

Gerald Horne. 2019. *White Supremacy Confronted: U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Communism versus the Liberation of Southern Africa, from Rhodes to Mandela*. New York, NY: International Publishers. 883 pages. Paperback. USD 28.99. ISBN 9780717807635.

Gerald Horne is one of the most original thinkers in the United States. By trade he is both lawyer and historian, holding a juris doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, and a history doctorate from Columbia University in New York. Over the course of his long career, he has written about the politics, economics, and cultural ramifications of race and the history of racial discrimination and liberation. But he has also lived these things. As a former practicing attorney and activist, Horne has worked against racism, apartheid, and other forms of oppression from his home base in the United States (Horne holds the John J. and Rebecca Moores chair in history at the University of Houston), but within an ever-widening personal and intellectual network which now spans virtually the entire globe, encompassing Latin America, Africa, East Asia, Europe, and beyond. Horne is the author of dozens of books and more than one hundred academic papers, ranging in scope from jazz to slavery, boxing to revolution, Ben Davis (1903-1964) to W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963).

What makes Horne an original thinker is not the range of his output (although I know of no one who can match it). Horne is original because he is unideological. To be sure, Horne has his commitments, and he wears them on his sleeve in all the work by him that I have read. Horne is anti-racist, sympathetic to communism (of the Soviet, and not the Chinese, variety), and dedicated to the dismantling of white supremacy. But each of Horne's books and essays is a new departure for him. One can sense his thrill at discovering new things as he researches and writes his thousands upon thousands of pages of text. Horne apparently has few preconceived notions and looks with fresh eyes on each new scholarly vista he surveys. For that reason, Horne is an original thinker. He relies on a wide array of archival and other documentary (and oral) sources in writing his histories and analyses, and not on ideological filler to bridge gaps or shoehorn facts into a preset narrative.

Horne's great insight, the one which has most defined his career, is what has come to be known as "the Horne thesis," namely that:

white supremacy and anticommunism were the major forces shaping post-World War II life and politics in the United States, with significant implications for African-descended and colonized people globally. Locked in a Manichean struggle with the Soviet Union for global supremacy, U.S. cold warriors, [Horne] argues, realized that legal or Jim Crow segregation was the 'Achilles heel' for Washington's propaganda campaign to win the 'hearts and minds' of people throughout the emerging 'Third World'. As a result, U.S.

government officials brutally suppressed [...] African American leftists who pursued an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, proletarian internationalist agenda. Simultaneously, the U.S. ruling class acquiesced to civil rights reforms for African Americans and other people of color out of fear that legal racial segregation would invalidate the U.S. claim to being the leader of the 'democratic free world' (McDuffie 2011: 236)

This, in a nutshell, is the thrust of much of Gerald Horne's work. This insight, into the kind of quantum entanglement of American empire and American racism, and of American anti-racism and anti-racisms overseas, has caused Horne to cast his vision globally to make sense of the past and present.

In one of his most recent books, *White Supremacy Confronted*, Horne tracks down the welter of personal, political, and thematic connections among North Americans and Africans, specifically over the fate of southern Africa and the anti-colonial struggles there. South African political and moral leader Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) was elected president of South Africa in 1994, and for a few years prior to that apartheid had been systematically negotiated away by the last apartheid-era president, F.W. de Klerk (1936-2021), and his counterparts in the African National Congress (ANC) and other anti-apartheid bodies. But as Horne shows, this is just one small part of the story. Missing from this snapshot of modern history are two key elements: the deeper story of conquest and racial oppression running worldwide for centuries before de Klerk or Mandela were born, and the pulsing currents of communism and other internationalist, anti-imperialist movements and ideologies animating much of the resistance to racial oppression in southern Africa.

To put it another way, it is no secret that Nelson Mandela was a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) (: 215, 220), but few historians have allowed this fact to reshape their view of southern African and global anti-racist history overall. Horne's approach to writing the history of South Africa, by contrast, is to take this affiliation seriously, foregrounding the history of communist actors in the history of modern Africa. In doing this, Horne is able to rethink the longer history of Africa, the "settler colonialism" (Horne 2018) leading up to the official declaration of apartheid in 1948 and the tortuous relations among various groups of Africans, and later among Africans and their collaborators around the world.

This is a lot of history and a lot of theoretical reconfiguring. The reason that other historians have shied away from the task of writing communism back into the history of anti-racism may be that it requires a lot of work. *White Supremacy Confronted* is proof of this. The volume is 834 pages of text, but even so the reading is dense, crowded with facts, names, movements, and dates. Over twenty-two chapters, Horne takes in not only the history of southern Africa but also of the wider Atlantic world, and more.

