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## Manifest Imperialism: Race and American Imperial Aspirations in the Pacific

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Manifest Imperialism: Race and American Imperial Aspirations in the Pacific

A Thesis

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Bryan Richter

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## Introduction: A Westward Gaze

Americans have always looked to the west and considered it as part of their birthright. Manifest Destiny has been at the heart of the American psyche even before the term for the extension of the United States across the continent was coined. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American involvement in the Pacific, the world's largest ocean has become the new frontier for a nation upon which the wilderness has always exercised an irresistible pull. The line between civilization and the wild frontier has shifted throughout time in an inexorable move westward. Like a glacier, the movement was slow, unstoppable, and forever changed the land as it passed. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century that line was the Appalachian Mountains, then the Mississippi, then the rising star of Chicago.<sup>1</sup> The line between the old world and the new. The line between stagnation and opportunity. The frontier was where a person could remake themselves and bring civilization and progress to a "Garden of Eden"<sup>2</sup> This space was where the United States could project its hopes, dreams, and global ambitions away from the influence of the "Old World".

This project seeks to understand how American foreign policy developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and how this policy was linked to American expansionism. I also seek to understand how American ideas about race influenced interactions with East and Southeast Asian nations. The shifting racial perceptions of the peoples that Americans came in contact with were crucial in the way in which official government policy and propaganda was drafted. I further examine these interactions chiefly from the American perspective but will also draw on

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<sup>1</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. pp. 14-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

resources that outline the perceptions of Americans in World War II and during the Cold War by the Japanese and Chinese respectively. I argue that all of the American conflicts from the Indian Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the American conflict in Vietnam are all a part of the same imperial project that has developed and grown in its scope and agenda as the United States has expanded westwards. I further outline American foreign policy by demonstrating how it is linked with domestic policy in the United States, specifically in regards to the Civil Rights movement during the Cold War, and how the treatment of African-Americans domestically undermined the agenda of the United States on the world stage.

The final portion of this project will seek to examine the motivations for and the actual involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Because of the hold that the Vietnam War exerts on the modern psyche of the United States, a wealth of literature has been written on the topic. The work I draw my inspiration from is David Kaiser's 2001 work *American Tragedy*. This work pointed me into looking more closely into the policies of the Eisenhower administration.

For this project I draw upon a number of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources I will engage with come from the Eisenhower presidential library in Abilene Kansas. These documents provide an insight into the decision making of one of America's most beloved leaders and show a darker side to his administration. The actions and policies during Eisenhower's term in office were crucial in involving the United States irrevocably in Southeast Asia. I therefore seek in this project to delve more deeply into what caused the United States to become entrenched in a conflict eight and a half thousand miles away.

An important secondary source that I am in conversation with is the work of John Dower in his book *War Without Mercy* examining the role of race and the effect it had on the

brutal nature of World War II in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Dower's study of the interaction and American racial perceptions during the war provides a crucial source for this project. In a similar vein, the work of Michael Hunt and Adam Levine on American imperial aspirations in the Pacific lends a useful tool in understanding the broader context of American conflict in the region and the effects that this involvement had on a broader scale.<sup>4</sup> Their work connects the American Wars in the Pacific and provides me with a framework for understanding the foreign policy of the United States not as separate events, but rather as inexorably linked. I will further support this claim with Bruce Cumings book *Dominion From Sea to Sea*. This work discusses the origins of American expansionism and how the ideals applied by American policy makers to the Native American population can be applied decades and even centuries later to how the United States thought of Asian peoples.<sup>5</sup> Another important work that I will engage with in this discussion is Akira Iriye's work in *Across the Pacific*. This examination of American-Asian relations provides an excellent example of a broad and continuous picture of foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> The final part of my project will address the role that the Civil Rights movement played in influencing the foreign policy of the United States. This piece will primarily examine the policies during Eisenhower's time in office, and to this extent I engage with the argument from David Kaiser's work.

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<sup>3</sup> Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, Michael H., and Steven I. Levine. *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2012. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Iriye, Akira. *Across the Pacific; An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967. Print.

I am in agreement with Mary Dudziak's book *Cold War and Civil Rights* on the importance that the American treatment of African Americans had in the broader context of the Cold War. The international perception of the plight of African Americans in the United States severely crippled the credibility of the United States on the international stage.<sup>7</sup> The attitudes displayed domestically in regards to Native Americans and the African American population of the United States, were also reflected in American foreign policy. This can be seen in the documents from the Eisenhower administration and the policies that resulted. These policies served to ensure American involvement in Vietnam and a crucial component of these documents was an American conception of inherent racial superiority. It is because of this that the integration of domestic issues of race are so crucial to understanding why the Eisenhower administration established policies that deeply involved the United States in Vietnam. Furthermore these policies are inextricably linked with the broader context of the global Cold War.

Given the controversial nature of the war in Vietnam, three different eras of literature have emerged in thinking about the nature and significance of the conflict. These eras of scholarship are the "bad war", revisionist, and post-revisionist periods.<sup>8</sup> My work is in conversation with all of these eras of scholarship, but I engage most with the post-revisionist period. The post-revisionist era has largely returned to earlier critiques of the war during the "bad war" period, particularly in regards to examining the presidential decisions and policies

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<sup>7</sup> Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Richter, Bryan. *The Hidden Architect: Dwight Eisenhower's Cold War Policies and the Vietnam War*. 2014.

regarding the Cold War and Vietnam specifically. As opposed to previous eras of discussion regarding Vietnam, the current areas of study have become much more historic as opposed to journalistic in its study. This has been made possible by recent declassification of documents that add depth to the materials that can be drawn upon to study the war and decisions leading up to it. Building off of the new area of international study is new research like that of two books have been published by Ilya Gaiduk and Qiang Zhai who wrote *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (1996) and *China and the Vietnam War* (2000) respectively, that discusses the historic viewpoint of the war which has been traditionally ignored.<sup>9</sup> This new school of thought particularly regarding the presidential policy aspect is what my archives and research will contribute to. In a similar vein to David Kaiser's work, I will seek to examine the policy decisions of Eisenhower's administration. However, my addition to the academic discussion is the inclusion of racial attitudes both domestically and internationally. The relation of domestic policy towards Native Americans and African Americans, and the international policy, particularly in regards towards to Vietnam, are my contribution to the literature regarding Cold War scholarship.

Methodologically I approach my research with the understanding that domestic and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin. Both aspects of governmental policy are affected by and are extensions of one another. This approach allows me to develop a richer portrait of American involvement in the Pacific and how this involvement did not exist in a vacuum. It is

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pg. 2. & Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1996; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

dangerous to ignore what occurs domestically while trying to understand the interaction of states on the internationally and vice versa. This is especially true in the case of the United States.

