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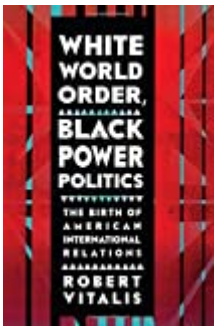

Robert Vitalis. *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations.* The United States in the World Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. 288 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-5397-7.

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White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations is a book that matters. Its author, Robert Vitalis, is a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania. He candidly explores race, imperialism, and the establishment of International Relations as an academic discipline. Composed of nine compact chapters, the study scours primary sources from twelve US-based archives and journals, conference proceedings, institutional reports, textbooks, policy papers, syllabi, and personal diaries produced by International Relations scholars.

In the early twentieth century, Vitalis argues, âinternational relations meant race relations.â The inaugural scholars of this âmongrel American social scienceâ grappled with the central question of empireâthe problem of ârace subjectionâ (p. 1). The âancestorsâ of International Relations transformed racist nineteenth-century ideas of race development, civilization, and colonization into a science of imperialism aimed at extending white supremacy throughout the twentieth century (p. 8). They sought to develop more efficient ways to administrate colonialism while simultaneously curtailing a seemingly imminent ârace warâ that threatened to end global white hegemony (p. 21). These scholars willingly lent their expertise and academic platforms to a project of American imperialism that stretched across the Atlantic (Cuba and Puerto Rico), Indian, and Pacific (Guam, the Philippines, and Hawaii) oceans.

In the post-World War II era, the Cold War further justified the discipline. Sponsored by a labyrinth of prestigious and lesser-known public and private foundations, think tanks, government agencies, and wealthy donors, its group of white academics was generously compensated financially, academically, and professionally for providing an intellectual buttress for imperialism. To varying degrees, this included influential scholars of International Relations, such as John William Burgess, Harold Isaacs, and Edward Mead Earle.

But the âwhite world orderâ is only half of the tale told by the text. The âblack power politicsâ in its title refers to the activities of what Vitalis calls the âHoward Schoolâââa core of black professors associated with Howard University who challenged collectively the imperialist notions held by International Relations. The text asserts that the Howard School has been virtually silenced within the fieldâs scholarship. This is striking, considering that the school referred to such prominent and influential scholars as W. E. B. DuBois, Alaine Locke, Ralphe Bunche, Rayford Logan, E.

Franklin Frazier, Merze Tate, and Eric Williams. Yet the Howard School fits (un)comfortably within the contours of African American history and African diaspora studies, particularly within the subarea of black internationalism.

The main argument of the book is that the Howard School was the central hub of dissent in International Relations as it sought to explicate the ârelationship of racism to imperialismâ in support of colonized black and brown peoples across the world (p. 11). Vitalis convincingly asserts that the Howard School was a part of a broader political and theoretical project of liberation that emerged in response to white supremacy. Howard, then, became the most viable space for developing alternative theories to the fieldâs ties to imperialism.

Organized chronologically, part 1 details how Du Bois and the Howard School argued that capitalism, colonialism, and the transatlantic slave trade created the contemporary hierarchy of races. This position opposed the claims of International Relations that race development was biologically determined. Part 2 critically positions Locke as in internationalist, who through publishing, networking, and his connections to the Africana intellectual and nationalist worlds, played a central role in âglobalizingâ the Howard School. White scholars, such as Harvard professor Leslie Buell, were âgateway keepersâ between Howard and an emerging industry of International Relations organizations and funders, such as the Institute of Pacific Relations, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and the Foreign Policy Association. Part 3 shows how leaders of International Relations sought to âquarantine the Howard Schoolâ and its âdangerous ideasâ regarding domestic and global black freedom (p. 21).

These dangerous ideas connected Howard and Washington DCâs Shaw neighborhood to New York and Harlem, which, in the 1920s, âexemplified the threat to global white supremacyâ represented by liberation struggles across the Africana world (p. 9). Members of the Harlem Renaissance, the Howard School, and other black political movements drew the ire of the fieldâs white power brokers. These power brokers consistently refused to invite black scholarsâeven the lionized Buncheâto participate in policy forming international institutions. A central issue was the Howard Schoolâs open critique of European imperialism and its defense of colonized peoples. For example, members of the school collectively raised concern that South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts worded the trusteeship policy of Phelps-Stokes funded Committee on Africa, the War and Peace Aims. Logan argued that the real principles of the policy were âwhite supremacy, segregation and continued effective disenfranchisement of the native peoplesâ (p. 111). Tateâs âWhite Manâs Blundersâ argued that the âwhite man was a century behind the colored man in his thinking on civilization,â and that imperialism had deprived him of vision (p. 112).

Vitalis argues that histories of International Relations usually were (and continue to be) about âwhite political scientists teaching in white departments and publishing in white journalsâ (p. 13). He claims that serious attention on the Howard School has only emanated from a handful of the fieldâs African American and Afro Caribbean scholars. Vitalis admits that he was once a part of this historical amnesia, informing his readers that he encountered âDu Bois for the first time at the age of 40â as he neared full professorship (p. x). However, he has written an important book that makes a number of key contributions, even as its path to doing so reveals a plethora of uncomfortable truths.

