



***Holding the Line:
Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy
toward Africa, 1953-1961***
Roundtable Review

Reviewed Works:

George White, Jr. *Holding the Line: Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy toward Africa, 1953-1961*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. x + 238 pp. Notes, index. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-3382-0; \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-3383-7.

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

Readers of this roundtable should also consult the H-Africa review of Professor White's work-Leland Conley Barrows. "Review of George White Jr., Holding the Line: Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy toward Africa, 1953-1961," H-Africa, H-Net Reviews, November, 2006. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=11441169492495>.

President Dwight Eisenhower and his White House advisers clearly faced a major challenge in the 1950s at home and abroad with the civil rights movement and the independence movements in Africa against European colonial regimes. On the domestic scene, the NAACP had extended its challenge to segregated education culminating in the Brown decision in 1954 in which the Supreme Court ruled that state sponsored segregated education was inherently unconstitutional. In the same year Martin Luther King emerged as the spokesperson for the Montgomery Alabama boycott of segregated city buses and went on to launch an expanding challenge through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to segregation in all public facilities and a broader challenge to discrimination against blacks in an expanding number of areas.

When Eisenhower arrived in the White House in 1952, Africa had not yet emerged as a major area of U.S. interest or concern compared with Cold War crises in Asia, the Middle East, and Berlin in Europe. By the time Ike packed up his golf clubs for retirement at the end of 1960, major challenges had emerged with Ghana gaining its independence from British control in 1957, followed by sixteen new African states joining the United Nations in 1960. The Cold War arrived most dramatically and destructively in Africa with the independence of the Congo from Belgian control in 1960 and the ensuing conflicts in the Congo that continue to this day.

George White's study joins a growing number of books and articles on U.S. involvement with Africa that recognize and explore the interaction of both the civil rights movement with African developments and the Eisenhower administration's simultaneous effort to manage the pace and direction of change in both areas. As more African leaders and representatives arrive in New York at the UN and in Washington at their diplomatic residencies, Eisenhower realized that he had to do something about the reality of Jim Crow segregation in the nation's capital and surrounding neighborhoods in Virginia and Maryland. Eisenhower and his advisers definitely preferred a gradualist approach on domestic civil rights issues such as school desegregation or civil rights as addressed in legislation in 1957 and 1960. The same stance is apparent in their response to new African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana.

The reviewers have appreciated Professor White's exploration of U.S. attitudes and policy toward Africa and raised some important questions starting with the most original dimension of his study, his use of critical race theory and whiteness to understand the view of Washington policy makers:

- 1.) Whiteness is defined by Professor White as the “complex of associations, assumptions, and immunities attributed to people who are identified as White,” and the author emphasizes five manifestations: “White innocence and entitlement, along with Black erasure, self-abnegation, and insatiability.” White innocence refers to the idea that “White people are inherently pious, just and law-abiding” and white entitlement refers to the idea that whites because of their sense of superiority in all things “deserve a disproportionate share of power, resources, and esteem.” On the other hand, Whites views Black people as the antithesis of Whiteness and, consequently, deny any black accomplishments, insist that Blacks themselves accept an inferior status, even as Whites believe that Blacks lack self-restraint and want too much with respect to jobs, education, rights, and independence. “Holding the Line” is Dr. White’s central thesis on the Eisenhower administration’s policy toward Africa, an effort to maintain the supremacy of Whiteness under challenge in Africa, to keep the essential economic, political, and ideological underpinnings intact at home and abroad in the Cold War even as the structure of colonialism collapsed in Africa and segregation faced mounting challenges in the U.S. (2-5, 37-39)
- 2.) The reviewers consider Professor White’s concept of Whiteness and thesis on the Eisenhower administration as successful in capturing the racial views of Eisenhower and his advisers and also their desire to replace European colonialism with a new relationship between the European powers and their former colonies. Dr. White’s use of the records of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and National Security Council studies support his assessments. The racial views of U.S. officials are definitely very important for understanding their responses to both domestic and foreign policy challenges. Anne Foster, for example, notes that this perspective could be broadened for comparative purposes to other relevant areas such as Asia and the U.S. involvement with independence movements before 1952 or simultaneous with Washington dealing with Africa. Seth Jacobs in *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957*, for example, gives considerable weight to the impact of religious views on the Eisenhower administration’s support for Diem.
- 3.) More challenging is the question of when Professor White’s concept of Whiteness has an important causative impact in the four case studies that he presents: U.S. policy toward Ethiopia and Haile Selassie’s regime; U.S. efforts to work with Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana on the Volta River project; the U.S. and South Africa; and the U.S. and the Congo crisis in 1960. Dr. White refers to Whiteness as an important shaping factor on attitudes and U.S. policy in each case study but there are questions about its relative importance particularly in weighting other concerns such as economic interests with respect to strategic raw materials and economic interests in South Africa, the domestic political ramifications of Eisenhower’s position on both civil rights issues and African issues, the importance of maintaining relations with major European allies, and, most importantly, the Cold War competition which swirls into

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Africa and brings in other contested issues such as the U.S. conflict with Fidel Castro's Cuba.

