Race Diplomacy: African American International Diplomacy, 1855-1955

By

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Acknowledgments

During one of the first days of orientation, I jotted down the average time to degree, a statistic offered in a dour tone by a program administrator: 6.1 years. “What kind of slacker takes that long to finish,” I thought, silently congratulating myself in anticipation of bringing the average down to an even six. Nine years later, I am a humbler, and hopefully a bit wiser. A dissertation, even one of mediocre quality and dubious merit such as this, is an enormous undertaking and I would not have finished without the support of many people.

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Abstract:

Acting as racial representatives, African Americans successfully tapped into the overlapping transatlantic networks of evangelical Christianity, social reform, and scientific rationalism that flourished in the mid-nineteenth century. These networks offered African American activists and other non-state actors access to an alternative international sphere beyond the established channels of state-to-state diplomacy. Within this space African Americans forged a distinct tradition of diplomacy that developed independently of and, at times, in direct opposition to U.S. foreign relations. Over the course of a century, African Americans went from stateless mavericks committed to disrupting U.S. foreign affairs to key state actors within the nascent U.S. cultural diplomacy apparatus during the Cold War.

This dissertation examines a host of strategies utilized by African Americans to appeal to foreign populations and governments, bolster the international image of the race, and effect domestic change from 1855 to 1955. I refer to these strategies collectively as "race diplomacy," a term that reflects the self-conscious identification of many African Americans as racial representatives and the fact that for most of the period under review they pursued racially specific interests in the global arena rather than the foreign policy objectives of the United States. To achieve their objectives, African Americans forged relationships with other non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, and foreign governments based on shared interests or common enemies. Put simply: they practiced diplomacy. In identifying African American international engagement as diplomacy this dissertation argues that scholars must pay greater attention to the distinct tradition of African American diplomacy that developed independently of and often in direction to U.S. foreign policy.

Introduction: African American Diplomacy in the *Longue Durée*

In April of 1857, a young African American artist named Wedgewood visited the U.S. consulate in London to obtain a passport for travel on the Continent. The clerk on duty refused the routine request on the grounds that the mulatto gentleman, according to a sweeping ruling from the Supreme Court a month earlier, was racially excluded from citizenship and therefore ineligible to hold an American passport.[1] The visibly stunned artist struggled to process the full implications of the bureaucrat's cold explanation. "What am I? Where do I belong?" he asked, before exclaiming, "I have no country, and yet I am an American!"[2] This plaintive, yet defiant declaration encapsulated a fundamental paradox at the heart of the African American experience. Denied full citizenship in the United States, many African Americans remained intent on claiming it as their birthright and turned to the international arena to press for domestic reform and to assert their Americanness.

The notorious *Dred Scott* decision did more than strand the unfortunate Wedgewood abroad with no passport. Siding with the court's majority, Justice Peter V. Daniel argued that among peoples of African descent "there never has been known or recognized by the inhabitants of other countries anything partaking of the character of

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[1] The summary refusal of passports to African Americans represented the culmination of decades of debate within the federal and state governments concerning black citizenship, nationality, and the purpose of the passport itself. For an insightful overview of these debates see Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131-134.

[2] The clerk was Benjamin Moore, the recently promoted Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Legation in London. The State Department's response to the *Dred Scott* decision and the broader context of this incident are covered in chapter one. Benjamin Moran, diary entry for April 27, 1857. Sarah Agnes Wallace and Frances Elma Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 36.

nationality, or civil or political polity," an assertion used to justify the wholesale and retroactive denial of U.S. citizenship to the entire free black and enslaved population of the United States in perpetuity.[3] In this sense, Wedgewood was not only a man without a country, but a "stateless person" as defined by current international law.[4] Treated as pariahs at home, statelessness threatened to make African Americans global outcasts as well.

It was precisely this outsider position, however, that spurred African Americans to pioneer an innovative form of diplomacy that eschewed the methods and mores of traditional statecraft. Acting as racial representatives, African Americans successfully tapped into the overlapping transatlantic networks of evangelical Christianity, social reform, and scientific rationalism that flourished in the mid-nineteenth century. These networks offered African American activists and other non-state actors access to an alternative international sphere beyond the established channels of state-to-state diplomacy. Within this space African Americans forged a distinct tradition of diplomacy that developed independently of and, at times, in direct opposition to U.S. foreign relations. Over the course of a century, African Americans went from stateless mavericks committed to disrupting U.S. foreign affairs to key state actors within the nascent U.S. cultural diplomacy apparatus during the Cold War.

This dissertation examines a host of strategies utilized by African Americans to appeal to foreign populations and governments, bolster the international image of the

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[3] *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1856).

[4] As a legal category, the term originated in the 1954 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which assigns the status to "a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law." The U.S. never ratified the convention. The full text is available on the UNHCR website: http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3bbb0abc7.pdf

race, and effect domestic change from 1855 to 1955. I refer to these strategies collectively as "race diplomacy," a term that reflects the self-conscious identification of many African Americans as racial representatives and the fact that for most of the period under review they pursued racially specific interests in the global arena rather than the foreign policy objectives of the United States. To achieve their objectives, African Americans forged relationships with other non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, and foreign governments based on shared interests or common enemies. Put simply: they practiced diplomacy**.**

In identifying African American international engagement as diplomacy, this dissertation bridges two parallel developments that have reshaped the field of diplomatic history in recent decades. The first is the hard-fought recognition that historians of U.S. foreign relations can no longer ignore race, racism, and African American actors.[5] While there is now broad consensus that racism shaped the form and content of U.S. foreign policy at various moments in history, it remains necessary to defend African American diplomacy as a legitimate sub-field of diplomatic history. The scholarship of Brenda Gayle Plummer, Carol Anderson, and Michael Krenn has provided a model for introducing African Americans, especially middle class individuals and organizations, as active participants in U.S. foreign affairs in the twentieth century.[6] Likewise, in the

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[5] For a sense of how interrogation of racial identity helped to revive the field of diplomatic history see Thomas W. Zeiler, "The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1069-1071.

[6] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off The Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003),

context of the Cold War and decolonization, several historians have detailed the transformation of U.S. race relations and African American civil rights from internal domestic issues to central concerns within U.S. foreign policy making and the subject of intense global attention.[7]

The present dissertation owes a significant debt to this body of literature, but seeks to locate the origins of African American diplomacy far earlier than the interwar period, and outside of the U.S. State Department. I argue that the formal incorporation of African Americans within the nation's Cold War cultural relations offensive effectively domesticated African American race diplomacy, which historically operated independently from U.S. foreign policy. In this sense the State Department did not serve as midwife to African American diplomacy, but as its undertaker. This conclusion requires scholars to acknowledge African Americans as capable of conducting diplomacy outside of the state system and to recognize African American race diplomacy as a distinct tradition within the broader history of U.S. foreign affairs.

While the State Department may have "discovered" the utility of race diplomacy in the mid-twentieth century, African American activism was a pivotal factor for the development of U.S. diplomacy from at least the mid-nineteenth century, if not from the

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Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

[7] Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*: *Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Itacha: Cornell University Press, 1997). See also the individual contributions to Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

moment of the nation's founding.[8] African Americans were well situated to puncture the self-righteous moralism that drove U.S. foreign policy and the doctrine of American exceptionalism, which they did frequently.[9] One hundred years before the Cold War, African American race diplomacy prompted U.S. officials to debate how best to curtail international discussion of domestic racial issues in order to blunt criticism of the institution of slavery and manage the nation's international image as an Empire of Liberty. These debates foreshadowed the manner through which race relations emerged as a top U.S. foreign policy concern following WWII and the efforts of African American activists to internationalize their struggle for human and civil rights.

The second development within diplomatic history that this study directly engages is the field's growing acceptance of non-state actors, cultural diplomacy, and other cross-cultural encounters as subjects worthy of study.[10] As axiomatic non-state actors, African Americans offer fresh insight into a topic that has garnered significant attention from

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[8] Odd Arne Westad has noted, "It was through battles over the institution of slavery that much of American foreign policy ideology took shape and the form of liberty that the United States was to stand for in the twentieth century was defined." Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21.

[9] For a critical assessment of moralism and the exceptionalist tradition in U.S. foreign policy see Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[10] For one of the earliest and best distillations of the arguments for expanding the conceptual boundaries of diplomatic history to embrace non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, and cultural exchange, see Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). In the U.S. context, much of the scholarship has focused on the expansion of American cultural influence, state-sponsored and otherwise, in Europe before and after WWII. Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006). Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

diplomatic historians in recent years.[11] Indeed, African American diplomacy invites a reassessment of the term non-state actor itself. Historians of U.S. foreign affairs have traditionally applied the term to missionaries, businessmen, philanthropists, entertainers, and other private citizens whose activities helped to spread American influence abroad and bolster the U.S. foreign policy objectives.[12] African Americans, by contrast, were non-state actors in a more literal sense. Although their formal statelessness ended in 1868 with the adoption of the 14th Amendment, African Americans lacked full citizenship and had minimal access to the institutions of U.S. diplomacy well into the twentieth century. As such, African American interests often sharply diverged from those of the U.S. government in general and the State Department in particular. Furthermore, as individuals who were seen by others—and saw themselves—as racial representatives first and foremost, African Americans denote a very specific type of non-state actor and do not fit neatly within the established categories of diplomatic history.

In the antebellum period, race diplomacy originated as a radical alternative to state diplomacy and was conducted by stateless actors. After the Civil War, African American citizenship was enshrined in the U.S. Constitution even as its exercise was limited by legal and extralegal racial discrimination. In the late-nineteenth century, African Americans engaged in race diplomacy as non-state actors in a more conventional sense but did so to promote a positive image of African American progress in order to advance a domestic reform agenda that had little bearing on U.S. foreign policy.

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[11] In addition to renewed attention from historians, the role of non-state actors in foreign affairs is a perennial concern of International Relations theorists. See Richard Langhorne,"The Diplomacy of Non-State Actors," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16, No. 2 (June 2005): 331-339.

[12] Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Following WWI, African American participation in state-sponsored Soviet cultural relations blurred the traditional lines between state and non-state actors. When the U.S. State Department formally enlisted African Americans in the nation's first foray into state-sponsored cultural diplomacy during the early Cold War it converted a select few individuals into state actors. Scholars have paid particular attention to this facet of African American race diplomacy, especially with regards to jazz musicians, but have largely ignored the complex progression of African Americans from stateless to state actors on the global stage.[13] These studies, while offering insight into the challenges of disciplining race diplomacy to serve American interests, have unintentionally obscured the deep-rooted tradition of non-U.S., and in some cases anti-U.S., African American cultural diplomacy.

The marginalized position of African Americans both domestically and internationally offers scholars a fresh perspective on the limitations of the Westphalian international system and modern diplomacy.[14] Out of painful necessity, African Americans developed a sophisticated understanding of concepts like sovereignty, citizenship, and reciprocity, which remained dim abstractions to the vast majority of people in the nineteenth century. African Americans rightly identified these norms, and

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[13] Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013). Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[14] Because African American actors have historically stood outside this state-centric model, they provide a useful critique of the Westphalian order that has come under increasing scrutiny following the erosion of state dominance due to globalization, terror, the rise of multi-national corporations. See A. Claire Cutler, "Critical Reflections on the Westphalian Assumptions of International Law and Organization: A Crisis of Legitimacy," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 2 (April 2001): 133-150.

the principle of national sovereignty in particular, as exclusionary and potentially oppressive. Having been enslaved by a legal regime that did not adhere outside the boundaries of the United States, African Americans were acutely aware that national sovereignty could inhibit or protect individual liberty depending on the circumstances.

In the context of international diplomacy, deference to sovereignty made criticism of another nation's domestic affairs a serious breach of decorum. In the context of the American federal system, states' rights, which became a rallying cry for advocates of slavery, secession, and segregation, rested on a contentious claim that each individual state was a sovereign entity. According to one popular pro-slavery interpretation, Article X of the Constitution guaranteed states "the power to claim the privilege of noninterference from foreign quarters, as to their domestic conditions."[15] African Americans rejected these applications of sovereignty and flouted the genteel etiquette of formal diplomacy. Instead, they actively courted foreign interference in order to bring their domestic plight to the attention of the world.

By insisting that historians of U.S. foreign affairs would benefit from more serious attention to African American race diplomacy, I am not rejecting the robust scholarship of black internationalism, nor claiming diplomacy as the sole interpretive framework for all types of African American international engagement. At the same time, historians of black internationalism overwhelmingly privilege Pan-Africanism and

[15] *Abolition a Sedition* (Philadelphia: Geo. W. Donohue, 1839; reprin. New York: AMS Press 1973), 53.

Marxism as the dominant strains of African American global activism.[16] These studies, while performing a valuable reclamation of previously neglected voices, tend to celebrate political radicals and "race rebels" while deriding more mainstream African American representatives as parochial or even reactionary figures.[17]

By contrast, the specific tradition of race diplomacy covered here derived from an intense ethos of collective racial identity and elite leadership conceived in antebellum free black communities and nurtured by the African American church, black colleges, and civic organizations in the second half of the nineteenth century. While historians have mainly treated racial uplift philosophy as synonymous with Booker T. Washington, it informed the worldview of middle class African Americans across the ideological spectrum in the first decades of the twentieth century. For the "race men" and "race women" of this era personal reputation was inextricably tied to collective racial identity. According to the widely accepted code of racial uplift an individual's success redounded to the credit of the entire race, while failure cast an equally outsized shadow. This worldview conditioned many African Americans to see themselves as race ambassadors at home and abroad.

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[16] For the authoritative intellectual history of Marxian black internationalism see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). For Pan-Africanism, Paul Gilroy's influential Black Atlantic model has proved resilient despite coming under fire for its omission of Marxism. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). For the most strident Marxist critique of Gilroy see Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 61.

[17] For a selection of the field's best scholarship see Keisha Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), Nikhil Paul Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for* Democracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

Contextualizing the Strategic Alliances of Race Diplomacy

To properly frame the forthcoming chapters, it is necessary to briefly summarize the two diplomatic relationships that serve as their backdrop. Throughout the 19th century, African American diplomacy focused most intently on fostering ties with Great Britain. From a strictly realist perspective, African Americans had ample reason to seek an alliance with Great Britain, a global superpower and the primary geopolitical rival of the United States. Operating from a position of abject weakness within the international system, African Americans directly benefitted from Great Britain's military and political might. During the American Revolution and the War of 1812, thousands of enslaved blacks won freedom by joining the British army.[18] In times of peace, Britain remained the center of international abolitionism and the most active opponent of the slave trade.[19] From the *Somerset* case in 1792 to the Abolition Act of 1838, British law curtailed slavery in England and eventually extinguished the practice throughout the entire empire. As such, British territories in the Western Hemisphere became key sites for the practice of what one historian has called African American "folk diplomacy" throughout the antebellum period.[20] Britain steadfastly opposed American diplomatic pressure to negotiate an extradition treaty that would require the return of fugitive slaves, who fled to

[18] For African American-Anglo relations from the Revolution to Civil War see Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013); Gerald Horne, *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. Before Emancipation* (New York: New York University Press, 2013),

[19] For British influence on the American and global abolitionist movements, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York, 1999).