More than any other nation on Earth, race has been the catalyst for many critical events in the history of the United States. This importance is reflected in the American Civil War, the treatment of Native Americans, and in westward expansion. The vital importance of the interplay between race and foreign policy continued from America's very inception and into the Cold War period. The inherent superiority contained with American expansion caused the United States to engage in conflicts and military actions across the globe. While there has been a great deal that has been written about each of these topics individually, there has not been a large body of work that ties racial attitudes with the large scale policy decisions. To tie all of these conversations together is one of the primary objectives of this project. By understanding all of these components together, a more accurate picture of past international relations of the United States can be seen. Only through understanding these past interactions, can we hope to avoid the mistakes of the past. The reasons behind the war in Vietnam are of particular interest to me given how deeply intertwined my family history is with the conflict and the profound impact it has had on my family and I on a personal level.

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1969 my uncle Donald Richter was killed in action in Tay Ninh province in South Vietnam. He served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Air Cavalry as a Private First Class. He served as a door gunner in a Huey transport helicopter and during a pickup of troops, the unit they were picking up came under heavy enemy fire in the landing zone. To ensure that the troops could be safely picked up, my uncle disembarked from the helicopter and using his M60



heavy machine gun, provided covering fire on enemy positions. In the course of this action, he was mortally wounded and died in the air on the way back to the field hospital. As a result of his bravery in the line of duty he posthumously received the Silver Star and the rank of corporal. The sacrifice that my uncle made in the jungles of Vietnam, provides me with a constant reminder of the importance of my research. If the United States wants to avoid future conflicts like Vietnam, it is imperative that we understand how we become involved. It was this connection to Vietnam, which first caused me to delve into the causes of the war and led me to collection of documents I uncovered at the Eisenhower Library.

## Manifest Destiny and the Origins of Empire

American imperial ambitions were not the result of an instantaneous or alchemical process. Rather, it was gradual and constantly shifting process. This process that led to these ambitions began in the centuries of the nation's founding and was a constant source of motivation and mission in the American Revolutionary project. The west represented opportunity and fresh start for American society. The movement away from Europe typified the trajectory of American society. The space in which the United States could develop an identity separate from that of Old World was that of westward expansion. This expansion began with the development of the frontier in present day Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia in what became known as the Deep South.<sup>10</sup> While the insatiable appetite for land and commercial enterprise drove the settling of this land, it inevitably led to conflict with the populace who called these regions home. This precedent of conflict with indigenous people on lands the United States sought to control would return in later decades. However, this trend began with Native American populace of the United States. The campaign to remove or eliminate the Natives, had a distinctly racial component to it. The "vacant" Garden of Eden Americans imagined the west to be was complicated by the presence of Indian nations.

The Native Americans were viewed as subhuman, and therefore, fairness and mercy were unnecessary when dealing with them. More than any other factor, disease was responsible for the demise of the native populace of the Americas. At the time of Columbus'

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<sup>10</sup>Rothman, Adam. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005. Print.

arrival in the “New World” the population of North America was roughly seven million people, but by 1600 had been reduced to 1 million.<sup>11</sup> Following rapid European colonization and military campaigns against the native populace, by 1900 the native populace in North America numbered an infinitesimal 220,000 to 300,000.<sup>12</sup> The unprecedented level of racially motivated slaughter that typified these conflicts would be seen in later American conflicts. An account of F. Trench Townsend from England recounts the attitude held by soldiers and settlers of the frontier. “He came to understand the ‘justice and necessity’ of annihilating ‘every Redskin we should meet- man, woman and child.’”<sup>13</sup> Bruce Cumings argues, native populations were incapable of dealing with a nation united against them in conquest. By the time the United States was formed, Native populaces had become so devastated by disease, war, and tribal factionalism that the conquest of the American west was essentially a foregone conclusion.<sup>14</sup> As a result of this relatively easy conquest, Americans believed that God had preordained the American push westward and that it was the duty of the United States to extend its hegemony from the West Coast of the United States into the great Pacific itself. Along with a duty to conquer the land, was a responsibility to civilize any non-white populations that they came across. It was with this civilizing mission that the United States embarked upon its first foray colonization. The year was 1899.

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<sup>11</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. pg. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 34. & Townsend, F. Trench. *Ten Thousand Miles of Travel, Sport and Adventure*. London: Hurst & Blackett, 1869. Print. pp. 148-149.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 29.

New technologies such as the steam ship and long range cannons made the world seem smaller and caused the United States to seek new territories with which to exert influence and preserve its national security.<sup>15</sup> The Philippines war marked an important milestone for American expansion. It was the first American incursion into a distinctly Asian nation and established the nation's first and only colony in the Pacific. As American imperial aspirations began to come to the fore, this sense of the anglo-saxon right to rule was exported from the shores of California to the beaches of the Philippines. As a result of the Spanish-American War, and the United States quick defeat of Spanish Naval forces defending the chain of islands, it opened the door for American ground forces to secure a base in Asia. This is exactly what President McKinley ordered American forces to do in the Phillipines.<sup>16</sup>

By doing so, McKinley committed the United States to an imperial project in Asia that began with the establishment of this colony and its subsequent pacification in a similar manner to that of the Native Americans. The viewpoint of the Filipinos was of a politically and societally immature culture and therefore incapable of self-rule.<sup>17</sup> Racially charged comments like Mckinley's would become commonplace in the rhetoric of American leaders in the years to come. In resistance to American conquest of the archipelago, native resistance groups shifted their focus from conventional warfare and geared up to fight a guerilla campaign against the island chain's new colonial power, the United States. This was to be an entirely different experience from their struggle with the Spanish. The wealth and military power the Americans

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<sup>15</sup> Hunt, Michael H., and Steven I. Levine. *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2012. Print. pg. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 17

could bring to bear exceeded that of the waning Spanish empire who lacked the funds to sustain any significant number of ground troops. The United States' replied to this resistance and sent 75,000 troops supported by adequate supplies, infrastructure and a flood of volunteers to augment their forces. The Filipinos, hurriedly assembled a force to resist this new threat but without the naval and artillery capabilities of the United States were nearly always routed.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the war in the Philippines took on the same atmosphere of the Indian Wars on the continental United States, and many of the soldiers perceived the war in this context. McKinley's successor, Teddy Roosevelt, thought of the conflict as part of the same struggle.

"If Indians and Filipinos go down before American power, then they must be identical: 'Everything that was said for Aguinaldo could be said for Sitting Bull.' Only foolish idealist would fail to understand that if you left the continent to the Indians it would become 'nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages.'...Roosevelt was preeminent in pushing manifest destiny beyond the continent, linking Indian fighting to imperial adventure and the westering of the American people, and Anglo-Saxons to the 'great fighting races'. Jefferson's empire of liberty had turned into Roosevelt's imperialism- 'we but pitch the tents of liberty farther westward.'"<sup>19</sup>

Therefore the conquest of the Philippines was the natural next piece of the American mission to civilize the savagery of the Native Americans of North America.

