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Introduction by James Meriwether

**James P. Hubbard. *The United States and the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa, 1941-1968.***  
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Introduction by James Meriwether, California State University, Channel Islands

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For a number of years now there has been an expanding literature on a variety of levels -- political or cultural, state-to-state or person-to-person -- by those examining interactions between the United States and Africa during the twentieth century. Yet notwithstanding important work initiated by scholars such as William Roger Louis, the literature has been growing without much direct attention to the U.S. role in the decolonization of the British African empire.<sup>1</sup> In that context, James Hubbard's *The United States and the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa, 1941-1968* appears as a welcome addition; as the reviewers make clear, however, while Hubbard adds some particular information, there are limitations to his monograph and there remains much more work to be done.

Hubbard works very much in the "old school" diplomatic history framework, commenting himself that his principle source materials are government cables, memoranda, and so forth. In Hubbard's view, because "the State Department in Washington did not face significant outside pressures" there exists little need to go beyond the records of official Washington in order to understand the American role in the decolonization of Africa. Correspondingly, on the British side, officials in London are very much a part of the story, and as well Hubbard includes administrators of individual colonies in the mix, although several of the reviewers find how Hubbard handles this to be problematic.

The result is a book that mines official records to address the question "Did the United States cause, or help to cause, the end of Britain's African empire?" (1). As it is hard to imagine anyone in this day arguing that the United States singlehandedly ended Britain's rule over vast areas of Africa, the question Hubbard really addresses is the extent of the role the United States played in the decolonization process. His answer: "U.S. policies defined the atmosphere in which the British government sought to manage its colonies and, as a result, played a significant role in the demise of Britain's African empire." (364)

Given Hubbard's approach, however, there are profound limits to the extent to which he has been able to convince his readers about his argument. As Thomas Noer points out, Hubbard's approach leaves out a rather daunting list of actors and influences in the decolonization process, including race, the civil rights movement, Congress, public opinion, and NGOs. Perhaps this contributes to Cary Fraser's concern that Hubbard is too sympathetic to U.S. policymakers, who spoke in anticolonial terms yet pursued policies largely supportive of colonial powers. Further, as Elizabeth Schmidt highlights, despite these chapters being written by the hand of a trained Africanist who rightly points out that Africans themselves played the pivotal role in decolonization, there is a frustrating lack of African perspectives and agency in these pages. These criticisms and more raise concerns

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<sup>1</sup> William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1987), as well as the books edited with Prosser Gifford, *The Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization, 1940-1960* (Yale University Press, 1982) and *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960-1980* (Yale University Press, 1988).

about the extent to which this book answers the question Hubbard poses. In his response, Hubbard rejects any such criticisms, dismissing the critiques and even the concept of “decolonization” (“an unhelpful concept produced in search of easy generalities”) and the use of “Cold War terminology” (“a relic of Truman era propaganda and not an analytical tool”).

The differences between Hubbard and the reviewers are not simply a case of the reviewers asking an author to write a different book, or to go to one more set of archives, or even to abandon traditional diplomatic approaches -- although to some extent it is all of those things. The reviewers are asking Hubbard to reach more broadly so that the actions of policymakers and the influences on officials have a broader context and scaffolding. To take an example from Hubbard’s response to the reviewers: is it really the case that on most African issues it was not until U.S. officials encountered Chinese representatives in Zanzibar in the early 1960s that the U.S. rivalry with Russia and China would “figure explicitly in United States thinking and actions”? Fraser and John Kent both find frustrating the lack of engagement with elements of the story such as the Cold War, both in terms of content and analysis. Overall, it is evident that had the author more broadly engaged sources outside the official records and cables of United States and British officials -- whether or not they led to similar interpretations and conclusions -- the reviewers might have been more confident in his conclusions.

Thus, while the reviewers appreciate Hubbard’s hard work in the official archives, and his bringing to light material that deserves to be examined more fully, at the same time the reviewers agree that there are inherent limitations in this monograph. Kent, indeed, makes the case that a clear set of well-analyzed themes is still needed. As such, the remarks of the distinguished panel of reviewers in this roundtable are well worth reading. They have given broad critiques not simply about Hubbard’s work, but read collectively they also have provided a sense of the field, approaches to it, and the work still to be done.

### Participants:

**James P. Hubbard** received a Ph.D. in African History from the University of Wisconsin and is the author of *Education Under Colonial Rule: A History of Katsina College* (UPA 2000). He was a Federal civil servant for 30 years, employed in, among other agencies, the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury and the Office of the Secretary of Commerce. In 2004, he retired as a financial manager from the United States Geological Survey.

**James Meriwether** received his Ph.D. from UCLA and is professor of history at California State University Channel Islands. His work on intersections between the United States and Africa has twice led to his being a Fulbright lecturer, first at the University of Zimbabwe and then at the University of Nairobi. He has published “‘Worth a Lot of Negro Votes’: Black Voters, Africa, and the 1960 Presidential Campaign” in the *Journal of American History* (December 2008), and is the author of *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002). His current research project is on the United States and the decolonization of Africa.

**Cary Fraser** teaches American and African American political history, the history of the African Diaspora, and the history of American Foreign Policy at the Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of *Ambivalent Anti-Colonialism: The United States and the Genesis of West Indian Independence, 1940-64*, and his essays have been published in Canada, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He is currently working on a book on politics in American domestic and foreign policy in the mid-twentieth century.