[20] In its original context the term referred to the strategies used by generations of enslaved Africans who skillfully negotiated imperial rivalries and Catholicism to secure freedom in Spanish Florida from 1687 to 1821. Frank Marotti, *The Cana Sanctuary: History, Diplomacy and Black Catholic Marriage in Antebellum St. Augustine, Florida* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

British Canada in increasingly large numbers following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.[21] The Royal Navy also flexed its muscle to curtail the international slave trade by routinely seizing slave ships, including many unflagged American vessels, transporting human cargo in contravention of maritime treaties.[22]

These actions earned Britain the admiration of African American leaders throughout the antebellum period. "There is no intelligent *black man* who knows anything, but esteems a real Englishman," the African American abolitionist David Walker declared in his influential and controversial *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* "We have here and there, in other nations, good friends, But as a nation, the English are our friends."[23] Walker's formulation of individual and national friendship denotes a recognition that within international politics the backing of a sovereign government carried far more weight than isolated sympathy. Walker's praise of Britain was itself strategic. By offering a "verification of a nobility ostensibly essential to the British character," Walker and other African American Anglophiles played to British

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[21] One-third of the estimated 60,000 "Negro" residents of Canada at the outbreak of the Civil War arrived in the decade after the infamous law took hold. Jason Kaufman, *The Origins of Canadian and American Political* Differences (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 172. A smaller number of American slaves found refuge in the British Caribbean. The most famous example occurred in 1841 when the African American leaders of a slave mutiny aboard the Lousiana-bound *Creole* forced the crew to sail the ship to a Bahamian port where they successfully claimed their freedom based on British law. Anita Rupprecht, " 'All We Have Done, We Have Done For Freedom': The *Creole* Slave-Ship Revolt (1841) and the Revolutionary Atlantic," *International Review of Social History* 58 Special Issue (2013): 253-277.

[22] This practice remained a reliable source of tension in Anglo-American relations for as long as American slavery existed. After Congress banned the international slave trade in 1808, the U.S. Navy took limited measures to discourage the African slave trade but these efforts were never prioritized. Britain, in contrast, "expended much diplomatic capital on moves against the slave trade." See Jeremy Black, "Suppressing the Slave Trade," in Donald A. Yerxa, ed., *British Abolitionism and the Question of Moral Progress in History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 39-43.

[23] Original punctuation. Charles M. Wiltse, ed., *David Walker's Appeal* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), 41.

national pride.[24] Deploying the rhetoric of what one historian has called "Black Anglo-Saxonism," Walker and others combined a romantic idealization of British civilization with a defiant embrace of Britain's ideological and moral supremacy.[25] In this way, African Americans provocatively challenged the cherished doctrine of American exceptionalism. African American activists cultivated ties with Great Britain, not to become Britons, but to leverage British support for domestic political reform in the United States.

Engagement with Great Britain constituted a novel form of diplomacy, in which ordinary individuals sought to influence popular opinion and official policy through non-official channels. By 1840, international travel had become an important medium for African American political activism.[26] As a central hub in the era's secular and religious internationalism, the British Isles attracted scores of reform-minded Americans of all races. Over the next two decades, African Americans attended numerous international conferences dedicated to abolitionism, temperance, peace, moral reform, and Evangelical Protestantism in the British capital.[27] With a few notable exceptions, U.S. delegations to the events were strictly segregated, forcing African Americans to find creative ways to

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[24] Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.
[25] Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 231.
[26] Elizabeth Pryor, " 'Jim Crow's Cars, Passport Denials and Atlantic Crossings: African American Travel, Protest and Citizenship at Home and Abroad, 1827-1865," (Ph.D diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2008), 112-126.
[27] London's only rival in this sense was Paris. Paris hosted two important peace conferences, in 1843 and 1849, which African Americans attended. London, however, also hosted two World Antislavery Conventions, held in 1840 and 1843 respectively, under the auspices of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which featured integrated U.S. delegations. By contrast, the French government blocked a planned 1842 world conference from being held in Paris. Black, "Suppressing the Slave Trade," 42.

attend these conferences, which provided valuable platforms for pushing the issues of American slavery and racial discrimination onto the world stage.

Their presence was not always welcomed by U.S. officials or delegates who wished to police the formal etiquette of diplomacy even outside the halls of state. When the abolitionist Frederick Douglass denounced slavery at the 1846 World's Temperance Convention in London, one of the official American delegates, an eminent doctor of divinity from Brooklyn New York, publically denounced Douglass as an "intruder" guilty of perpetrating "an iniquity against the law of reciprocal righteousness" for having smuggled anti-slavery into the temperance cause and impugned the reputation of American Christians.[28] Douglass, who attended the convention as a delegate for Newcastle, was unapologetic. Rather than studiously avoiding offense, African American race diplomacy often courted conflict. African Americans saw no reason to spare the United States from embarrassment on the global stage, for they viewed shame as a necessary catalyst for reform. As consummate outsiders, African Americans had to repeatedly crash the gates of international diplomacy and pry open the doors of transnational reform to bring their plight to the attention of the world.

Nineteenth-century African American-Anglo relations provide a unique window into the role of morality in diplomacy. Historians have long recognized—and debated—the dynamic interplay of moral sympathy, moral prestige, and moral opprobrium at the heart of global efforts to abolish chattel slavery.[29] As African Americans mobilized

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[28] Douglass, *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 691.
[29] Brown, *Moral Capital;* Donald A. Yerxa, ed., *British Abolitionism and the Question of Moral Progress in History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 3.

popular opinion and public support on both sides of the Atlantic, they became skilled practitioners of what John Kane has called "the politics of moral capital."[30] Christopher Brown, in his groundbreaking study of British abolitionism, refined the concept further. Brown explained, "A cause that has earned moral capital becomes, itself, a source of moral capital for other causes; the association with people or causes that possess moral capital becomes a strategic benefit for those in search of moral standing or moral influence."[31] By claiming the banner of universal human rights and liberty, African Americans effectively leveraged their own moral capital to attract British support and undercut the moral influence of the United States. In this sense it is not an accident that African American diplomacy found fertile ground in two ideological rivals of the United States confident in the moral superiority of their own societies: Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the Soviet Union in the twentieth.

While geographically and logistically novel, African American engagement with the Soviet Union was by no means a total break from earlier forms of race diplomacy. It drew most, but not all, of its participants from the educated, middle-class segment of African American society—the same "Talented Tenth" that produced previous generations of "race ambassadors."[32] African American engagement with the Soviet Union in the twentieth century derived from the same shrewd moral and political calculus that animated campaigns to garner British support for abolitionism, African American education, and anti-lynching in the nineteenth century. Race diplomacy in Soviet Russia

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[30] John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.
[31] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 457.
[32] This is true even of the jazz performers who tour the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, several of whom were graduates of historically black colleges. See S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985). 56-57.

also borrowed a set of tried and true tactics—appealing to a host nation's sense of moral righteousness and superiority, contrasting acceptance abroad with maltreatment at home, and widely publicizing endorsements from foreign elites—pioneered during these previous campaigns. Even the oft-quoted assertions of African American visitors to the Soviet Union that racial discrimination did not exist in the "New" Russia echoed earlier generations of travelers who commented on the absence of racism in England, France, and elsewhere. Though the specific valence of these statements changed, the rhetorical purpose remained the same: to expose the glaring contradiction at the heart of American claims to represent a model democratic society.

In other key respects, however, African American engagement with the Soviet Union in the interwar years departed significantly from earlier efforts and established patterns of race diplomacy. In the twentieth century, African American non-state actors continued to conduct race diplomacy outside of the formal channels of international affairs, but in the case of African American-Soviet relations they partnered directly with the Soviet state, which possessed a sophisticated cultural relations apparatus. The importance of this innovation cannot be overstated, for it is what distinguished African-American-Soviet relations, not only from previous expressions of race diplomacy, but also from all other contemporaneous manifestations of African American cultural diplomacy.

Far more African Americans visited France during the interwar period than the Soviet Union and the influence of African American popular culture was greater in London, Berlin, and Paris than in Moscow. But the French government did not host

African American leaders as foreign dignitaries. The German government, as popular as African American music became among its young citizens, did not use state funds to sponsor jazz tours. While London remained an important hub of Pan-Africanism, British officials did not recruit African American workers or systematically work to influence African American public opinion. Even the U.S. government, despite the fact that African American cultural forms accounted for much of the nation's growing "soft power" reserves, made no effort in the interwar period to develop a cultural diplomacy strategy to bolster American foreign policy objectives.[33] The Soviets did all these things and more.

Beginning with the founding of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Nations (VOKS) in 1925, the Soviets launched a state-sponsored cultural relations offensive designed to cultivate foreign support for the Soviet Union, raise much needed hard currency, and alleviate the strain of official diplomatic isolation.[34] While African American-Soviet relations remained a marginal concern within the larger scheme of Soviet foreign policy, Soviet officials nevertheless worked to establish and maintain formal cultural relations with African Americans. The Soviet government commissioned translations of the literary works of African American intellectuals including W.E.B Du

[33] The US State Department did not formally embrace state-sponsored cultural diplomacy until 1939. For the private initiatives of Americans in the Soviet Union during the interwar see J.D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1983).

[34] VOKS (or BOKC in the original Cyrillic) stands for *Vsesoiuznoe Obshchstvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s Zagranitsei*. For a overarching history of Soviet cultural diplomacy during the interwar years that contains an organizational history of VOKS and an intellectual history of some its key leaders, see Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Bois and William Pickens, whose Soviet tours feature prominently in chapter three.[35] In addition to courting influential leaders, writers, and celebrities, Moscow promoted the integration of student and labor delegations from the United States and provided opportunities for African Americans to work and study in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. When African American musicians toured the Soviet Union, they did so under the auspices of VOKS and affiliated cultural institutions performing in state-owned venues usually reserved for expressions of "high culture." Institutionalized support from the Soviet government lent legitimacy to African American cultural diplomacy even as it signaled the potential cooption of race diplomacy to serve Soviet interests.

While there were times when the two overlapped or intersected, African American-Soviet relations developed separately from U.S.-Soviet relations. African Americans who traveled as part of U.S. delegations, jazz musicians, and African American Communists enrolled at the Communist University for Toilers of the East (KUTV) largely saw themselves as racial representatives first and national representatives second. Soviet policy in turn, conceptualized African Americans as an oppressed minority lacking national self-determination akin to colonized peoples in Africa and Asia.[36] Washington's protracted refusal to recognize the Soviet government created space for this unconventional relationship to develop and allowed it to continue even after the normalization of US-Soviet relations in 1933. Although African American-

[35]The Soviets also published two novels by a third NAACP official, Walter White. Glenora W. and Deming B. Brown, eds., *A Guide to Russian Translations of American Literature* (New York: King's Crown Press, Columbia University, 1954), 151, 168, 210.

[36] The institutional placement of African Americans demonstrates Soviet conceptual inconsistency on this matter. African American (and African) students were sent to KUTV the Moscow school devoted to providing revolutionary training for peoples of "the East," but within VOKS, the Anglo-American sector planned the itineraries and provided guides for African American visitors.

Soviet relations did not—and could not—operate through the traditional channels of state-to-state diplomacy, they were not completely informal or disorganized.

Within the framework of Soviet cultural diplomacy, African Americans functioned as both state and non-state actors often blurring the boundaries between the two categories. High-profile African Americans, though they lacked any official sanction from U.S. State Department, were received by the Soviets as foreign dignitaries and indeed thought of themselves as racial representatives. To further complicate matters, several African Americans who lived and worked in the Soviet Union were integrated, both directly and indirectly, into the Soviet cultural relations bureaucracy. The African American press helped to construct and amplify the image of the Soviet Union as a society where people of color were afforded full citizenship and equal opportunity and spared the indignities of racial discrimination. The prominence of racial themes in Soviet propaganda acted as a catalyst for the U.S. government's decision to formally enlist African Americans in state-sponsored cultural diplomacy in the early years of the Cold War. In this sense, the Soviet Union was directly and indirectly responsible for converting African Americans from non-state actors into state actors. As agents of U.S. foreign policy, African Americans were charged with promoting American exceptionalism and defending the moral supremacy of the United States a complete reversal of the traditional orientation of race diplomacy.

Overview of the Project

The full trajectory of African American race diplomacy is presented over five chapters. Chapter one, "'A Contemptuous Silence': Race, Citizenship, and Diplomacy in

the Shadow of *Dred Scott*," examines the State Department's struggle to formulate a consistent policy regarding its responsibilities to African Americans from 1853 to 1857 when the legal parameters of African American citizenship remained in flux. Vacillating between the departmental duty to protect Americans abroad and the political imperative to defend chattel slavery and white supremacy at home, U.S. officials highlighted the conceptual dissonance of maintaining an under class of non-citizens within a democracy. Following the Supreme Court's 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, African Americans traveled to Britain where they publically confronted U.S. diplomats and forced them to reckon with the international dimensions of slavery and racial discrimination. By seizing the initiative and generating publicity, this disruptive diplomacy placed the State Department, and the policies they enforced, on the defensive. The State Department could neither ignore these provocations, nor respond to them forcefully, a dilemma that underscored the strategic brilliance of African American race diplomacy as the Civil War loomed.

The second chapter, "Voice of the Race: The Fisk Jubilee Singers, Racial Uplift, and 19th Century African American Musical Diplomacy," presents a case study of the famous singing group who used musical diplomacy as an instrument of soft power to bridge racial and national divides in service of a well-defined political agenda. As members of the first post-emancipation generation who came of age in the tumultuous years of Reconstruction, the Jubilees were living symbols of African American achievement, humanity, and potential. As the pre-eminent representatives of African American culture on the world stage, the singers countered racist stereotypes and won support from middle class reformers, journalists, and European royalty. The Jubilees returned home determined to utilize their celebrity, and the publicity that this status

attracted, to bring greater attention to racial prejudice in America and rally support for African American civil rights legislation. While they failed to arrest the march of racial violence, disenfranchisement, and racial segregation, the Jubilees provided a useful template for future action.

