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Decolonization and the Cold War

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Abstract: This chapter examines decolonization during the Cold War. It suggests that decolonization can be considered both as a response to the globalization of European influence and as a process of globalization which paved the way for the dismantling of the North Atlantic centered international system. The chapter contends that decolonization during the Cold War was about the rethinking of the nature of the global order and the role of race and citizenship therein. It also argues that decolonization is the proof and constant reminder that the bipolar order pursued by the superpowers and their allies after the war was never a stable framework for the management of international relations.

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines decolonization during the Cold War. It suggests that decolonization can be considered both as a response to the globalization of European influence and as a process of globalization which paved the way for the dismantling of the North Atlantic-centered international system. The chapter contends that decolonization during the Cold War was about the rethinking of the nature of the global order and the role of race and citizenship therein. It also argues that decolonization is the proof and constant reminder that the bipolar order pursued by the superpowers and their allies after the war was never a stable framework for the management of international relations.

Keywords: decolonization, Cold War, globalization, international system, bipolar order, superpowers, international relations

The decolonization of the pre-war empires—American, Belgian, British, Dutch, French, Japanese, and Portuguese—has stimulated an extraordinary range of scholarship on the processes of imperial disengagement from the colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The scholarship has focused on: (a) the dynamics of nationalist struggle in the colonies; (b) the shifting dynamics of policy at the level of the imperial capitals; (c) the role of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in various cases of decolonization; and (d) the ways in which the competition between the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact and their allies influenced the processes and outcomes of the decolonization process. Some of the studies provide detailed explorations of the process of decolonization in individual instances, while others seek to synthesize the dynamics of decolonization in regional, comparative, and global contexts.¹

The myriad contexts that shaped the decolonization process, the complexity of issues that emerged as the process unfolded, and the proliferation of nationalist sentiment and struggles all contributed to the fascination with decolonization and its role in reshaping

the international order after 1945. Decolonization marked a phase in the globalization of politics that ended the intellectual and political legitimacy of colonial rule and eroded the hierarchies of race that underpinned the centuries-old colonial order. In effect, the globalization of European imperial projects after 1492 was reversed by the decolonization process in the second half of the 20th century.

Decolonization was thus both a response to the globalization of European influence and a process of globalization that paved the way for the dismantling of the North Atlantic-centered international system. It was driven simultaneously by imperatives of imperial deconstruction and the constitution/reconstruction of sovereignty in the former colonies. However, scholars also need to give greater thought to the ways in which decolonization was both reflective of the rise of nationalist sentiment and a process that was larger than the relationship between the imperial powers and their respective colonies. Future

scholarship will need to be attentive to the international and transnational dimensions of decolonization as a global process. There is much to be said about the ways in which the diplomatic initiatives of new nations such as India, Indonesia, and Egypt that emerged after 1945 helped to mobilize resources and develop strategies to accelerate and expand the opportunities for the decolonization process by way of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth Group of Nations linking the former British colonies, and other multilateral fora. Similarly, the role of the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and Cuba in providing military supplies, military advisors, and, on occasion, combat units to nationalist movements challenging the colonial powers helped to accelerate the decolonization process after 1945. Decolonization was part of the shifting terrain of international relations and a factor in the calculus of the global balance of power.

In addition, the decolonization process helped to create avenues of political mobilization within the imperial centers which opened opportunities for coalitions supportive of decolonization to engage and influence policy at home and in the wider international system. In Britain, the Labour Party became a major factor in pushing the process of decolonization, while the Communist and Socialist parties played similar roles in France. The rise of the American civil rights movement, which challenged the domestic racial regime, had a catalytic effect upon the national liberation struggles in various African countries. In turn, the rise of independent states in Africa forced American policymakers to recognize the paradox of its claim to "leadership of the Free World." As a consequence, the American racial regime became a casualty of the cold war and decolonization after 1945.² This interactive effect between the struggle for national liberation in colonies across the international system and the impetus for social and political change in other societies is, perhaps, best represented in the ways in which Gandhi's advocacy of nonviolence to challenge both South African race policies and British colonial rule in India helped to frame the civil rights struggle in the United States.³