**John Kent** is a Reader in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has edited one three part volume of the British Documents on the End of Empire Project and written monographs on Anglo-French Relations in colonial West Africa and on United States policy in the Congo in the fifties and sixties. He has also written on the British Empire and the Origins of the Cold War and with John Young a History of International Relations after 1945.

**Thomas J. Noer** is Valor Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Carthage College. He is the author of *Briton, Boer, and Yankee, Cold War and Black Liberation*, and *Soapy: A Biography of G. Mennen Williams*.

**Elizabeth Schmidt** is a professor of African history at Loyola University Maryland. She received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her books include: *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958* (2007); *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (2005); *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (1992); and *Decoding Corporate Camouflage: U.S. Business Support for Apartheid* (1980). Her current book project, *African Battlegrounds: Foreign Intervention in Africa from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, will be published by Cambridge University Press.

James Hubbard has provided a synoptic analysis of the evolution of Anglo-American relations as the two imperial allies and competitors grappled with the challenge of the rise of non-European nationalism during the Second World War and subsequent decades. The focus of the study is on their separate and joint responses to the rise of African nationalism in the post-war/Cold War era, and the tensions that arose from their competing perspectives and priorities toward the changes in the international system that flowed from the challenge to the North Atlantic-dominated colonial order in Africa. The study also helps to illustrate the process by which the Anglo-American relationship was redefined in the post-1945 era as Great Britain slid from the top tier of international powers prior to the Second World War to a power punching above its weight with support from the United States after 1945. In effect, the end of the British 'formal' empire in Africa presaged the rise of an American 'informal' empire on the continent and the two powers explicitly recognized their shifting roles in the continent as part of the larger strategy of 'containing' the rise of the Communist powers in the international system. By focusing upon the dynamics of the Anglo-American relationship over the period 1945-1968, Hubbard helps to illustrate how the rise of African nationalism helped to reshape Anglo-American relations and the ways in which the Anglo-American alliance sought to shape the contours and outcome of the decolonization process.

While the study captures the continuities and changes in Anglo-American relations, the author is unduly sympathetic to the American perspective, in large part because the study suggests a rhetorical consistency in American anti-colonial sentiment that is belied by the reality of American policy. Before the end of the Second World War, American policy in the British Caribbean had been defined by support for colonial reform rather than anti-colonial objectives. It was a contradiction that became evident in American policy towards Africa after 1945 and that contradiction was born of the American desire to forge an effective partnership with Britain and the other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that were colonial powers in pursuing its global strategy of containment. In effect, whether it was the struggle against Nazi Germany during the 1939-45 war or the Soviet Union in the Cold War, the United States was prepared to articulate anti-colonial rhetoric while pursuing in large part a policy supportive of the European colonial powers. American policy towards African nationalism after 1945 was dictated by the requirements of Containment – and support for both African nationalism and the continuation of British colonial rule were equally useful to American policy makers at different junctures in the post-war era. The author's assessment of President Franklin D. Roosevelt captures the fundamental thrust of American policy towards the end of colonial rule after 1945: "While Roosevelt may have maintained strategic consistency, even he admitted to tactical improvisation." (p. 5) In effect, Roosevelt was emblematic of the inconsistencies that defined the American approach to decolonization in Africa which did not end until 1990 when Namibia acceded to independence.

It would also have been useful for the study to have explored in greater detail the reason that anti-colonialism became a theme of American foreign policy that was enshrined in the

Atlantic Charter of 1941 endorsed by both Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. While the author asserts the importance of that document in shaping Anglo-American relations during and after World War II, the lack of an extended discussion of the impact of the Great Depression upon both countries creates an impression of American anti-colonialism as a reflection of American idealism. Unfortunately, the image of anti-colonialism as a foundation stone of American idealism and American history after 1776 is belied by the reality that American independence created the space for American colonialism to displace the European colonial powers in areas of North America from Louisiana to Alaska, and from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands over the course of the period from the nineteenth<sup>19<sup>th</sup></sup> to the early twentieth<sup>20<sup>th</sup></sup> century. Thus, anti-colonialism was instrumental in the creation of the United States but American Presidents from Thomas Jefferson to Lyndon Johnson oversaw the expansion of American colonial power from Louisiana to the Japanese-mandate territories and to the British Overseas Territory of Diego Garcia. The duality of the American experience – both anti-colonial nation and colonial power – may be one root of the “strategic consistency” and “tactical improvisation” that Hubbard attributes to Franklin D. Roosevelt and should provoke some questioning of the idea that American idealism is untarnished in matters colonial.

In addition, the unrest that rocked Puerto Rico in the 1930s raises questions about the American record as a colonial power – those disturbances mirrored the widespread unrest that rocked the British colonies in the Caribbean during the same decade. Out of those protests, nationalist movements emerged that would help lead to independence from Britain but Puerto Rico remains tied to the United States as a Commonwealth – half dependent and half free. This ambiguous status that Puerto Rico still enjoys is particularly striking as Alaska and Hawaii became states of the U.S. after 1945 – after being U.S. colonies/territories. Thus, the ambiguity of the American colonial record as a factor in shaping American policy towards the decolonization of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s should also merit some careful examination of the roots of American anti-colonialism after 1945.