Chapter three, "New Negroes and New Russians: African American-Soviet Relations, 1922-1928," examines African American engagement with the cultural relations apparatus of the young Soviet state in the relatively open period of the New Economic Plan (NEP). Leftist African American leaders admired Lenin's anti-imperialist pronouncements and proactive nationality policy while sympathizing with the ambitious economic restructuring of Soviet society. In the midst of a dramatic reordering of the international system following WWI, the U.S. government's diplomatic shunning of the Soviet Union further endeared the revolutionary state to African Americans who felt betrayed by the soaring rhetoric of Wilsonian democracy. Heeding the call of scholars to internationalize American history, this chapter draws on the archival records of VOKS, speeches, diaries, and travelogues of individual travelers, and the African American press to evaluate the ways in which Soviet cultural relations elevated and legitimized African American race diplomacy while furthering Soviet strategic interests.

Chapter four, "Stalin's Man in the Black Press: Race Diplomacy in the Red Decade," examines African American-Soviet relations at the height of American interest in the Soviet Union. The chapter closely follows the experiences of Homer Smith, the lone African American foreign correspondent in Moscow, who played a crucial role in shaping and disseminating a popular narrative of Soviet antiracism to African American

readers in the mid-1930s. In his profiles of "race men" and "race women" thriving in the Soviet Union, Smith creatively utilized middle class racial pride to promote the superiority of Soviet society over the Jim Crow America. Drawing on the Smith's Comintern dossier and previously classified U.S. surveillance files, this chapter reassesses Smith's place within African American-Soviet relations in light of revelations that he worked in the propaganda wing of the Comintern from 1935 to 1945 and became a Soviet citizen in 1939.

One of the most significant consequences of African American engagement with the Soviet Union was the American foreign policy establishment's realization that African Americans possessed tremendous potential to help as well as to hurt America's image abroad. In this sense, African American race diplomacy in the Soviet Union during the interwar period influenced the adoption and direction of American cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.

The final chapter, "Edith Sampson's Cold War and the Perils of Propaganda," details how America's embrace of cultural diplomacy in the early Cold War led the State Department to harness African American race diplomacy to further U.S. foreign policy objectives. It follows the rise of Edith Sampson, a Chicago lawyer appointed to the American delegation to the U.N. as part of the Truman administration's push to counter Soviet propaganda highlighting racial inequality and violence in the United States. The charismatic and staunchly anticommunist Sampson excelled at person-to-person diplomacy and embraced her role as a cold warrior. In addition to exposing the limitations of state-sponsored race diplomacy, the State Department's cultivation of

Sampson's public image as a woman sheds light on the gendered dimensions of Cold War propaganda. Sampson's experiences capture both the promise and limitations of aligning African American interests with America's official foreign policy agenda.

Taken as a whole, these chapters offer a long view of African American diplomacy over a full century. In adopting this framework, I hope to underscore the deep roots of African American race diplomacy and establish commonalities in the strategies developed in the context of African American engagement with Great Britain in the nineteenth century and those utilized in African American engagement with the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. Likewise, the challenges that independent African American diplomacy posed to U.S. foreign policy makers did not materialize out of thin air with the onset of the Cold War. Much to the chagrin of Washington, America's domestic racial issues had begun to intrude into the realm of U.S. foreign affairs with alarming frequency in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War. American officials felt compelled to respond and defend the nation's reputation before the world. The resulting struggle to define America's international image and the place of African Americans within the nation came to a head in a series of diplomatic incidents in the final years before the outbreak of the Civil War, to which we now turn.

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"A Contemptuous Silence": Race, Citizenship, and Diplomacy in the Shadow of *Dred Scott*

"*I am a man before I am an American […] To be a human being is to have claims above all claims of nationality. But I have no nation*." –Frederick Douglass, Scotland, 1846.[37]

"*The American Minister would compromise all his duties and obligations by expanding into a Cosmopolite: he must be American and, American only.*" –George M. Dallas, American Minister to Great Britain, 1860.[38]

On March 3, 1853, President Franklin Pierce delivered the traditional inaugural address to a small audience gathered in the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol. The New Hampshire Democrat, whose father had fought in the Revolutionary War, opened with a reflection on the nation's founding. "It is no paradox to say that although comparatively weak, the new-born nation was intrinsically strong," Pierce began. While "inconsiderable in population and apparent resources," Pierce asserted that the nation's democratic foundation had made the United States a shining inspiration on the world stage. "The oppressed throughout the world from that day to the present have turned their eyes hitherward not to find those lights extinguished or to fear least they should wane," Pierce continued, "but to be constantly cheered by their steady and increasing radiance." America, Pierce maintained, must continue to lead by example. "But no example […] can

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[37] Frederick Douglass, "British Influence on the Abolition Movement in America: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on April 17, 1846." Renfrewshire *Advertiser*, April 25, 1846. John Blassingame, et al., eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, *Volume I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 215.

[38] George M. Dallas to Lewis Cass, No. 289, October 2, 1860, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 72.

be powerful for lasting good," the president warned, "which is not based upon eternal principles of right and justice."[39]

In terms of presidential rhetoric, Pierce's opening paean to American exceptionalism was—much like the man himself—fairly unremarkable. And yet, in spite of the hackneyed rhetoric, Pierce articulated an early formulation of the concept of a nation's "soft power." More specifically, Pierce seemed to grasp the dynamics of what John Kane has called "the politics of moral capital." Kane defined moral capital as "moral prestige […] placed in useful service."[40] Pierce celebrated America's reserve of moral capital, which he referred to as the "moral influence of a great people," as both a source and a reflection of "the power of [American] advocacy" on the world stage.[41] At the same time, Pierce recognized that the value of a nation's moral capital was volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of global public opinion.

Aware that others viewed American expansionism and chattel slavery negatively, Pierce affirmed his support of both and pledged that while in office he was prepared to defend American actions "before the tribunal of the civilized world." After all, Pierce proclaimed, "an Administration would be unworthy of confidence at home or respect abroad should it cease to be influenced by the conviction that no apparent advantage can be purchased at a price so dear as that of national wrong or dishonor." By couching this

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[39] Franklin Pierce's Inaugural Address, March 3, 1853, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/pierce.asp (accessed 10 August 2015).
[40] Kane is primarily concerned with the accumulation and expenditure of moral capital by individual world leaders, institutions, and causes. John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7. Joseph Nye, Jr., who coined the term, remains the foremost theoretician of "soft power." See Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: PublicAffairs, 2004).
[41] Franklin Pierce, Inaugural Address, March 3, 1853, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/pierce.asp (accessed 10 August 2015).

statement in the gendered language of chivalry while categorically denying all wrongdoing, Pierce revealed that his primary interest concerned preserving the formal façade of national honor.

Accordingly, Pierce identified the principle of "reciprocity" as paramount to America's claim to great nation status and the key metric by which a foreign nation's "respect" for the United States should be gauged. "The rights which belong to us as a nation are not alone to be regarded," Pierce explained, "but those which pertain to every citizen in his individual capacity, at home and abroad, must be sacredly maintained." In other words, America's status in the world depended on the government's ability to protect its citizens wherever they traveled. Under his watch, Pierce promised to ensure "no rude hand of power or tyrannical passion is laid upon [an American] with impunity."

Roger B. Taney, the Chief Justice of Supreme Court who administered the oath of office to Pierce that morning, likely joined the rest of the assembled dignitaries in polite applause. It is unclear if the president's emphasis on American citizenship, which Pierce had called "an inviolable panoply for the security of American rights," had any effect on Taney's views on the subject. At the time of the inauguration, the case of Dred Scott, an enslaved man suing for this freedom based on his extended residence in the free state of Illinois and the free territory of Wisconsin, had reached the Missouri Supreme Court for the second time, where the justices ruled that Scott must remain a slave. In 1853, Scott's freedom remained in limbo as the case moved to the federal circuit court system. Whether or not Taney, who would eventually write the notorious majority opinion stripping Scott, and all African Americans, of citizenship four years later, was moved by

Pierce's address, African American citizenship soon became a troublesome issue for U.S. foreign policy makers and diplomatic officials.

James Gadsden, the newly appointed U.S. Minister to Mexico, was one of the first such officials to grapple with the issue firsthand. Gadsden, a railway promoter and arch-expansionist from South Carolina, had no prior diplomatic experience. The chaotic state of Mexican politics, however, would have challenged even the most experienced statesman. In the spring of 1853, the deposed leader Santa Anna had returned to power, but the new government remained internally divided and unsteady. From the moment Gadsden took up his new post in Mexico City, letters from American citizens appealing for official assistance had flooded into the various consulates. These appeals, Gadsden wrote in an official memorandum to American consular officials, presented "a fruitful source of vexatious issues" that required individual discretion and collective consistency.

Gadsden recognized that his consuls had a sworn duty, recently affirmed by the president himself, to protect citizens abroad. At the same time, Gadsden was shocked to discover that U.S. Consuls in Mexico extended official protection, issued passports, and in other ways "recognize[ed] Africans reporting as from the U. States [sic] as Citizens." This practice, according to Gadsden, embarrassed the Legation, encouraged fugitive slaves to flee to Mexico, and soured Mexican-American relations. "Those who seek abroad what would not be acknowledged at home […] over whom the Shield of American protection has been imprudently extended," the circular concluded, should be denied the assistance due only to "legitimate citizens."[42] Gadsden's order summarily

[42] James Gadsden, US Minister to Mexico, Circular to Consuls of the United States in Mexico, June 28, 1854, in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States:*

revoked the citizenship of an estimated 2,000 African Americans living in Mexico and many more who worked as sailors on merchant ships that called on Mexican ports.[43]

Less than a month later, Juan N. Almonte, the Mexican Minister to the United States, wrote to US Secretary of State William L. Marcy, to protest the high number of "Africans who are flocking in numbers from the U. States to Mexico, and who are as unwelcome emigrants." Almonte's letter turned a long-standing complaint of the United States government—that Mexico willfully sheltered fugitive slaves—on its head. Almonte, using phrases lifted verbatim from Gadsden's circular, relished his official obligation "to caution American consuls for the future, from certifying the Citizenship of Africans of whatever caste […] as they cannot be acknowledged as citizens of the United States."[44] The following January, Gadsden issued his own formal protest. The aggrieved ambassador wrote to Manuel Diez de Bonilla, Mexico's Minister of Foreign Relations, to charge the Mexican government with "aiding […] fugitives from labor to escape pursuit by granting passports and free ingress to the interior, while legitimate citizens of the United States were denied the same facilities."[45]

Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860, *Volume IX-Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1937), 720-721.

[43] This figure was cited in an international arbitration judgement in the Mateo case. "Numero 33: Lucien Matthiew Contra Mexico," in Jose Ignacio Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta de reclamaciones mexicanas y americanas establecida conforme tratado de 4 de Julio de 1868 Entre Mexico Y Los Estados-Unidos* (Palacio, Mexico: Imprenta Del Gobierno, Jose Maria Sandoval, 1873), 60.

[44] Juan N. Almonte, Mexican Minister to the United States, to William L. Marcy, US Sec. of State. July 15, 1854 [translation], in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs*, 721.

[45] Gadsden to Bonilla, January 29, 1855, quoted in Frederick Sherwood Dunn, *The Diplomatic Protection of Americans in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 75.

Soon thereafter, Gadsden wrote to Washington to complain of his Mexican counterpart's breech of diplomatic decorum. "His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Relations has even so far forgot the respect to a neighboring Republic, as to introduce the spirit of his sympathy for an enslaved race: in his official correspondence," Gadsden informed Marcy. To make matters worse, Bonilla's criticisms of American slavery seemed to have increased in frequency and intensity. Gadsden, like many ardent pro-slavery advocates, sensed a wider conspiracy at work. "His condemnations would seem to have emanated from Exeter Hall in London," Gadsden remarked, before adding the incriminating observation that in Mexico, "Uncle Tom's Cabin, translated into Spanish, is found in almost every domicile, and evidently with the intention of the Premier."[46] Two weeks later Gadsden wrote again to complain that the Mexican foreign minister continued, "clandestinely, officially, and even thro' the columns of a restrained Press [to] interfere in that disturbing issue on African Labor, and with all acrimony of the fanatical agitators on the subject."[47] Bonilla refused to back down and called on Washington to recall Gadsden.

In the midst of this diplomatic war of words, an African American named Luciano Mateo languished in a Mexican prison cell.[48] On January 23, 1855, Mexican authorities in the city of Minatitlan arrested and jailed Mateo after an associate accused him of

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[46] Gadsden to Marcy, April 3, 1855, No. 60, in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs*, 750.

[47] Gadsden even charged that Bonilla had called for abolitionists to "Bring the War Into Africa." Gadsden to Marcy, April 17, 1855, No. 61, in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs*, 757.

[48] Many variations exist for the spelling of Luciano Mateo's first and last names. I have chosen the spelling used most consistently in the official American records. In Spanish-language records his name is spelled Lucien Matthiew. For a concise overview of the case, see *The Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Fifty-Third Congress, 1893-1894*,Volume 39 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 2461-2462.

making derogatory comments about "His Serene Highness" Santa Anna.[49] Mateo, who claimed to have been born free in the United States, wrote to the U.S. Consul in hopes of securing his release. In light of Gadsden's previous prohibition on extending assistance of any kind to African Americans, the consul decided to seek further guidance from the Secretary of State before interceding to defend Mateo, whom officials referred to as "an inoffensive and respectable African Barber from Louisiana."[50] Unbeknownst to Gadsden, William Barry, the U.S. Consul in Matamoros, Mexico had also written to Washington for clarification on the official protocol for answering requests for assistance from African Americans abroad. Secretary of State Marcy responded to Barry's inquiry only five days before Mateo's arrest.[51]

The Secretary of State's instructions, which set a far-reaching precedent, revealed the contortions required to simultaneously protect the rights of African Americans abroad as U.S. nationals while denying their civil rights at home. The question at hand—How should U.S. consular officials handle requests from American-born individuals of African descent?—proved deceptively complex. Marcy acknowledged that several states

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[49] Mateo later admitted to an international arbitration court that that he told an acquaintance he "had never interacted with people of such bad faith as the people around here [Mexico]." Nevertheless, Mateo insisted he was a victim of the informant's desire to exact "revenge" on him. Spanish translation provided to the author by Alejandra Casar, August 13, 2015. "Numero 33: Lucien Matthiew Contra Mexico," in Jose Ignacio Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta de reclamaciones mexicanas y americanas establecida conforme tratado de 4 de Julio de 1868 Entre Mexico Y Los Estados-Unidos* (Palacio, Mexico: Imprenta Del Gobierno, Jose Maria Sandoval, 1873), 59.

[50] Barbers enjoyed high social status within the entrepreneurial African American middle class. Mateo's "respectable" profession is interesting in light of his later testimony that he had come to Mexico to work in the building trades. A migrant, manual laborer did not command the same respect as a barber. Gadsden to Marcy, No. 61 April 17 1855, No. 4217, in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs*, 757; Mateo's original purpose for coming to Mexico was recorded as "para trabajar como albañil en el castillo de San Juan de Ulúa." Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta*, 59.

