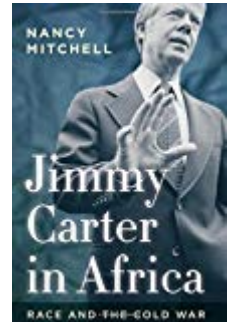


Nancy Mitchell. *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War*. Cold War International History Project Series. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 880 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-9385-8.



Reviewed by Benjamin Griffin

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Nancy Mitchell's *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race in the Cold War* is a phenomenal addition to the scholarship of the Cold War. Drawing heavily on archival research conducted in the United States, Britain, and South Africa and on documents from Cuba and Zimbabwe, the book presents an in-depth and engaging international history of President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. Mitchell does a commendable job of providing context, ensuring that the book is readily accessible regardless of a reader's expertise. It is an essential and enjoyable read for any historian interested in the late Cold War or modern Africa.

The book provides a much-needed, exhaustive examination of US policy in Africa. Mitchell moves the account easily between the Horn of Africa and southern Africa, providing an in-depth study of the areas where the United States most actively engaged. What is most remarkable about this book is the ease with which it captures the very different dynamics at work in the two regions. Mitchell deftly demonstrates how local ac-

tors in Ethiopia and Somalia sought to play the Americans and Soviets against one another to achieve their own aims. The objectives and issues at stake closely resembled those of other Cold War struggles in the developing world. *Jimmy Carter in Africa* effectively builds on the work of Odd Arne Westad's *Global Cold War* (2005). It shows that the major actors had varying degrees of desire and commitment, resulting in an inconsistent and ultimately detrimental policy toward the region.

Rhodesia proved more complicated. Noting that "the domestic politics of race" infused the issue, Mitchell shows the difficulty of both the Ford and Carter administrations in developing a viable strategy to bring about majority rule (p. 8). Mitchell expands on the themes of Thomas Borstelmann's *Cold War and the Color Line* (2001), by showing how racial tensions caused the spheres of international and domestic policy to merge. Rhodesia becomes a central issue in the fight between the executive and legislative branches, restricting the options of the Carter ad-

ministration. *Jimmy Carter in Africa* furthers this narrative through its treatment of Andy Young, Carter's controversial ambassador to the United Nations. Mitchell portrays Young in a nuanced fashion. Though largely sympathetic to him, the author takes care to note how his candidness with the press complicated Carter's efforts in Rhodesia by drawing congressional and public ire.

Jimmy Carter in Africa takes aim at several common interpretations of the Carter administration. Mitchell paints Carter as a "dedicated Cold Warrior" throughout his presidency, who consistently followed an orthodox version of containment in Africa. While agreeing that Carter's demeanor contributed to misperceptions, Mitchell argues that the president was an "inept idealist." The book is largely successful in showing that Carter's twin desires for "racial justice" in Rhodesia and his "deep Cold War instincts" were more compatible than they are often portrayed (p. 8). Mitchell also compellingly places Carter back at the center of his own administration, showing him to be a driving force behind his foreign policy. The internal turmoil between Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security advisor, and Cyrus R. Vance, his secretary of state, that marks many accounts of Carter's policy process is absent in the book. At times Mitchell advances these revisions to Carter's image too far; however, the book still offers a welcome and fresh perspective on how the administration operated.

In judging Carter's policy toward Zimbabwe, Mitchell declines to moderate her sense that the policy was a "Cold War victory" in light of the later "murderous thuggery" of President Robert Mugabe (p. 679). This lets the Carter administration off too easily. While Mitchell's sense that it is not fair to judge a policy entirely by its outcome is accurate, it does not mean that results should be entirely absent from its study. Questions about why the administration did not understand Mugabe's true nature are both fair and important. Similarly, it is also important to gauge the long-term effec-

tiveness of a policy in order to determine its overall worth. The Cold War is rife with events that looked like a success in the immediate aftermath, only to prove ruinous with the passage of time. A deeper exploration of why the Carter administration did not anticipate the failure of Zimbabwean democracy would have benefited the book.

Overall, Mitchell's work is truly impressive, and a must read for historians of the Cold War. The nuanced portrayal of Carter challenges the established views of both the man and his administration. It also serves as an incredibly useful primer on the modern history of US involvement in Africa and contextualizes the present-day challenges faced by Ethiopia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. The voluminous research and international context of the book make it a remarkable scholarly achievement. It should prove the standard in the field for many years to come.

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