Finally, as Hubbard recognizes, a critical element in American support for continued British colonial rule in the immediate aftermath of the war was Britain’s dependency upon the African colonies as part of the strategy of post-war recovery. Inevitably, the American pressures for ending the system of British Imperial preferences as a mechanism for safeguarding British export markets and sources of commodities were blunted by the American dependence upon Britain for the global strategy of Containment. In effect, until the late 1950s, it can be argued that American policy towards Africa was shaped by the priority given to ensuring that Britain and its other European partners were able to use colonial reform as a strategy for European recovery. American anti-colonialism was held in abeyance.

In sum, after 1945 American anti-colonialism had become a function of the grand strategy of Containment of the Communist bloc. A closer examination of this dimension of the Anglo-American relationship would help to explain the inability of the United States to articulate a coherent or persuasive policy against the colonial order in Africa for the period 1941-68. Ultimately, as the pace of change in Africa accelerated after Ghana’s independence

in 1957 in tandem with the expansion of the civil rights struggle in the United States, American policy began to shift ground in the 1960s. However, the ambiguities of American policy in dealing with the British African colonies continued to manifest themselves in the case of the Portuguese colonies, South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia well after 1968.

The number of books and articles on the U.S. and the decolonisation of the British African Empire are relatively few despite the vastness of the continent. Somewhat inappropriately the United States only features as a bit player on the oft neglected international stage on which the African decolonisation process was played out. This book does attempt to rectify this, but the problems of tackling such a broad U.S.-UK imperial topic within a large geographical area are enormously challenging in terms of methodology. Not least it requires a well constructed framework of analysis to deal with such a vast array of issues and countries as they approached independence. A demanding task even if the meaning of 'empire' formal or informal is discounted.

One of the problems in choosing what should or should not be focussed on is that whatever one chooses it is rather too easy to criticise that choice. Should the book be essentially about those still controversial factors which acted as the primary driving, or causal, forces behind the policy choices that constituted the end of the British African Empire? Should this be an essentially British story, with some U.S. comments about how this significant international process of transferring power in Africa was handled? Or should it essentially be an analysis of how the British Empire and the United States, with their alleged special relationship, dealt with the changes to the projection of British power on the international stage as the Cold War developed and was fought? The United States clearly figures in much of the story, especially after 1949, as either Britain's powerful friend, with its global reach and vision, or as the often hostile voice shouting from its 'special' and traditionally anti-imperial place on the sidelines. There is an attempt here to try and compensate for the U.S. assumption of an absent *ex officio* role in the story of the post-1945 British African Empire which offers interesting connections to the Cold War as well as to particular U.S. interests in different regions of the African continent. Yet one cannot fail to wonder just what criteria have determined the coverage in this monograph which ranges well beyond Africa and the U.S. and British policies for the different regions of the continent.

Initially the book leaves the impression that this is essentially about how Britain and the United States, as key allies who emerged victorious from World War II, participated during and immediately after the conflict, in defining a new international order. The principles of the Atlantic Charter were seen as a vital component of that order, despite Churchill's efforts to maintain that such laudatory principles applied only to the territories liberated from Nazi tyranny, and not to those set to continue under a more benevolent form of British colonial tyranny. In other words the beginning of the book focuses not on the nature and impact of the war on Africa, but on American attitudes to colonialism and the British Empire. The U.S. tendency to conflate and confuse imperialism is in evidence, and the anti-colonial proposals of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration are examined through secondary sources in general and the work of Roger Louis in particular. The initial focus on United States policy, unsurprisingly given the wartime importance of the pre-1945 efforts to consider British imperial/colonial role in the post-war world, is supplemented by subsections on an odd range of associated topics from Yalta to Lend Lease, trade and finance and the American role in India and the Philippines. All are dealt with under the auspices of



the high moral ground, which could well apply to the essential American veneer heavily layered onto U.S. post-war planning for the post-1945 world - as opposed to the African continent which was not yet seen as significant by a broad range of U.S. post-war planners and policy makers.

At all events wartime changes are not examined from an essentially African perspective either from within the continent or from the metropole. Yet the African areas subsequently covered are not limited to those south of the Sahara, which featured more largely in the formal, or colonial parts of the British Empire, than did the southern shores of the Mediterranean in North Africa. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages, as the broad coverage may be useful for an understanding of the importance of the international context in which the British Empire, and U.S. perceptions and plans for its future, were central to the American vision for the post-war world once the Axis powers were defeated. Thus the significant U.S. wartime role in North and West Africa, details of the wartime activities of U.S. military and economic agents and agencies in British colonial Africa are not examined whatever the imperial or moral associations of capitalism, commerce and finance. The focus is very much initially on broader 'colonial empire' issues than the nature of British colonial policy in Africa or U.S. reactions to it.

Africa however assumes significance when the book, with its somewhat superficial and confusing sub-headings, begins to look at British colonial African policies under the wartime government in London. The British discussions on Africa, in the emerging and radically different context produced by the war, serve as useful background with a much greater British African focus, but we are soon catapulted back into the very different international world of power politics with some American Cold War signposts. Perhaps the rapid post-Rooseveltian shift in terms of U.S. attitudes to Empire in the light of Cold War ideological requirements and the military and commercial pressure for landing rights in the British Empire are not given sufficient emphasis. A world still full of European colonial territories, some of which in British Africa were quite important for U.S. commercial and governmental interests, attracted more U.S. support as the Cold War began. Thus this important change in U.S. approaches to the British Empire in general, and to colonial policy in Africa in particular, soon produced what was to be the essential American dilemma in dealing with British colonialism during the Cold War.