[51] William L. Marcy, U.S. Secretary of State, to Mr. Barry, U.S. Consul at Matamoros, January 18, 1855.

recognized African Americans as citizens.[52] At the same time, in light of the ongoing *Dred Scott* case, Marcy felt obligated to tell Barry that he believed peoples of African descent did not enjoy "the privileges of citizens to a full extent." Seeking a middle course, Marcy instructed the consul, "if such persons who are free […] and of respectable character should apply to you for protection, they should be entitled to your assistance." And while the consul could not certify the citizenship of free blacks, he could and, in Marcy's personal opinion, should, certify that "they were born in the United States, are free and that the government thereof would regard it to be its duty to protect them if wronged by a foreign government." Thus, Marcy advocated for treating African Americans as "subjects," rather than full-fledged citizens.[53]

Marcy's letter to Barry had immediate consequences. Gadsden, despite his personal views and prejudices, dutifully fell in line. In early May, Gadsden wrote to Marcy to "respectfully suggest" that the U.S. government officially intervene to secure Mateo's release.[54] When the U.S. Consul did take up Mateo's defense, the Mexican authorities ignored his efforts and rejected his right to intervene on behalf of a non-citizen of the United States. To Gadsden, the Mexican government's refusal to recognize the validity of an official U.S. protest, added to the initial injustice of Mateo's incarceration.

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[52] Louisiana, Mateo's home state, did not. The Louisiana Purchase, on the other hand, had included provisions for the federal recognition of the citizenship of the territory's free "men of color." The issue of whether state citizenship conferred U.S. citizenship, and vice versa, lay at the center of the Dred Scott case and related cases. See, in particular**,** *Scott v Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857), 564-624 (Curtis, J., dissenting). For an in-depth analysis of these issues from a legal perspective see Stuart A. Streichler, "Justice Curtis's Dissent in the *Dred Scott* Case: An Interpretive Study," *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 24: 509 (199): 509-544.

[53] William L. Marcy, U.S. Secretary of State, to Mr. Barry, U.S. Consul at Matamoros, January 18, 1855, excerpted in Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta*, 61-62.

[54] Gadsden to Marcy, May 5, 1855, No. 62, in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs*, 764.

The irony at the center of the dispute, that Mexico based its denial of U.S. jurisdiction directly on Gadsden's circular, seemed to be lost on the American minister who instead blamed the "outrage" entirely on the inherent insolence of an uncivilized people.[55] Mateo, a victim of the schizophrenic policies of his own nation as much as the whims of a foreign dictator, spent a total of 102 days in his small prison cell.[56] By the time of his release on May 3, 1856, neither Gadsden, nor Santa Anna remained in office. Meanwhile, the precedent established by Mateo's case continued to guide U.S. diplomats' dealings with African Americans abroad while depreciating America's moral capital.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tumultuous, five-year tenure of George M. Dallas as U.S. Minister to Great Britain from 1856 to 1861.[57] Dallas was appointed by President James Buchanan, who previously headed the American Legation in London during the Pierce Administration. It was a prestigious diplomatic post, subordinate only to the Secretary of State, and had historically served as a springboard to the White House.[58] Dallas, a well-connected Pennsylvania Democrat and fierce intra-party rival of Buchanan, held clear ambitions for higher office. While Dallas's active engagement with American electoral politics was certainly not unique in a diplomat, the ambassador devoted a great deal of personal and official attention to issues of race in foreign affairs in

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[55] "Outrage," see Ibid. It was not lost, however, on the international arbitration court that later adjudicated Mateo's lawsuit against the Mexican government. Gadsden's circular, the court noted, seemed designed to "to deny the protection of the United States to all individuals of African descent born in this country, without distinction [and] encourage the ignorant and corrupt Mexican employees to oppress all [African] Americans in a condition similar to Matthiew [Mateo]." As such, it "probably heavily influenced the arbitrary trampling of the claimant's rights." Author's translation. Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta*, 60-61.

[56] In 1871, the international arbitration court ruled in Mateo's favor and awarded him 3,000 pesos in damages. Rodriguez, ed., *La Comision mixta*, 64.

[57] The position is also known by its formal title: US Minister to the Court of St. James.

[58] In addition to Buchanan, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, James Monroe, and Martin Van Buren all held the post before becoming president.

large part because they allowed him to stay in touch with domestic political debates while physically out of the country.

Dallas, like the U.S. consuls in Mexico, sought a clear explanation from Washington of official U.S. policy regarding African American citizenship. As Dallas explained in a letter to Secretary of State Marcy, the murky legal status of African Americans had complicated mundane "matter[s] of practical routine." Recently, Dallas continued, a "negro" visited the London embassy to apply for a US passport. "Had my own mind been clear that under the Constitution and by the federal government, a free black is entitled to recognition as a citizen of the United States," Dallas asserted, he would have issued the passport. However, in view of the judicial deliberations in the *Dred Scott* case, Dallas decided that he could not in good conscience issue the document and turned the man away empty-handed. "My rule is to decline giving the passport where I do not feel at liberty to pledge, as against all the world, the natural protection from unjust wrong," Dallas asserted. In closing, Dallas asked that Washington supply "some definite direction" or "a precedent by which to be governed on a case so likely to occur frequently."[59]

In response, Secretary of State Marcy sent Dallas a copy of his letter to Mr. Barry, the U.S. Consul in Matamoros from January 1855, which to his knowledge contained the only formal instructions offered to US diplomatic officials on the subject. With regards to Dallas's decision, Marcy assured the ambassador that as it was the "invariable practice of the [State] Department to refuse passports in all such cases, [it] therefore cannot but

[59] George M. Dallas, U.S. Minister to Great Britain, to William L. Marcy, U.S. Secretary of State, No. 10, May 23, 1856, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Rolls 65-66.

approve your conduct in declining to issue one on the occasion referred to in your latest dispatch."[60] Upon reviewing Marcy's letter to Mr. Barry, Dallas was thrilled to find both his course of action and his underlying logic vindicated. Demonstrating a career politician's flair for self-aggrandizement, Dallas wrote to confess that he had initially been "extremely reluctant to originate what might seem to be a harsh and an unjust rule for the future, [but after] very careful consideration, [I] came to the conclusion that my duty, however, unpleasant, was imperative." With the backing of the State Department, Dallas would now confidently and without exception deny passports to anyone of "African extraction and colour, on the ground that, however clearly, as a native of the United States, such a person may be entitled to general assistance and protection, he cannot be regarded as a citizen within the meaning of the Constitution."[61]While the State Department's official policy possessed the mantel of executive authority and claimed justification in the U.S. Constitution, the full revocation of African American citizenship was not yet settled law. Only the final ruling by the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case, issued in the spring of 1857, spared Dallas and others from a potentially embarrassing reversal.

The landmark decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* remains one of the most significant and divisive rulings in the history of the U.S. Supreme Court. Summarizing the general distain in which historians hold the infamous decision, one legal scholar referred to *Dred Scott* as "a major disaster, degrading the Court and the Constitution and

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[60] William L. Marcy to George M. Dallas, No. 18, June 16, 1856. *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State: Great Britain, July 20, 1829 to August 13, 1861*, Microcopy, FM 77, Rolls 73-76.
[61] George Dallas to William L. Marcy, No. 19, July 11, 1856. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Rolls 65-66.

precipitating the Civil War."[62] The case, which first went to trial in 1847, concerned whether Dred Scott, an enslaved servant of an Army doctor from Missouri, could claim his freedom by virtue of spending an extended period of time in the territories and free states of the Upper Midwest where slavery had been barred. In his majority opinion, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney not only denied Dred Scott's bid for freedom, but took the opportunity to level a radical, sweeping judgment on the broader issue of U.S. citizenship with far reaching consequences. As Taney saw it, the question before the court was simple: "Can a negro whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights and privileges and immunities guaranteed to the citizen?"

Taney, citing a strict interpretation of the Constitution and the original intent of the founding fathers, answered emphatically in the negative. At the time the Constitution was drafted, Taney asserted, "the state of public opinion in relation to that unfortunate race, which prevailed in the civilized and enlightened portions of the world" regarded blacks "as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." In a jab at the British anti-slavery movement, Taney pointedly noted that "in no nation was this opinion more firmly fixed or more uniformly acted upon than by the English Government and English people."[63]

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[62] Carl B. Swisher, *The Oliver Wendall Holmes Devise History of the Supreme Court of the United States, Volume Five: The Taney Period, 1836-1864* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 631.
[63] *Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857)

While Taney's decision summarily stripped African Americans of their US citizenship, the underlying logic of *Dred Scott* unintentionally legitimized the objectives and orientation of African American race diplomacy. The eminent justice repeatedly cited international public opinion and even used the moral authority of Great Britain as the lynch pin of his argument for the universal acceptance of slavery in the civilized world at the time of the Constitution's ratification. In this way, Taney invited some dangerous, and potentially damning, questions. If world public opinion mattered in 1789, what did the chief justice make of the undeniable shift against slavery among the "civilized nations of the world?" If past British approval of slavery testified to its basic righteousness, what did the present British disapproval of slavery signify? Taney's defiant attitude only thinly covered the weakness of his reactionary logic. By 1857, global opinion had shifted significantly against slavery and dozens of governments in North and South America, Europe, and Asia had abolished the institution, draining much of the force from pro-slavery appeals to international support or universal values.

Long before Taney's decision, African American activists noted the growing support for their cause in the realm of global public opinion. "The nations of the world are moving in the great cause of universal freedom, and some of them at least will, ere long, do you justice," the African American minister and abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet predicted fourteen years earlier at the National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. In Garnet's estimation, American slaves needed to capitalize on the favorable international climate by ramping up their resistance. In the meantime the free black

leaders would continue to campaign to isolate America by lobbying European powers to place "their broad seal of disapprobation" upon slavery.[64]

Other African American activists tailored their rhetorical attacks on slavery to fit America's delicate self-image as a young, ambitious nation whose democratic ideals made it unique among the nations of the world. Before an audience of women abolitionists in 1847, William Wells Brown, an African American anti-slavery activist who gained international fame, declared, "liberty is being discussed throughout the world," and noted that the Bey of Tunis had recently abolished slavery in his North African kingdom. Brown allowed that information to sink in briefly before posing two pointed questions expertly crafted to pierce the veil of American exceptionalism. "Shall the American people be behind the people of the Old World?" Brown asked, "Shall they be behind those who are represented as almost living in the dark ages?[65] From George Washington's declaration that the new republic would serve as liberty's "surest guardian" to Franklin Pierce's affirmation that since independence the "steady and increasing radiance" of American democracy continued to set a shining example for peoples around the world, the rhetoric of American statesmen ignored the blot of slavery.[66]

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[64] Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States, Buffalo, NY, 1843." http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=etas (accessed June 12, 2015).

[65] William Wells Brown, "A Lecture delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem," in Ezra Greenspan, ed., *William Wells Brown: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 121.

[66] George Washington's Farwell Address, 1796, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18thcentury/washing.asp (accessed 17 August 2015); Franklin Pierce's Inaugural Address, March 3, 1853, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/pierce.asp (accessed 10 August 2015).

While slavery had long tarnished America's reputation in the world, the *Dred Scott* decision threw these contradictions into sharp relief and invited attacks on America's much vaunted moral superiority. Britain, of course, eagerly pounced on American hypocrisy. "It is truly melancholy to witness the Judiciary and Senate of a great nation influenced by a chronic policy which must degrade the name of republic in the eyes of every Christian people," an editorial in the *British Post* lamented, shortly after the publication of Taney's majority opinion. "Before the Declaration of Independence, the free black possessed the rights of a British subject; but under a republic, however useful he may be as a member of society, he is consigned to political slavery—to hopeless and abject political degradation," the article observed, before concluding, "this contrast cannot fail to be suggestive as well as instructive."[67] In London, the tremendous publicity generated by the *Dred Scott* decision led the American ambassador Dallas to call for an information campaign to explain the court's rationale and defend the nation's honor.

Much like U.S. foreign policy officials a century later who came to see race relations as major liability for America's image abroad, Dallas viewed the *Dred Scott* decision as public relations challenge with direct bearing on America's reputation in Europe. "Confronting the unreasoning and reckless prejudice so universal on this side of the Atlantic against our Southern form of labor," Dallas wrote to Secretary of State Lewis Cass in late March, "I cannot but regard the decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case as of vast importance in its bearing upon our national character and relations." While Dallas agreed with Taney's ruling and believed whole-heartedly that the U.S. Supreme Court had "no superior in the great qualities of integrity, independence and

[67] "Untitled," *British Post*, April 14, 1857, included as enclosure in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906,* Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 66.

learning" anywhere in the world, the ambassador feared that the British public, who relied on the hostile coverage of the English press, might not fully appreciate the wisdom of the ruling. As "newspaper condensations destroy the impressiveness of the judgment, leave a great deal unexplained, and create doubts," Dallas suggested a more direct and proactive response. The minister asked that the American Legation in London "be supplied with a suitable number of copies of that decision," which his staff in turn would distribute to interested parties. Dallas was confident that such a campaign, if properly executed, would succeed. Dallas assured Secretary of State Lewis Cass, "I have already had applications for exact and full information on the subject from gentleman whom I know to be alike able and willing to use it justly."[68]

Having established the demand for a public relations campaign, Dallas made the case for its urgency in a letter written the following week. "If we do not, in some authentic form, let this prejudicial portion of the world have access to the *whole truth*," Dallas warned Cass, "it is a hundred to one that the *dissenting opinions* of Judges McLean and Curtis will be represented and almost universally received as *the Judgement*." Curtis's dissent, in particular, threatened to sow confusion as it was methodically written to refute Taney's "majority opinion" point by point.[69] Although Dallas conceded that it would be nearly impossible to obtain a fair hearing of American

[68] George M. Dallas to Lewis Cass, March 26, 1857. *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 66.
[69] Streichler, "Justice Curtis's Dissent," 509-544.

slavery in the British or European press, he felt that the United States should at least try "to vindicate the principles and practice of our national democracy."[70]

Dallas's conception of a modern information strategy anticipated U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War nearly a century later, but proved too ambitious for his own time. The State Department in the antebellum period was simply not equipped to execute the type of information offensive championed by Dallas. Restricted to the traditional channels and protocol of state-to-state diplomacy, America's foreign policy elites effectively ceded the field of public opinion to African American activists and their allies who were well-versed in the art of propaganda and publicity. In this sense, the *Dred Scott* decision served as a catalyst for the emergence of a highly effective strain of African American diplomacy.