The transnational activism that shaped the decolonization process had a "domino effect" that required new avenues of collaboration among the colonial powers for policies aimed at preventing, slowing, and/or defining the process of decolonization during the cold war.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was not simply about a mutual security pact that provided an American commitment to the defense of Western Europe—it was also a mechanism used to develop coordinated strategies for dealing with the decolonization process in the non-European world. In the 1950s, America helped France contain the communist insurgency in Vietnam as a way to maintain a French commitment to the containment of the Soviet Union in Europe. Similarly, America premised its support for the Portuguese colonies in Southern Africa on the need to maintain access to military bases in the Azores for American military operations within the NATO alliance. NATO represented an alliance of the European colonial powers with the United States that influenced the process of decolonization after 1945. As a consequence NATO, as one of the major alliance systems in the cold war, became a vehicle for the expansion of America's "informal empire" on the global stage and symbolized the Western Alliance's commitment to maintaining the politics of racial supremacy that had underpinned the pre-1945 global order.⁴

The successful Japanese military and ideological assault on the European and American imperial holdings in Asia during World War II seriously discredited the legitimacy of colonialism. The Japanese military successes in the Asia-Pacific region during the war exposed the vulnerabilities of Western colonial rule and created the political space for the rise of nationalism in Asia.⁵ As the Asian power that demonstrated its immunity to the spread of European imperial rule in the nineteenth century, Japan became an independent industrial and military power capable of defeating Russia in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. Japan also established its own colonies in Korea, Taiwan, and in mainland China. Japan in the early 20th century became a symbol of Asian modernization and industrialization that could withstand European imperial ambitions.

If Japan's success provided an alternative vision to Western imperial rule, it was the genocidal tragedies unleashed by Nazi Germany in Europe that shattered the idea of Western imperial rule as sustainable. The Nazi regime demonstrated through genocide the ultimate logic of Western civilization's politics and ideology of racial supremacy. All the colonial powers, including the Japanese and the United States, had less than stellar records in their treatment of their colonial subjects, and Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jewish populations of Europe followed the earlier pursuit of genocidal policies against the Herero population in its colony in South West Africa. This convergence of the domestic and colonial politics of race in the German experience provided powerful insight into the dangers of the ideology of racial supremacy. In the wake of World War II, racial supremacy was progressively relegated to the margins of serious political debate. The complicities of European colonial rule in the non-European world with the trajectory of Nazi Germany could not be avoided after 1945.⁶

In effect, the anti-colonial struggle and decolonization were catalysts in the creation of an alternative moral universe in which colonial rule was repudiated by its challengers as antithetical to the ideas of a global society based upon the principle of human equality. The course of decolonization was more than a process of political transformation of countries and peoples. It was also a symbol of moral regeneration leading to the birth and

reinvigoration of “nations.” Simultaneously, it represented a search for international redemption from the historical embrace of the “civilizing mission,” and its corollary, racial supremacy, on the part of the colonial powers.⁷ It was this dual thread of the decolonization process that helped to fuel and constrain the cold war in the post-1945 era.

The cold war was driven by the search for a security architecture in Europe that would prevent a return to the destabilizing nationalisms that had wracked Europe in the first half of the 20th century. The rise of non-European nationalism, however, limited the appeal of the major alliances to the emergent nationalist elites. Unless the alliances showed themselves disposed to support the challenge to colonial rule by nationalists and demonstrated a willingness to distance themselves from the commitment to imperial rule by the colonial powers, their claims to leadership within the international system were contested. Decolonization represented the search for a new international order in which nationalism and ideological pluralism—as opposed to bipolarity—were constituent elements. Decolonization was thus project, process, and outcome of the search for a replacement for the quest for North Atlantic hegemony that had shaped the (p. 472) imperialism that preceded 1945 and the bipolar vision of the leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact that emerged after 1945.

The intersection of the cold war and decolonization produced a sustained engagement global in its reach. In the aftermath of World War II, the decolonization of the Philippines, followed by the transfer of power from Britain in India, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Burma, and the Dutch decision to leave Indonesia, were early indications of the momentum building for decolonization. However, the US decision to extend its colonial possessions by acquiring the Pacific territories that had been held by Japan under the League of Nations’ Mandate, and France’s decision to reoccupy Indochina and reassert its colonial rule, sent an alternative message. When the Chinese Communist party won the civil war in 1949, establishing the People’s Republic of China (PRC), it became evident that the geopolitics of Asia had shifted against the colonial powers. It was also evident that the struggle over Asian independence would become a catalyst for the expansion of the cold war into Asia. For the United States, the “loss of China” illustrated the limits of its strategy of containment directed against the Soviet Union. The creation of the PRC extended communist influence into the heart of Asia, confronting America with a new challenge. Two of the world’s largest states which straddled much of the Eurasian landmass were now both communist powers.