- 4.) With respect to the four case studies, the influence of Whiteness may have been the least with respect to Ethiopia and the greatest with respect to South Africa. As Professor White points out, Selassie supported U.S. Cold War policies despite an unwillingness on the part of Washington to provide the level of military aid requested by Selassie who finally visited Moscow in 1959 to sign two loan agreements. As Dr. White suggests, Whiteness views reinforced concerns about the impact of arms to Ethiopia on its tenuous relations with Egypt and the Somalian territory. South Africa would seem to fit Dr. White's thesis the best, although other considerations definitely influence U.S. policy. White South Africans were not leaving unlike Belgians from the Congo or the British for Ghana. They were determined to maintain a whiteness, apartheid regime, and the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to challenge South Africa in any meaningful way. The Congo is probably in between on the Whiteness scale. The Cold War was in full bloom in the Congo with Nikita Khrushchev's desire to court the third world for Marxist-Leninism and, most specifically, to provide aid to Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the independent Congo in July 1960. Lumumba clearly did not follow the requirements of Whiteness for a dependent, undemanding, appreciative black leader. However, an external Cold War consideration that should be considered is the failure from Washington's perspective of its effort to deal with Fidel Castro in Cuba, which, undoubtedly affected its views on Lumumba and efforts to get rid of him.
- 5.) Foster and Daniel Byrne both note that Professor White attempts to incorporate a gender analysis with his emphasis on race. They note that in each chapter in the last couple of pages Dr. White turns to the women of different African countries and notes how U.S. policies tended to reinforce the limiting impact of colonialism on the rights and opportunities of African women. Both reviewers ask for a more systematic analysis, noting that it is not clear whether U.S. officials applied gendered concepts to Africa or whether their policies had the intent of affecting the status and roles of African women. For example, Dr. White mentions that African women in general and specifically in the Congo received little education and that the Eisenhower administration emphasized the importance of a western education for African leaders. Dr. White implies that Washington endorsed the gender subordination of African women by African men just by advocating higher education for African leaders. (130-132) As the reviewers note, more analysis and primary sources are needed to support Dr. White's gender analysis.

Participants:

George W. White, Jr. is an Assistant Professor of History at York College, City University of New York (CUNY). White received a JD from Harvard Law School in 1987 and, after

practicing law, returned to school and received a PhD from Temple University in 2001. White has written scholarly articles on U.S. diplomacy toward Africa in the 1950s, the development of public housing in Knoxville in the 1940s, and efforts of Black business owners to enter into contracts with government entities. He is the author of "An Overview of the Impact of Race on American Foreign Policy Toward Africa," National Association of African American Studies Conference, *NAAS Monograph 2001*, and "The Impact of Race on American Foreign Policy Toward Africa," The Society of Research on African Cultures Conference, SOARC, *Journal of African Studies*, 2001. During the 2001-2002 academic year, White served as the Geraldine R. Dodge Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rutgers Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience. As the Dodge Fellow, White helped conceive, plan, and stage a televised town-hall discussion of the events and aftermath of 9/11 entitled "Why Us?, Why Here?, What Now?" "Why Us" aired on New Jersey public television in March and September 2002 and was nominated for a regional Emmy award. He has a book-length manuscript under review by academic presses and is working as the editor of the papers of Rev. Robert Boston Dokes, a World War II chaplain who served in the Pacific Theater.

Daniel Byrne earned his Ph.D. at Georgetown University in United States Diplomatic History in the summer of 2003. His dissertation, entitled "Adrift in a Sea of Sand: The Search for United States Foreign Policy toward the Decolonization of Algeria, 1942-1962," developed broad themes of the United States attitudes towards African decolonization, pan-Arabism, and pan-Africanism by examining a case study of the Algerian war of independence. After two years as a visiting professor at Bradley University, Dr. Byrne became an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Evansville in the fall of 2005. He is currently working on converting his dissertation into a monograph and preparing two articles on the United States policy on Algerian independence for publication. He plans further research into United States policy towards the decolonization of French West Africa.

Anne L. Foster is an Assistant Professor at Indiana State University. She obtained her B.A. at American University and Ph.D in History at Cornell University. She teaches U.S. diplomatic history. She has a forthcoming study from Duke University Press, *Projections of Power: The U.S. in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* and a number of articles including "Timing, Balance of Power, and the Decision in Vietnam," article for Roundtable on Gareth Porter's *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, in *Passport*, the newsletter for the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations; "Avoiding the Status of Denmark: Dutch Fears about Loss of Empire in Southeast Asia," solicited chapter forthcoming in Chris Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds. *Connected Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Asian International History*; co-editor, *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, including my essay, "Models for Governing: Opium and Colonial Policies in Southeast Asia, 1898-1910," (Duke University Press, 2003; Philippine edition by Anvil Press, 2005); "Before the War: Legacies from the Early Twentieth Century in United States-Vietnam Relations," in Marilyn Young and Robert Buzzanco, eds., *Blackwell Companion to the Vietnam War* (Blackwell Publishers,

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2002); "Prohibition as Superiority: Policing Opium in South-East Asia, 1898-1925," *International History Review* (June 2000); "Secret Police Cooperation and the Coming of the Cold War in Southeast Asia," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* (December 1995); and "French, Dutch, British and U.S. Reactions to the Nghe-Tinh Rebellions of 1930-1931," in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov, eds. *Imperial Policy and Colonial Revolt* (Copenhagen, 1995).

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