

Vincent J. Intondi, *African Americans Against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015. 207pp.

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The history of the antinuclear movement in the United States has been well served by a plethora of publications in recent years. The comprehensive three-volume study of the world disarmament movement produced by Lawrence Wittner (1993, 1997, 2003) has been joined by work assessing the effect of nuclear weapons on particular aspects of American culture and society. (Mariner & Piehler, 2009; Heefner, 2012; Findlay & Hevly, 2011; Jacobs, 2011; Gavin, 2012; Badash, 2009). However, though scholars have often acknowledged the complex relationship between the black freedom struggle and the peace movement, there remains a gap in the historiography dealing with this particular constituency of American activists. In *African Americans Against the Bomb*, Vincent J. Intondi demonstrates the commitment to antinuclear activism displayed by prominent black figures from 1945 through to 2013. The book, though not without some limitations, represents an insightful contribution both to study of the United States disarmament movement and the campaign for racial equality.

The opening three chapters focus on the response of the black community to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the effects of anti-Communism and McCarthyism on black-leftist peace activists, and the anticolonial direction of the Civil Rights Movement. The second half covers the black freedom movement during the Vietnam War and African American activism in the post-Vietnam era, before offering a glowing appraisal of Barack Obama's disarmament efforts since 2008. *African Americans Against the Bomb* highlights the role black activists played within the disarmament campaign while attempting to rectify what Intondi sees as the failure of historians to appreciate the internationalism of the black freedom struggle (2). While not fully addressing the claim that 'the black freedom struggle cannot be properly understood without exploring antinuclear campaigns' (5), the book nevertheless shows that prominent voices overtly tied the

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American nuclear weapons program to wider concerns of colonialism, racial equality, and social justice. Vivid examples of the struggles experienced by minority groups that attempted to work with the peace movement, such as those that occurred at the June 1982 March for Disarmament, are particularly valuable (100-105).

However, some limitations do emerge. *African Americans Against the Bomb* dedicates its focus to the pronouncements and attitudes of a handful of prominent black figures over grassroots activists. The outspoken anti-militarism and anti-colonial views of some, such as Martin Luther King, Paul Robeson, Bayard Rustin and W.E.B. Du Bois, are represented through speeches and comments, but Intondi does not link them to a broader groundswell of black antinuclear sentiment. The absence of a statement explaining the reasons for focusing on these select figures sometimes confuses the narrative and the concluding chapter, exclusively examining the presidency of Barack Obama, departs from the preceding tone that concentrated on social activism. Likewise, further investigations of smaller organizations that overtly linked racism to nuclear weapons could have benefitted the study. The coverage of Blacks Against Nukes (BAN) is a particular highlight (95-97), but could have been reinforced with examinations of groups such as the Independent Negro Commission to End Racism, Ban the Bomb, and the Assembly of Unrepresented People.

By stretching nearly seven decades over six chapters, *African Americans Against the Bomb* sometimes misses out on providing a focused analysis of the differing arguments of the figures covered. Some promising opportunities for further study present themselves. The tensions between activists who linked the bomb to colonialism and civil rights against those who simply prioritised the black freedom struggle are often alluded to without receiving further examination. The reverse trajectories of Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, for example, are acknowledged without explaining the background to their differing motives. A depiction of Rustin's transformation from important antinuclear activist to critic of King would be particularly enlightening (78). In some cases the tensions existing within organisations could be extrapolated further to emphasise the competing views of those within the movement. For example, Intondi only briefly mentions that the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were reluctant to adopt formal anti-war positions and feared merging the Civil Rights Movement with the Peace Movement, sometimes against the wishes of its own membership (27, 77, 78).

While acknowledging some limitations, the ambitious scope of *African Americans Against the Bomb* demonstrates the necessity for further studies devoted to the book's salient themes. Vincent J. Intondi has provided a timely addition to the history of the antinuclear movement and encourages further study into the demographics of the peace movement, intersections between antimilitarism and

social justice issues, and the broader critiques produced by members of the black freedom struggle.