The competition for influence in the changing Asian context triggered a military confrontation that superimposed the cold war struggle on a civil war on the Korean peninsula in 1950. The Korean War provided the venue for the United States and the PRC to deploy resources to engage in mutual containment on the Asian mainland as they clashed over the future of the former Japanese colony. The war was about both the struggle for control over the entire country between the pro-American and pro-communist nationalist factions and the confrontation between the United States and the communist powers in the strategic competition for influence in Asia.⁸ The first large-scale

military conflict of the post-1945 era symbolized the integration of the decolonization processes into the cold war conflict. The insurgencies in Malaya, the Philippines, and Vietnam that emerged during the late 1940s provided further evidence that the politics of decolonization and communism were intimately linked at the level of the internal politics of the Asian nationalist movements.⁹ Korea signaled the emerging struggle for influence among the Western alliance, the Soviet Union, and a resurgent China in the post-1945 politics of Asia.

Even as the Korean War settled into a protracted military stalemate, the Vietnamese insurgency escalated. French military weakness provoked a major crisis. American support for the French military effort to defeat the insurgency by the Vietnamese communist forces proved to be inadequate. The Eisenhower administration discussed the possibility of direct American intervention, but there was little enthusiasm for another misadventure on the Asian mainland following Korea. The possibility of the use of American nuclear weapons against the Vietnamese communist forces was considered briefly but failed to gain traction.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the issue indicated that the nuclear genie unleashed by the cold war in Europe was beginning to influence the calculus of the shifting Asian balance of power. The growing realization that the Western powers lacked (p. 473) the military capacity to win a decisive victory against Chinese military forces and Chinese-backed insurgents in countries directly bordering the PRC created the conditions for the negotiated settlements and geographical division in both the Korean War and the French war in Vietnam. The cold war had become a determinant of the contours of the Asian decolonization process and the boundaries of the post-colonial states in Korea and Vietnam. Just as important, the divisions among the United States, France, and Great Britain that emerged around the issue of the French military failures in Vietnam reflected the tensions that decolonization had provoked within the heart of the NATO alliance over strategy in both Europe and Asia.¹¹

This process involved both the former Japanese colonies and the European colonies occupied during the war by Japanese forces. The Japanese conquests of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaya, and Indonesia during World War II had shattered the legitimacy of American, French, British, and Dutch colonial rule in each colony. The Americans acknowledged independence for the Philippines in 1946. The unsuccessful Dutch campaign—with support from the British—to reassert colonial rule in Indonesia led to the Hague's acceptance of the independence of its colony in 1949.¹² The British faced an insurgency led by the Communist party in Malaya from 1948 to 1960, which albeit unsuccessful, paved the way for Malayan independence under a pro-Western government.¹³ For the French, however, imperial disengagement from Vietnam came only after a decisive military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.¹⁴ The surrender of Japan in 1945 had also led to the loss of its pre-war colonial possessions in Taiwan and Korea, which resulted in a confrontation between China and the United States over the future of these former colonies after the 1949 communist victory in the Chinese civil war. China was determined to reassert its sovereignty over Formosa/Taiwan while the United States sought to protect the nationalist regime on the island from the consequences of the political and military ineptitude of its leaders.¹⁵ Similarly, the Korean War laid the basis

for the escalation of Sino-American tensions over the unresolved status of the former Japanese colonies. Thus, the decolonization process in Asia had provoked the imposition of cold war tensions in the former colonies of both the European and Japanese empires.

In response to the expansion of the cold war into Asia, the newly independent countries of the region sponsored the Bandung Conference of 1955 that sought to create support for Asian nationalism and the space for a negotiated end to colonial rule. Signaling that a “Colored Curtain” had been drawn against the European alliances in the affairs of the non-European world, invitations were extended to the PRC and Japan, but the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Western colonial powers were excluded. The conference articulated a vision of neutrality that sought to decouple the struggle for decolonization in Asia and the non-European world from the cold war. It marked the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement as a factor in post-1945 international politics that would complicate the efforts of the major alliance systems to consolidate their influence outside of Europe. Just as important, the pursuit of neutralism under the umbrella of the NAM by the new states stimulated the growth of ideological pluralism that contested the bipolar order that defined the North Atlantic region over the course of the (p. 474) cold war. Yet, Bandung also represented an early indication that the bipolar system in Europe was less stable than it appeared. Yugoslavia's Josip Broz “Tito” proved to be an early harbinger of European disaffection with the bipolar order as he became a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement.¹⁶