The first stage of this development, as explained here, was the increased importance Washington began to attach to Africa, which at the governmental level inspired a quest to obtain some significant knowledge of the Continent. This was emerging by 1949, but the immediate post-war years are covered in the book under review through sub-sections pertaining to conventional Cold War topics from Dean Acheson to atomic weapons and the Truman Doctrine. The relationship between decolonisation and Cold War in the 1950s and early 1960s then becomes a key theme when more attention is given to the Eisenhower administrations and the Conservative governments. The earlier changes in British African policy, involving initiatives and greater input from London under the Labour government, are not given such prominence. In a sense this emphasis does not reflect how British initiatives may have had a significant effect on the end of colonial rule in Africa. Yet the book is very much a detailed account of the way in which the process of ending British

colonial rule in Africa was produced and reacted to by the Americans. The United States plays at best a supporting role, but the relationship between Cold War requirements and decolonisation is surely crucial. More specifically, U.S. Cold War policy requirements and the need for African allies in the Cold War, as opposed to Cold War colonial allies in Europe, surely requires a precise examination of what exactly the different Cold War phases in Africa meant for the U.S. And this in turn requires a more specific analysis of the nature of the African Cold War given the orthodox and often misguided generalities about the U.S. and the Cold War, which centred on hard power and armaments in Europe, and which do not reflect how Africa's importance in Cold War terms was perceived by some U.S. policy makers particularly under John Kennedy.

In the early Harry Truman years, somewhat bizarrely U.S. policy in the Philippines receives attention which only detracts from U.S. Cold War policies that were to be significant for the African decolonisation process. The book primarily provides interest by the light it sheds on pre-1949 U.S. African policies as changes were taking place in the formulation of African colonial policy in London. When the Eisenhower administrations subsequently responded to the nature and timing of the British attempts to maintain influence in Africa, while colonial territories proceeded to self-government and independence, there is much greater use of U.S. archival sources. Henceforth the Central Decimal and Subject Numeric State Department Files are used effectively to provide a range of comments from different African consulates about British policy. There is no attempt to use any of the presidential libraries and some might complain about the inconsistent way in which RG 59<sup>1</sup> is referenced. In the case of British policies, again faced with an enormous volume of material, secondary sources are the means employed along with published primary sources from the important British Documents on the End of Empire series. Both the general and country volumes are used from all the countries covered apart from Egypt.

The Americans had the essential Cold War requirement that independence in Africa should be realised through 'responsible' (i.e. right wing or center-right African nationalist) politicians and bring stability without racial conflict. They were much less concerned about the effects on particular British economic interests or on Britain's general position as a world power. American policy in the 1950s and 1960s is characterised accurately, with supporting justification, as "middle of the road" (65) where the road was the path to African independence. Independence arose naturally from the ideology inherent in the American War of Independence and the post-1945 Cold War conflict that demanded the winning of African hearts and minds prior to independence. Unfortunately the Cold War also required, or was portrayed as requiring, the deployment of hard power forces from Britain and Europe before difficulties European colonialism produced in using the more important soft power effectively in the Cold War became clearer. Hence the U.S. dilemma which was compounded by the difficulties American policy makers had in locating the middle of the road and staying on it. The usual disagreements and bureaucratic battles within Washington, never mind the divergent views from the mixed assortment of representatives on the spot in Africa, as with most U.S. foreign policy, bedevilled the

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<sup>1</sup> RG 59 refers to Record Group 59 for the State Department Central File and Office or 'Lot files.'

formulation and implementation of a U.S. policy. Little wonder that the Americans for much of the period were happy to follow a British lead in most African matters.

Not that it should be implied that there was a British policy for the decolonisation of their African colonies when so much depended on the different circumstances pertaining in each territory. The issue for the British and Americans was essentially to continue planning for self-government and independence while avoiding going too slowly and risking the radicalisation of nationalist demands, or going too fast and leaving, (in conventional interpretations), such ill prepared states as the Congo - although arguably it was the degree of radicalism and the level of support it found in the Congo which was the real problem.

Importantly, and commendably, the book provides a good analysis of these dilemmas faced by the Americans and the fact that their decolonisation and Cold War policy requirements were often pulling in two opposite directions. For British policy the general argument that emerges here interprets the Conservative governments after 1951 as generally trying to slow down the inevitable transfer of power. Some official and ministerial policy makers, however, were reluctantly concluding that the dangers of not going fast enough outweighed the natural dislike and repugnance aroused by the difficulties of speeding up of the process. Whether this was primarily caused by international or domestic pressures influencing the policies produced in the Cold War, or whether specific African demands or particular British policy initiatives were the essential driving force is not so clear. Hence it is somewhat regrettable that the merits of the book with its comprehensive coverage (often too comprehensive) have to be evaluated against a style and structure which produces fragments or glimpses, albeit competently researched, about British decolonisation in Africa and U.S. reactions to it. However informative such vignettes and sketches may be, with the welcome use of U.S. archival sources, a set of well analysed themes flowing smoothly from the mixture of Cold War and decolonisation demands that the Americans and British faced in Africa often remains elusive.