The text asserts that, in the aftermath of World War II, the Howard School was at least as informed and more knowledgeable about colonialism and Africana liberation movements as any other academic body across the world. In 1969, Howard became the first university to offer a PhD in African studies.[1] Yet, part 4 demonstrates how, in a Cold War era of significantly increased foundation support of international studies, think tanks, programs, and centers, the Howard School was looked at with structural disdain by the white academy. For example, in 1958 the African Studies Association confidentially claimed that Howard was an âatavism destined to disappear,â and that its professors, such as Frazier, lacked âstrong driveâ and were not concerned with developing such new fields as African history (p. 136). Blacks had âno prior claimsâ to African studies, and the fieldâs work could be done at other schools outside of âNegro Universitiesâ (p. 137). This was even as Logan âtraded in his pan-African identityâ to become the schoolâs âmodel Cold War anticommunist liberalâ (p. 158).

Howard did not receive the significant kinds of funding given to other schools. The text reveals that this was not an oversight but a matter of racist policy that even informed the Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie Foundations. Funders claimed that âNegroâ schools and scholars would be biased toward people of colorâstruggling *against* white colonialists. For example, in 1954, Fordâs first grants for university programs in African stud-

ies included 235,000 dollars to Northwestern University, 200,000 dollars to Boston University, and a âpittanceâ of 29,000 dollars to Howard (p. 135). It was none other than Melville Herskovits, who was at Northwestern at the time, who advised Ford on this decision. *White World Order, Black Power Politics* revealingly notes that Herskovits âroutinely denigratedâ black scholars and the Howard School (p. 115). This is a striking part of the text, particularly given that Herskovitsâs first position was at Howard. One can only ponder about the number of black scholars who had their careers hindered or sabotaged by Herskovits, greatly contrasting his remembered image as the âwhite patronâ of Africana studies.

Perhaps the most critical intervention made by *White World Order, Black Power Politics* is in its discussion of Merz Tate, the first black woman to receive a doctorate degree in International Relations. The text positions Tate as a stand in for generations of black women who were professional scholars, as the work is largely composed of the voices of black and white men. Over the span of her career, Tate produced a pioneering and phenomenal body of work centered on white imperialism in the South Pacific. Given the intense pressures that she faced as a black womanâracism, sexism, patriarchy, envy, physical violence, and personal/professional clashes with Logan (who served as chair of Howardâs Department of History)âit is remarkable that she was able to produce so much.

It is not clear what the text means by âblack power politics.â At no point does the narrative offer a definition of the phraseââblack powerâ is not even listed in the index. Scholars of the black power movement might take issue with the borrowing of the phrase without even a cursory explanation of the relationship between black power and the Howard School, particularly given that the text ends circa 1960.

What are the origins of the Howard School? How does it fit within the late Cedric Robinsonâs conception of the black radical tradition, black internationalism, and the Africana activist scholar tradition? *White World Order, Black Power Politics* unpacks the âancestorsâ of International Relations (institutions, personalities, ideologies, and publications) but makes less reference to the historic streams of black internationalism, domestic protest, and pan-Africanism that helped birth the Howard School. While the global list is long, DC-based icons would include Alexander Crummell, Ana Julia Cooper, George Washington Williams, and Mary Church Terrell.

Was the Howard School the only voice of black internationalism? Most certainly not. *White World Order, Black Power Politics* highlights the connections between the school and the broader black internationalist world by affording cameo appearances to a number of other Africana internationalists and activists. These include Alphaeus Hunton, William Leo Hansberry, George Padmore, St. Clair Drake, Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, and Paul and Eslanda Robeson. Little mention is made of Africana women. Yet the unique perspectives and experiences of such black women as Amy Jacques Garvey, Cooper, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Suzanne CÃ©saire, and Dorothy Hunton remain critical to our understanding of black internationalism. This includes Martiniqueâs Jane Nardal and her 1928 essay âInternationalisme Noirâ (black internationalism). The networks of these women often circle through Washington DC and the Howard School.

The history of Howardâs Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC) is essential to understanding black internationalism at the university and the Howard School. Between 1930 and 1973, librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley developed Moorland-Spingarn into one of the worldâs leading black archives. Through her efforts, the center helped and benefited from the universityâs production of scholarship on the Africana world. In discussing the fate of the Howard School, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* only passingly mentions MSRC while chastising the condition of the Tate papers as an unprocessed âjumble of papers in a mass of boxes stored off siteâ (p. 166). It is not an academic secret that MSRC faces a number of financial challenges. However, the author could have placed the structural and fiscal issues of MSRC within the context of the aforementioned denial of funds given to Howard that the text reveals.

Who are the direct descendants of the Howard School? A short answer to this open-ended question lies in the formation of African diaspora studies, which largely occurred via Howard. One of the critical founders of the field, Joseph E. Harris, was a former student of Tate. His pioneering work on the African diaspora in the Middle East is reminiscent of Tateâs work on the black Pacific. After a major 1965 conference in Tanzania, Harris and others, such as Ruth Simms Hamilton, convened the First African Diaspora Studies Institute at Howard in 1979. Despite not receiving the research funding given to diaspora studies programs across the nation, Howard continues to be a leading producer of pioneering black PhDs in the field. Indeed, does a Howard School still exist? Is there still racist and structural bias toward historically black schools and their faculty in terms of

foundation funding, academic prestige, and disdain of the Africana activist-scholar tradition? Are we not in an era when white scholars reap professional benefits by associating with the Howard School and Africana studies but still ritually denigrate black scholars and institutions? While beyond its scope, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* prods scholars to think about these kinds of challenging questions in honest ways, and for this reason, it is highly recommended.

Note

[1]. Grace Virtue, âLeadership for the African Diaspora,â *Howard Magazine* (Winter 2011): 20.

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