The emergence of the NAM created the “Third World”—a term used to define countries that sought to avoid being trapped by the major alliance systems in Europe. This strategy of distancing themselves from the bipolar conflict provided these states with the room to manipulate that conflict for their own individual and collective aims. It also allowed them to bring to the international agenda their concerns about the legacies of colonial rule and “underdevelopment” that perpetuated their relative poverty within the international political economy. Thus, the NAM served member states as both a device for escaping the pressures of the cold war and a framework for coordination on trade and economic issues that could become articulated through the United Nations and other international organizations. For newly independent states which had limited economic and military resources, the NAM was a mechanism for enhancing their autonomy vis-à-vis the major military alliances, a diplomatic tool to advance the goals of national self-determination and economic development, and a forum for legitimizing the idea of ideological pluralism as a counter to the competing ideologies of communism and capitalism. The fact that the largest Asian states were represented at the Bandung Conference was a powerful statement of the ideological (and religious) pluralism that shaped the Third World challenge to the agendas of the major European alliances. As a consequence, by the mid-1950s the process of decolonization in Asia had begun to reshape the contours of the international system and to establish limits upon the capacity of the major powers to enforce ideological conformity.¹⁷

This challenge to ideological conformity represented by the NAM also had an enormous impact upon the relationships among the major powers. In the wake of the Soviet Union's successful launch of its Sputnik satellites, signaling the sophistication of its space exploration technology and its development of an intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM) launch system, the United States and the Soviet Union began to explore the possibilities of détente in an effort to negotiate mechanisms for stabilizing their relationship and limiting the possibility of nuclear war. The development of intercontinental nuclear missiles elevated the status and power of both the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1956 both had been motivated to use their considerable leverage to "limit" the autonomy of their alliance partners. The Hungarian challenge to Soviet orthodoxy in 1956 had resulted in a Soviet-led invasion and the installation of a loyal regime in Budapest. Simultaneously, Britain, France, and Israel had invaded Egypt in an effort to seize control over the Suez Canal, which had been nationalized by the Egyptian government led by Gamal Abdel Nasser.¹⁸ Soviet support for Nasser's nationalization policy, as well as its willingness to supply Egypt with arms and financing for the Aswan Dam project, had helped to trigger the actions by Britain, France, and Israel. The Eisenhower administration used its economic leverage and its influence at the United Nations to force the withdrawal of its partners from Egyptian territory and accept Nasser's nationalization policy.¹⁹

(p. 475) Each superpower demonstrated the limits of its willingness to accord autonomy to its alliance partners. For the Soviets, ideological orthodoxy was a primary concern in maintaining their control over the Warsaw Pact, and their determination to prevent the emergence of another Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe was manifest in their intervention in Hungary. For the United States, Eisenhower was signaling America's willingness to support non-European nationalism for reasons of grand strategy in limiting the expansion of Soviet influence in the non-European world even if it required humiliating its NATO partners. As the Dutch had discovered in Indonesia, the United States was prepared to concede political independence to nationalists in the non-European world if required to "contain" communism. In the Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising, actions by allies of the superpowers had escalated international tensions, and the superpowers pursued initiatives that signaled their control of their respective partners. With the emergence of ICBM systems on both sides of the iron curtain, the superpowers confronted the dilemma of preventing their allies from triggering crises that could precipitate escalation of conflicts because of treaty commitments. The cold war had crossed a critical threshold.

Several of America's partners in NATO were colonial powers, and this was a matter of concern as the growth of nationalism and decolonization in the non-European world gained momentum. In 1962, the increasing Cuban-American antipathy that followed upon the Cuban revolution in 1959 and the American-backed Bay of Pigs invasion aimed at toppling the revolutionary regime was a trigger for the major post-1945 superpower confrontation over non-European nationalism. While Cuba was no longer an American colony in constitutional terms, the American military base at Guantanamo and American investment in Cuba had compromised Cuban sovereignty since the end of the American occupation in 1903. The Soviet decision to deploy nuclear missiles, and the threat of a

major confrontation between the two nuclear powers over the issue, provided a stark glimpse into the possibilities which could result from unrestrained competition between the two major alliances over their influence in the non-European world.²⁰ The increasing globalization of the decolonization process—spreading from Asia to Africa and thence to the Caribbean—had undermined the ability of the superpowers to assert control over the international order.