The commanding officers and generals of the war in the Philippines were veterans of the Native American conflicts. While in the initial phase of the war, the American forces were composed primarily of volunteer regiments like the 13<sup>th</sup> Minnesota, by 1901 regular Army

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pg. 33

<sup>19</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pg. 138. & Slotkin, Richard *Gunfighter Nation : The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth- Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1992. Print. pp. 106-107, 109-111.

troops had taken over the war with a number of African-American troops entering into the conflict. The racial components of the conflict became even more pronounced. The black American soldiers felt discrimination at the hands of their fellow white soldiers who hurled the same slurs against them as they did against the Filipino enemy.<sup>20</sup> Despite this obvious source of common grievance between African-American soldiers and their enemy, the Black soldiers considered the Filipinos in the same manner as the white soldiers did. They viewed the Filipinos as uncivilized and childlike, requiring the intervention of the more advanced American culture in society to educate them.<sup>21</sup> In this way, black American soldiers took up the symbolic “white man’s burden” in civilizing and Americanizing the country.<sup>22</sup>

After the professional troops had taken over the majority of the fighting in the conflict, racial tensions escalated to their highest levels. This was brought on primarily by the shift to guerrilla warfare and the ensuing frustration of the American soldiers trying to fight an enemy that often couldn’t be found or identified.<sup>23</sup> The frustration led to the frequent use of terms among American troops like *gugu*, and *gook* that would become commonplace throughout American wars in Asia.<sup>24</sup> Along with name calling, persecution and torture of captured Filipino soldiers and civilians believed to be supporters of the “rebels” intensified to unprecedented levels. Entire villages were razed to the ground and their populations either deported to other parts of the islands or simply massacred.<sup>25</sup> This legacy of racially motivated soldiers is

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<sup>20</sup>Cummings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. pg. 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

noteworthy and would reappear in later conflicts in the Pacific and East Asia. Upon contact with the enemy, many soldiers acknowledged the humanity and cleverness of their enemy rather than dismissing them as inhuman beasts.

However, when the war took on a guerrilla aspect, the Filipinos became dehumanized and racist attitudes and practices began to rule the day. Furthermore, the conflict in the Philippines announced to the nations of Asia that despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the United States had no interest in the self-determination of Asiatic nations and established a colonialist legacy that would come to the fore from World War II through the Vietnam War. However, after McKinley's assassination in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt took office and shifted the doctrine of Manifest Destiny even more deeply into the Pacific arena.

Despite increased Pacific involvement during this period, the United States was still Atlanticist in its leanings. However, Roosevelt sought to change that. He realized that the arena where the United States could project its ascendant power was in the Pacific. His nationalist vision for the United States was a nation that encompassed both the Atlantic and the Pacific.<sup>26</sup> In this way America represented the new world order, and Europe the old. While the recently acquired Philippines directly reflected Old World concepts of empire, the future relations in East Asia were in Roosevelt's ideas to be a different kind of relationship. Rather than direct control, East Asia would be "opened" to American economic interests and influence.<sup>27</sup> American's had always been interested in the affairs of the Atlantic world, but the focus on the Pacific created a new global dynamic to American ambitions. Members of the

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<sup>26</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pg. 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 139.

American political establishment reflected the incredible opportunity that the defeat of the Spanish and consequent conquest of the Philippines had provided the United States. The American ambassador to Great Britain, Whitelaw Reid provided an interesting insight into American domination of the Pacific.

“Practically we own more than half the coast on this side, dominate the rest, and have midway stations in the Sandwich and Aleutian Islands. To extend now the authority of the United States over the great Philippine Archipelago is to fence in the China Sea and secure an almost equally commanding position on the other side of the Pacific- doubling our control of it and the fabulous trade the Twentieth Century will see it to bear. Rightly used, it enables the United States to convert the Pacific Ocean almost into an American lake.”<sup>28</sup>

As the United States moved to establish its control over the Pacific, the Japanese also working to create an Empire of their own.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, technological advances economically, militarily, and societally were making great strides throughout Europe. Japan seeking to make itself a power on the world stage cast aside its traditional culture and engaged in the rapid process of modernization. Japan sought to be able to compete with the Western powers that had been carving apart Asia for so long. To become a world power and save Japan from the imperial ambitions of western nations, Japan had to join these “advanced nations” on the international stage.<sup>29</sup> By joining the “European League of Nations”, Japan would ensure its survival and prosperity in the new global world. Furthermore, Japan needed to establish its dominance over Asia in order to save it from the machinations of the west. Essential to this new assertion of power was China. By asserting

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pg. 141. & Healy, David. *US Expansionism; the Imperialist Urge in the 1890s*. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1970. Print. pg. 174.

<sup>29</sup>Iriye, Akira. *Across the Pacific; an Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967. Pg. 65.



itself into Asia, Japan would ensure both that they would be taken seriously by other “developed nations” and they would gain a greater sphere of influence in Asia.<sup>30</sup> As this shift towards western ways of government and institutions was occurring, Japan also emphasized the traditional culture more and more in order to establish themselves as unique from the powers of the west. Japan readily adopted the narrative of eastern versus western and set themselves up in vehement defense of what they viewed as their sphere of influence.<sup>31</sup> The antagonism that existed between Japan and the United States only intensified as Japan emerged as a larger threat to American security. With Japan’s crushing victory over the Russians in the 1904 Russo-Japanese War, they emerged as true global force to be reckoned with.<sup>32</sup>

Japan’s continued policy of expansionism led them to come into increasing conflict with the United States over which nation had the right to exert its influence in Pacific. The path of empire that the Japanese had laid for themselves made war with the United States, who harbored similar interests, increasingly likely. Japan’s invasion of a weakened China in 1931 firmly exerted their imperial ambitions, and the country’s militarism earned the condemnation of the United States and its allies. The resulting antagonism made the outbreak of war between the two powers ever more likely. But it would not be until Europe became embroiled in conflict that the cauldron of resentment between the United States and Japan would overflow.

While the narratives of World War II in Europe are understood through a lens of moral struggle against the forces of Nazi tyranny, the Pacific theater is far more complex. Unlike in

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pg. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pg. 68.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pp. 106-108.

Europe, the easily comprehended struggle of good versus evil was forced to make way for a conflict more easily understood through traditional motivations. That is to say both sides were concerned with obtaining power, wealth, and territory. These more concrete objectives clash with American perceptions of World War II as a heroic struggle to stop a tyrant. While these concrete objectives were in place, the notion of American ascendancy across North American and extending their hegemony into the Pacific rose to the forefront of the conflict. The rise of Japan as a world power caused the two forces of American expansionism to clash with that of Japanese Imperialism and this in turn led to conflict. While the United States viewed the Pacific and Asia as inside the American sphere of influence, Japan perceived the international political situation in a different light.

Japan saw itself as a force that could unify Asia against the west under the umbrella of the Japanese Empire.<sup>33</sup> This Pan-Asian movement would consolidate the Japanese as the ruling power in Asia while preserving the status-quo in global relations. By 1941, Germany and Italy had succeeded in taking control of the European continent. The USSR had also been neutralized through the German and Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939.<sup>34</sup> Matsuoka Yosuke, who served as Japanese foreign minister from 1940-1941, saw a world divided into 4 distinct regions of influence. Japan would hold sway over all of Asia in their Pan-Asian vision for the continent. Germany and Italy would have hegemony over Europe, and lastly the United States and the Soviet Union would remain neutral and maintain their current hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and Russia respectively.<sup>35</sup> This system would allow Japan to extend its

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pg. 173.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Pg. 209.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

control over Asia without involving the United States or the Soviet Union in a global conflict. However, in adhering to this line of thought, they severely underestimated the United States interest in the Pacific. The United States believed that if the threat of force was applied the Japanese as lacking the level of resources and troops the United States could muster, would fold under the threat of force. The Japanese conversely believed that the United States could be bought off with favorable trade deals that would encourage the United States to remain neutral in any conflict.<sup>36</sup> These fictitious perceptions of one another led both nations down a path to war. The stage had been set for the conflict on a global scale for the second time in twenty years. The struggle for supremacy was also typified by the underpinnings of race struggle. Both sides viewed the other as inhuman and therefore necessary that they be exterminated.