Dred Scott had other more tangible effects on African Americans traveling abroad. As a general rule, U.S. consular officials followed the injunction that passports should be issued to all individuals who provided proof, in the form of a signed and notarized affidavit witnessed by at least one citizen, that they were native citizens of the United States. [71] Taney's explicit exclusion "persons of African extraction" from citizenship, therefore automatically disqualified African Americans from holding U.S. passports.[72] Following the final ruling in *Dred Scott*, the State Department formally instructed American diplomats abroad to refuse to issue passports to African Americans

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[70] Italics in the original. George Mifflin Dallas to Lewis Cass, April 2, 1857 in Julia Dallas, ed., *Letters From London, Written From the Year 1856-1860*, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), 223.
[71] Department of State Official Passport Instructions, August 1857, enclosure, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 67-69.
[72] Handwritten Addendum to Passport Instructions, enclosure, in Ibid.

or visa existing passports.[73] The policy did not, however, prevent African American from applying for, or even obtaining, passports. As with earlier cases of African Americans requesting the protection of the United States government, travel documents engendered confusion and conflict while exposing the inherent contradictions within American policy.

Benjamin Moran, who served under Dallas as the Assistant Secretary of the American legation in London, was tasked with implementing the new racial restrictions. One month after the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision, an aspiring sculptor named Wedgewood turned up at the American consulate in London to request a passport. After Moran identified Wedgewood as a mulatto from Louisiana he refused to issue the travel document. Distraught and confused, Wedgewood exclaimed, "What am I? Where do I belong? I have no country, and yet I am an American! I am in a foreign land, and yet I have no country. What am I to do?" Moran confided to his diary that during the outburst the sculptor's "countenance exhibited [the] most complete picture of mental anguish I ever witnessed." Wedgewood's pain must have touched Moran, since the usually cantankerous bureaucrat attempted to comfort the sculptor by explaining that while he was not technically a citizen, he could still seek the protection United States consular officials while abroad and that in all proper cases "aid was freely given to negroes as to whites." [74] In all likelihood Moran's words, which accurately conveyed the convoluted policy of the State Department, did little to assuage the sting inflicted by his actions.

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[73] I have adopted the Englihs "visa" in place of the French *visé* used at the time.

[74]Benjamin Moran, diary entry for April 27, 1857. Sarah Agnes Wallace and Frances Elma Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 36.

Moran's own records indicate that he struggled to consistently uphold the color line dictated by the *Dred Scott* decision. One morning in April of 1859, according to Moran's meticulously maintained diary, "a coarse looking Southron with evidence of Negro blood in him came with a tall, beautiful girl of 20 years, for a passport." The pair, who hailed from South Carolina, turned out to be a slave trader and his daughter. While Moran privately commented on the man's low intelligence, he issued the passport and did not subject the man to any official inquiry concerning his "muddy complexion."[75] The fact that man was a South Carolinian may explain Moran's uncharacteristic leniency. On another occasion, Moran bitterly observed that within the walls of the American legation the mere mention of the Palmetto State seemed to possess "cabalistic" powers that won special treatment from his boss, U.S. Minister and would-be Democratic Presidential candidate George M. Dallas.[76]

Not all Southerners, however, garnered special treatment. When a wealthy slave-owner from Slocomb, Louisiana requested a passport for his black servant, Moran denied his request. The diplomat then silenced the man's subsequent protest by pointedly asking "if he would like to see a black man from the North" with an official passport declaring him a citizen of the United States? As for the source of the man's present inconvenience, Moran explained that it represented the "practical workings [of *Dred Scott*] in a form the South scarcely looked for."[77] Typically, knowledge of these "practical workings" did not

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[75] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for April 13 1859, in Ibid., 527.
[76] For a Northern Democrat like Dallas, the support of South Carolina would have been crucial to winning the Democratic Party's nomination. Fatefully, it was also the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860. Benjamin Moran, diary entry for Sept 28 1858, in Ibid., 436.
[77] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for June 3, 1859, in Ibid., 549.

extend beyond the individuals involved. If Wedgewood or the aggrieved slaveholder sought official redress, their claims were not recorded or preserved.

In November of 1859, however, Moran's routine refusal to visa the passport of an African American woman flared into a minor scandal. Sarah P. Remond, the woman in question, belonged to a prominent free black family of Salem, Massachusetts. Her brother Charles was a well-known abolitionist who had visited Great Britain in the 1840s. Sarah, a pioneering abolitionist in her own right, earned popular acclaim during an anti-slavery speaking tour of the British Isles.[78] In late November, Remond and her sister Caroline Putnam, called at the American Legation to obtain visas needed for travel on the Continent. Moran asked the two "negresses" to be seated, but refused to visa Remond's passport, after identifying her on sight as a "dark mullato with wooly hair and negro features."[79] The assistant secretary admitted that if he had received the documents by post, he would have approved them without hesitation. Remond's physical appearance led Moran to surmise that her passport was fraudulent or obtained through deception. As the application process for a passport required little if any direct contact with officials, and racial restrictions on citizenship were relatively new to the State Department, no reliable method for screening out African Americans existed.

While the standard form required applicants to list physical characteristics including eye and hair color, facial characteristics, and complexion, it did not contain a

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[78]See Sibyl Ventress Brownlee, "Out of the abundance of the heart: Sarah Ann Parker Remond's quest for freedom" (Phd Diss., University of Marlyand, 1997).

[79] Benjamin Moran, diary entry November 22, 1859, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1*, 608. Memorandum, Benjamin Moran to George M. Dallas, December 12, 1859 in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 70.

line for race.[80] Consequently, Remond's passport, which was signed by Secretary of State Lewis Cass, identified her as a thirty-two-year-old woman with black eyes, dark hair, a full mouth and a "dark" complexion.[81] Remond's failure to explicitly identify herself as a "person of color" in her original application constituted a violation of a little-known State Department provision. Under this policy, any passport obtained by an individual who "omit[s] to mention in the application that he or she is a person of color […] through accident or design," would automatically be voided.[82] In view of Remond's race, Moran explained that he could not legally countersign such a passport, nor supply the requested visa. Moran asserted that he was simply performing his duty by upholding the Legation's established practice.

Not satisfied with the assistant minister's bureaucratic evasion, Remond's frustration boiled over. According to Moran's official report, the petite woman "stamped on the floor saying she thanked God she was in a country where her rights would be respected, and that I should hear from her again, as she would make the newspapers ring about this."[83] In Moran's version of the events, laden with racist and sexist overtones, he insisted Remond became "so impudent that I had to order her out of the house."[84] Moran suspected that Remond, who "evidently expected a refusal," had intentionally sought out

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[80] Department of State Official Passport Instructions, August 1857, enclosure, Microfilm
[81] Copy of Sarah P. Remond's Passport, No. 10350, issued September 10, 1858, enclosure, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 70.
[82] Handwritten Addendum to Passport Instructions, enclosure, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906,* Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 65-67.
[83] Memorandum, Benjamin Moran to George M. Dallas, December 12, 1859. in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 70.
[84] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for November 22, 1859, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1,* 608.

a confrontation.[85] The following week, Moran foiled a clumsy attempt by one of Remond's white allies to surreptitiously obtain a passport for Caroline Putnam, Remond's sister and travelling companion. The well-meaning friend admitted that Mrs. Putnam "had African blood in her," but swore that she was an American citizen. Moran sent him away empty-handed.[86]

Remond's account of the exchange, presented in a formal letter to Ambassador Dallas, chided Moran for the discourteous manner in which he issued his refusal. "Being a Citizen of the United States," Remond concluded, "I respectfully demand, as my right that my passport be vised by the Minister of my country."[87] Moran responded two days later in a note dripping with condescension. As a gentleman, Moran insisted, he would be truly "sorry if any of his countrywomen, irrespective of color or extraction, should think him frivolously disposed to withhold from them facilities in his power to grant." However, Moran reiterated that because Remond lacked U.S. citizenship—"the indispensable qualification for an American passport"—"a just sense of his official obligations" compelled his actions.[88] According to the assistant minister's logic, which accurately represented the State Department's official stance, Remond could be his fellow "countrywoman" but never his fellow citizen. Having defended his honor, and that of his nation, Moran considered the matter closed.

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for November 28, 1859, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1,*610.
[87] Sarah P. Remond to George M. Dallas December 12, 1859 in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 70.
[88] Benjamin Moran to Sarah P. Remond, December 14, 1859 in Ibid.

Remond, however, quickly made good on her threat to "make the newspapers ring." The English press picked up the story in early December of 1859 and a flurry of stories followed in quick succession. The daily onslaught of "attacks on the Legation" distorted by an "immense amount of misrepresentation" caught Moran and Dallas off guard.[89] The *Morning Star*, a radical London newspaper founded by the famous liberal reformers Richard Cobden and John Bright three years earlier, led the charge. One of the *Star*'s editorials condemned Remond's treatment by the American legation and castigated the official American policy of refusing to recognize the citizenship of African Americans. The public criticism struck a nerve at the U.S. Legation. Moran reported that the unfavorable coverage had "fallen like a bomb-shell" among the American diplomatic staff and outraged Ambassador Dallas. In a fit of histrionics, the minister even threatened to resign in protest if the attacks persisted.[90]

In addition to pleading her case through the press, Sarah Remond wrote a final message to Dallas, in which she expressed her disgust that "persons born in the United States, and who have been subjected all their lives to taxation and other burdens imposed upon American citizens, are to be deprived of their rights as such, merely because [our] complexions happen to be dark." That the enforcer of such an unjust policy was a public

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[89] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for December 8, 1859, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1*, 613.

[90] Moran viewed Dallas's threats to resign as a publicity stunt calculated to win the favor of Democratic voters, especially in the key state of South Carolina, in the coming presidential election. Benjamin Moran, diary entry for December 10, 1859, in Ibid., 613-614.

official whose salary she had helped to pay, Remond concluded, added insult to injury.[91] Moran, who read the letter, deemed it further evidence of Remond's "vulgar insolence."[92]

The fallout from the "Remond Affair" continued into the first months of 1860. In January, several British newspapers published without comment the entirety of the correspondence between the U.S. Legation and Remond.[93] According to one editorial, the letters provided "an instructive commentary on the boasted freedom and equality of every citizen of the United States."[94] The flood of negative publicity prompted the State Department in Washington to send a note of support to the London legation.[95] Meanwhile Remond, joined by famous African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass, spoke at an anti-slavery meeting in Wakefield in front of a cheering audience of 1,500 people.[96] While Moran dismissed the public criticism as "fudge" and counseled Dallas to ignore the newspapers, he was not wholly immune to British moral censure.[97] At a social function, Moran could not help but notice Her Royal Highness Queen Victoria looking "very scrutinisingly" in his direction. "I now suspect the Remond affair was dancing about in her mind and that she wished to know what kind of person […] the Secretary

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[91] Sarah P. Remond to George M. Dallas, December 15, 1859, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 70.
[92] Benjamin Moran, diary entry for December 16, 1859, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1,* 616.
[93] "Disabilities of American Persons of Colour," *The Times* (London), January 7, 1860; *The Standard* (London), January 8, 1860; "American Persons of Colour," *Morning Standard* (London), January 9, 1860; "The Land of Liberty," *Lancaster Gazette*, January 14, 1860.
[94] "The Aristocracy of Colour," *The Liverpool Mercury*, January 10, 1860; "American Tyranny," *The Derby Mercury*, January 11, 1860; "American Tyranny of Colour," *The Essex Standard*, January 13, 1860.
[95] Moran was heartened by this note of official approval, although he felt that Dallas was unfairly claiming credit for his actions. Benjamin Moran, diary Entry February 6, 1860, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1,* 637.
[96] "Anti-Slavery Meeting in Wakefield," *Leeds Mercury*, January 14, 1860.
[97] Benjamin Moran, diary Entry for January 9, 1860, in Wallace and Gillespie, eds., *The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1*, 627.

was that refused that lady of color a vise," Moran wrote in his diary, betraying a status anxiety perhaps tinged with mild embarrassment. [98]

While Moran imagined others silently judging him as a racial bigot, his boss, George Dallas harbored the opposite fear. When the London *Times* published a story commending Dallas for publicly shaking the hand of the Haitian Minister at the opening of Parliament in February of 1859, Dallas reacted with "something of mortified pride." The Minister ordered Moran to send an official dispatch to Washington repudiating the incident in no uncertain terms. While Dallas no doubt wished to avoid a reputation for racial tolerance, his discomfort may have also stemmed from the fact that even such a minor pleasantry might be interpreted as a de facto recognition of the Haitian government, with whom the United States had steadfastly refused to normalize diplomatic relations since that nation's independence in 1804.[99] "Although the unexceptionable deportment of this gentleman of colour has often struck me, I have never formed the slightest personal acquaintance with him," the dispatch asserted, explaining that the journalist had misrepresented a routine exchange with the Venezuelan Minister, who was "somewhat Indian in appearance," or with one of his "dark-complexioned colleagues from South America."[100] The fact that Dallas felt compelled to issue this corrective, which he sent to the President of the United States, speaks to the minister's obsession with racial propriety. While these incidents testify to the American Minister's

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[98] Benjamin Moran, diary Entry February 25, 1860, in Ibid., 643.

[99] Abraham Lincoln would become the first U.S. President to officially recognize the Haitian Republic on July 12, 1862. "The Opening Parliament," *The Times* (London), February 4, 1859: 5; Benjamin Moran, diary entry for February 4, 1859, in Ibid., 504. For a comprehensive examine of antebellum U.S.-Haitian relations see Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations in the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

[100] George M. Dallas to Lewis Cass, No. 121, February 4, 1860 in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30 Roll 71.

delicate sense of racial identity, they also provide insight into the process by which seemingly minor, petty exchanges could become major diplomatic incidents when American racial prejudice combined in combustible fashion with national honor, mass-media attention, and international affairs. Unfortunately for Dallas, African American activists understood this as well and deliberately sought high-profile opportunities to needle U.S. officials and provoke a response.

During the summer of 1860, "lovers of science from all parts of the globe" descended on London for the second International Statistical Congress. A total of ninety representatives from twenty-four nations and six continents participated in the historic meeting. One London newspaper boasted that the entire human race, even non-white "children of Ham," were represented at the congress.[101] The United States sent two official delegates across the Atlantic: Dr. Edward Jarvis, registrar of births, deaths, and marriages for the city of Boston, and Judge Augustus Longstreet, President of the University of South Carolina. The London congress, held under the official auspices of the British government, represented an early endorsement of a central tent of cultural diplomacy—the belief that intellectual exchange had the power to foster positive international relations. "The intercourse of men of high attainment and enlightened minds, who are thus afforded an opportunity of cultivating friendly relations," the official

[101] Vienna hosted the first International Statistical Congress in 1856. "Recent Events," *The Morning Post* (London), July 18, 1860.

report confidently proclaimed, "cannot fail to be advantageous to the maintenance of peace and good-will among the nations."[102]

Given the high-minded spirit of congeniality surrounding the congress of "men of figures and facts," few of the bespectacled delegates could have predicted that their collegial academic meeting would become the scene of a major diplomatic incident. Certainly, such a remote prospect did not darken the mood of George Dallas, as the American Minister made his way to Somerset House on the afternoon of July 16 to attend the convocation of the congress as an honorary guest. And yet, only moments after His Royal Highness Prince Albert officially opened the congress, Dallas found himself at the center of an embarrassing imbroglio that would soon reach the highest rungs of American foreign policy making.