Even so, *White Supremacy Confronted* tells just part of the story of racial liberation in southern Africa. While in some of his other work Horne reaches back to the Atlantic slave trade to help narrate the saga of race and empire, in *White Supremacy Confronted* Horne glances at this dark period in the first few pages (: 39-41, for example) before picking up the trail at the end of the nineteenth century, as Americans began arriving in southern Africa for mining or missionary work (: 41-42, 46, 48), and, later, took sides in the First (1880-1881) and Second (1899-1902) Boer Wars (: 48-52). The special affinity between white Africa and white America is one key element in Horne's history. "It was as if one umbilical cord tied together the U.S. and Southern Africa," Horne writes (: 53). The Boers' fight for independence against the British was redolent of the American colonists' fight against the same some hundred and twenty years before, so many white Americans felt an affinity with the Boers' plight. Many Black Americans, meanwhile, had much more complicated views. "Ethiopianism," a religious- and race-informed movement tinged with pan-Africanism (: 56), was just one part of an ongoing rediscovery and renegotiation of identity among various parts of the African diaspora which white powers had scattered via the slave trade and other forms of oppression for centuries before we arrive at the time of the subject of Horne's book.

This endless competition between power and resistance Horne frames in many places in a classically Marxian way, seeing capitalism as the adjunct to, or rather the paradigm for, oppressive profiteering around the world. This is less programmatic than it sounds. History bears Horne out turn after turn, and so in many ways Horne appears to be correct in his diagnosis that capitalism was central to the darker dramas of the African past. The braided thread of capital and race runs through *White Supremacy Confronted*. For example, while mining and other industries in southern Africa were often clearly predatory, relying on racial subjugation, colonial power structures, and gross violations of labor and other rights to extract the maximum yield in resources and cash from the southern part of the continent, a similar pattern—perhaps the same pattern—of unequal relationships and unjust enrichment continued through the Cold War. During and before World War II, Horne shows, many whites in South Africa were not only openly racist—that much is clear—but avowedly pro-Nazi (see generally Chapter Four, "Pro-Nazi Sabotage in Pretoria, 1940-1945" : 137-168). This continued after the war, with South Africa offering refuge to unapologetic fascists from Europe (: 189-191). Even in this Nazi haven, however, American businessmen were not averse to making money. Major American corporations overlooked the violence and oppression in southern Africa, both the history and the ongoing reality of these, turning a blind eye to human suffering in order to increase profits.

It is in this milieu that Horne makes another major intervention. The Cold War, he argues, produced a peculiar tension between the American sphere and the Soviet sphere, with race as one of

the major sites of geo-political friction. This Cold War tension is the flywheel for much of Horne's narrative, driving, for example, Chapter Five, "Washington Midwives Apartheid's Birth, 1945-1952" (: 169-207) and Chapter Six, "Where are the Militant Non-Communist Whites? 1952-1956" (: 209-241). Americans in general, and white Americans in particular, Horne argues, were shy about confronting apartheid, and this appears to have been, in part at least, a product of the contradictions which Horne sees inherent in the burgeoning American empire. On the one hand, the Americans felt that they had to win the Cold War propaganda battle with the Soviet Union, positioning the American way of life as the way of freedom for all around the world. On the other hand, America was sandbagged at home by Jim Crow and addled as well by the need to supplant the British Empire with its own array of global power. In the middle of all this stood the African diaspora. "U.S. Negroes and Africans were a kind of odd couple that had managed to forge close ties," Horne writes. "But the postwar environment provided a stiff challenge to this union, as Washington moved contradictorily to ease Jim Crow while seeking to elbow aside London and co-opt liberation movements for the ends of anticommunism" (: 195). Just as Americans often do not know what to make of Mandela's communism, Americans often do not know what to make of Cold War racism. Both things upset pat narratives, and Horne has done a great service in exposing where such narratives break down in the face of much more complex historical processes.

As Horne spends much of *Confronting White Supremacy* relating (and much of his other books as well), it was the communists on the ground in Africa who were really fighting for freedom. But not only in Africa. In Chapter Fourteen, for example, "Copernican Changes in Portugal, 1973-1974," Horne writes that, "it is difficult to overstate the importance of the overthrow of fascism in Portugal in 1974 as a factor in laying the groundwork for democratic elections in South Africa two decades later" (: 493). The turmoil in Portugal was, of course, connected with the unrest in her African colonies of Angola and Mozambique. Here, too, race and politics were fused. And communism keeps bubbling to the surface of the historical narrative despite Cold War myths of American freedom-fighting, with Cuba, for example, sending troops and weapons to the anti-colonial rebels in Angola.

