

**The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the
Globalization of the Cold War Roundtable *Review***
Review by Brian Etheridge



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Review by Brian Etheridge, Louisiana Tech University

It goes without saying that foreign relations historians are driven in large part by present-day concerns in foreign policy. For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, as most of the members of this list are aware, foreign relations historians were obsessed with the origins and conduct of the Cold War conflict that afflicted it. The central question of responsibility for the Cold War, which has been so important to scholars of earlier generations, has seemed less important to scholars who have come to intellectual maturity in the 1980s and 1990s. Younger scholars have followed somewhat different agendas, a fact which has been reflected in the exploration of eras and subjects unconcerned, or only peripherally concerned, with the origins, character, and conduct of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War accelerated this trend, and foreign relations history is increasingly populated today with studies not only studying other eras but also emphasizing culture, gender, non-state actors, race, international perspectives, and so on in an effort to understand different facets of America's relationship with the world.

It not yet clear how the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will shape the historiography of American foreign relations over the next thirty years-but that it will have an impact is without question. And if current questions about America and the Third World serve as the foundation for this shift in historiography, the contours of this new focus will bear a striking resemblance to the central questions of Cold War historiography. In the wake of Third World terrorism on American soil, an ongoing war on terror, the fraying of US-European relations, and the rise of economic nationalism in Latin America, Americans are asking themselves: how did this happen, who is responsible, and, flowing from these two questions, where do we go from here?

In this sense, Kathryn Statler and Andrew Johns's edited volume, *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*, could not come at a better time. In offering the first systematic treatment of Eisenhower's foreign policy toward the Third World, it provides a long-needed focus on this crucial time in America's relationship with the developing world. The very term itself, the Third World, was coined on the eve of Eisenhower's assumption to office, and the 1950s were dominated by a global "earthquake," in the words of David Anderson, of Third World nationalism. The essays in this volume collectively present a forceful and sobering perspective on American handling of the Third World at one of the most important times in this relationship. Although all of the essays are first-rate and deserving of individual attention, the thrust of this review is to examine and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their similar approaches.

As Chester Pach points out in an excellent introduction, this volume represents a decisive turning away from the original historiographical debate concerning Eisenhower. Using recently declassified documents, early revisionists such as Stephen Ambrose challenged popular impressions that Eisenhower was not in charge of his own foreign policy. Elevating "process over policy," in the words of Stephen Rabe, these revisionists argued that not only was Eisenhower in charge but that he was a decent, committed, and

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ultimately successful leader.¹ No work in this volume disputes the first and most important part of this interpretation: all agree that Eisenhower was in charge.

Rather than addressing the policymaking process, the works in this book heed the call of Robert Divine and others to assess the policies of the Eisenhower administration. The essays in this volume evaluate Eisenhower's policy toward the Third World from a number of perspectives. The first three essays address specific programs that dealt with the Third World. Kenneth Osgood's essay concerns public diplomacy in the Third World, John Prados's essay deals with intelligence operations, and Michael Adamson looks at Eisenhower's policy of foreign aid. The next three examine Eisenhower's policy in Asian countries. Robert McMahon's essay addresses Eisenhower's approach to Indonesia, Kathryn Statler's focuses on Eisenhower's handling of Vietnam, and Yi Sun's contribution judges John Foster Dulles in light of Mao Tse-Tung. The third section addresses Eisenhower's policies in Latin America and Africa, with essays by Jason Parker on the Bandung Conference, James Meriwether on Africa, and James Siekmeier on Latin America. Finally, the last two essays assess Eisenhower's Middle Eastern policies. Peter Hahn probes the nature of the relationship between the United States and Israel during Eisenhower's administration, and Nathan Citino explores Eisenhower's policies toward Iraq and Egypt.

Following the path first blazed by Robert McMahon, and later, after it had become so heavily traveled, christened "Eisenhower postrevisionism" by Chester Pach, these essays uniformly sound an overarching theme of failure. The programs evaluated in the first three essays failed to achieve their objectives. Osgood argues that Eisenhower's administration failed to reconcile its rhetoric with its actions. Prados contends that Eisenhower failed to use covert operations to achieve long-term goals. Adamson points out that Eisenhower failed to use foreign aid programs effectively to develop a healthy international political economy. As the rest of the authors highlight, the Eisenhower administration worsened relations with important countries in the Third World. In Asia, McMahon and Statler underscore that American relations with Indonesia and Vietnam soured during the Eisenhower period. In Latin America and Africa, Meriwether and Siekmeier observe the Eisenhower regime embittered important nations with their policies. In the Middle East, Hahn and Citino show that the Eisenhower administration had difficulty balancing multiple rivalries while pursuing their objectives.