Following the Prince Consort's suitably eloquent and forgettable convocation, the octogenarian aristocrat Lord Henry Peter Brougham rose from his seat on the dais. Though the former Lord Chancellor was no longer actively involved in electoral politics, Brougham continued to command respect as one of the last surviving lions of British abolitionism. After asking the delegates to thank the Prince for his remarks, Brougham directly addressed the American Minister. "I beg my friend Mr. Dallas to observe there is in the assemblage before us a Negro and hope the fact will not offend his scruples," Brougham announced. Following his Lordship's finger, Dallas "perceived the sable gentleman seated conspicuously in the centre of the crowd." Adding to the American Minister's already acute discomfort, the black man, who unbeknownst to Dallas was the

[102] James T. Hammack, "Report to the Statistical Society on the Proceedings of the Fourth Session of the International Statistical Congress, Held in London, July, 1860," *Journal of Statistical Society of London* Vol. 24, No. 1 (March 1861): 17.

African American abolitionist Dr. Martin Delany, stood and begged permission from the Prince to add another "interesting statistical fact" to the official record. Delany then looked squarely at Dallas and declared, "I am a man!" As the hall echoed with applause, Dallas stewed in silence.

The entire scene, as he promptly reported to Washington, struck Dallas as a "premeditated contrivance to insult the country which I represented, and to provoke, if possible, for the benefit of the audience an unseemly discussion between the American Minister and the Negro."[103] By refusing to be drawn into a racially charged confrontation, Dallas believed that he had preserved his own personal honor and more importantly saved his government from a diplomatic debacle. From a purely theoretical standpoint, Dallas reasoned that it "would have been great folly to imply, by word or act, that the question of slavery could legitimately be discussed before the American minister at a European conference of any sort."[104] Wary of setting a dangerous precedent, Dallas held his tongue despite his firm conviction that the British government should be held responsible for the insult. The responses of the two American delegates, however, undercut the Minister's carefully calculated inaction.

Judge Longstreet, a native Georgian and ardent defender of slavery, promptly walked out of the session and withdrew from the congress in protest. [105] He then vented

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[103] George M. Dallas to Lewis Cass, No. 246, July 20, 1860 in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 71.
[104] George M. Dallas, diary entry, July 20, 1860 in in Susan Dallas, ed., *Diary of George Mifflin Dallas, While United States Minister to Russia, 1837 to 1839, and to England 1856 to 1861* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1892), 410.
[105] Longstreet's nephew James became a celebrated general for the Confederacy. For information on Longstreet's pro-slavery sentiments see Bishop O.P. Fitzgerald, *Judge Longstreet: A Life Sketch* (Nashville: Barbee and Smith, 1891).

his displeasure in a London paper. "I could be not be received as an equal, in country or in character, while the negro was received with open arms," the Judge explained.[106] A short time later, Longstreet told a friend in the Buchanan administration that the incident constituted a triple offense as "an ill-timed assault upon our country, a wanton indignity offered to our minister and pointed insult offered to me."[107] As a point of nation and personal honor, Longstreet could not idly abide such an attack.

Longstreet proceeded to mount a familiar defense of slavery as a humanitarian venture that provided the enslaved population with a life materially superior to that of Europe's impoverished peasantry. Without missing a beat, Longstreet insisted that the United States remained "one vast asylum for the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden, the persecuted of the world […] the good Samaritan of nations." It is telling that Longstreet saw no contradiction in celebrating the United States as "a multitudinous brotherhood of all climes, religions, and tongues living in harmony," in a column dedicated to asserting the impossibility of harmony between white and black Americans.[108] Nor did Longstreet seem to appreciate the irony of his words as they echoed against the backdrop of intensifying sectionalism that would drive the nation into civil war less than one year later.

These divisions were exposed when Longstreet's fellow delegate, Dr. Jarvis of the American Statistical Association, refused to withdraw from the congress. Jarvis

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[106] A. B. Longstreet, "The American Delegate and Lord Brougham," *The Morning Chronicle* (London), July 21, 1860. Longstreet's wife wrote to assure him that he had "given the English some home thrusts and told them some truths which I hope will do them good." Mrs. Longstreet to Her Husband, August 8, 1860 in Fitzgerald, *Longstreet*, 202.
[107] Augustus Longstreet to Howell Cobb, quoted in Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall*, 34.
[108] A. B. Longstreet, "The American Delegate and Lord Brougham," *The Morning Chronicle* (London), July 21, 1860.

maintained that, as a proud resident of the free Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Brougham's remarks had not offended him. Massachusetts, the home state of Sarah Remond and the fiery abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, stood at the vanguard of Northern resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Privately, Dallas cursed Jarvis's brand of "half-faced fellowship."[109] Jarvis further alienated Dallas by attempting to play peacemaker between Brougham and the minister. Despite Jarvis's efforts, Dallas rebuffed all of Brougham's tepid attempts to make amends and remained unmoved by the intersession of other high profile envoys.

The inability of the American delegation to present a united front pointedly demonstrated that the sectional and ideological rifts tearing at the fabric of American society at home were not easily kept out of the international arena. As news of the incident spread, American and British newspapers offered predictably divergent accounts. Dallas's assistant, Benjamin Moran, was repulsed by the British press coverage, which he felt reveled in the latest opportunity "to laugh at Americans for being over sensitive as to what is said to them in England on slavery."[110] On the other side of the Atlantic, American newspapers and magazines defended Dallas, white supremacy, and slavery.[111] If Brougham and Delany had indeed set out to embarrass the United States, gin up controversy, and draw publicity, their stunt had thus far worked to perfection.

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[109] George M. Dallas, diary entry, July 18, 1860, in Susan Dallas, ed., *Diary of George Mifflin Dallas,* 408.
[110] Benjamin Moran, diary entry, July 20, 1860, in Sarah Agnes Wallace and Frances Elma Gillespie, eds., The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 697.
[111] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 34.

Though Dallas's official report was meant to expose and discredit Brougham's actions as part of a devious "plot," Dallas accurately captured the brilliant design of the era's African American diplomacy. By confronting American representatives attending international conferences with the issue of slavery in the United States, African Americans forced American domestic affairs onto the world stage. This provocative strategy courted controversy by violating the rigid decorum of international diplomacy as well as the social mores of middle class society. African American activists consciously risked opprobrium for disregarding these norms, because they correctly judged that the changes they sought would be impossible to achieve within the constraints of the existing system.[112] As savvy propagandists, African American abolitionists understood that controversy attracted publicity. Publicity, in turn, could be leveraged to push for political change. Frederick Douglass, in an oft-quoted line from an 1857 speech, memorably defended this strategy when he declared, "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground […] Power concedes nothing without a struggle."[113] In 1860, Martin Delany's agitation in London skillfully baited U.S. officials into a very public struggle.

Delany's presence at the conference highlighted the inability of the American government to fully suppress independent African American diplomacy. Delany, who was born free in Virginia and spent most of his adult life in Pittsburgh, emigrated to Canada in 1856 and attended the congress as part of the Canadian delegation. By

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[112] For example, it is hard to imagine African American abolitionists making any progress to end slavery in the United States had they observed the State Department's near total prohibition on discussing slavery overseas.

[113] Frederick Douglass, "West India Emancipation," speech delivered at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857, in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*: *Vol. 2 The Pre-Civil War Decades, 1850-1860* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 437.

obtaining official status as a Canadian delegate, Delany improved on Frederick Douglass's strategy at the World's Temperance Conference, where Douglass gained admission as a honorary representative of Newcastle. Delany, however, was far from an interloper at the congress. One of the first African Americans admitted to Harvard Medical School, Delany possessed expertise and direct experience in combating disease epidemics that qualified him to authoritatively address scientific and statistical issues at the center of the congress's agenda.

Delany's status as a respectable "coloured gentleman" legitimized his participation and led many observers to approve of his pointed announcement. At the same time, Delany's direct challenge of the top U.S. diplomat in Britain, in the presence of foreign statesman and royalty, escalated a diplomatic strategy of confrontation and forced the issue slavery from its domestic confinement. The State Department, which in the past had studiously avoided drawing attention to African American diplomacy, could not ignore the fallout from the International Statistics Congress. For one, extensive press coverage focused public attention on the incident. Additionally, a story that combined an aspiring presidential candidate, slavery, and American honor offered music to the ears of journalists primed to the fever pitch of partisan politics in an exceptionally divisive election year. Due to the surrounding circumstances, the incident could not be written off as "the impetuous eccentricity of a very aged man," as Dallas half-heartedly suggested, or

dismissed as yet another example of Lord Brougham's "habitually ill regulated temper."[114]

The State Department's first official comment came in September, two months after Dallas's initial report. Secretary of State Lewis Cass asserted that because the incident occurred at "a semi-official meeting of the highest character composed of delegates from almost every part of Christendom and upon which the public attention is earnestly directed," the United States had "just cause for complaint." With the tacit approval of the British government, Brougham had diverted the "praiseworthy" congress "from its appropriate functions into a theatre for insulting a friendly power." Cass reassured Dallas that the Minister was right to take offense. By deliberately embarrassing the American Minister, who attended the congress's opening in his official diplomatic capacity, Brougham's "flagrant breach of the proprieties of his position" had insulted the United States. After all, Cass continued, Brougham's jibe constituted "a reproach upon a large portion of the American people, among whom slavery is an established institution, and upon a still larger portion, among whom I am one, who consider the negro race an inferior one and who repudiate all political equality and social connection with its descendants." According to this logic, foreign governments should not only avoid criticizing slavery, but also refrain from any statement that might be construed as an endorsement of racial equality in deference to American sensitivities.

While pledging his own personal commitment to white supremacy, Cass was nevertheless quick to point out that as a matter of principle the U.S. State Department

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[114] Ibid.; Lewis Cass to George M. Dallas, No. 278, September 11, 1860 in *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State: Great Britain, July 20, 1860 to August 13, 1861*, Microcopy, FM 77, Reel 75.

foreswore any interference in the internal affairs of another nation. As a sovereign nation, Britain was free to practice and promote racial "amalgamation" within her own borders. Likewise, the British people might choose to "admit this caste even into the most intimate relations of life." That said, Cass told Dallas that the British government should understand that such a social system, if introduced into public life, would jeopardize "the preservation of friendly feelings" between the two nations as "there are many Americans visiting Europe, who would consider exclusion from such mixed collections much more complimentary than invitations to them."[115] The disruption of the International Statistical Congress, Cass argued, was far from an isolated incident. Rather, it represented "another contribution to the system of attack, of vituperation rather, which in high places and low throughout England is carried on with unsparing severity against the United States." These attacks, "brought over the ocean by every packet […] cannot fail to be followed by unhappy effects upon the intercourse of the two countries."

Despite this assessment of Anglo-American relations and his personal sympathy for Dallas's predicament, Cass concluded that the United States could take no official action in response to the incident. After assuring Dallas that his remarks bore "no spirit of censure whatever," Cass proceeded to censure Dallas for his mishandling of an admittedly delicate situation. While silence may have appeared prudent in the moment, Cass told Dallas that he should have appealed immediately to the Crown Prince or to Lord John Russell, the British Foreign Minister, who was also in attendance. Barring

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[115] Lewis Cass to George M. Dallas, No. 278, September 11, 1860. *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State: Great Britain, July 20, 1860 to August 13, 1861*, Microcopy, FM 77, Reel 75.

satisfaction, he then should have left the meeting post haste to unambiguously communicate his displeasure.

Finally, Cass noted that the days immediately following the event marked the appropriate time to register an official complaint with the British Foreign Ministry. Now, two months after the fact, it was too late to pursue this course.[116] This practical, bureaucratic logic belied the true motivation behind the State Department's decision to bury the issue. With the Crown Prince in the midst of a celebrated goodwill tour of the United States, the Buchanan administration had no desire to unnecessarily derail a potential rapprochement in Anglo-American relations.

The dispatch from Washington, which carried Cass's thinly veiled criticism, drove Dallas into a fit of rage. The aggrieved ambassador responded with a long, impassioned defense that filled twenty-four pages. Dallas felt betrayed by his superiors, whom he insisted did not fully grasp the gravity of the situation, nor appreciate the brilliance of his deft response. Dallas constructed a case that drew on the formal etiquette of diplomacy as well as unwritten codes of masculine, national, and racial honor. Dallas used racially charged language to paint himself as the victim of an undignified and uncivilized surprise attack. The insidious Brougham, in Dallas's recounting, had lay in wait "secretly whetting his tomahawk," biding his time until he could "pounce from a covert and with a yell" to scalp an unsuspecting gentleman with the aid of a "sable phenomenon." Such savagery, Dallas argued, could only be met with "calm and well digested preparation."

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[116] Lewis Cass to George M. Dallas, No. 278, September 11, 1860. *Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State: Great Britain, July 20, 1860 to August 13, 1861*, Microcopy, FM 77, Reel 75.