The war was especially brutal from its outset with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. The surprise attack on the headquarters of the American Pacific fleet served to confirm American perceptions of Asians as untrustworthy and treacherous. Racial concerns underpinned the United States' understanding of the nature of the war in ways that simply did not apply in the conflict against Germany.<sup>37</sup> As close racially to Anglo-Saxons, in the eyes of many Americans at the time, the Germans were more similar than Asiatic or Slavic peoples. American ire was particularly directed at Asians and had been for years harkening back to the first arrivals from China.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. pp. 218-219.

<sup>37</sup> Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Pg. 36.

The first impression that many Americans had of Chinese was of the unskilled “coolie” laborers and other temporary laborers that had arrived in the United States prior to 1868.<sup>38</sup> More than this, was the perception of Chinese society as immoral and the Qing dynasty as cruel and in humane towards its citizens. It was feared that the stereotypical vices of opium, gambling, prostitution, and organized crime would pollute American society more as greater numbers of Chinese flooded into the country.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Chinese were viewed as backward and stubbornly set in their ways particularly compared with the Japanese. In this early stage of American- East Asian relations, the average American considered Asians to be of no account.<sup>40</sup> Despite these early perceptions of Chinese, it is interesting to note that early perceptions of Japan and the Japanese people were extremely positive. When the Japanese envoy first arrived in 1860, it was met with enthusiasm and hospitality, in sharp contrast to the way in which Americans welcomed the Chinese delegates just eight years later. The press in the United States aided in this perception. The Japanese delegation was given further credibility by the lack of an American representative in their party. When the Chinese delegation visited they appeared to be under the leadership and therefore dominion of American diplomat Anson Burlingame.<sup>41</sup> While his lobbying on behalf China captivated his audiences, he could not remove the common perception of the coolie workers.<sup>42</sup> Japan in the other hand was free of the domination of westerners in the delegation. Furthermore, the

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<sup>38</sup>Iriye, Akira. *Across the Pacific; an Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967. Pg. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pg. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pg. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp. 27-28.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. pg. 28

Japanese were interested to learn all that they could about American culture and society.

Americans saw this action in a very favorable light.

“All of this served to confirm the image of Japan casting aside its policy of seclusion and eagerly turning to America for friendship and guidance. Subsequent visits by students and officials everywhere repeated the same pattern. Americans extended their cordials welcome to Japanese studying at Ann Arbor, Harvard, and Rutgers. Some, like T. L. Harris, invited Japanese youths to participate in their religious communities. Other like Walt Whitman, wrote poems about their sight of Japanese visitors. Some of the most distinguished American educators responded to the request from the Japanese legation in Washington that they offer suggestions for educational reform in the new Japan. Japanese seemed to be intent on learning all they could from America.”<sup>43</sup>

This earlier perception of Japanese as the staunchest American ally in East Asia would change as Japan continued to gather power until the nations clashed after Pearl Harbor.

With the seeming confirmation of Asian treachery in the minds of many Americans, the war began in earnest. The government rushed to play off of all the negative perceptions of Asians that had been held in the United States for years. Most propaganda of World War II portrayed Japanese as a kind of ape-like creature. The feeling of the American soldier regarding the state of the Japanese can adequately be summed up in the words of Journalist Ernie Pyle. “But out here I gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.”<sup>44</sup> This labeling of the Japanese as vermin to be stamped out, contributed significantly to the extreme brutality of the war in the Pacific. The war took on racial connotations not only in the American context, but in the context of the survival of the white race. From its earliest beginnings, the conflict was

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid. pp. 29-30

<sup>44</sup>Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Pg. 78.

framed not only in racial sense but also as crucial to the survival of Western civilization. The East and West were in a continuous struggle for supremacy within the world. The East represented uniformity and “blandness in life” while the West represented “life as rich and fruitful as possible in varied material and spiritual achievement.”<sup>45</sup> Western scholars like Alfred T. Mahan also argued that Western civilizations had the duty to rule over inferior societies like those in the East.<sup>46</sup> However, as Eastern societies modernized as mandated by the west, fear began to spread that these Eastern societies would supplant the west.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, it was because of the superiority of the white race that victory would be won by the allies over their “subhuman” enemy. In a speech to his troops in 1943, General Thomas Blamey showed the precise level of hate for their Japanese foe.

“You have taught the world that you are infinitely superior to this inhuman foe against whom you were pitted. Your enemy is a curious race- a cross between the human being and the ape. And like the ape, when he is cornered he knows how to die. But he is inferior to you, and you know it, and that knowledge will help you to victory. We must go on to the end if civilization is to survive. We must exterminate the Japanese.”<sup>48</sup> Belief in the inhumanity of the Japanese was propagated by and promoted both by existing Anglo-Saxon biases coupled with propaganda campaigns depicting the Japanese as subhuman. As with any conflict, racial slurs and derogatory terms for the enemy became commonplace with terms like Jap, Nip (Nippon) entering the common language.<sup>49</sup> The dehumanization of the

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<sup>45</sup> Iriye, Akira. *Across the Pacific; an Inner History of American-East Asian Relations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967. Pg. 60.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pg. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. pg. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. pg. 71. & Johnston, George Henry. *The Toughest Fighting in the World*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943. Pg. 228. Quotation of Thomas Blamey.

<sup>49</sup> Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Pg. 81.

opponent chiefly as primates, but also as other creatures was used in the halls of government. Everyone from heads of state like Winston Churchill to members of the bureaucracy referred to the Japanese in animalistic terms. Beyond this, the peoples of Asia were lumped together eschewing any sense of nationalism or culture. Americans perceived the Japanese not as a kind of national enemy but as a horde that would sweep aside Western civilization and project a “yellow empire” across the globe.<sup>50</sup>

In World War II and beyond, this fear of a “yellow menace” was part of the American world view and became integrated into foreign policy of the day. While in World War II it was applied to Japan, only a few years before this had been projected onto China. Following the war, it was projected back onto communist China under Mao. This fear of a yellow horde invading the sweeping across the Pacific and then into American homes, was perceived as a very real and present danger within the United States. The idea of the “yellow horde” can be traced back to the first American foray into the Pacific. While certainly this idea was largely unfounded, it exerted a very powerful influence over American society through books, plays, films, and sensationalist journalism.<sup>51</sup> Books such as those written by Homer Lea about the evil and insidious Dr. Fu Manchu captivated audiences with his adaptation of western technology, his mysterious Eastern sorcery, and his command of the yellow horde terrified western readers on a fundamentally racial level. In this way, Japan as the rising power in Asia surpassed the menace previously accorded to China rather than merely replacing it.<sup>52</sup> This idea of the horde continued into the era of the Cold War with the conflicts in both Korea and Vietnam.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. pg. 156.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp. 157-158.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. pg. 158.