As the Suez crisis likewise demonstrated, the United States and its European partners diverged on the issue of decolonization as a symptom of the relative decline of the influence of the European colonial powers in the international system. The process of decline also had a significant impact upon the domestic politics of the colonial powers. Great Britain's prime minister in 1956, Anthony Eden, resigned and departed from politics, opening the way for a new generation of political leaders. In 1960 his successor, Harold Macmillan, delivered his speech on “The Wind of Change” in South Africa, acknowledging that the age of European empire was on the wane.²¹ Later that year the UN General Assembly passed its Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples which stipulated:

Immediate steps shall be taken, in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories or all other territories which have not yet attained independence, to transfer all powers to (p. 476) the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire, without any distinction as to race, creed or colour, in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom.²²

A similar process of colonial disengagement occurred after France's failures in Vietnam, at Suez, and in Algeria. The collapse of French imperial influence led to a loss of legitimacy for the Fourth Republic and the return to power of Charles De Gaulle. De Gaulle conceded independence to Algeria and decided to negotiate independence for France's other African colonies.²³ More than a decade later, with the collapse of the fascist-era Estado Novo regime under Marcelo Caetano in Portugal, the successor regime in Lisbon divested the country of its colonies in Africa.²⁴ As the individual European empires in the non-European world disintegrated, the project aimed at deepening and widening the integration of the European states gained momentum. European integration provided a focus for the energies of European leaders who sought to have the continent remain a major player in international politics. Decolonization was a catalyst for increasing pluralism in the international order. As a consequence, the former imperial powers sought to forge bonds that would allow the continent to compete more effectively with the superpowers. They even became part of the search for ways to limit the capacity of the superpowers to define the limits of sovereignty.²⁵ A major step in this direction began under the Willy Brandt government in West Germany with the adoption of *Ostpolitik*, a policy intended to create alternative forms of constructive engagement across the iron curtain.²⁶ The search for sovereignty that underpinned the decolonization process in the non-European world opened the way for the search for a new European

order that would revive Europe after the tragedies of two world wars and the division of Europe into competing ideological and military blocs.

As Anthony Hopkins argues, the decolonization process also triggered a recalibration of the relationship between Britain and its colonies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, which had become self-governing dominions with considerable prerogatives in domestic and foreign policies. During the cold war, these former colonies moved to reshape the constitutional relationship with Britain to expand the scope of their sovereignty and to develop greater latitude in foreign policy.²⁷ This search for enhanced sovereignty among these former colonies revealed the centrality of nationalism in reshaping the post-1945 international order even as the superpowers had sought to secure greater control over the international order. Of considerable importance in this process was the way in which these former British colonies became increasingly tied to the global strategy of the United States and the Anglo-American alliance. While Canada was a member of NATO, the others were not—yet they emerged as strategic partners for both Great Britain and the United States in the Asia-Pacific, the South Atlantic, and Indian Ocean regions. This redefinition of the imperial connection among the former British colonies and the creation of a new alliance system among the “Anglo-Saxon” countries were indicative of subtle shifts in the international political order triggered by the cold war's decolonization process.

(p. 477) The expansion of American influence by way of American penetration of the European empires and, on occasion, for the displacement of the colonial powers' influence in specific colonies during and after the transfer of power paved the way for the United States to redefine the priorities of the various countries. One early example of this process was the creation of Israel in part of the Palestine Mandate. The Truman administration's recognition of Israeli independence in 1948 opened the way for American influence to expand in the country over succeeding decades; British influence became increasingly marginal.²⁸ America's role in South Vietnam followed a similar path until the unification of the country by the Vietnamese communist forces in 1975.²⁹ An analogous process occurred in the Belgian Congo, which became an American client state in Central Africa after its independence from Belgium amid a protracted violent struggle among the country's political factions.³⁰ This process of American displacement of British influence during the decolonization process was also evident in British Guiana during the country's struggle for independence.³¹ The expansion of American influence in parts of the non-European world resulted in the transformation of formal European colonial rule into informal American empire.³²

The case of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean suggests how the pursuit of American strategic goals also subverted and delayed the process of decolonization. In 1971 the American government leased Diego Garcia from the British government. As part of the arrangement, the British systematically removed and relocated the indigenous people of the islands in order to facilitate the American occupation. In return, the United Kingdom received American-subsidized Polaris submarine-launched nuclear missiles from the United States to support its goal of becoming a military nuclear power.³³ Diego Garcia

illustrates that the continuation of European colonial rule facilitated the expansion of American containment strategy in a global context. Some colonies were trapped by the imperatives of the cold war conflict, which provided the communist states with the opportunity to pillory the Western alliance for perpetuating colonial rule.³⁴

