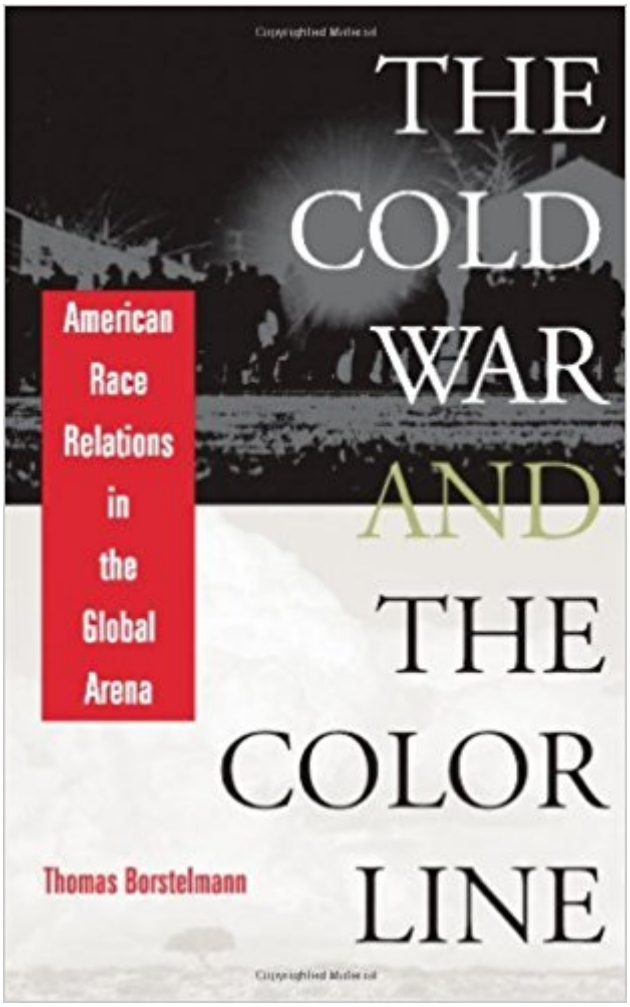
The Cold War And The Color Line: American Race Relations In The Global Arena



Synopsis

After World War II the United States faced two preeminent challenges: how to administer its responsibilities abroad as the world's strongest power, and how to manage the rising movement at home for racial justice and civil rights. The effort to contain the growing influence of the Soviet Union resulted in the Cold War, a conflict that emphasized the American commitment to freedom. The absence of that freedom for nonwhite American citizens confronted the nation's leaders with an embarrassing contradiction. Racial discrimination after 1945 was a foreign as well as a domestic problem. World War II opened the door to both the U.S. civil rights movement and the struggle of Asians and Africans abroad for independence from colonial rule. America's closest allies against the Soviet Union, however, were colonial powers whose interests had to be balanced against those of the emerging independent Third World in a multiracial, anticommunist alliance. At the same time, U.S. racial reform was essential to preserve the domestic consensus needed to sustain the Cold War struggle. The Cold War and the Color Line is the first comprehensive examination of how the Cold War intersected with the final destruction of global white supremacy. Thomas Borstelmann pays close attention to the two Souths--Southern Africa and the American South--as the primary sites of white authority's last stand. He reveals America's efforts to contain the racial polarization that threatened to unravel the anticommunist western alliance. In so doing, he recasts the history of American race relations in its true international context, one that is meaningful and relevant for our own era of globalization.

