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**Nico Slate.** *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. 344 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05967-2.

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## **Green on Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India***

Since Jacqueline Dowd Hall's pivotal 2005 essay calling for a new paradigm for understanding the civil rights movement, there has been a plethora of scholarship emphasizing the "along civil rights movement." [1] Nico Slate's *Colored Cosmopolitanism* is a fine addition to the recent historiographical direction that forces reconsideration of the connections between the freedom struggles in India and the United States and the webs of connection among activists, conceptualizations of their individual and shared struggle, and the re-imaginings of freedom. Through the notion of colored cosmopolitanism, these colored cosmopolitans—or the racial vanguards and most often the elites of the respective groups—questioned the meaning of color and freedom, bridging cultural and historical differences and achieving, although fleeting at times, transnational solidarities. But, Slate also shows that the diversity of the Indian and American freedom struggles produced contradictions which challenged and reinforced definitions of race, nation, class, cast, and gender. Together, African Americans and South Asians "contributed to the dismantling of the British Raj and of Jim Crow segregation as well as the decline of a racialized global order" (p. 4). By understanding the ebbs and flows of their activism, Slate argues, these activists "fought for an expansive emancipation" that redeemed "words like democracy, *swaraj*, and freedom from a hypocrisy" and "rejected not only narrow notions of territorial independence but any conception of freedom that involved somebody else's slavery" (p. 5).

In the first chapter, Slate illuminates how notions of race, caste, and nation sharply divided Indians and African Americans but also set the stage for the emergence of colored cosmopolitans in the late nineteenth century. Culture understandings of the other were the main obstacles to racial solidarity. Indians' perceptions and lack of deep historical knowledge about American slavery and Reconstruction led to misguided interpretations but also allowed for more fruitful means to critique caste prejudices. Similarly, Booker T. Washington employed African American-Indian comparison to highlight as well as critique the African American experience. Despite sharing "racialized national spaces," differing notions of racial hierarchies, and internal divisions, a cadre of forward-thinking Indians and African Americans laid the crucial foundation for the "inclusive conceptions of belonging and resistance" essential to colored cosmopolitanism (pp. 7-8). They could imagine a world in which the old divisions would no longer matter and found creative solutions through combining their efforts in a shared struggle for freedom and citizenship.

In chapter 2, Slate highlights World War I as a major epoch in terms of racial diplomacy and new alliances for a more encompassing definition of freedom. The war pushed colored cosmopolitanism into a new realm of possibility and hope; however, obstacles remained. African Americans embraced Gandhi as inspiration for anticolonial activities but not as a model for shared protest. Even

the efforts to unite all dark-skinned peoples through organizations like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Indian National Congress (INC) tended to overstate harmony without significantly reducing oppression in India or in the United States. But, Indians used the notion of caste to justify efforts in critiquing Indian society while simultaneously showing its merits in comparison to American racism. This blindness of a racial diplomacy led to the privileging of transnational comparison in order to defend the nation (p. 37). Yet not all lost hope in the promise of colored cosmopolitanism's transformative power. Individuals, like W. E. B. Du Bois and Lala Lajpat Rai, could promote the importance of transnational solidarities. Ultimately, WWI ended with unfilled hopes for African Americans and Indians alike. As Slate concludes, though, the limitations of racial diplomacy should not overshadow the power and hope of racial alliances.

During the interwar period, Slate argues in chapter 3, the notion of the "colored world" significantly transformed the definition of racial borders and helped to overcome previous obstacles for a transnational unity of darker races against imperialism and racism. Several intellectuals, travelers, and socialists promoted colored cosmopolitanism by framing the commonalities of "colored" activism across the world. This inclusive humanist approach provided the necessary solidarity originally sought by the pioneer generation of Indian and African American activists. Rather than focusing on prominent intellectuals, Slate uses the underappreciated Cedric Dover in order to show how calls for solidarity appealed to African American and Indian socialists and expanded among artists and intellectuals who traveled widely and reported in the black press. While expansive in terms of appeal, the cadre of colored cosmopolitans remained small and could not overcome internal divisions resulting from American immigration policy centered on whiteness and racial superiority.