As Cold War concerns reshaped international relations after World War II, the United States reevaluated its relationship with the European imperial powers. In the war's early years, Washington had joined London in signing the Atlantic Charter, which championed the principle of self-determination of peoples. With the implementation of the Charter's tenets, the U.S. government anticipated a more open world for American trade and investment. However, in the postwar period, Washington worried about the vulnerability of its allies, whose economies had been devastated by war. Should the United States use its power to push for political, economic, and social reforms in the colonies—and extend the Atlantic Charter mandate to colonized peoples? Would such a stance win the U.S. friends in the non-Western world and strengthen it vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, or would it mortally weaken American allies in the fight against international communism? The dilemma provoked heated debates within the American policy-making apparatus and resulted in inconsistent and contradictory policies.

It is in this context that James P. Hubbard examines the decline of Britain's African empire and the role of American power in hastening that decline. Exploring the interactions between Washington and London from the era of Roosevelt and Churchill through the governments of Lyndon Johnson and Harold Wilson, Hubbard investigates policy debates within the various administrations, describes the ways in which American policies changed over time, and considers the extent to which they opposed British colonialism and favored African independence. He scrutinizes collaboration and dissent among British and American officials, divisions within the U.S. State Department, and divergences between government officials in Washington and diplomats on the ground. He traces the progression of American policies from unswerving support of an important ally to uncomfortable public distancing, born of concern that too close an association with colonial regimes would put the United States on wrong side of history. For the most part, Hubbard argues, Washington attempted to straddle the divide, prodding its ally to implement reforms to appease African political actors and forestall the worrisome consequences of radical nationalism, while allowing Britain to dictate the pace of change.

Hubbard's detailed narrative provides a rich account of the ins and outs of British and American policymaking in the face of African nationalist agitation. Unfortunately, the author offers the reader both too much and too little. Ten chapters in this long book home in on the book's central themes. The eleven remaining chapters focus on changing British policies toward African colonies in the post-World War II era and divisions within the British government over questions of self-government and independence. Although some of this material is discussed in the context of British-American relations, much of it is tangential to the book's primary focus and might well have constituted a second book. Despite the abundance of detail, the picture rendered is incomplete. The actors portrayed are limited to British and American elected officials, civil servants, and other policymakers, with a special focus on those based in London and Washington. At variance with this top-down vantage point, Hubbard notes, "This study...assumes that the principal impetus for political change in Africa originated in Africa itself. It assumes that African colonies became

independent largely because of demographic, economic, and social changes within Africa” (2). Regrettably, even this important caveat attributes the rise of independent African states to impersonal forces, leaving no room for African historical agency. While Hubbard’s account mentions various African political leaders and describes some mass actions against British colonial rule, African perspectives are notably absent. Hubbard contends that Washington courted moderate African nationalists, in the hope that they would promote alternatives that were responsive to Western concerns, but he does not show us how popular movements responded to American initiatives. Without an assessment of African perspectives, we cannot judge Hubbard’s conclusion that “U.S. policies...played a significant role in the demise of Britain’s African empire” (364).

A more inclusive interpretation would require a broader source base. Hubbard’s principal primary sources include U.S. State Department files housed in the National Archives and published documents in the series *Foreign Relations of the United States* and *British Documents and the End of Empire*. Rich sources in American presidential libraries, the British National Archives, and the United Nations archives, remain untapped. Oral interviews, including those in the extensive Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, would have provided more nuanced perspectives. Most importantly, the absence of documentation from African sources results in an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of decolonization in Britain’s African empire.

Review by Thomas J. Noer, Carthage College

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This is an extremely ambitious but ultimately frustrating book. In the past 35 years the scholarship on U.S. relations with Africa has grown from a few fragmented articles to an impressive body of work. There are now dozens of studies of American interaction with specific nations, analyses of economics, race, personality, and other influences on policy, biographical works, and comparative efforts.

Despite this expanding body of work, there is no comprehensive study of American response to the decolonization of the entire continent. James P. Hubbard does not attempt to cover all of Africa, but does examine the dissolution of the largest European empire in Africa. This is a daunting task.

The frustrations arise from Hubbard's conception of "diplomatic history" (or "international relations" or "the history of foreign policy") and his research emphasis. His topic is broad, but his focus extremely narrow. His research is limited almost exclusively to official records of government agencies, memoirs, and documentary collections in London and Washington and his book is largely an exhaustive study in minute detail of every nuance of position papers, briefing books, conference minutes, and memos of those in the State Department and the British Foreign and Colonial offices.

As a result of this limited research decision, diplomats and policy-makers operate in a near total vacuum, immune from any influence except other governmental officials. There is no discussion of groups, ideas, or individuals outside of the bureaucratic structure. There is no mention of domestic politics, Congress, pressure groups, or any non-governmental agency. There is no consideration of African-American leaders or groups. Books such as Brenda Gayle Plummer's *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*; Peggy Von Eschen's *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*; George White's *A Whiter Shade of Pale: Ike, Race, and Africa*, Mary L. Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* and dozens of other significant works do not even appear in the bibliography. There is no mention of any black American or organization. Even the NAACP and Martin Luther King are excluded. There is not a single reference to an American, British, or African newspaper, or to the anti-colonialism of the British Labour Party.

The result is not quite history of "what one clerk said to another" but it is pretty close. Certainly those lodged in the bowels of the State Department or Foreign Office were aware of the outside world. It is hard to envision a history of American and decolonization of Africa without some notice of race, the civil rights movement, Congress, public opinion, and non-governmental organizations.