In response to the American integration of the European colonies and ex-colonies in the containment of Soviet and PRC influence in the non-European world, the two communist states embraced anti-colonialism as a strategy for limiting Western influence. Insurgents in Vietnam, Algeria, and Angola among others received military and diplomatic support from the communist powers. This support for the decolonization of the European empires, and the identification of the United States with the European colonial powers, illustrated the ways in which decolonization became an integral factor in the evolution of the cold war and the strategic calculus of the superpowers and their respective alliance partners. America's perception of itself as a superpower capable of guaranteeing the survival of an allied regime in South Vietnam was key to its pursuit of a futile war. In 1975 South Vietnam collapsed despite more than two decades of American military and financial support.

The longest war of decolonization during the cold war was the terrain of the shifting fortunes of the major powers and the recalibration of the relationship among them. The People's Republic of China's support for Vietnamese reunification did little to enhance its relationship with the Vietnamese Communist party. The two countries fought a brief (p. 478) war in 1979 and competed for influence in Laos and Cambodia,³⁵ The reunification of Vietnam likewise exacerbated the Sino-Soviet split as both Vietnam and the Soviet Union were clearly interested in containing China and its growing engagement with the United States.³⁶ The United States found itself increasingly isolated from its European allies as it escalated its involvement in Vietnam, and both China and the Soviet Union competed for influence over the Vietnamese Communist party, while the latter manipulated both in pursuit of its goal of national reunification. The outcome was the reorientation of priorities that resulted from the negotiations over ending the war. The Soviet Union and the United States moved toward détente, while the United States and China opened an era of strategic engagement that would result in increasing collaboration between them to contain the growth of Soviet-bloc influence.

If the Vietnam War proved to be a catalyst for the relaxation of cold war tensions by way of détente and the US-PRC rapprochement, it was the decolonization of the Portuguese empire in Africa that signaled that détente between the superpowers was ephemeral. As the Estado Novo regime under Marcel Caetano collapsed in Portugal, the nationalist movements in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique moved to take control of these territories. The disintegration of Portuguese rule triggered an effort by the Gerald Ford administration to encourage the South African government to intervene in Angola and Mozambique. Following South African military intervention in Angola, the Cuban government responded to the request by the MPLA faction of the nationalist movement for support. Cuban troops routed the South African military forces, and the Soviet Union

subsequently provided even greater support for the Cuban military forces in Angola as the MPLA sought to consolidate its authority against an insurgency supported by South Africa and the United States.³⁷

The Cuban military success, and the Soviet decision to support the Cuban effort, reflected the shifting strategic balance in the international system. The Soviets displayed an unprecedented, and decisive, long distance force-projection capability that was critical in accelerating the end of colonial rule in Southern Africa. The demise of Portuguese colonialism posed a direct threat to the survival of the apartheid regime in South Africa, its control over Namibia, and the white supremacist regime in Rhodesia. The United States and the United Kingdom had supported South Africa and Rhodesia in their pursuit of policies that systematically deprived the black majority populations of political rights and economic opportunities. In 1976 South Africa's military defeat was followed by the Soweto uprising, led primarily by students. These protests laid the basis for more than a decade of escalating confrontation that eventually produced a democratically elected multiracial government in 1994. In 1980 the new country of Zimbabwe emerged after the Rhodesian white minority regime was removed through an insurgency and growing international pressure.³⁸ By 1988 the country of Namibia had achieved its political independence as the domestic crisis within South Africa undermined the apartheid regime's legitimacy and regional influence.³⁹ In Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, the communist states provided support for the victorious nationalist factions against the white supremacist regimes. Decolonization continued to be a catalyst for increasing conflict between the superpowers even in an era of détente, and the decolonization process in Southern Africa further eroded the influence of NATO and its allies as the cold war was coming to an end. The end of apartheid in South Africa and Namibia was the ultimate acknowledgment that the politics of white supremacy that had underpinned the Euro-American colonial order had been discredited. Soviet-Cuban intervention in Southern Africa contributed to the revival of the cold war in the 1980s, and the end of the cold war in Europe resulted in the unraveling of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the repeal of apartheid both occurred in 1991. These historical convergences in the politics of Europe and Africa in the post-1945 era offer useful insights into the ways in which the politics of white supremacy and European colonial rule were at the heart of the cold war. For both the Eastern and Western blocs, decolonization became a surrogate battlefield in their struggle to expand or retain their influence. For the Western alliance, continued colonial rule was a critical component of a grand strategy to maintain the pre-eminence of the capitalist order at home and abroad. For the communist powers, the end of colonialism was an effective strategy for undermining the Western alliance and its historic control over the international political economy. Decolonization was integral to the cold war confrontation and the struggle for ideological supremacy in the wider world. (p. 479)