The expansion of American power in the centuries leading up to the Second World War was a gradual process, but with the end of World War II it became meteoric. Following the defeat of Japan in 1945, the United States reached the pinnacle of its power in the Pacific, attaining a level of power that had been dreamed of by ambitious men like the Roosevelts, but up to this point was unprecedented. The dream of an American empire in the Pacific was realized. While certainly this empire was never labeled or considered as such by the men who had brought it into being, it was an empire nonetheless. Having attained hegemony over this massive region, the United States moved from an episode in conquest to an exercise in maintaining that empire. The Americans would have no time to enjoy the spoils of war as it were, for just as soon as the world's largest scale war had ended, the United States would involve itself in the diplomatic struggle with the Soviet Union that would come to be known as the Cold War. While this war is considered to have been a Mexican standoff on the grandest scale imaginable with little actual conflict, the Pacific and the east in general became the arena where the Cold War became hot. The first entry of the United States into this new realm of international political struggle would be manifested by the American military action in Korea that would change the course of American society for years to come.



## **Racial Apathy: Civil Rights and the Eisenhower Administration's Domestic Policy**

Following World War II, an era of suspicion and fear began to sweep across the globe. The two major propagators of this Cold War were two allies during World War II; the United States and the Soviet Union. Both feared the strategic goals and intentions of the other, and felt that an ideological struggle for the soul of the world was at stake. As a result, both nations employed every strategy short of direct conflict to increase power over the other. This antagonism was on display for all to see, particularly in Europe. However, the popular public perception that the Cold War was only a contest of wills, or an espionage conflict waged in Europe, is not accurate. In the Pacific theater, the Cold War became quite hot both with the conflict in Korea and later in the jungles of Vietnam. Having defeated Japan and its imperial ambitions, the United States now faced what it perceived as the next great threat, an international communist movement led by the Soviet Union. In the context of this belief, American policy makers like John Foster Dulles, Dean Acheson, and President Harry Truman perceived that any communist regime posed a clear and present danger to American national security.

This idea first came into being under the Truman administration, as the post-World War II balance of power was being determined. In a 1947 speech to congress, Truman asserted that it was the duty and responsibility of the United States to prevent the spread of communism worldwide as a threat to the continued existence of the "free world".<sup>53</sup> While this thinking was initially applied to Europe, it spilled over into considerations of preserving the balance of power

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<sup>53</sup> Hunt, Michael H., and Steven I. Levine. *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2012. Print. Pg. 121.

in Asia. This thinking became even more critical following the rise of the Chinese Communist Party to power in 1949, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This was seen as a catastrophe in the American policy of containment outlined by Truman and the conflict that developed in Korea was viewed in the context of preventing the "fall" of any more territories to communist dominance.<sup>54</sup> Initially in Korea, the United States 1950 invasion and push to the Yalu River on the peninsula's northern border was a crushing victory for the United States. However, the entrance of 500,000 Chinese "volunteers" pushed American forces back, and after three years of hard fighting, resulted in a stalemate. While, the conflict became increasingly unpopular at home, government officials perceived it as an important effort internationally by the United States to prevent the spread of Communist conspiracy. However, the unpopularity of the war became associated with Truman and in 1953 he was succeeded by former Supreme Allied commander Dwight D. Eisenhower. In a document from the first year of Eisenhower's presidency it becomes plain to see that this thinking, carried over to his administration.

The document in question is a report by the National Security Council on the role that the United States should play in Southeast Asia. The most noteworthy aspect of this document is the language. The communist movement throughout the document is viewed as something international that transcends borders. Rather than viewing any such movement as nationalist, Asian communist movements were instead perceived as puppets of the Soviet Union.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. pp. 122-124

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Psychological Strategy with Respect to the Thai Peoples of Southeast Asia, July 2, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene Kansas. pp. 1-6.

Furthermore, the movement of Asians towards communism proved particularly problematic given existing racial fears of a “yellow horde” that was now represented by the PRC. This perception of global conspiracy only increased fears of communist subversion domestically, as Civil Rights movements swept across the United States began to gain steam in the early years of the Cold War.

During the Cold War, the racial attitudes held by the citizens of the United States played a significant part of American foreign relations and policy. In order to claim the moral high ground in their “war” with communism, the United States was forced to examine and seek to change the race dynamics within their own country. These dynamics needed to be changed to reflect the public mission of the United States, establishing freedom and equality globally, in the domestic sphere. In the wake of World War II, solving domestic racism became a greater part of the national agenda. Campaigns were launched to support equality for all. Racism, after all had been a hallmark of fascism in Nazi Germany and what could be more un-American than that?<sup>56</sup> However, immediately following World War II, racially motivated crimes against returning African-American veterans swept through the southern United States. In response to the lynching and other crimes, often at the hands of police, President Truman felt ever mounting pressure from the Afro-American community to bring an end to the issues plaguing the nation. However, the pressure was not only felt at home, it was also felt internationally with criticism from other nations.

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<sup>56</sup> Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pg. 9.

In the wake of World War II, with the United States becoming the outspoken international voice of self-determinism, the lack of rights and representation for minorities was an embarrassment and a liability. It was difficult for the Truman administration to label communism as an oppressive regime when the rights of African Americans were far less than white Americans, particularly in the south. The policies of segregation and Jim Crowe were particularly damning evidence in this regard.<sup>57</sup> These lack of rights were noted by papers internationally, particularly in Asia. This was due to the fresh memory of the brutal and racially charged conflict in the Pacific between Japan and the US. Papers from Fiji to China all condemned American policies towards “the Negro Question”.<sup>58</sup> The attention that this garnered significantly undermined the Americans’ claims of supporting self-determination. Many Asian peoples had experienced the exact opposite as the United States demonstrated throughout the Cold War period that self-determinism only applied in cases in which it led to “democracy”. Furthermore and most alarmingly for Americans, the discrimination against blacks in the South was capitalized on by the USSR in the national Soviet newspaper *Trud*.<sup>59</sup> In articles about the tensions in the United States, *Trud* simply reported American articles on the issue.<sup>60</sup> It was through events like the insertion of a prominent Soviet newspaper into the discussion that the link between racial issues within the United States and the external Cold War became linked. With the condemnation of US inaction in “the Negro Question” by the

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<sup>57</sup> Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001. Pg. 89

<sup>58</sup> Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. pgs. 31-33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* pgs. 37-38.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

USSR, the Civil Rights movement was placed in an awkward spot in which criticizing the US government could be presented as a communist plot. On the other hand, the American government had to reevaluate its stance on Civil Rights issues as they undermined the credibility of American ideology worldwide.