This isolation also ignores the popular image of Africa and its move towards independence. The Mau Mau revolt in Kenya led to massive converge in the press and popular culture in both England and the U.S. and convinced many that Africans were unfit for independence. Hubbard's book covers this in one paragraph. The atrocities following the independence of

the Congo in 1959 also provided emotional support for those opposed to African freedom. The graphic description of the rape of Belgian nuns did more to influence American perceptions of Africa than any internal memo.

By focusing almost exclusively on official documents, Hubbard provides us with a detailed analysis of position papers, conference background briefings and notes, and official diplomatic exchanges. But we do not get the impact of the decolonization debate that raged outside the offices of governmental officials.

Within this limited framework, the author makes some compelling arguments and offers some fascinating detail. He shows how Franklin Roosevelt's vague anticolonial rhetoric during World War II alarmed Britain, particularly Washington's view that the Atlantic Charter could be seen as implying self-determination for Africa.

After the war, both nations faced a dilemma: The British reluctantly recognized that the U.S. was now the dominant power and it needed to keep relations between London and Washington cordial. They were convinced America was sympathetic to decolonization, but did not want to be pressured by their more powerful ally to abandon Africa. They had to keep Washington happy, but not give in to the rising tide of African nationalism. America wanted to keep close relations with its strongest European ally, but also to court Africans as they moved towards independence. The result was a 'middle of the road' policy for both: Britain argued that independence, or at least some form of self-rule, was destined, but could not be rushed. They needed time to "prepare" the African for freedom. African nations were neither economically nor politically ready for independence and rapid decolonization would lead to chaos on the continent and provide a favorable opportunity for communist inroads. London also suspected that Washington was promoting African independence in part to gain access to trade and raw materials denied as long as colonialism persisted.

American officials urged gradual independence, but shared their ally's concerns for "premature" freedom for Africa. The U.S. was forced to be "anti-colonial, but not pro-independence." Washington was, in the author's words, "both the upholder of the postwar world order and a proponent of political change in Africa; Britain's special ally and, at the same time, a friend of African nationalists." (p. 2) As Africa moved inevitably towards independence, America found its awkward position increasingly difficult to maintain and balancing on this political tightrope ever more precarious.

As early as 1956 the State Department's Policy Planning Staff predicted African independence was inevitable and would be rapid. It urged the U.S. to align more clearly with the forces of nationalism even at the risk of alienating Britain. It had little impact. Throughout the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower years Africa and its aspirations remained a minor issue in Washington. Far more concerned with the Cold War conflict and the situation in Europe, American politicians had little concern for Africa. Many U.S. diplomats shared Britain's view that Africans were incapable of self rule for several generations and that African nationalists were Marxists under the control of the Soviet Union.

With the independence of Ghana in 1957 America finally, and still rather reluctantly, faced the inevitable; Africa was going to be independent and it was going to happen with or without American influence. As Hubbard notes: "The general mood of Eisenhower and his top advisers was more resignation than enthusiasm about the prospect of more independent African states." (p. 167) There were, however, voices within the administration that called for a more 'pro-African' policy. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. and America's representative on the UN's Trusteeship Council, Mason Sears, called for a stronger commitment to decolonization, but they had little influence. Even as late as 1960, the U.S. joined eight other nations in abstaining on a UN General Assembly vote calling for the immediate independence of all colonial territories. The vote passed by 89-0.

Having taken the reader to the end of the Eisenhower administration, the author makes one of many curious organizational decisions. He abandons the U.S. and backtracks into a lengthy discussion of British economic development plans for Africa, beginning in 1953, and a country-by-country analysis of political developments in Britain's African colonies. For nearly 100 pages America disappears from the narrative. While this section contains some interesting material, it is of little direct interest to those concerned with the United States and disrupts the author's narrative.

Hubbard's coverage of the John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson years is less detailed but more analytical. He notes that Kennedy's self-created image as an advocate of decolonization was not always followed by an 'African first policy.' Despite the efforts of African advocates such as Chester Bowles and G. Mennen Williams, Kennedy saw Africa largely as a Cold War battleground; "Competing with Russia was the first priority." (p. 291), Many of his advisors shared his view and had little interest in identifying with African nationalism or providing economic aid to independent nations on the continent. By 1961 most of the British colonies in Africa were independent or close to it and Kennedy was most concerned that these new states might fall under the sway of America's international rival.

Kennedy maintained good relations with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, but alienated his ally by supporting numerous UN resolutions condemning colonialism and calling for immediate independence. The votes (and U.S. support) were largely symbolic as British control of Africa was near its end. Washington did pressure Britain to move towards independence in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, one of its last possessions and under the control of a fanatical white minority. Hubbard is particularly successful in guiding the reader through the complex relations in central Africa culminating in the white minority's Universal Declaration of Independence for Rhodesia in 1965. He also shows that Lyndon Johnson generally deferred to Britain in response to Rhodesia's defiance of world opinion and maintained strong political and economic pressure on the 'outlaw' nation.

In his conclusion, Hubbard contends that American rhetoric and policies "played a significant role in the demise of Britain's African empire." (p. 364) Despite its lack of a firm



commitment to immediate independence, Washington was effective in prodding its ally to accept the inevitable end of its rule in Africa. He also makes it clear that “U.S. policies and actions were only a contributing factor to the demise of Britain’s African colonies. The primary reason for the end of Britain’s colonies was changes in Africa and British reactions to them.” (p. 369) America may have helped speed up African independence, but it was the Africans themselves who first demanded and later obtained their own freedom.