However, decolonization also raised salient questions about human equality and citizenship within the imperial states. As the legitimacy of white supremacy was increasingly questioned in the post-1945 era, the status of colonial subjects within the imperial framework forced open new avenues of debate and struggle. As colonial subjects

and members of “inferior races” within the colonial dispensation, the inequality of citizenship was taken for granted. However, wartime service in the imperial armies by colonial subjects, and the postwar challenge to notions of racial supremacy that defined the colonial order, raised the issue of whether colonial subjects would be content to remain second-class citizens within the imperial project. The rise of the nationalist movements in the colonies offered one route to first-class citizenship in a country free of colonial rule for many colonial subjects. However, for those interested in seeking citizenship within the imperial state, the problem of the color line and the politics of citizenship became increasingly contested terrain as the imperial centers struggled with the idea that “alien” populations would constitute an indelible part of their post-colonial ideas of national community.

Integrating the human “fruits of empire” within the post-colonial North Atlantic context has been a fundamental predicament of the post-1945 international order and a dimension of the decolonization process that requires exploration by scholars in greater depth and breadth across the post-imperial order in Europe, North America, and their surrogates in the wider world. Given the population losses in Europe due to war and its consequences in the first half of the 20th century, postwar reconstruction through the recruitment of labor from the colonies to work in the imperial center increasingly became a strategy for addressing the demographic deficit within Europe. In addition, the reliance upon military recruits from the colonies during World War II and to support the efforts to reassert/maintain colonial rule after 1945 posed the problem of how to deal with populations of colonial subjects who sought imperial citizenship as an alternative to returning to their places of origin.

(p. 480) For these societies, most of which were democracies in the cold war, integrating former colonial and other “alien” subjects as citizens was critical to their creation of an alternative to the politics of white supremacy. In this project of integrating “alien” populations, the United States had to address its own problem of second-class citizenship for African Americans and other minorities in the post-1945 period. As the United States sought to exercise leadership in the cold war, it found its credibility challenged by its politics of racial inequality and segregation. In 1944 Gunnar Myrdal, with support from the Carnegie Corporation, published *The American Dilemma*, advocating an end to its racial regime. It was the first major domestic effort to articulate an alternative to the politics of white supremacy in the post-1945 international order.⁴⁰ As the cold war intensified, and as the NATO alliance and its championship of democracy as a system of government superior to communism was refurbished, the gap between the rhetoric of democracy and the reality of an exclusionary politics that targeted “alien” populations became a problem that could not be wished away. Further, the Nazi regime provided a powerful incentive to find a way out of the morass of ideologies and policies based upon the absurdity of “racial supremacy” and its corollary, color-coded citizenship.

In the case of the United States, this search for a vision of citizenship that transcended race eventually converged around both its domestic history of color-coded citizenship and its own policies as a colonial power. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the

Supreme Court in 1954 invalidated the constitutional sanction of segregated education and citizenship. The decision was a major catalyst for the escalating civil rights struggle in the United States. Further, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders pushed the process of racial reform that culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These acts removed the legal impediments to the exercise of citizenship by the historically disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups in the United States. As Mary Dudziak argues, the politics of racial reform in the United States was driven by the sensitivity of American policymakers to the contradictions of their espousal of democracy as superior to communism while continuing segregation.⁴¹ In the post-1945 era, similar problems were faced by other Western democracies, including Britain, France, and the Netherlands, which had become a destination for immigrants from the former colonies, many of them people of color. These new arrivals were responding to political changes in the colonies and the growing demand for labor in Europe as a result of the postwar reconstruction process.⁴²