In discussing and criticizing the treatment of African-Americans within American society gained the Soviets a great deal of credibility within the non-white third world communities. The sentiments condemning imperialism outlined and practiced by the USSR, contrasted with the practices of the United States that were observed by leaders of third world nations.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the treatment of foreign dignitaries of color also presented an embarrassment to the United States. Being asked to attend a conference in Mississippi, the Haitian Secretary of Agriculture was refused entry to the hotel where the conference was being held and was accommodated elsewhere. As a result the secretary left the conference in a rage.<sup>62</sup> While nations like Haiti were not powers on the world stage, incidents such as this one were commonplace during the early years of the Cold War and severely damaged the prestige of the United States internationally. Visiting foreign dignitaries were often given a type of honorary “white” status upon entering the United States.<sup>63</sup> This status proved insulting these guests of the United States and presented a troubling portrait of American society to the international community. The society that perpetuated these values of segregation and discrimination was one that Eisenhower and his administration were quite willing to allow to continue. This was

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<sup>61</sup> Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001. Pg. 113.

<sup>62</sup>Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. pg. 40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. pg. 41.

not so much a belief in discrimination in and of itself, but instead in the society that perpetuated it.

Eisenhower was born during the 1890's while the suppression of Native Americans was still taking place in the western frontier of the United States. Racial segregation was being implemented into American law with the Plessy vs. Ferguson case in 1896 and it was in this atmosphere that young Dwight was brought up.<sup>64</sup> While it should be noted that Eisenhower did not demonstrate a propensity for racial discrimination, he was not someone who differed from popular attitudes in American society during the times in which he lived. Having been raised by a Texan in his mother, Eisenhower had a respect for the cause of the Confederacy and the "genteel southern tradition". While Eisenhower condemned racial violence in the South during his presidency, his leanings towards white southern society can be clearly seen in a 1958 new conference he delivered.

"From babyhood I was raised to respect the word 'Confederate'-very highly I might add-and for hoodlums such as these to describe themselves as any part or relation to the Confederacy of the mid-nineteenth century is, to my mind, a complete insult'. These were not the words of a man much troubled by regional racial traditions, like the slavery at the heart of that honored Confederacy."<sup>65</sup>

While this particular instance may paint Eisenhower as biased against racial equality, it seems that he simply did not consider it of any great importance. A piece of evidence that adds nuance to the perceptions of race that Eisenhower held is his frequent denouncement of blatant racial bigotry by members of his staff or administration.<sup>66</sup> However, apart from these episodes of private condemnation, Eisenhower quite simply felt uncomfortable in addressing

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<sup>64</sup> Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001. Pp. 86-87.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. pg. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

issues of race and removed any elements from his speeches and other public appearances that dealt with racial issues.<sup>67</sup> The one member of his staff who was African American, Frederic Morrow, was told by Chief of Staff Wilton Persons to refrain from any discussion of race or civil rights around the president. Whether this order came from the Chief of Staff or from Eisenhower himself is unclear.<sup>68</sup> What is clear is that race relations for the Eisenhower administration were the proverbial elephant in the room. However, during his time in office Eisenhower realized certain aspects of American society reflected poorly on American international prestige and sought to do away with old practices. Most notable of these was the integration of the military.

The American armed forces were already implementing racial integration by the time Eisenhower took office in 1953, which had been introduced by the Truman administration in 1948. This formed a portion of society outside of the usual standards of segregation and allowed for a racially inclusive culture to flourish in the American military. Despite this federal institution that was adapting to the modern world of the Cold War rapidly, the rest of American society was slower to embrace change. However, change arrived in the form of the Brown vs the Board of Education court case.

Upon the 1954 ruling by the Supreme Court in favor of eliminating racial segregation, the decision was framed in the context of the Cold War by members of the administration. The decision would “stun and silence America’s Communist traducers behind the Iron Curtain.”<sup>69</sup> Once again the Eisenhower administration demonstrated that its policy of avoiding the human

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. pg. 89.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pg. 88

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. pg. 94.

rights and moral context of the Civil Rights Movement in favor of one focused instead internationally. Indeed the decision of the court was considered in this context as a way to promote the American battle for freedom against Communist tyranny. It was important for the Eisenhower administration that African-Americans made strides with their civil rights during this period. This would in turn endorse the American political system as superior to that of communism. Therefore, actions like the *Brown* decision were of vital importance to proving this point on the world stage. Therefore, it was endorsed by the Eisenhower administration but only in so far as it promoted American foreign interests. It was crucial to demonstrating that people of color in the United States enjoyed the privileges and freedoms the United States espoused internationally.<sup>70</sup> While *Brown* and the Montgomery bus boycotts clearly demonstrated this, the escalating racially charged violence in the South served to work at cross purposes to the Eisenhower administrations agenda of showcasing the benefits of American democracy internationally. However, as he had done his entire term in office, Eisenhower and his administration continued to skate around the issue of racial inequality, avoiding any discussion of it unless absolutely necessary. Despite the policy of avoiding involvement in racial issues, the Eisenhower administration was forced to face these issues head on with the Little Rock crisis in 1957.

The white southern reaction to the integration of nine black students into Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas showed the world how entrenched American racial discrimination was.<sup>71</sup> The governor and school officials first attempted to use the Arkansas

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. pg. 97.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pg. 103.



National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school, and when ordered to cease and desist, they turned to the crowd of white southerners who closed down the school in protest. Faced with a clear usurping of federal power, Eisenhower had no choice but dispatch the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne to restore order.<sup>72</sup> Even in this case, what Eisenhower objected to most strongly was not the prevention of the African-American students to enter the school, he instead opposed the mob's actions as contrary to "public order". He once again refused to take a stand on a clear issue of racial equality.<sup>73</sup> This damaged American claims abroad that Soviet influence represented a new era of communist colonialism. Condemnation of colonialism on the part of the United States given their alignment in the Cold War.

The United States closest allies in the Cold War were all former colonial powers, with France still fighting a war in Vietnam to retain its final grasp on colonial power. This precedent made it difficult to swallow that the United States primary interest was in equality for all citizens when in reality, if the same people were living in the United States they would be denied many of the rights taken for granted by white American citizens. Domestically, the Eisenhower administration did not seek to integrate the new era of freedom that was dawning on the world stage. While they advocated self-determinism and democracy on the international stage, the administration did nothing to challenge the ruling ideology of white supremacy at home. Although there were blows struck for the cause of Civil Rights during Eisenhower's term in office such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Little Rock nine, in the whole the rhetoric and actions of his administration demonstrated his apathy towards racial

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. pg. 103.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

change.<sup>74</sup> While this cold apathy was experienced on the home front, the racial battle intensified on the international stage in the context of the Cold War as Eisenhower and his administration laid the groundwork for American involvement in Vietnam.

The Vietnam War in and of itself was not necessarily about race. However, many of the policies and attitudes that led the United States into conflict in Vietnam are. The way in which Vietnam and other third world nations is what made an impact on policy making decisions. The NSC labeled the leaders of these third world nations as “immature and unsophisticated with respect to the issues that still divide the world today.”<sup>75</sup> This disdain for the leadership of the third world is reflected by this attitude in tone of condescension that is demonstrated by the Eisenhower administration, particularly in examining the language concerning the developing involvement in Vietnam. This language places the United States firmly above the Vietnamese and demonstrates conceptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority were transposed on thinking about Vietnam.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. pp. 133-134.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. pg. 114.

