



David L. Hostetter. *Movement Matters: American Antiapartheid Activism and the Rise of Multicultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 214 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-97811-8.



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A “Postmodern” Interpretation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

The anti-apartheid movement was the first successful transnational social movement in the era of globalization. In its transnational scope and eventual success, it can be compared to the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century. What is unique about the anti-apartheid movement is the extent of support it received from individuals, governments, and organizations on all continents. Few social movements garner anywhere near the international support mobilized against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa.

The movement consisted of the internal campaign to destabilize the racist apartheid regime in South Africa and the external campaign for political, economic, and cultural sanctions. At the heart of the movement was the struggle of black Africans to end white supremacy in South Africa. This internal movement was a catalyst for actions at the international level and the critical link that gave coherence to the movement as a whole. The external campaign can be divided into: regional efforts to provide military bases, material and diplomatic support for liberation movements; and the diaspora movement, which focused on seeking international sanctions

against the regime and providing direct aid to the liberation movements.

Scholars of the anti-apartheid movement are at the forefront of a new and exciting transnational approach to U.S. historiography.[1] This transnational approach examines movements that attempt to transform U.S. relations with other nations and support global campaigns for social change. These foreign policy initiatives are tied to diasporas in the United States that maintain transnational ties with their countries of origin. Thus the anti-apartheid movement is examined in the context of the long history of Pan African solidarity movements in the United States.

Movement Matters: American Antiapartheid Activism and the Rise of Multicultural Politics by David L. Hostetter, does not address this growing body of work on the U.S. anti-apartheid movement. Instead, Hostetter chooses to place the movement in the context of “American civil religion” combined with extended digressions into post-modernism and multiculturalism. The methodology is eclectic; the first two chapters are institutional histories that use some primary documents, while the rest of the

chapters on popular culture, civil religion, and multiculturalism include film and movie reviews, a long analysis of a television debate between Jesse Jackson and Jerry Falwell, and stream-of-consciousness commentary on multiculturalism. According to Hostetter:

“The effort to end U.S. support for apartheid spurred institutional divestment and sanctions legislation because it constructed and communicated foreign policy dissent in the vocabulary of American civil religion. In its outward advocacy as well as its internal debates, the American antiapartheid movement helped to promote multiculturalism as a public norm in academia, business, government and the entertainment industry. As a renewed form of civil religion, multicultural politics recognize the broadest representation of cultural traditions in the national political discussion” (p. 3).

This “civil religion” is portrayed as a triumphant march of U.S. nationalism from the American Revolution to the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement. Hostetter argues that the anti-apartheid movement is the last act in this self-congratulatory narrative of American nationalism before the Valhalla of “multiculturalism.” He writes that the anti-apartheid movement is the “final united act by the revived civil rights coalition” (p. 127). This appropriation of the successes of a movement that spent forty years in the wilderness of U.S. government and majority white public support for apartheid, smacks of a disingenuous and dangerous attempt at revisionism. The type of revisionism that made the misuse of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech the anthem of the right wing’s assault on civil rights and liberties in the 1990s. This lack of grounding in anti-apartheid historiography leads to bizarre claims that remain unsubstantiated. This shaky background in the history of the movement is compounded by the author’s hostility toward Pan Africanism and *ad hominem* attacks on individual Pan Africanists such as W. E. B. Du Bois.

Hostetter emphasizes the centrality of this “vocabulary of American civil religion” embedded in “movies, television and popular music” (pp. 10, 127, and see pp. 143, 95-122). He argues that the anti-apartheid movement had its greatest impact when it spoke in the language of U.S. popular culture that was familiar to Americans (p. 127). This focus on popular culture as the linchpin in the anti-apartheid movement is a good sound bite but fails to analyze the underlying dynamics that led to the transformation of U.S. foreign policy. African Americans did not need news media, movies, and popular music to “comprehend apartheid” (p. 120); they lived it in

their daily lives. The success of the anti-apartheid movement in changing U.S. foreign policy in the mid-1980s was based on the united front of African American legislators and activists in organizations such as the Congressional Black Caucus, TransAfrica and the Free South Africa Movement. U.S. television news coverage of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and the world was mostly negative during the apartheid years.

In *Race for Sanctions: African Americans against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (2002), I show how the mainstream media supported Reagan’s “constructive engagement” policies in editorials and favorable coverage. For decades, Nelson Mandela was referred to as a “terrorist” and the ANC as a “terrorist” or “communist” group. Mandela’s release from prison and subsequent tour of the United States got some positive coverage, but soon after he returned to South Africa, the U.S. media immediately latched onto the South African government-orchestrated “black on black violence” to tarnish Mandela and the ANC.[2] In what should have been a crucial chapter on the 1980s, Hostetter covers the sanctions campaign in Congress in only four paragraphs, while movies such as *Lost in the Stars* (1974), *Do They Know It’s Christmas?* (1984), *Cry the Beloved Country* (1952, 1995), and *A Dry White Season* (1989) get dozens of pages.

Hostetter argues that the opponents of apartheid came up with a “*modus vivendi* negotiated by black and white activists during the course of the antiapartheid movement whereby they divided leadership and labor within the American antiapartheid movement” (p. 4). Thus the segregation of anti-apartheid organizations was “negotiated” among the anti-apartheid activists. This negotiated segregation is held up as epitomizing postmodern multiculturalism. There is no mention in the book of the struggles that led to this segregation in the late 1960s. The secession of black scholars from the African Studies Association and the formation of the African Heritage Studies Association were not simply based on binary tension set up by Hostetter between integration and Pan Africanism. This binarism harks back to discussions in the 1960s about integration versus nationalism and constitutes a serious misreading of Pan Africanism and black political thought in general.

This binary thinking is not helpful because it blinds the researcher to more complex interactions and alternative perspectives that do not rely upon the integration versus separation paradigm. Hostetter’s analysis epitomizes the problem of binary thinking. He essentializes Pan Africanism, reducing a complex political phi-