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Abstract

The 1986 passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAA) over President Reagan's veto marked the culmination of years of growing opposition by the American public to the apartheid policy of the white minority government of South Africa. The United States had been since the early Cold War a supporter of South Africa and a major importer of strategic resources from that country, regardless of the white government's repressive racial policies administration, while tipping its hat to the need for change with its "constructive engagement" policy, stayed true to a cold warrior mentality and maintained that South Africa was of strategic interest to the United States. The CAA put the U.S. in an entirely different direction as a leader in the international campaign for sanctions on the apartheid state. Some have argued that the sanctions included in the CAA instead were the result of changing strategic interests, such as a decreasing American reliance on South African mineral imports. This paper, however, argues that the sanctions were a direct result of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States, particularly on university campuses, which in turn gained its strength from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and was furthered augmented by the Carter administration's foreign policy on human rights.

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