Cuba was a major irritant to the anticommunist forces in Washington. But it was not the only consideration which the Americans were nursing. The collapse of the Holden Roberto-led *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) and allied forces to the Cuba-backed *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) in 1976 (: 544) caused headaches in Washington, and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger expressed a desire to intervene, ostensibly to counter Cuban and other communist influence in Africa. Horne, though, thinks that the status of the Republic of Rhodesia, which was experiencing its own crisis of white rule over Black Africans, was what was really on Kissinger's

mind (: 545). And yet, Washington was not to get its way in the crumbling Portuguese colony. “Angola was a game-changer, a transformational development,” Horne writes (: 547). It was not only Cubans in Africa, but also Chinese communists, as well as Soviets and those from other communist states, who were on the ascendant. Militarily, and culturally too. And as Angola and Mozambique were roiled by anti-colonial agitation, the United States was pushed into narrower and narrower straits over its partner, Pretoria. South Africa was isolated even more by the fall of Angola and the eventual fall of the white-ruled Republic of Rhodesia. (See here also Chapter Fifteen, “Will Cuban Troops Invade Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, 1975-1976?” : 527-562). Communists, Horne spells out on page after page, were the real players in the liberation struggle in Africa.

Turning to the United States, Horne reserves some of his harshest criticism for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP), which Horne accuses of being more concerned with maintaining a united anticommunist front at home than with confronting racism head-on at home and abroad (: 33, 497). The NAACP, Horne recalls, adopted the “Sullivan Principles,” a “corporate code of conduct” for American firms operating in South Africa which involved a pledge not to engage in discriminatory practices on shop floors or in boardrooms (: 638, 762-763). The Sullivan Principles were named for Black American pastor Leon Sullivan (1922-2001), whom Horne sees as having “sidelin[ed] the radical left [in America] by dint of minor concessions to desegregation,” thus exemplifying the more passive approach to apartheid adopted by many American Blacks (: 635). The NAACP, by following a similarly concessionist line as Sullivan, Horne avows, helped South Africa put off the confrontation with white supremacy which communists and other radicals in the United States, Africa, and elsewhere were advancing. If only Americans had taken the path laid out by early Cold War-era progressives like Paul Robeson (1898-1976), Horne implies, things might have gone differently in southern Africa (: 172-174).

But even the NAACP eventually had to get behind the swelling tide of anti-apartheid-ism in the United States. Much of this anti-apartheid work was carried forward in America by activists such as Malcolm X (1925-1965) (: 424), but also by athletes and entertainers such as Sammy Davis, Jr. (1925-1990) (: 728-729), tennis ace Arthur Ashe (1943-1993) (: 659, but see also 627 on Ashe’s earlier apparent indifference to South African Blacks), Tony Bennett, Bill Cosby, actor Ossie Davis (1917-2004) (: 659) and many others. When the Reverend Desmond Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, it signaled a turning of the tide, a point of no return in American consciousness (: 710, see also generally Chapter Eighteen, “The Tide Turns, 1980-1984”). The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, passed over President Ronald Reagan’s (1911-2004) veto in 1986 (: 707), signaled a further shift in American policy, and probably apartheid’s doom. Without the work of Americans of all races to call attention to apartheid

(Horne himself was among the activists in America working to bring down the South African regime), the tide would surely have turned much more slowly. The NAACP was well behind the curve, then, but the NAACP was hardly representative of all Black opinion on the apartheid question, and was indeed increasingly out of touch with prevailing views on the subject.

As the tide against apartheid swelled in the United States, and as anti-colonial wars continued in Africa, it was arguably the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991—and thus the removal of Washington’s pretense for backing the virulently racist, but anti-communist, white regime in Pretoria—which sounded the real death knell for apartheid. Mandela had already been freed from prison in early 1990 (: 775), and after that it seemed to be just a matter of time before the racist South African state turned over a new historical page. Fittingly, perhaps, Horne writes that “by December 1991 President de Klerk himself was in Moscow, one of the last heads of state to visit the imploding Soviet Union” (: 778). In surprising ways, communism and apartheid, race and politics, class and color, paralleled.

