relevance beyond the US civil rights movement with his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize. Intondi's account of the evolving positions of black intellectuals and organizations shows their dilemma in trying to find a stance that could preserve both the principles and effectiveness of insecure institutions, such as the National Association for the Ad-

vancement of Colored People (NAACP), in the constantly hostile social and political environment in which they operated. The threat of using the bomb against additional peoples of color also further heightened the chronic debate in the black community over the ongoing contradiction between African Americans serving in the US military, fighting Asian peoples, and being subjected to racial bias at home.

This study is a valuable addition to the history of African American involvement in world affairs that looks beyond the roles forced on them. Given the title's inclusion of the black freedom movement in general, one part of the story that merits a more focused treatment is Pan-Africanism, which is mentioned in connection with W. E. B. Du Bois and Kwame Nkrumah. For example, further discussion of George Padmore and other like-minded leaders in that movement from the Caribbean and Europe could have contextualized the book's portrayal of African Americans as part of a global enterprise even more clearly.

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