Eisenhower failed in the Third World, these authors argue, because it failed to capitalize on and lead the rising tide of Third World nationalism. And here is where failure turns into tragedy for most of these authors. As many of them note, key figures in the Eisenhower administration understood the importance of accommodating Third World nationalism. Osgood points out that even though Eisenhower administration officials understood that

¹ Stephen Rabe, "Eisenhower Revisionism: The Scholarly Debate," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 324.

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nationalism and anti-colonialism were the greatest forces in the Third World, and that the United States was often seen as an ally with European imperialists, the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to support policies that were anticolonial in nature. Prados highlights that the CIA understood the inevitability of decolonization and the desirability of cultivating friendly relations with the newly emerging nations, but Eisenhower “routinely bungled the policy aspect” (p. 42). Adamson argues that despite the positive assessments of American social scientists and postcolonial elites, and Dulles’s own belief that foreign aid represented “far and away the most important single aspect” of containing communism in the Third World, US officials failed to provide the amount of aid necessary to stimulate the system (p. 48).

Tragedy also describes American foreign policy with various countries in the Third World during Eisenhower’s tenure. Despite the early, more even-handed observations of Ambassador Hugh Cummings and CIA operatives on the importance of nationalism in Indonesia, McMahon points out that Eisenhower administration resolved to get rid of Sukarno because of his relationship with both domestic and international communists. Statler highlights that even though Eisenhower grasped the negative effect of French colonialism in Vietnam on world opinion and sought to create a noncommunist and noncolonialist Vietnam, the United States ultimately pursued neocolonialist policies similar to the French in shaping the country. Parker argues that American policymakers recognized the significance of Bandung, but failed to take advantage of the opportunity to lead the movement. Meriwether, Hahn, and Citino find similar dynamics in their studies. Prominent members of the Eisenhower administration understood the importance and inevitability of Third World nationalism, but the administration failed to take actions that would have been both morally righteous (in the eyes of many) and wholly within the long-term interests of the nation.

Naturally, the question becomes why: why did the Eisenhower administration implement policies that were counterproductive in the Third World? And here, in understanding the reasons for Eisenhower’s tragic failure in the developing world, a book dedicated to the Third World spends a great deal of time talking about the First and Second Worlds. Put simply, the Eisenhower administration emphasized priorities in the industrialized and communist worlds over the concerns and objectives of those in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In some cases, these priorities involved domestic politics. As Osgood, Parker, and Meriwether show, Eisenhower refused to take a more muscular stand in favor of the civil rights movement, even though he knew how badly racial segregation and discrimination played in the Third World, because of his own rigid views regarding race and federal power. In others, these priorities concerned the domestic economy. As Siekmeier and Citino demonstrate, the Eisenhower administration blunted economic nationalism in Bolivia and the Middle East to maintain an advantageous position for American businesses.

Most importantly, however, Eisenhower’s concerns about the Cold War played a powerful role in shaping his attitudes toward developing nations. Playing on David Anderson’s witty appropriation of Townsend Hoopes’s “devil” metaphor in his conclusion to this volume, I would label these administration arguments as “the devil made me do it” and “better the

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devil you know than the devil you don't." Using the former line of reasoning, administration officials often argued that they had no choice but to fight against Third World nationalism, because, in their minds, Third World nationalists often harbored sympathy for the international communist movement. Fighting an evil expansive system, they argued, sometimes required subverting the wishes of local rulers. Such was clearly the case in the US handling of Indonesia and Vietnam (and Guatemala, Cuba, and Iran, although they are not covered in this volume). Using the latter, administration officials contended that, no matter how odious European colonialism might be, European imperialists were predictable and generally could be counted on to support American foreign policy. Many policymakers believed that Third World nationalism was an unpredictable X factor that could lead, in the worst case scenario, to communist subversion. Such fears were clearly at work in Eisenhower's handling of Bandung and Africa. Of course, these lines of argument were often mutually supportive and, as such, were often cited at the same time in defense of American policy against Third World nationalism.

