

***Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, by Mary L. Dudziak (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).**

One of the most powerful, dramatic, and visible struggles for human rights in the modern world appeared with the civil rights movement and its fight for racial equality within the United States. Confronting a brutal legacy of slavery and lynching, an oppressive context of racism and segregation, and the violence of mob attacks and policy brutality, those who engaged in this struggle did so in a country that claimed not only to believe in certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and equal opportunity for all, but also claimed to be the leader of the free world. Civil rights activists' efforts were watched carefully by the nation and by the world, and now are described and analyzed for us all with masterful skill by Mary Dudziak in *Cold War Civil Rights*.

This book focuses on the impact of international relations upon the domestic civil rights movement within the United States from the Truman to Johnson administrations, paying particular attention to the US-USSR Cold War rivalry. Dudziak asserts that the Soviet Union effectively used every attack upon, or discrimination against, African-Americans as a ready source of critical propaganda to the whole of US values. Dudziak argues that this Cold War criticism sometimes inhibited progress when activists were accused of playing into the hands of enemies but in the end proved to be so effective in embarrassing the United States and presenting obstacles to its foreign policy in the contest to win the hearts and minds of those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, that it deserved major credit for helping to facilitate the

struggle for racial equality at home and the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In doing so, Dudziak provides a model of scholarship. Her work represents detailed archival research at its best, demonstrating the value of those painstaking and often lonely efforts in exploring the secrets tucked away within boxes of declassified memos and reports in the National Archives, Library of Congress, presidential libraries, and private papers. The book is also beautifully written with clarity, force, and verve, a personal passion for the subject, a willingness to confront controversial issues, sophisticated interpretation, and a judicious use of quotations that allows the participants to speak directly, rather than having words put into their mouths. Of particular importance, Dudziak marvelously frames her discussion of the US civil rights movement in the international and Cold War context in such a way that raises, discusses, and illuminates larger issues that help us to understand how the struggle for human rights proceeds.

Progress in the evolution of human rights, for example, often has occurred in the wake of marriages of convenience between politics and principle. That is, governments may support aspects of human rights not necessary because of belief or merit in the argument of the worth and dignity of each person, but rather because political factors pressure them to do so. For those who doubt this, Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights* provides ample evidence for reflection. She demonstrates in great detail how the administrations of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson often became reluctant supporters of desegregating the armed forces, sending federal troops to enforce Supreme Court decisions dealing with desegregation, or speaking on

behalf of new civil rights legislation due to pressures at home such as securing particular voting blocs, gaining support for other legislative agendas, or creating the image of a decisive leader, and especially in attempting to respond to political pressure from abroad. Criticism from foreign countries sharply accused the United States of not living up to its promises or its democratic principles, she argues, and thus came to be not only embarrassing to the nation and its image, but presented serious international pressure and political liabilities particularly in the context of the Cold War contest when the nation desperately wanted allies and friends.

Similarly, Dudziak's book reminds us of the often close and powerful interaction between international and domestic efforts to advance the cause of human rights. Evolving international norms—and the determination to see them realized in practice—historically have played extremely important roles in changing national policies and legislation that helped to end the slave trade and slavery, provided care for the wounded in war and created humanitarian law, promoted the entire process of decolonization, protected women and children, restricted torture, and mobilized efforts against apartheid, among many other issues. *Cold War Civil Rights* marvelously demonstrates that in this larger, global context with its often passionate determination to end all forms of racial discrimination, local events quickly became international events. Deep interest throughout much of the world, the human rights agenda of the United Nations, the efforts of adversaries to magnify problems, and the technological means of radio and television broad-

casts, all possessed the capacity to immediately transform any local lynching, racial attack, school closure, fire bombing, arrest, or civil rights march into an international issue, thereby bringing pressure to bear. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk reported to Congress, racism existed elsewhere around the globe,

But the United States is widely regarded as the home of democracy and the leader of the struggle for freedom, for human rights, for human dignity. We are expected to be the model . . . . So our failure to live up to our proclaimed ideal are noted—and magnified and distorted.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting international outrage and pressure, he reported, was ruining American foreign policy. For this reason, Rusk concluded, the nation should take action that would end racial discrimination and thereby remove the source of the criticism.

The question of motives and the degree to which outside pressure is brought to bear, in turn, raises the difficult issue in human rights of the relationship between form and substance. If action is taken, if court decisions are made, if legislation is enacted, or if treaties are signed, are governments truly committed to advancing human rights or are they more interested in projecting an image, either to themselves or others? Dudziak tackles this issue head on. Indeed, the subtitle of her book is *Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Her conclusions are likely to generate considerable discussion. Drawing heavily upon archival material from the US Information Agency, she describes how the United States worked diligently to manage or "spin" the way the story of US race relations was told overseas in

1. MARY L. DUDZIAK, *COLD WAR CIVIL RIGHTS: RACE AND THE IMAGE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY* 185 (2000).

order to control the terms of the narrative and thereby project a particular and desired image. Part of the strategy involved attempts to silence critics such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois by confiscating their passports, thereby denying them access to an international audience. Another part of the strategy involved the development of propaganda including pamphlets like *The Negro in American Life* or *The Louisville Story*, crafted reports for Voice of America broadcasts and newsreels, films like *The March* or *Nine from Little Rock* with the "right" interpretation, inspired editorials in foreign papers, "talking points" for embassy personnel, or "approved" speakers sent on tours overseas that all would present an account of progress, of the triumph of good over evil, and of US moral superiority over communism.

Finally, Dudziak reminds us first and foremost that the struggle for human rights is not about abstractions, but rather for and by real people with lives, faces, and specific names. These include the victims of *Cold War Civil Rights* such as African-American Jimmy Wilson, a handyman sentenced to die in Alabama for stealing two dollars; George Dorsey, an Army veteran who survived the war against fascism in Europe only to die in a hail of bullets from white supremacists on a roadside in Georgia; Melba Pattillo, a young school girl who was denied entry into Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas; and Malic Sow, the Ambassador from Chad who was refused service at a diner on Route 40 from New York to Washington, D.C. because of the color of his skin. There also are individuals who offer resistance to human rights, and in this book we read about those who vociferously defended segregation and claimed that the civil rights movement was a communist plot: Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge who denounced the US Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v.*

*Board of Education* in which the Court ruled that "separate but equal" education violated the US Constitution; Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus who refused to integrate Little Rock schools; Alabama Governor George Wallace who stood at the door of the University of Alabama to block African-Americans from attending class; and police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor who used fire hoses and police dogs to attack demonstrators in Birmingham. Specific and often heroic individuals also served as the advocates of human rights in the movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin and Joseph Baker who spoke out against injustice while abroad, Walter Bergman who suffered permanent brain damage after a mob attack while participating as a Freedom Rider, and civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan after the march on Selma. Dudziak also explores the impact of individuals who served in government positions of power and authority, from Dean Acheson to Dean Rusk serving as secretaries of state and from Harry Truman to Lyndon Johnson serving as president, all caught in the tension-filled vortex of forces from domestic politics, foreign outrage and pressure, and the values of the United States and the emerging norms of international human rights.

Although the Cold War is over, race remains a critical feature of global politics. As recent events remind us so well, much appears to be tied closely with the destiny of democracy in the United States and the way that the country is seen by a diverse and divided world. In understanding this process, the issues at stake, the roles that individuals play, and the implications for human rights, *Cold War Civil Rights* will provide enormous assistance.

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