His study also shows that after World War II, the ‘special relationship’ between America and Britain was not one of equals: “The United States was always the dominant partner. Britain cared more about the relationship than did the U.S.” (p. 367)

Hubbard’s strength is his detailed summary and analysis of the bureaucratic battles in Washington and London. His weakness is that by focusing exclusively on the official paper trail, we do not see the groups, politics, and individuals who shaped those documents. The book serves as an excellent reference but is not the definitive analysis of the independence of British Africa and the American response.

**Author's Response by James P. Hubbard, Independent Historian**

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Years ago, I read a movie review that observed that it was pointless to criticize someone for not making the movie one would have made. Since then, I have often thought that the world would be a better place if more reviewers heeded this advice. The reviews produced by Elizabeth Schmidt, Thomas Noer, John Kent, and Cary Fraser often prompt similar thoughts.

*The United States and the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa, 1941-1960* addresses the question: did the United States cause, or help to cause, the end of Britain's African empire? The book's structure, sources, and subjects are intended to address this question, hopefully with few preconceptions and certainly without regard to academic fashions or political correctness.

Answering the question requires consideration of the policies adopted and, more important, the actions taken by the governments of the United States and United Kingdom regarding British Africa. Because the British government allowed the governors of its African colonies considerable leeway, the analysis must also consider the policies and actions of the colonial governments in the sixteen British African colonies. The result is a study with at least three foci, Washington, London, and the several African colonies, a complex, but necessary, arrangement. Schmidt seems to suggest that that a study limited to Washington, or Washington and London, would have sufficed.

Another reason to consider events in Africa is the critical role played by African nationalist leaders and movements in moving their countries towards independence. Beginning with the Accra riots in 1947, Africans, their leaders, and political parties were the active force within the colonial situation. Born of demographic, social and economic changes since the British conquest, the African desire for national independence pushed the British far beyond where they intended to go in, say, 1945. Actions in London and Washington would make little sense without considering events in Lagos or Nairobi and nearly half the chapters, therefore, deal with such events. It is odd that Schmidt suggests that these chapters don't belong while arguing that the study assigns African an unduly small role.

Kent would have preferred "a set of well analysed themes flowing smoothly from the mixture of Cold War and declonization demands that the Americans and British faced in Africa." Nevertheless, an organization based on chronology and regions fits the facts. The text deals with four principal groupings: the Sudan, the two large West African colonies, the four East African colonies, and the three territories that comprised the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Events within these regions were inter-related, especially in Central Africa, and followed distinctive trajectories, especially in the Sudan. Time also matters. Events in the Gold Coast and the Sudan in the later 1940s were significantly different from those in East or Central African in the early 1960s. It is true that the smaller colonies, like Sierra Leone or Zanzibar, often don't seem to fit. Of course, British and United States policy makers struggled with the same phenomenon.

Moreover, Africa is maddeningly diverse, full of shifting identities which challenge easy analyses. Policy documents that dealt with Africa in general, in London or Washington, were often vague and superficial, belaboring the obvious without providing any new insights. An historical analysis built around a generic African colony, rather than specific African colonies, is likely to be similarly slight. "Decolonization" is an example of an unhelpful concept produced in the search for easy generalities. For all the similarities among Britain's African colonies, it is the differences that are revealing, for British policy as well as United States interventions. The Sudan is the most apt example, but any of the East or Central African colonies would do as well.

The reviewers voice the concern that the book does not adequately explain the end of the British empire in Africa. Schmidt in particular, in concluding that the United States played a significant role, suggests that the book slights the role of Africans. The end of the European empires in Asia and Africa was a lengthy and complex event. It took a century, beginning in the aftermath of the First World War and continuing, perhaps, to this day. It involved a host of factors, some specific to individual colonies or to specific imperial powers, some of more general significance. This study's aim is not to explain the end of the European empires (a daunting task at best), but merely to account for the United States' role in the end of Britain's African possessions. In concluding that the United States had a significant role in the demise of Britain's African empire, the work does not ignore the fact that other factors, some more consequential like African nationalism, were involved.

Noer voices objections to the book's focus on civil servants and the paperwork they produced. If the popular media are any guide, he has considerable company. This is, however, a study of governmental action. The principal non-African actors are British and American elected officials and civil servants. Accordingly, the principal source materials are government papers: cables, memoranda, briefing materials and the like. An extensive secondary literature supplements what is known about African nationalist activities.

Schmidt also raises concerns about sources. She asserts that reading more files and oral interviews would generate more 'nuances' and, puzzlingly given the sources she suggests, move Africans to center stage.

State Department records are the major United States source. British Africa was a low priority within United States foreign policy; rarely did an issue involving Britain's African colonies find its way to the Secretary of State's office, much less the White House. The Kennedy and Johnson White Houses, in fact, took steps to keep African issues at bay. When British Africa did appear on a White House agenda, for example National Security Council meetings during the Eisenhower administration, the State Department records provide a full account. Career diplomats in Washington and Africa were the important players and the records they created are the most significant.

The main British source is the multi-volume series, *British Documents on the End of Empire*. Comparable to the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the series contains documents from the British National Archives selected by leading scholars and dealing with both policy deliberations in London and events in the African colonies. An individual scholar

would be hard pressed to duplicate the effort expended in assembling the collection and the benefits of doing so would be limited.

