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Lala Lajpat Rai, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, and Vithalbhai Patel are not names one readily associates with the United States Civil Rights Movement. In fact, the influence of Indian activists and the Indian independence movement as a whole on the struggle to dismantle Jim Crow in the United States remains a largely unexplored area of historical inquiry. As a result, the efforts of United States civil rights activists in the fight to overthrow the British Raj have also been neglected. In Colored Cosmopolitanism Nico Slate seeks to uncover these connections. He examines how historical figures in both countries bridged “differences and...achieve[d] transnational solidarities” by utilizing shared definitions of words such as “freedom” and “colored” to create a “colored cosmopolitanism” that helped topple the British Raj in India, dismantle Jim Crow in the United States, and bring an end to the “white racialized global order.”(pp.2-4)

Slate argues that imperialistic expansion and immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century enabled American and Indian citizens to communicate with greater ease and allowed for wider dissemination of works by anti-colonial critics including Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas Gandhi, and Swami Vivekananda. By the 1920s, civil rights leaders including W.E.B. Dubois and Cedric Dover began invoking a “colored world” philosophy in their speeches and writings, which Slate effectively argues, bonded oppressed peoples in the two regions together. (p.66) Newly created organizations such as the Pan-African Congress and the International Council of Women of Darker Races arose during this time using this philosophy to fight colored oppression worldwide. Slate further points out that Mohandas Gandhi also used this philosophy to solidify ties between the regions, regularly corresponding with civil rights activists in the United States and by keeping American missionaries Charles Freer Andrews and Robert Gregg as advisors. According to Slate, Gandhi’s use of American advisors gave his non-violent philosophy credibility with United States audiences and also allowed the Mahatma to perceive similarities between subjugation in India and Jim Crow racism in the United States. (p.97)

Slate’s examination of the early Cold War period provides one of his most intriguing arguments. He asserts that after India achieved independence, United States foreign policy advisors viewed the nation as a possible Democratic stronghold in the Middle-East. (p.162) Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru used India’s “middle of the road” position between Communism and Democracy as a bargaining chip to pressure the United States government to take a more active role in civil rights issues. Even though Slate successfully restores India’s significance back into the Cold War narrative, his argument on its connections to American civil rights leaders could have been strengthened with a more substantive discussion on the details of how India gained independence. By detailing how quickly United States civil rights leaders

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used Indian independence to pressure their own government for civil rights reform, Slate could have provided further examples of the bonds the two regions shared.

Visits made to India by noted civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Edith Sampson in the post-independence period highlight the increasingly tenuous relationship the two regions maintained in the latter-half of the twentieth century. Indian officials assailed the visitors for continued racial injustices in America, and American civil rights leaders, eager to defend their country, attacked India’s caste system. Slate, however, could have further illuminated facets of these tensions through an analysis of the trips taken to the Middle-East by Malcolm X in the early 1960s which would have provided a window into how the Black Power philosophy was received in the region. A mention of these trips could have also explained why the formation of the Dalit Panthers, a paramilitary group of low-caste Indians organized around the same principles as the Black Panther Party of Oakland, became a necessary group for low-caste Indians in the late 1960s.

At first glance, one might view Slate’s reliance on personal journals and correspondence from elite persons of color as problematic. Upon closer examination, however, one can see that Slate artfully mined these sources to uncover the names and actions of grassroots activists when their voices could otherwise scarcely be found in the historical record. Moreover, his careful use of newspapers from both the United States and India and his incredible ability to connect events in both regions with literary works, give one the feeling that his source selection is not as much of a problem as it is exemplary of the author’s commitment to producing thorough research of the highest caliber.

*Colored Cosmopolitanism* showcases Slate’s incredible ability to draw connections between two seemingly disparate regions of the globe and bring to light vitally important, but forgotten actors in the transnational struggle for civil rights in the twentieth century. Slate’s work outshines previous scholarship on the relationship between the global Cold War and the American Civil Rights Movement, and expands on its closest comparator, Gerald Horne’s *End of Empires*, in both scope and content. Unlike its predecessors, Slate’s work gives a clearer view of how Indian intellectuals and activists shaped the American Civil Rights Movement, and effectively evidences the reciprocal nature of international communication. For these reasons, *Colored Cosmopolitanism* deserves a place in any classroom discussion on twentieth century history for its interdisciplinary and global approach that sets a high standard for future scholars.

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