## The Final Leap: Race and Vietnam

As The United States was embroiled in escalating racial tensions at home, the Eisenhower administration turned its gaze towards fighting the Cold War in Vietnam. Inextricable from the increased involvement were the events occurring in regards to the African-American community. With a large part of the domestic population at home in a state of protest and civil disobedience, securing the Cold War internationally became even more crucial to demonstrating American ideological superiority.

The seeds for American involvement in Vietnam can be traced back to the end of World War II and the final days of the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Initially, Roosevelt supported the idea of establishing a self-determined state free of the yoke of colonialism. As the end of the war drew near, Roosevelt changed his opinion adopting the all too familiar stance that the people of Vietnam were not yet politically mature enough to run their country.<sup>76</sup> He argued that they would need twenty to thirty years in order to be able to properly handle the responsibility however, he refused to take the role of mentor and passed the buck to the French in reinstating their colony in Indochina.<sup>77</sup> It was during this period that the French colony, previously a tertiary objective to the United States, came to the fore of the Cold War. While intrinsically and politically insignificant for the United States, in the context of the larger Cold War Vietnam was given significance by policy makers and Cold War theorists like Dean Acheson. Acheson served as secretary of state and was instrumental in shaping Cold War policy for the United States. It was Acheson who first proposed the strategy of containing and

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<sup>76</sup> Hunt, Michael H., and Steven I. Levine. *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2012. Print. Pg. 187

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

preventing the spread of communism. This new Cold War coincided with the passing of responsibility of serving as the primary political and military power of the west.

This was a role that had been fulfilled for years by the British Empire through their vast infrastructure of global naval bases. These outposts served both to protect British economic and colonial interests abroad, but also served the crucial role of acting as a “power of last resort”.<sup>78</sup> This new role for the American government was primarily taken on by Acheson who took a much more Atlanticist approach by developing strong treaty relationships with European nations, and initially adopting a European colonial approach to their foreign policy. As a result of the inherent belief that America had a duty to establish hegemony internationally, the United States had a duty to become more involved internationally. In Europe, US allies dominated the continent and through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the United States shared power with these allies. However, in the Pacific there was no organization comparable to NATO. Despite the fact that SEATO was established in 1954, it had none of the cooperative power and relied solely on the United States for relevance. Therefore, if the United States wished to exert its influence over the Pacific, it would have to act unilaterally. The British had given up their interest in the region and in the colonial project, while France was entrenched in colonial war in both Indochina and Tunisia. This ensured that the United States not only took the lead in Asia following the French defeat in Vietnam, but was guaranteed to do it virtually alone.

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<sup>78</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. pg. 389.

Unlike in its previous engagements in Asia like the Philippines, World War II, or Korea, the United States inched into war in Vietnam. It began with financial and political support for the French colonial project.<sup>79</sup> Then it was espionage networks and advisors to the South Vietnamese government following the Geneva Accords dividing the country into North and South Vietnam. Finally the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1965 brought a decade of tension to a head and the war in Vietnam began in earnest. However, before that fateful year, the Eisenhower regime played a crucial role in keeping the Diem regime afloat in South Vietnam. In addition to the previously discussed meeting between Eisenhower and Diem, the figures outlining the true extent of Southern reliance on both military and financial support from the United States is astounding. The CIA ran operations throughout the country to support his regime, and the American government made a huge financial investment within the country. By the end of the Eisenhower years, the United States was paying 85 percent of the military budget for South Vietnam as well as subsidizing 80 percent of their imports.<sup>80</sup> The level of American support demonstrates their commitment to preserving the integrity of South Vietnam. However, what were the motives behind this commitment? Was it for freedom, democracy, and self-determinism? Or were there ulterior motives?

In an NSC report from 1953, the commitment of America to assisting the French in Vietnam is discussed. Following a meeting on September 8<sup>th</sup>, America decided to commit 385

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<sup>79</sup> Memorandum for the National Security Council on Indochina, September 8, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene Kansas.

<sup>80</sup> Hunt, Michael H., and Steven I. Levine. *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2012. Print. pg. 199.

million dollars to the French cause.<sup>81</sup> This funding was done covertly by removing it from a number of existing aid programs. Additionally, the money taken from these programs was on top of the 400 million dollars already appropriated by congress to aid the French in the conflict.<sup>82</sup> All told this 785 million dollars would equal roughly 6.8 billion dollars in 2015. This large financial commitment by the United States established the American investment in the prosecution of conflict in Vietnam. To the Eisenhower administration, this policy of supporting the troops of another nation was an effective way to prevent the spread of communist aggression while preventing America from becoming involved in another potential conflict so soon after the end of the Korean War.<sup>83</sup> However this would change following the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu expulsion from their former colony.

With the removal of the French from Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva Accords, the newly divided Vietnam became two new nations. While the country was divided into North and South Vietnam this solution was only meant to be a temporary one. Two years following the partition national elections would be held to decide the fate of the country's political future, whether Communist or "Free". However, the United States had no intention of allowing the Communist North, which would win any freely held election in a landslide, to gain control over the entire country. This would be a great threat to the interests of the United States in Asia,

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<sup>81</sup>Memorandum for the National Security Council on Indochina, September 8, 1953, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene Kansas. Pg. 3-4.

<sup>82</sup>Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2012. Pg. 366.

<sup>83</sup> Richter, Bryan *Remembering the Forgotten War: Korea, Eisenhower and the War and Vietnam*. 2015. Pp. 6-7.

namely their economic market in Japan.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, in order to ensure Japan's security, the United States needed to maintain a sympathetic government in the newly formed South Vietnam. The man they turned to fill this role was Ngo Dinh Diem. With this decision, the United States fundamentally went against their professed principles of self-determinism to prop up Diem's tyrannical regime.

In a telegram from the US Department of State to the Saigon embassy, the language that establishes American dominance is plain to see. In the telegram, one point in the objectives and orders for the embassy is to replace the Vietnamese police force and military if it seems to be ineffective with a police force and military answerable to the Americans. Furthermore, the US forces should gain control of the South and dictate how the country is run.<sup>85</sup> This not only goes against the American principle of self-determinism but has racial undertones to it. The document demonstrates a fundamental mistrust of the South Vietnamese to protect and further interests of the United States within Vietnam. Given racial tensions and attitudes towards non-whites in America during 1954, a factor in this attitude is almost certainly related to a matter of racial mistrust. It was believed that Diem, as a man educated in America would be the only way the US could have control over South Vietnam. Additionally Diem had no real base of power within Vietnam and his power within the country was the result of the great deal of financial, military, and political influence that Eisenhower administration was able to apply within Southeast Asia. In a confidential meeting with

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<sup>84</sup> Richter, Bryan. *The Hidden Architect: Dwight Eisenhower's Cold War Policies and the Vietnam War*. 2014. Pg. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Telegram from US Department of State to Saigon Embassy, October 22, 1954. J. Lawton Collins Papers, Special Mission to Vietnam Series, Policy Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene Kansas. Pg. 2.

President Eisenhower in 1957, the depth of the Diem's dependence upon American support becomes plain.