Reminiscences of long past events are rarely as revealing as contemporaneous documents. Eyewitness accounts of dramatic events, like the crash of the Hindenburg, might be the only exception. The Georgetown collection of oral testimonies suggested by Schmidt might be useful for some studies, but it appears to include no one who served in British Africa, notorious as a backwater for career diplomats, and at most, three or four diplomats with any association with British Africa. In several of these cases, moreover, Africa was not among the topics covered in the interview.

Noer suggests that the work neglects outside pressures on decision makers in London and, even more so, in Washington. He apparently would have preferred to have read about pressure groups, especially African-American organizations, agitating for political changes in the colonies. It is not clear whether he believes such groups played a role in United States decisions or whether such actors are more worthy of historians' attention than civil servants. (Schmidt's concern about African agency raises a comparable question.)

In London, electoral politics and outside pressure groups intruded at key moments on colonial policy. The Attlee government saw itself as implementing the Labour Party's commitment to colonial reform (see page 91). Chapter Sixteen describes how Harold Macmillan's political instincts, African scandals, the Labour Party's conversion to a pro-independence position, and the internal politics of the Conservative Party combined to change British policy.

Popular opinion helped shape United States policy toward British Africa. As Franklin D. Roosevelt seemingly recognized in 1941, the default position for American popular opinion was anti-colonial and anti-British. Accordingly, State Department officials, no matter how pro-British, dared not abandon the pro-independence position enshrined in the Atlantic Charter.

Nevertheless, the State Department in Washington did not face significant outside pressures. Before the mid-1950s, British Africa was invisible to the American public. Particularly after the Gold Coast's independence, public interest in things African grew. Nevertheless Congressional interest was rare. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee established an African sub-committee only in 1957, but it met only three times in the next two years. Congressman Charles Diggs championed African issues in the House, but with little discernible impact on government action. The only pressure group that gained the State Department's notice was the American Committee on Africa.

Political appointees like Mason Sears and G. Mennen Williams argued that the government should take the heightened interest into account. Nevertheless much of what they advocated was public relations, more photo opportunities at the White House for example. When Sears or Williams engaged in policy debates, they usually remained within the mainstream of State Department thinking. When they strayed from the mainstream, they

were ignored. Otherwise it is hard to detect any instance where the State Department changed its policies or practices regarding British Africa in response to outside pressure.

In addition, the views of ostensible critics of United States policy did not necessarily differ markedly from State Department positions. John Kennedy's famous 1957 speech on Algeria was, in fact, broadly consistent with what the Eisenhower administration was doing behind the scenes and, because it threatened the bipartisan approach to foreign policy, received a less than positive response in the Democratic Party. African policy figured in the 1960 presidential campaign. Nevertheless, Richard Nixon's and Kennedy's views were roughly similar and both were consistent with the actions taken by the Eisenhower administration. Further, the Kennedy administration's policies toward British Africa differed little from those of the Eisenhower administration.

Kent would have preferred an earlier focus on Africa rather than discussion of some of the general U.S.-British issues during WWII such as "Yalta to Lend Lease, trade and finance and the American role in India and the Philippines" as well as an early situation of the end of empire in a Cold War context. Kent also asks for more emphasis on post-1945 U.S. imperial and Cold War interests in Africa such as "commercial and military pressure for landing rights in the British empire." The book, however, deliberately avoids Cold War terminology, a relic of Truman era propaganda and not an analytical tool. Instead it presents the United States and Britain as two great powers confronting each other, as they had since the nineteenth century and leaves the United States' confrontation with Soviet Russia in the background.

After 1941, United States relations with Great Britain went through two phases. In the first, the United States viewed Britain as both an ally and a rival. During this period, Lend Lease, the Bretton Woods agreement, the atomic bomb and the like were important steps towards the dominance of the United States over Britain. Some time before the Marshall Plan, however, United States officials realized that they now had the upper hand and that Britain was weaker than they had imagined. Thereafter, the United States was willing to make concessions to keep its junior partner afloat. The United States' aims became retaining Britain within an anti-Russian and eventually anti-Chinese coalition and ensuring that British Africa remained in friendly hands. British officials attempted to exploit the United States' desire for allies against Soviet Russia and against any emerging communist groups, but, for most African issues, the United States-Soviet Russia rivalry remained in the background, albeit still important. Only in the early 1960s, when United States officials encountered Chinese representatives in Zanzibar did the United States' rivalry with the Soviet Union and China figure explicitly in United States thinking and actions.

United States thinking about colonial Africa went through two similar phases. Through the establishment of the United Nations at the beginning of the Truman administration, the focus was on colonial matters generally. Africa was largely invisible. Roosevelt's interventions in India provide the only concrete evidence of how the United States would have proceeded in a British colony. After the San Francisco conference, the State Department began to grapple with the issues posed by colonial Africa and, eventually, developed a stance regarding both Africa in general and individual colonies.

British officials were apt to consider United States officials as naïfs in colonial affairs. Less often United States officials acted as if they were new to colonial empires. The United States' experience in the Philippines, however, demonstrates that the United States, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations in particular, had first hand experience with administering large, important colonies. Ironically, the United States managed the transition to independence before the British did and, one might argue, with greater success. An independent Philippines remained within the United States' orbit to a degree greater than most African colonies remained within Britain's orbit. What, therefore, Kent sees as bizarre, in fact, advances the analysis.

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