Silence, in such a case, was not a sign of passive acceptance, feminine weakness, or defeat. Rather, it was a manly "weapon," that when properly wielded could deliver a powerful blow. While the Minister conceded that silence was, "of necessity open to varieties of construction, unfriendly and friendly," in the final analysis, there could be no doubt that his was "a contemptuous silence." By remaining in his seat, Dallas denied the provocateurs the reaction they craved. To withdraw would have "involved a surrender of the purpose instinctively at heart." Dallas explained that, "an attitude involving a confession that the reference to Slavery had deeply stung, wounded and provoked me, would not have suited," because all present would "have deemed it a proof that the archer's arrow had gone home."[117]

Worse, the delegates would have inferred from this reaction that American slavery was "a legitimate topic of discussion for European Congresses […] An example once set, on a conspicuous occasion, by such a functionary, could not fail to be imitated and prostituted." Dallas warned that such a precedent would invite "the distant foreigner, by overreaching or entrapping diplomacy" to criticize American domestic affairs at will, which would further diminish the image of the United States abroad. To prevent this "exceptionally repulsive prospect," Dallas recommended decisive action. England must be taught that America was no longer its colony, and "the rest of the world may as well be initiated without delay into the habit of thinking that the subversion of our polity has ceased to be a debatable question." Moreover, "conspicuous theatres of public life," like the International Statistical Congress, where leaders and dignitaries of many nations gathered, offered the best venue for communicating this message. By answering the

[117] George Dallas to Lewis Cass, No. 289, October 2, 1860, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 72.

provocation with "contemptuous disregard," Dallas, **"**without a word uttered, or a gesture permitted" believed he had proven "that there is one method at least by which the careering, constant, intrusive, and arrogant intermeddling with our southern system of labor by foreign fanatics may be vanquished."[118]

Cass never responded to this final missive from Dallas. Abraham Lincoln's election the following month and the subsequent secession crisis, quickly overshadowed the controversy in U.S. domestic and foreign affairs. Delany, for his part, returned to the United States in late 1860, a changed man. Previously a prominent supporter of mass emigration, Delany abandoned his plan to establish an African American colony in Africa and threw himself fully into recruiting African American soldiers for the Union Army. Like his contemporary Frederick Douglass, Delany was now convinced that African Americans must fight for full citizenship in the land of their birth. The next generation of African Americans, for whom constitutional amendments granted freedom, citizenship, and male suffrage, would follow to the path blazed by Delany and others in the ante-bellum period. Of this generation, a group of student singers from Nashville's Fisk University carried the tradition of abolitionist race diplomacy forward as they adapted its strategies for a post-emancipation world. Rather than adopting Delany's sharp-edged confrontational style, the Fisk Jubilee Singers pursued race diplomacy as an instrument of "soft power."

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[118] George Dallas to Lewis Cass, No. 289, October 2, 1860, in *Despatches from United States Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906*, Microcopy, FM 30, Roll 72.

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The Voice of the Race: The Fisk Jubilee Singers and African American Musical Diplomacy.

In the summer of 1872, crowds flocked to the newly reconstructed Boston Coliseum for "a series of monster entertainments" known as the World's Peace Jubilee and International Musical Festival.[1] The eighteen-day festival was the brainchild of the entrepreneurial bandleader P. S. Gilmore. Gilmore had personally recruited a slate of world-renowned musicians to perform at the festival and worked tirelessly to fill every one of the Coliseum's sixty thousand seats. Profit was not Gilmore's sole motivation. As a firm believer in the power of music to unify mankind, he hoped the festival would foster goodwill between nations and promote peace. In spite of Gilmore's idealistic intentions, imperial rivalry remained very much alive at the World's Peace Jubilee. Military bands in full regalia marched daily on the parade grounds and the performers competed with their peers from other nations for the unofficial title of world's best musician.[2] The festival itself reflected the growing significance of music as a marker of cultural, national, and racial supremacy during the late-nineteenth century. Amid all of the festival's spectacle and pageantry, nine students from Nashville's Fisk University introduced African American music to the global stage in dramatic fashion.

The students belonged to the Fisk Jubilee Singers and had arrived in Boston following a tour that raised twenty thousand dollars for the American Missionary Association (AMA). Recognizing that their star was on the rise, Gilmore invited the

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[1] Three years earlier Gilmore organized the much smaller National Peace Jubilee to celebrate the end of the Civil War. "The Jubilee," *The New York Times*, June 18, 1872.

[2] England and France both sent their finest military bands. At the behest of the Kaiser, Germany sent two. The United States Marine Corps Band represented the host nation.

troupe to sing a verse from Julia Ward Howe's rousing anthem, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," backed by a one-thousand-piece orchestra, a ten-thousand-voice chorus, and a full battery of cannon. In addition to the basic acoustic challenge of such a grand performance, the Jubilees faced a more insidious obstacle. When they first arrived at the Coliseum, one section of audience members greeted the singers with a "shower of brutal hisses," before being shouted down. Rather than dampening their spirits, this inauspicious debut motivated the singers.[3]

Convinced that "the reputation of their color was at stake," the singers returned to the stage on the sixth day of the festival with the explicit intent of vanquishing every last vestige of "colorphobia" from the Coliseum. [4] At the appointed hour, the Jubilees launched into a rendition of "The Battle Hymn," delivered with such clarity and feeling that all forty thousand spectators fell silent. As soon as the final chorus ended, the audience erupted. The musicians in the orchestra and the massive chorus seated behind the Jubilees abandoned decorum and joined in the ovation. Even the great Viennese composer Johann Strauss leapt out of his seat, threw his hat into the air, and "waved his violin excitedly."[5] According to one of the group's earliest chroniclers, the performance

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[3] Charles E. Little, *Cyclopedia of Classified Dates* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1900), 78.
[4] J.B.T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers ; With Their Songs*. [Revised Edition] (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 41.
[5] Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," 1, Fisk Jubilee Singers Archive (FJSA), Box 1, Folder 1. Fisk University, Franklin Library Special Collections, Nashville, Tennessee. *Fisk University News*, "Reminiscences," October, 1911 (Jubilee Number), 29, FJSA, Box 6, Folder 6.

"was worth more than a Congressional enactment in bringing that audience to the true ground on the question of 'civil rights.'" [6]

The Jubilees' triumph at the Coliseum marked the first time in history that an African American group performed at an international music festival and added to the troupe's growing fame. Over the next decade, the Jubilees raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for Fisk University, spawned dozens of imitators, and launched an entire genre of music. The Jubilees, however, were far more than prolific fundraisers or famous performers. As the era's pre-eminent global standard bearers of African American culture, the men and women of the Jubilees acted as early and innovative practitioners of what scholars now call musical diplomacy. At the very moment of the Jubilees' ascendance, statesmen had begun to view music as a medium through which nations could peacefully project power, win influence, and bolster foreign policy objectives.[7] Because the Jubilees identified, and were perceived by others, primarily as racial representatives, the nature of the group's musical diplomacy differed in significant ways from other contemporary efforts to convert music into an instrument of state power.

In their capacity as "race ambassadors," the Jubilees developed a sophisticated musical diplomatic strategy that operated at the intersection of domestic race relations, international relations, and the emerging field of public relations. Using music to bridge racial and national divides, the Jubilees aimed to counter negative racial stereotypes that dominated popular representations of African Americans and win respect for African American music as an art form. "It was to be part of our mission," Ella Sheppard, the

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[6] Marsh, *Jubilee Singers*, 42.
[7] Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

group's longest serving member, later recalled, "if not to remove at least to ameliorate" racial prejudice by promoting interracial goodwill.[8] To this end, the group's musical performances aimed to do more than entertain audiences by showcasing the intellectual, moral, and cultural capacity of African Americans. As the Jubilees garnered international acclaim, they pivoted from wooing foreign dignitaries to protesting the rapidly deteriorating position of African Americans in the United States. Converting the social and cultural cache they achieved abroad into political capital at home, the Jubilees provided a lasting template for future civil rights activism based in cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy in general, and musical diplomacy in particular, have recently attracted greater attention within the field of diplomatic history as scholars become more interested in non-state actors, cultural exchange, and "soft power" within the realm of international affairs.[9] In the American context, the Second World War accelerated the advance of cultural relations, while the onset of the Cold War led directly to its institutionalization and proliferation.[10] African American jazz musicians figured prominently in America's Cold War cultural offensive. This prominence, and the inherent tensions involved in deploying African Americans to promote democracy abroad as they endured the indignities of second-class citizenship at home, has prompted a number of scholars to mine the complex interplay of race, cultural diplomacy, and

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[8] Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," FJSA, Box 1, Folder 1.
[9] In addition to an explosion of monographs and articles dealing with cultural diplomacy, the field's journal of record recently devoted a special issue to musical diplomacy. *Diplomatic History*, 36, no. 1 (January 2012).
[10] Jennifer L. Campbell, "Creating Something Out of Nothing: The Office of Inter-American Affairs Music Committee (1940-1941) and the Inception of a Policy for Musical Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 36, no.1 (January 2012), 29-39.

domestic civil rights activism during the Cold War era.[11] These studies, though they have greatly expanded the traditional purview of diplomatic history, focus exclusively on African American participation in formal state-sponsored initiatives and exchanges. As a result they elide the long tradition of African American cultural diplomacy carried out independently of American foreign policy. As the career of the Jubilees richly demonstrates, African Americans recognized the latent political potential of music long before the State Department discovered musical diplomacy. Just as America's Cold War musical diplomacy was designed to serve the nation's foreign policy interests, the Jubilees' musical diplomacy was tied to a comprehensive social, cultural, and political agenda rooted in the racial uplift ideology of the nineteenth century.

Nearly all of the Fisk Jubilee Singers were born into bondage in the twilight of American slavery and came of age during the tumultuous years of Reconstruction.[12] In the five years immediately following the end of the Civil War, a Republican Congress helped to secure a series of constitutional amendments that permanently abolished slavery, affirmed African American citizenship, and established universal male suffrage.[13] Despite these landmark gains, legal and extra-legal forces greatly circumscribed the ability of African Americans to exercise these rights. Across the war-torn nation, debates continued to rage over whether African Americans could truly handle the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. Within this deeply divided society individual African American achievements—as well as individual failures—frequently

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[11]See Von Eschen, *Satchmo*; Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy*; Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[12]Of the twenty-four men and women who belonged to the troupe between 1872 and 1882, twenty were born into slavery. Three of the remaining four had parents who were slaves. All but one were born in the 1850s. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee* Singers, 102.

[13] The 13,th 14,th and 15th Amendments respectively.

assumed outsized symbolic significance. As Illinois Governor John M. Palmer would later tell the Jubilee Singers in 1881, "Every member of the race to which you belong who enters upon *any* field of honorable effort is a pioneer and a representative […] He or she struggles not for himself or herself, but for a race which has heretofore been disregarded and underrated by the European races."[14]

The governor hardly needed to explain the dynamics of racial representation, or its stakes, to the Jubilee Singers. At home, in church, and especially at Fisk University, the men and women who later joined the Jubilees imbibed an ethos that linked individual self-improvement and moral rectitude with collective racial advancement from an early age. This ethos, known as racial uplift, had deep roots in the African American community. In the antebellum period, many free blacks, especially those who belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), felt that leading upright, Christian lives was not simply a matter of religious faith but a racial duty. A keen awareness that both friends and enemies of emancipation looked to freedmen to bolster their arguments instilled what James Campbell has called a "sense of representiveness, and the almost palpable feelings of obligation that flowed from it" within the members of these communities.[15]

This mentality did not disappear with the abolition of slavery. If anything, it intensified as African Americans fought to assert their fitness for citizenship against

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[14] Italics in original. John M. Palmer quoted in *State Register* (Springfield), May 6, 1881. FJSA, Box 8, Folder 2.

[15] James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

reactionary efforts to limit the revolutionary promise of freedom.[16] In this new battle, the onus of race leadership shifted to the first cohort of African Americans to take advantage of newly available educational opportunities. Admission to one of the numerous Protestant missionary schools that sprang up throughout the South represented the pinnacle of these opportunities. Staffed by idealistic and deeply religious teachers from the North and Midwest and sustained by an infusion of funds from an interconnected network of philanthropic, ecclesiastical, and federal organizations, these schools aimed to transform former slaves into agents of racial uplift. Fisk University, the American Missionary Association (AMA) college attended by the Jubilees, was one such institution.

Named for Gen. Clinton Bowen Fisk, Fisk opened in 1866 on the grounds of a former Union Army hospital in Nashville, Tennessee.[17] Its first dormitories were repurposed barracks. Ella Sheppard, one of the original Jubilees and a member of Fisk's inaugural class, spent her first months shivering under threadbare military blankets and wondering if the ghosts of the soldiers who had perished in the cots she and her classmates now slept in would return to haunt her.[18] Despite the primitive nature of the school's facilities, Fisk did provide its students with a first-rate education. Like the New England model it was based on, the Fisk curriculum provided students with a classical education infused with a strong dose of evangelical Protestantism. Students learned Greek and Latin, attended chapel daily, and received training in Victorian social and

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[16] For an excellent case study of African American activism during this pivotal time see Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012).
[17] It was originally known as the Fisk Free Colored School.
[18] Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," 43. FJSA, Box 6, Folder 2.

gender mores. Idleness was discouraged by a schedule that kept students engaged in study, classwork, chores, and religious devotions from seven in the morning until ten at night.[19] On campus a strict code of conduct banned alcohol and tobacco consumption, heavily restricted the interactions between male and female coeds, and forbade dancing entirely. The university's evangelical missionary instruction dovetailed with the ideals of late-nineteenth century racial uplift.

Fisk students were encouraged to think of themselves as members of a racial elite, an "aristocracy of talent and character," which the intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, himself a Fisk alumnus, would later famously call the "Talented Tenth."[20] Most Fisk graduates became teachers or missionaries, roles in which they transitioned from beneficiaries to beacons of enlightenment.[21] No matter what profession he or she chose, each graduate was expected to leave Fisk with a "distinct and avowed purpose to bless his race."[22] This strong service ethic, which echoed the missionary drive of evangelical Protestantism and reinforced the uplift imperative to positively represent the race, provided the bedrock of African American higher education in both its collegiate and practical manifestations. Virtually all African Americans educated at Fisk and similar institutions in the final quarter of the nineteenth century were conditioned to think of themselves as racial exemplars upon whose shoulders the future of an entire people rested.

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[19] Toni P. Anderson, *"Tell Them We Are Singing For Jesus:" The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian Reconstruction, 1871-1878* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010), 18-20.
[20] Du Bois graduated from Fisk in 1888. In actuality, the "Talented Tenth," constituted a considerably smaller fraction of the total African American population. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," *The Negro Problem*, 1903 in *W.E.B. Du Bois Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1996), 847.
[21] Teaching, in the context of racial uplift, was itself a missionary profession. Four of the original Jubilees worked as teachers before, during, or after their time at Fisk.
[22] Fisk University Promotional Brochure, ca. 1899, quoted in Anderson, *Tell Them We Are Singing For Jesus*, 171.

The Jubilees, in this sense, were typical "race men" and "race women." They shared the worldview of this professional class and its elitist orientation toward the black "masses." In other ways, however, the Jubilees were unique. As celebrities, they attracted far more attention than their more conventional counterparts. Their performances—and the political messages they communicated— reached tens of thousands of people directly at live concerts and hundreds of thousands indirectly through media coverage. The Jubilees' success allowed them to spread the gospel of racial uplift globally and supplied them with valuable cultural capital. The genius of the Jubilee's diplomacy lay in using the capital they accumulated abroad to advance African American claims to basic humanity, social equality, and full citizenship at home. Music, as a medium equally conducive to universalist and nationalist projects, proved particularly well-suited to this larger mission.