In this meeting Diem states directly that the preservation of his state is entirely dependent on American aid, particularly financially and militarily. He stresses time and again throughout the conversation that without American aid that his country will collapse.<sup>86</sup> The fact that Diem's regime is so reliant on American support is telling about their understanding of the situation in Vietnam. The United States fundamentally misunderstood what the will of the Vietnamese people was, instead decided that they knew what was best for Vietnam. As the leaders of the Free World in the Cold War, surely they knew the best way in which to make a backwards and primitive nation like Vietnam modern and civilized. Furthermore, it was believed that not only was Vietnam primitive and backwards, but that it represented a larger global communist conspiracy.

Following the Chinese entrance into the Korean War in 1950, the United States came to believe all the more strongly in this notion of a global communist movement and this certainty affected the way in which the United States perceived Vietnam. The tiny country in Southeast Asia became, in the eyes of the Eisenhower Administration, the battleground upon which the Cold War would be fought. However, Eisenhower wanted to avoid becoming involved in another land war during his time in office, having just extricated the United States from stalemate in Korea. However, the primary concern in Vietnam was ensuring that the leader of South Vietnam would be willing to take directives from his paternalistic American allies.

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<sup>86</sup> Meeting Between Dwight Eisenhower and Ngo Dinh Diem, May 9, 1957, Ann Whitman Files, Papers as President 1953-1961, International Meeting Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene Kansas. Pgs. 3-4.



Without, the oversight of the United States how could it be certain that these Asians would know how to lead their country away from communism? This mistrust of non-white national leaders led the United States to insert itself farther and farther on the road to conflict in Vietnam. An important turning point was the drafting of NSC policy 5809 in 1958.

“Because these countries do not have the capability of creating armed forces which could effectively resist large-scale external aggression, the United States will be required to provide a basic shield against Communist aggression. For the foreseeable future, local will to resist aggression will depend on conviction in Southeast Asia that United States will continue its support and will maintain striking forces adequate to counter aggression in Southeast Asia with the capabilities described in current basic national security policy.”<sup>87</sup>

This policy provided an important precedent in regards to military involvement in Vietnam.

NSC 5809 allowed for unilateral intervention in Vietnam to combat vague “communist aggression” without congressional approval. This policy would come home to roost in 1968 with President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed by Congress and gave executive powers to Johnson to initiate a conflict within Vietnam. In the resolution Johnson’s powers in relation to Southeast Asia were threefold. First the president had the ability to respond to attacks on American naval vessels with any measures to prevent them from reoccurring. Second the United States was prepared to engage in any military action to protect any region that fell under the SEATO Treaty. Third the resolution would continue until the chief executive deemed that peace and security had been brought to the region.<sup>88</sup> The language present in this resolution, especially section two, are a

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<sup>87</sup> NSC 5809, April 2, 1958, FRUS, 1958-60, XVI, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Kaiser, David E. *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000. Pg. 336.

reiteration of NSC 5809 and the statements of Eisenhower outlining American commitment to Southeast Asia. This resolution is concrete proof of the lasting effects of Eisenhower's administration on the Vietnam War. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution was nearly of decade of American foreign policy under Eisenhower embodied in a single document.<sup>89</sup> The racial components of these policies are clear to see when examined in the context of past American presidents and Eisenhower's view of race domestically.

### Conclusion

American race relations have dominated the path of American Expansionism and the perpetuation of its Pacific empire. These racial perceptions were, however, nuanced and complicated. More than merely complicated, they were in constant motion. What initially applied to a certain group of people, might shift to a different group of people the next moment. These shifting perceptions were particularly clear in how attitudes regarding Native Americans were transplanted onto Filipinos upon the entrance of the United States into colonial war with the former Spanish possession. The inhuman portrayal reflected the same views held by soldiers during the Indian Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If the Filipinos were defeated by the United States in the same manner as the Native Americans, then they must possess the same level of racial worth.<sup>90</sup> These concepts were then exported upon to the greatest challenge to American power in the Pacific, the ascendant Pan-Asianism of the Japanese in the

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<sup>89</sup>Richter, Bryan *Remembering the Forgotten War: Korea, Eisenhower and the War and Vietnam*. 2015. Pg. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pg. 138.

20<sup>th</sup> century. To combat this threat, it was crucial that the populace of the United States perceive World War II in the same racial context as the suppression of the Filipinos. The fear of a “yellow peril” that would sweep aside western civilization and the most cherished aspects of American society ensured that the United States bought strongly into war in the Pacific.

Following the defeat of Japan, a new threat in the form of global communism needed to be addressed and to this end, perceptions of race again came to the fore. However, with emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1950’s this movement ceased to be merely a domestic issue and took on international significance. The taking up of the banner of Civil Rights by the Communist nations of the world inextricably tied communism and the Civil Rights movement together in the eyes of American policy makers. As the United States faced mounting pressure from the global community, it was forced to address issues of racial inequality. The best way for the United States to combat these allegations was to make changes and by doing so promote the American system of democracy. While this certainly did push forward the cause of the Civil Rights in the eyes of the federal government, it removed the moral and human rights component of the movement and presented it in a purely political context. The Eisenhower and his administration were quite willing to pass the buck on dealing with America’s racial issues and only did so when completely necessary. This discussion of race and racial issues extended into foreign policy in Asia and Vietnam and worked off a “white man’s burden” style policy to civilize the people of Asia by Americanizing and democratizing them. This fundamental racial mistrust embedded in American policy making led to the drafting of policies like NSC 5809. This in turn enabled the executive to involve American troops on his own initiative in Vietnam which was indeed done under President Lyndon B.

Johnson. Therefore, the establishment of the American Empire in the Pacific is one of racial prejudice and inherent white superiority. This lens was used by the United States to justify involvement in conflicts from the Philippines to the conflict in Vietnam that really began in 1954 following the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu. The United States took up the torch that was set aside by Great Britain following World War II. The torch of western civilization that demanded subjugation and adaptation by the “lesser peoples” of the planet in the new American Hegemony that was engaged in a battle with communism for the ideological soul of the world. It was this mandate that led the United States into Vietnam and it was this reason that American troops planted their boots in the red soil of Vietnam and went on patrols into the jungle. It was for this reason that 20 year old Donald Richter lost his life on March 26, 1969 some 13,000 miles from his home in Sheboygan Wisconsin. In the way that these events have shaped my family, they have also served to shape generations of citizens of all nations. Americans, Filipinos, Native Americans, and Vietnamese have experienced the impact of American Expansionism, the effects of which continue to influence us in the present day.

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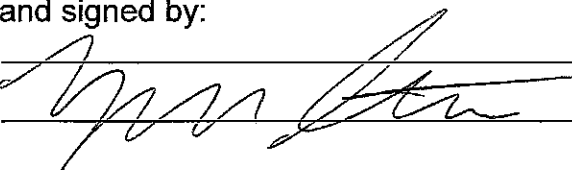
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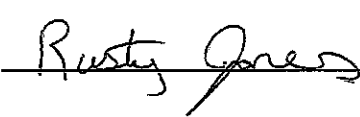
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