However, a little noticed aspect of American domestic political reform during the cold war was the transformation of Alaska and Hawaii from colonial possessions into non-contiguous states in the American union. American colonial rule had become, like domestic racial segregation, a liability in the cold war conflict. By undertaking its own process of colonial reform, the United States was burnishing its credentials as leader of the "Free World." With the accession of Hawaii and Alaska to statehood, the US provided an example of its commitment to ending colonial rule by including its former colonial subjects in the American body politic as citizens. The importance of this step was underlined by the fact that Hawaii had become a state despite the non-white, multi-ethnic identity of the majority of its inhabitants even before the mid-1960s.⁴³

(p. 481) A similar strategy was adopted by the Netherlands with regard to its colonies in the Caribbean, by France in relation to its own Caribbean and Pacific colonies, and Britain for some of its colonies in the Caribbean, which were recognized as lacking the economic viability to obtain independence. In the United States similar approaches were adapted to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Pacific territories, where the inhabitants of these territories had representative government based on universal suffrage and citizenship but were hostage to limited economic opportunities. These former colonies were transformed into units where their inhabitants were citizens but with limited economic options and dependent upon the largesse of the imperial country. As a consequence, colonial reform did not lead to decolonization in legal terms but rather mitigated the perpetuation of a colonial politics of racial disadvantage and color-coded citizenship. Just as important, these arrangements made it possible for the inhabitants of the dependent territories to migrate to the imperial countries and exercise citizenship rights there—effectively creating a shift in the demographic composition of these societies and leading them to grapple, like the United States, with the implications of multicultural democracy during, and after, the cold war. The American dilemma during the cold war became part of a larger problem of equal citizenship within the North

Atlantic world and in other areas of the former colonial world. Any area settled by Europeans who had displaced indigenous populations during the colonial period, including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa, had to confront the issue of equal citizenship rights for the disadvantaged populations.

As the American civil rights struggle unfolded in 1954 after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the politics of race and equal citizenship within the democracies became intimately linked to the issue of decolonization. In a very evocative insight into the ways in which these processes were linked, Martin Luther King, Jr. observed in April 1957—after his return from Ghana's independence celebrations—that:

... Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice ... That night when I saw that old flag coming down and the new flag coming up, I saw something else. That wasn't just an ephemeral, evanescent event appearing on the stage of history, but it was an event with eternal meaning, for it symbolizes something. That thing symbolized to me that an old order is passing away and a new order is coming into being. An old order of colonialism, of segregation, of discrimination is passing away now, and a new order of justice and freedom and goodwill is being born.⁴⁴

King's observation was remarkably prescient. He understood the linkages that were driving the processes of change in both the United States and in the wider international system and recognized that his generation of leadership would play a critical role in that transition. Decolonization in Africa became a catalyst for empowering King as a civil rights leader who saw African decolonization as a stepping stone for the advancement of the African American struggle for full citizenship in the United States. African independence, like Gandhi's advocacy of nonviolence in the Indian nationalist struggle, offered King valuable insights about the development of a strategy for promoting change within the United States.

(p. 482) In the final analysis, decolonization during the cold war was about more than either the "end of empire" or the "transfer of power." It was also about the rethinking of the nature of the global order and the role of race and citizenship therein. In very fundamental terms, it was a process that was transformative for both the colonies and the imperial powers. It also represented the emergence of a global process that was both international—as in the relationships among states, and transnational—as in the relationships among individuals and groups at the level of sub-national strategies of engagement. In addition, decolonization marked a shift in global consciousness from notions of racial hierarchy as a fundament of human society to the search for human community by transcending race. The study of decolonization as a global process featuring a range of actors within multiple arenas provides a multifaceted prism through which the post-1945 history of international relations can be reconceptualized. Decolonization constituted a constant reminder that the bipolar order pursued after 1945

by the superpowers and their alliance partners was never a stable framework for the management of international relations.

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Notes:

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(2.) Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

(3.) Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter with Gandhi* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992).

- (4.) Cary Fraser, "Understanding American Policy towards the Decolonization of European Empires, 1945-1964," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* (March 1992): 105-25; and Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22 (1994): 462-511.
- (5.) Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Christopher Thorne, *The Issue of War: States, Societies, and the Far Eastern Conflict of 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
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(41.) Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

(42.) Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Peo Hansen, and Stephen Castles, eds., *Migration, Citizenship, and the European Welfare State: A European Dilemma* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24–8; and Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

(43.) Rostow argues that Lyndon Johnson's advocacy of civil rights was influenced by the Hawaiian statehood campaign in the 1950s. See W.W. Rostow, “The Case for the Vietnam War,” *Parameters* 26 (Winter 1996–7): 39–50.

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