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Customer Reviews

In rich, informing detail enlivened with telling anecdote, Cornell historian Borstelmann unites under one umbrella two commonly separated strains of the U.S. post-WWII experience: our domestic political and cultural history, where the Civil Rights movement holds center stage, and our foreign policy, where the Cold War looms largest. After moving swiftly from a 19th century where white consolidation of dominion in the American South and West coincides with Europe's conquest of Africa, and through a Second World War where German prisoners of war are better treated than black soldiers, Borstelmann follows "the nexus of race and foreign relations" through successive administrations as the Cold War develops. Readers deeply familiar with the history of race in America or American foreign policy history may find little that is news here, but by placing the Ole Miss debacle in an international context, or the Marshall Plan in a racial context; by juxtaposing the Bandung Conference and Brown v. Board of Education; by positioning a Selma, March 7, next to the March 8 arrival of marines at Danang, Borstelmann shifts the lens through which we view both the Cold War and the civil rights movement, revealing something new and provocative: the extent to which "domestic and foreign policies regarding people of color developed as two sides of the same coin" and "how those racial lenses helped shape U.S. relations with the outside world in the era of American dominance in the international sphere." No history could be more timely or more cogent. This densely detailed book, wide ranging in its sources, contains lessons that could play a vital role in reshaping American foreign and domestic policy. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Borstelmann (history, Cornell Univ.; Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle) analyzes the history of white supremacy in relation to the history of the Cold War, with particular emphasis on both African Americans and Africa. In a book that makes a good supplement to Mary Dudziak's Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy (LJ 11/15/00), he dissects the history of U.S. domestic race relations and foreign relations over the past half-century. Like Dudziak, he contends that continuing racial injustice in the United States was not in America's best interest during this era. The Communists competed with Americans for the friendship of the new nonwhite nations in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia during the Cold War, when America's commitment to freedom abroad conflicted with the absence of freedom for people of color at home. Interestingly, both Borstelmann and Dudziak approach the Civil Rights Movement as international history rather than just American history. This book provides new insights into the dynamics of American foreign policy and international affairs and will undoubtedly be a useful and welcome addition to the literature on U.S.

foreign policy and race relations. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. Edward G. McCormack, Univ. of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Lib., Long Beach

Thomas Borstelmann has done another excellent job (a word of Dutch South African origin, btw) in drawing the dots between race and American foreign policy in the cold war era. In focusing on this particular timeslice, he somewhat slights the connections already established: the US "colored uprisings" of 1919 were seen as manifestations of Bolshevism to be crushed in the name of preserving freedom, as well as white supremacy. Reactionary authors like T. Lothrop Stoddard penned immensely popular tracts like "The Rising Tide of Color," linking the rise of Communism with the anti-colonial revolt against "white world supremacy." The Bolsheviks, in their turn, were promoting this link by sponsoring the 1920 "Congress of the Peoples of the East" in Baku. Thus when the cold war hit the fan there was an already well-disposed audience on hand to receive it. Stoddard’s own embrace of Nazism underscored the bankruptcy of the old racial formulas for the postwar world.But as Borstelmann shows, those ideas did not pass easily. US elites’ racial attitudes were patronizing at best, at home and abroad (see Melvyn Leffler’s "A Preponderance of Power" for the social views of US policy-making elites.) All "colored folks" were like servants: to be addressed respectfully, but firmly put in their place when forgetting it. Eisenhower, Dulles, and Reagan were sincerely confused at the ingratitude of such colored folk to rest content with sweeping and polishing - after all, they were being allowed in the house and given good clothes. The equating of race equality with socialism and revolution was a hard nut for national elites to crack, and they could do so only by positing their righteousness against the backward tendencies of regional Southern leaders. "We’re not all like that," Kennedy and Johnson would insist to skeptical Afro-Asian observers, "so don’t go Commie on us."This obtuseness to the North-South cold war was played out in the US response to the Cuban Revolution, when Castro embraced the East-West linkage espoused by North American reactionaries; in turn leading Eastland and Stennis to justify racial crackdowns on the civil rights movement as home-grown Castroism. Kennedy and Johnson justified their initial interventions in Vietnam with the language of self-determination, vainly linking their guarded promotion of civil rights in the Mississippi Delta with bringing the American Way to the rice paddies of the Mekong. The fatuousness of this effort was revealed in the actual behavior of Pentagon strategists and troops on the ground, degenerating into ku-kluxing body counts of gooks and slopes. The 1960s liberal axis of civil rights and anti-Communism was fundamentally discredited by elite inability to rise above their own presumptions.Though the liberal view finally

prevailed with the passage of time, the cold war was as much a barrier to civil rights as a catalyst. Borstelmann rather slights that it took the final passing of Communism from the world stage to make the liberal hope a reality. South African leader F. W. DeKlerk was ready to concede free elections *only* because the Berlin Wall had fallen two months before (p. 265). As long as a Soviet counter-bloc existed, Reaganite and apartheid reactionaries could never be truly disarmed into "surrender."With this caveat - that racial liberalism could triumph in the West only due to the Eastern enemy's demise - Borstelmann's book will stand as a definitive recounting of that other cold war.