In chapter 4, Slate addresses the pivotal figure of Gandhi by showing how analogies of race and caste both promoted and restricted his understanding of *swaraj*. Interactions and correspondence with African Americans forced Gandhi to evolve and revise his understanding of caste and ultimately, reject it as a problem in Indian society and anti-Hinduism. African American religious leaders and their followers viewed Gandhi as similar to themselves for blending religion and politics to bring about meaningful change for the oppressed. While Gandhi and these African Americans might not have fully understood the respective religions, their mutual respect for

the faiths led to an interracial solidarity and understanding of the other. Indeed, George Washington Carver's promotion of rural self-sufficiency and religion as tools of empowerment as well as African American travelers to India led to Gandhi's evolution and revision of *swaraj*. Slate astutely concludes that these interactions as well as the legacy and writings of Booker T. Washington played a significant role in strengthening Gandhi's commitment to transnational colored solidarity. It would take the second World War to finally realize his vision.

In chapter 5, Slate demonstrates that hope for a global double victory influenced Indian leaders' views of the United States, promoted racial solidarity, and showed the opportunities as well as limits of colored solidarity. Still, activists formed relationships based on sympathy, colored cosmopolitanism, and a shared history of oppression. Although Walter White of the NAACP and Gandhi disagreed over how to achieve the global double victory, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, K. A. Abbas, and other grassroots activists employed color as a marker of shared oppression to generate solidarity. The American and Indian Left, black newspapers, and Indian journalists functioned in promoting the new emphasis of colored cosmopolitanism. Although African American military service in India highlighted the limits of the global double victory, the power of hope successfully promoted an inclusive freedom among African Americans and Indians and laid the foundation for India's support of postwar African American freedom struggles.

In chapter 6, Slate explores how advocates of colored cosmopolitanism wanted to make the newly independent India a model for the colored world, but the Afro-India alliance remained tenuous at best. Cold War politics gave potential to colored cosmopolitans' push for equality in the United States. Cedric Dover attempted to fulfill Nehru's promise of India as a "bulwark for the rising colored world" through his use of history and culture. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya played a similar role with her 1946 *America Land of Superlatives*. Through these examples, Slate shows how the immediate postwar possibilities were quickly dashed by Cold War politics and fears by U.S. and Indian officials over such imaginings. The new Cold War world not only demanded new strategies and tactics but required Indians to shift their concern from the discrimination endured by Indians living in the United States to the racism experienced by African Americans. Initially hamstrung by these new challenges, Indian ambassadors muted their opposition to racism while still promoting colored cosmopolitanism and support of the larger colored world. They often drew inspiration

from Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and other activists who refused to remain silent. Ultimately, balancing national loyalties and colored cosmopolitanism strained even the best intentions among its strongest advocates.

In chapter 7, Slate delves into the legacy of Gandhi during the civil rights movement and challenges the simple dichotomy between integration and black nationalism. Slate makes the bold assertion that by claiming rights as American citizens, African American protest finally made the African American-Indian solidarity significant. The promotion of black integration in the United States as well as in the entire colored world led to the creation of a new middle ground and new adherents in Pauli Murray and Martin Luther King Jr. These individuals, especially King, built on the rich legacy of colored cosmopolitans and Gandhi's image in the United States. While the power of Gandhian Satyagraha brought meaningful change, the rise of the Black Power movement in the United States rendered it less relevant by the 1970s. Even as the legacy of Gandhi declined in popularity among African Americans, King and his interpretation of Gandhi as well as the tenets of Black Power found

new meaning in India as part of the shared struggle for human rights.

Throughout this wonderful work, Slate highlights the importance of not underestimating the power of hope and the potential of colored cosmopolitanism. Both continued to inspire an interconnected struggle and solidarity in freedom movements across the globe. Translation issues, missed opportunities, the tendency to project one's own suffering onto others, and contingency contributed to both setbacks and achievements over time, but continuity of purpose remained. Colored cosmopolitans created new channels of connection despite the fragmentation. These powerful comparisons allowed for generations of Indians and African Americans to pursue notions of freedom and to bring about significant change with courage and stubborn persistence (p. 254).

#### Note

[1]. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

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