If we return to the questions posed at the beginning of this review, it becomes obvious that the essays in this volume represent an important and necessary examination of American policies in the Third World during a critical time. All of them are top-shelf in their research and interpretation and provide, with a strong, clear, and collective voice, a unified answer to one of the questions that we ask ourselves about the America's relationship with the Third World today. These essays demonstrate that virtually all nations in the First and Second Worlds bear some responsibility for the current difficulties experienced in the Third. Despite the vigorous American-bashing going on these days across the Atlantic, it is fair to point out that things might have turned out differently had many European nations not sought to maintain or reestablish influence over their colonies in the Third World. It's also clear that the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China attempted to inspire communist revolutions in the Third World to further the reach and influence of the communist nations in their global struggle with the West. And the United States, often caught between these contradictory movements and blinkered by its own domestic political and economic imperatives, usually played it safe and supported stability, thereby backing their imperialist allies in the process. For much of the Cold War, Third World nations were the pawns of the great powers, and today, these essays suggest, we are dealing with the consequences of that exploitation.

Although these essays do a masterful job of assessing American foreign policy and assigning blame, they are less useful in helping us understand where we go from here. Most of the essays point out the hypocrisy of American policy toward developing nations and suggest that this hypocrisy had terrible consequences for America's reputation in the various regions of the Third World, but none of the essays really provide any evidence of the reception of these policies. And to be fair, this is not their aim. All of these authors are concerned with the explication of American foreign policy, and, as I said before, most of them carry out their goals beautifully. But I would encourage these authors (and others working on similar topics) to follow their analyses through to the logical conclusion—how precisely did these policies engender resentment toward the United States and contribute to the global rise of anti-Americanism? The participants of a recent roundtable in the

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American Historical Review on anti-Americanism point out that many scholars across disciplinary lines have taken up the study of this very large and timely subject. And although the contributions by Greg Grandin and Jessica Gienow-Hecht demonstrate that anti-Americanism is a complicated phenomenon that often has nothing whatsoever to do with the United States (the U.S. as the “other” for Europeans or Latin Americans), Juan Cole’s contribution reminds us that American foreign policy does affect how other nations understand the United States.²

In this sense, linking American foreign policy to the rise of anti-Americanism would provide a real service to both historians and policymakers. Taking their studies in this direction would mean following Emily Rosenberg’s advice many years ago to “walk the borders” of power and consider how imperial power has been viewed, constructed, and attacked from the periphery.³ It would require the combined perspectives of international history and cultural history to ferret out and process how American foreign policies have generated attitudes, domestic policies, and political movements in Third World countries. It would also ask them to take their projects in directions where sources would doubtless be harder to find and more difficult to interpret. But as Juan Cole suggests, a clear understanding of how others have responded to specific American policies would provide policymakers with the means (if not the resolve or inclination) to lessen the rampant anti-Americanism that fuels Third World terrorism.

Explaining anti-Americanism, of course, is not the aim of this book. But I think that it speaks to the quality of the work contained in this volume that this reviewer found the research and interpretation so convincing that he spent the bulk of his time not quibbling with specific essays but wondering what the next step should be in the evolution of the historiography. Together with Chester Pach’s excellent introduction and David Anderson’s outstanding conclusion, these essays provide a needed and important perspective on the historical literature regarding both the Eisenhower administration and the United States’ relationship with the Third World. From today’s perspective, the continuing effects of decolonization, not the Cold War, appear to be the most enduring legacy of the latter half of the twentieth century. This book provides a vital departure point for understanding and wrestling with how the United States handled this issue at a critical juncture in its relationship with the Third World.

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² Greg Grandin, “Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* 111 (October 2006): 1042-1066; Jessica Gienow-Hecht, “Always Blame the Americans: Anti-Americanism in Europe in the Twentieth Century,” *American Historical Review* 111 (October 2006): 1067-1091; Warren Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “America in Asian Eyes,” *American Historical Review* 111 (October 2006): 1092-1119; Juan Cole, “Anti-Americanism: It’s the Policies,” *American Historical Review* 111 (October 2006): 1120-1129.

³ Emily Rosenberg, “Walking the Borders,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 24-35.

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History and serves as the director of graduate studies as well as Research Director of the American Foreign Policy Center. He also serves as the Roster and Research List Coordinator for the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. He is currently finishing revisions on his manuscript, *Nazis and Berliners: Representing Germany in Cold War America*.

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