Horne thus reframes the major questions of African and trans-Atlantic history to foreground race, yes, but race under the rubrics of Marxian class analysis and anti-capitalist historiography. In doing so, Horne is clearly on the side of the SACP, and against one of their main rivals in Africa, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) (: 518). This is an important corrective for non-specialists in African history who may be tempted to see Africa in terms of racial affinity, without the complicating factors of politics and class laid overtop. Horne notes, for example, that Leopold Senghor (1906-2001), then the leader of Senegal, backed *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) leader and Angolan revolutionary Jonas Savimbi (1934-2002) in the latter’s fight against communist forces in Angola. This is retrograde for Horne, for whom liberation from colonialism is conceptually married to liberation from racial oppression.

For Senghor and Savimbi, though, Horne points out that the fight in Africa was about race, an affinity that Senghor once articulated to a State Department official in terms of “Negritude” (: 751). Horne does not accept Senghor’s interpretation, following one of Horne’s early research subjects and major influences, W.E.B. Du Bois, in insisting that in order to understand Africa in the modern world, we must think much bigger. Race is important, but it does not fully explain, Horne argues, the African story. For that, we must look to class and politics, which help us get much closer to the bottom of motivations and successes. White supremacy was confronted, Horne says. But not by racial sentiment, but rather by movements led and inspired by the radical, global left, in particular communism in its various iterations.

Confronting White Supremacy tells the story of this complex history in a commanding way. It is a towering achievement, but it is not without its flaws. The most challenging aspect of this book is its *in*

media res quality. Horne's paragraphs are hardwood and often require several reads to bore through, so tightly packed are they with information. Sometimes the information is sparsely contextualized.

For example, Horne mentions the 1984 Mozambique-South Africa Nkomati Accord on a good half-dozen occasions (: 650, 678, 702, 740, 756, 783, 816, and 827). The first time it appears, it is simply described as "ill-considered" (: 650). The second time, it is described as "the disastrous Nkomati Accord which led to the ouster of ANC cadre and, ultimately, the death of [Mozambican] President Samora Machel [(1933-1986)]" (: 678). The third time, we get a rough sketch of the Accord in the words of American politician and Republican adviser Patrick J. Buchanan: "'the South Africans have done a deal with Machel—he kicks out the ANC; they cut off the anti-Machel guerrillas,'" which Horne avers to be "a bargain Pretoria was not bound to uphold" (: 702). Next, we learn that the Nkomati Accord was an agreement "whereby Maputo [the capital of Mozambique] thought it had a deal with Pretoria in which the expulsion of ANC militants would lead to a cessation of the war against FRELIMO [Front for the Liberation of Mozambique]" (: 740). Similar tidbits dribble out over the subsequent mentions, but it would have been helpful to have a gloss of the Accord at the first mention, as very few readers are likely to know the details.

Also, while the front cover of the book features a fairly good map of southern Africa, additional maps in the volume would have been greatly appreciated. Photographs, too, of some of the key figures in the book would have been good. There is a lot going on in Horne's narrative, a lot of names and places to remember. Even the most attentive reader may struggle to keep up.

But these flaws are perhaps inevitable side effects of Horne's archival mastery. It is difficult to think of another historian who ranges so broadly and freely across sources. Opening a page at random (: 439), I find Horne citing the Mary Louise Hooper Papers, the *African Communist* newspaper, and the George Houser Papers. Opening to another page (: 491), we have the William Rusher Papers, the Herb Shore Collection, an oral history source found at Columbia College in Chicago, a "Memorandum of Conversation with T.T. Letlako" from February 22, 1969, and a 2017 essay from *Cold War History*. Horne has used the presidential libraries of Reagan, Lyndon B. Johnson, and several other chief executives, the archives of the African National Congress, a wealth of oral histories, archives from the United States Department of State and many other American government agencies, country files from the AFL-CIO, and more newspapers, books, essays, and other materials from Africa and North America (including *Granma* in Cuba) than I can reasonably count. Horne's archival work is richer than virtually any other scholar in his field. As such, however, there is a steep learning curve when reading a Gerald Horne book. This one is especially demanding. Readers should expect to keep the Internet handy, because they will surely be looking a lot of things up (I certainly did).

But the Internet alone is hardly enough. Readers of *White Supremacy Confronted* should resolve to read other Gerald Horne books in concert with the volume under review. Horne is prolific and his thinking is mosaic and deeply multi-dimensional. Even across more than eight hundred pages in this volume, he is still very far from exhausting what he has to say. To get an understanding of Horne's history, it is imperative that multiple books of his be carefully read through and understood. Horne is not just an historian, he is also an original thinker. In *Confronting White Supremacy* we find new angles to "the Horne thesis," perhaps his biggest big idea. But this is just an introduction. There is still so much about the history of race and communism in Africa and the trans-Atlantic that we have yet to discover.

References

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