Thomas Borstelmann earned his B.A. from Stanford University in 1980, his M.A. from Duke in 1986 and his Ph.D. (also from Duke) in 1990. Having previously taught at Cornell, he is currently the Elwood N. and Katherine Thompson Professor of Modern World History and Chair of Graduate Studies at the University of Nebraska. Having published five books, his most recent work is The 1970ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality.Borstelmann argues that the war in America for racial equality was inextricably linked to the movement abroad for racial equality. Furthermore, the author notes that the lack of racial equality at home undermined American arguments abroad about liberty and justice for all. Finally, the author argues that the cold war had a positive effect on the civil rights movement at home. Having said that, Borstelmann, while arguing that some presidents were better than others, does argue that these men, at the end of the day, simply wanted to contain blacks and whites who were attempting to bring racial equality to the United States. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The unfolding of national self-determination across Asia and Africa, in turn, nourished the struggle for equality in America.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•While the book focuses on the cold-war presidents from Harry Truman-George H.W. Bush, Chapter one starts off with a look at race relations prior to the end of World War II. Chapter two begins with Borstelmann noting that the U.S. had won World War II with an army made up of men from every continent on earth, preaching He also spends a good portion of the chapter looking at the relationship between Jim Crow and Apartheid in South Africa, noting that the election of 1948 meant the window of opportunity for both to work together was about to end. The author ends the chapter noting that the fight against the NaziÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s meant Jim Crow was in trouble. Chapter three takes a hard look at the Eisenhower administration and itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s dealings with civil rights, noting that the year 1954-55 ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“marked a sea change in American and international race relations.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Chapter four revolves around the presidency of John F. Kennedy (short though it was), a time of intensifying change and conflict in the realm of race relations, noting the effects (and goals) of certain policies, not the least

of which was the Peace Corps. Chapter five deals with Lyndon Johnson, noting that while he did more for the cause of racial equality than any other president (before or since), Johnson was unable to deal effectively with ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the rise of black power, the onset of urban racial violence, and the growth of the white backlash.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Chapter six wraps up the narrative, going through the remaining presidencies (of the cold war) fairly quickly, but in a thorough manner.The author has crafted a narrative which is quite impressive, when one considers the long period of time he is covering, as well as the large amount of material he is synthesizing. His ability to weave into his argument both domestic and international affairs is second to none. By creating a work which is easily accessible, and yet well sourced, Borstelmann has given us a work which can be used in both undergraduate and graduate classes at the same time, something for which he should be lauded. There are plenty of works of history which are not very accessible, limiting their impact. This, however, is not one of them.

Interesting read

The Cold War and the Color Line is a must read for anyone who is interested in understanding democracy and the challenges of making it real. Another great read to accompany this is Eyes Off the Prize. Were high school students allowed to read this sort of text not only would they find history more interesting, but they'd likely become more engaged as citizens.

my daughter needed this book for an AP Summer Assignment and it was a great read & very informative .

Bias Makes Race Relations Worse World History: Ancient History, American History, and the History of Europe, Russia, China, India, World War 1 and 2, Vietnam War, Cold War, Medicine, Science and Technology Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line (American Crossroads) Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy (Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America) Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy (Politics and Society in Modern America) Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China 1949-64: Changing Alliances (Routledge Series: Cold War History) World War 2 HistoryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s 10 Most Incredible Women: World War II True Accounts Of Remarkable Women Heroes (WWII history, WW2, War books, world war 2 books, war history, World war 2 women) We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (Council on Foreign Relations Book) The Arena: Inside the Tailgating, Ticket-Scalping, Mascot-Racing, Dubiously Funded, and Possibly Haunted Monuments of American Sport Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States (American Encounters/Global Interactions) Arena Legacy: The Heritage of American Rodeo (The Western Legacies Series) Civil War: American Civil War in 50 Events: From the Very Beginning to the Fall of the Confederate States (War Books, Civil War History, Civil War Books) (History in 50 Events Series Book 13)