Music was never simply entertainment to the Jubilees. The group originally formed in 1871, as Fisk, dependent on the already strained budget of the AMA, teetered on the edge of financial insolvency. In a bid to stave off bankruptcy, George L. White, the university's treasurer and choir director, proposed a novel solution: a musical fundraising tour. Like speaking tours, in which exceptional students demonstrated their elocution skills and oratory for potential donors, the singing tour was meant to showcase the dividends of African American education. White recruited nine students—five women and four men—to form a singing group, which he would later christen the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Initially, the group performed a standard repertoire consisting of religious hymns and popular songs. After a disappointing debut marred by low turnout, White suggested that the students add a selection of "Negro spirituals" to its program.

African Americans created the spirituals during two and half centuries of slavery. They sang them openly while working in the fields and secretly at clandestine religious meetings. Drawing from the imagery and themes of the Old Testament, the spirituals provided hope and resolve for generations of enslaved African Americans. They were also, according to the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, an effective mode of political protest. "Every tone," Douglass wrote in his first autobiography, provided "a testimony against slavery." The spirituals laid bare for the listener the "dehumanizing character" and "soul-killing effects" of slavery and converted all feeling men to the cause of abolitionism.[23] This analysis, however, raised questions about the continuing relevance of the spirituals in the post-emancipation era. Did the songs of slavery really belong in the new age of freedom?

The Jubilees, responding to their director's suggestion, were not so sure. Given the deeply personal nature of the spirituals and the music's historical weight, the singers were hesitant to perform them in public, especially for all-white audiences. Ella Sheppard later explained that in the minds of the students the spirituals "were associated with slavery and the dark past, and represented things to be forgotten. Then, too, they were sacred to our parents, who sang them in their religious worship and shouted over them."[24] After discussing the matter, the singers reached a consensus. They decided that they would honor their enslaved ancestors by giving voice to what Sheppard poetically called

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[23] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 24. Later scholars have built on Douglass's interpretation. Several have analyzed the lyrics for coded messages and championed the spirituals as form of peasant resistance in the tradition of James C. Scott's "weapons of the weak." Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[24] Ella Sheppard quoted in, *Fisk University News*, Jubilee Number (October 1911), 43. FJSA, Box 6, Folder 6.

the "Passion Flowers of the Slave Cabin."[25] The spirituals quickly became the Jubilees' hallmark and the key to their growing fame.

When the Jubilees began their singing careers, spirituals were virtually unknown outside of the American South. Over the next decade, the Jubilees, with a rotating cast of members, introduced spirituals to the rest of the United States and then to the world. In the process, they imbued the songs with new political significance. Songs that had provided a window into the anguish of chattel slavery in the ante-bellum period became vehicles to dramatize the post-emancipation progress and potential of African Americans.

The Jubilees' performances were carefully choreographed to advance the group's musical diplomacy. While dressed in the formal attire of Victorian ladies and gentlemen, the Jubilees, many of whom were born into bondage, sang spirituals whose lyrics and plaintive melodies evoked the brutal experiences of slavery. In this way, they invited the audience to vicariously experience the distance traveled by African Americans since emancipation. It was, as one reviewer wrote, a dramatic juxtaposition "of the 'then' as contrasted with the 'now.'"[26] Every concert, therefore, entailed a dual performance: the performance of the spirituals unfolding simultaneously with a performance of contemporary black intelligence, refinement, and artistic ability. The Jubilees' recitals—they typically sang acapella or accompanied only by piano—reinforced the singers'

[25] Ella Sheppard Moore, "Before Emancipation," 6. FJSA, Box 6, Folder 2.
[26] *The Baptist*. Undated. In "Testimonials," 6. FJSA, Box 3, Folder 5.

modesty and piety. When the music stopped the group's "genteel performance" continued. [27]

Off-stage the singers continued to serve as racial ambassadors whose speech, table manners, demeanor, and behavior reflected on the collective merits of their race. The singers' upbringings and education had ensured that they were well-versed in the pageantry of Victorian "respectability." While touring a strict code of conduct governed the singers' behavior. They abstained from alcohol, shunned the theater, stayed in temperance hotels and attended chapel as often as possible. And last, but not least, a white female chaperone traveled with to help the group uphold its pious reputation and avoid scandal—something the Jubilees accomplished, at least, publicly.[28] Both on stage and off, the Jubilees used their performances to bolster positive perceptions of African Americans at time when much of their audience shared, "the prevailing idea, that all negro singers must be essentially farcical, and that all people of colour must be at the best but missing links between the monkey and the man."[29] In the words of one recruit, each singer stood "willing and ready to do anything that will attribute good to [our] downtrodden race."[30]

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[27] The term was coined by Willard B. Gatewood. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 8.

[28] Frederick Loudin, the group's charismatic—and married—bass, carried on an affair with the soprano Georgia Gordon. The affair contributed to infighting and controversy within the group, but never became public. Isaac Dickerson, one of the original Jubilee Singers who left the group to attend the University of Edinburgh, earned a reputation as a lothario. America Robinson wrote that Dickerson "is not exactly a gay debaucher but approaches it […] he makes love to rich gentlemen's daughters—gets their attention riveted on him and then tires of them: gives no cause for abrupt departures." America Robinson to James Burrus, June 3, 1876, FJSA Box 1, Folder 12.

[29] *The Truth* (Toronto), October 23, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.

[30] Lola M. Washington to Erasmus Cravath, July 8, 1877 (Birmingham). Erasmus Milo Cravath Papers, Fisk University, Box 1, Folder 3.

With this larger objective in mind, seven of the original Jubilees and four new members set sail for England in April of 1873. At the time of their departure, most Europeans, and many Americans for that matter, thought of the United States as a musical backwater, a country of cultural scavengers that lacked a national tradition of its own. Far from the juggernaut whose culture "colonized" much of the world in the twentieth century, America in the final quarter of the nineteenth century was the target of foreign cultural diplomacy as Germany and France in particular vied for greater cultural influence in the United States.[31] For five years, over the course of several tours, the Jubilees initiated a transatlantic cultural exchange of their own in the opposite direction. The group introduced Negro spirituals, a distinctly American cultural production, to audiences in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland and became the most visible representatives of black America on the world stage. During an era when racial and national fitness were both closely tied to cultural achievement and America still looked to Europeans as the cultural arbiters of Western civilization, the Jubilees recognized the unique value of European critical opinion.

The European tour's starting point was deliberately and strategically chosen. Great Britain was home to a proud tradition of abolitionism and had remained a center of Christian missionary activity.[32] Their planned itinerary retraced the route traveled by the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who had toured Great Britain at the height of the anti-slavery movement thirty years earlier to rally foreign support for America's bondsmen. The Jubilees hoped they could revive Britain's abolitionist spirit and win

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[31]Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy,* 20-39.
[32] See Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 57-75.

allies for a new moral crusade against racial prejudice. Great Britain's numerous Protestant congregations, temperance clubs, and missionary societies constituted a dense matrix of trans-Atlantic linkages. Pre-existing affiliations, as between the American Missionary Association and its British auxiliary the Freedmen's Missions Aid Society, gave the Jubilees access to these important networks. Another pre-existing transnational network, however, complicated the Jubilee's arrival in Europe.

Since the 1830s, white minstrel troupes in blackface had trod the boards of Europe and North America plying their trade. In the name of comedy and popular entertainment traveling minstrel companies, like the famous Christys Minstrels, reduced African American culture to a series of demeaning stereotypes and grew rich doing so. In this first age of minstrelsy, blackface performers, so called because of the smeared burnt cork they wore on their faces, had the field all to themselves.[33] As a result, many Europeans mistook the buffoonish performances of minstrels for accurate portrayals of African American culture. Not for the last time, African Americans who traveled abroad discovered that they had little or no control over how they were represented in popular media.

While audience reactions and press coverage invariably commented on the strangeness of the melodies and the surprising range of skin tones possessed by the singers, they also frequently endorsed the Jubilees as the rightful representatives of African American culture. In the central Scottish city of Perth, a reporter hailed the Jubilees as the "true exponents of negro music" and denounced the local minstrels as

[33]This spelling of Christys reflects the contemporary usage in the British press.

charlatans "as false in the delineations of negro character as the colour on their faces."[34] Another article declared that the group's performance established, "a singular contrast between them and the grotesque attempts which are repeatedly made by 'darkeys' to represent negro life."[35] A review in *The Musical Standard* demonstrated how the press often blunted its praise with underhanded caveats. Its author explained that while the Jubilees "may not perhaps satisfy the artistic standard of educated musicians," they were "at least genuine […] and have nothing in common with 'nigger mongery' and its accompaniments." [36] Comments like this, which stressed the inferiority of low-brow imitators and praised the authenticity of the Jubilees, while qualifying the artistic merit of the music demonstrate the partial nature of many of the group's victories against racial stereotypes.

In their quest to have Europeans affirm the cultural value of their music, the Jubilees faced another set of barriers stemming from religion rather than race. The group and its managers had to contend with the deeply ingrained Protestant aversion to "entertainment." The Jubilees, who attended an evangelical missionary school where dancing and theatrical performances were banned, were intimately familiar with the Puritanical view, shared by conservative Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic, that almost all popular entertainment was morally suspect. For this reason, the Jubilees's

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[34] Article from "Perth," paper and date of publication unknown. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.
[35] Article from "Hawick," paper unknown, January 9, 1874. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.
Many of the media attacks on minstrels contained undertones of British class prejudice and ethnic tensions. At times, this feeling was made explicit as in one journalist's declaration that, "An organ grinder in an Orpheus compared to the idiotic Cockneys, who, duly besmeared with burnt cork, sing songs composed in the Seven Dials as choice specimens of the melodies of the negro race. The 'Nigger minstrels' vilely caricature what is in itself inimitable." From "The Jubilee Singers in Darlington," March, 1874, paper unknown. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.
[36]Excerpt from *Musical Standard* reprinted in "Testimonials," 7, FJSA, Box 3, Folder 5.

promoter billed the group as a wholesome, edifying alternative to the "the whole swarm of doubtful and degrading amusements," which comprised the kaleidoscope of popular entertainment in a rapidly modernizing world.[37] When they traveled abroad the Jubilees also encountered the widely held belief that any cultural export from the United States must be part of get-rich scheme, or as one Englishman put it, "a Yankee dodge of [a] swindle."[38]

The Jubilees, aided by their canny promoter, successfully won over skeptics by linking their music to Christian missionary work, targeting the middle class reform networks, and cultivating positive coverage from the press. Though they ultimately aimed to raise money, the Jubilees gave free concerts in churches, orphanages, and asylums. They sang in chapels, public squares, and revival tents where no admission fee was charged as frequently as they performed at more conventional entertainment venues like opera houses and concert halls where tickets were sold. Similarly, although the singers were paid salaries, they were never billed as professional singers but rather as "ex-slave students" and selfless Christian missionaries engaged in a "purely benevolent" enterprise.[39] The discourse of racial uplift served to further distinguish the Jubilees from ordinary entertainers whose motives were purely mercenary.

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[37] The author helpfully catalogued these "amusements" to avoid any confusion. He named "the beer hall, the ballet, the minstrels, the dancing party, [and] the variety theater." J.B.T. Marsh, "Recreation that Re-Creates," no date. FJSA, Box 8, Folder 2 (1879-1881).

[38] M.F.B., Birmingham, Letter to the Editor, *Morning News*, April 9, 1874. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.

[39] Advertisement for Manchester, England performance, January, 13, 1874. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2. G.D. Pike, quoted in the *Memphis Evening Standard*, September, 1870. FJSA, Box 3, Folder 1. As might be expected, money was a constant source of friction. The singers frequently fought against both internal and external suggestions that they accept lower salaries or even perform for free in the name of Christian missionary work. At the same time, the Jubilee management and

In the British context, the group adapted its message of racial uplift to harmonize with the nation's self-image as bastion for Christian humanitarianism. The Jubilees provided an outlet for the expression of British self-righteousness at a time when the glow of the anti-slavery movement had faded.[40] One editor proudly announced that "the land of Wilberforce has not lost its ancient love of freedom, and having loved the African in his chains, she rejoices that he is slave no longer, and will own and call him brother."[41] In an effort to capitalize on the surge of popular interest in Africa brought on by Dr. David Livingstone's widely publicized exploration of the continent, the group's promoter touted Fisk as a training ground for future missionaries who would bring enlightenment to their benighted brethren in the American South, the West Indies, and Africa. "The negro is the best missionary to negroes," a British clergyman asserted, explaining that "he knows their wants, he can speak in their own tongue, he can quicken their memories, and move their aspirations as no Anglo-Saxon can ever hope to do."[42]

The group and its supporters encouraged this line of thinking and directly linked their fundraising—at times in blatantly sectarian language— to the larger goal of

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Fisk University struggled with AMA officials for greater transparency in how the funds raised by the group were spent.

[40] "To sympathise with the children of a suffering race […]," according to one English newspaper, "seems to have been regarded as a duty and a pleasure." *Cambridge Independent Press*, June 17,1876. FJSA. Box 7, Folder 3. Of course, the British abolitionist tradition coexisted with the nation's participation in the slave trade, just as the great humanitarian impulse of the Victorian-era coexisted with the violent expansion of British imperialism.

[41] *Manchester Examiner*, January 12, 1874. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.

[42] *The Christian Union*. May 13, 1875. FJSA. Box 7, Folder 3. This was a widely held view among British missionary circles. Another article quoted the Rev. Dr. Cunningham who emphatically stated, "It is only black men-with their black faces and black sympathies—who can convert black men." Scrapbook entry, "Jubilee Singers in Crieff," n.d., FJSA. Box 7, Folder 3

evangelizing Africa.[43] In order to garner foreign support for a geographically and emotionally remote cause, the Jubilees necessarily appealed to the egos of their hosts, but in the process unwittingly helped to distract from the violence and oppression intrinsic within European colonial projects.[44] At the same time, the Jubilees utilized the romantic discourse of universalism so often attached to music to win recognition of African American humanity and sympathy with the cause of civil rights.

English press coverage of Jubilees stressed the power of the music to transport an audience to a different time and place. The songs, wrote one reviewer, "carry us in a moment to the slave cabins, [where] we see and feel with the slaves."[45] The music penetrated the hearts of audiences, even when they could not understand the words. In non-English speaking countries, audiences insisted that the language barrier did not prevent them from "feeling" the music. Many related the spirituals to local or national folk songs, a comparison that established African American music as a folk tradition worthy of preserving and legitimized African American claims within the larger discourse of popular cultural nationalism. Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, an American clergyman and early supporter of the Jubilees, hailed the Jubilees as the "best living representatives of our only native school of purely American music."[46] James Weldon

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[43] The Rev. Dr. White warned Irish Protestants that at the very moment of the Jubilees tour, " insidious agents were endeavoring to educate freed slaves, with the view of […] subjugat [ing] Africa to Papal domination. Quoted in *The Daily Express* (Dublin), December 15, 1876.

[44] "Maybe the education of the freedmen, is an American, not a British, concern," began one editorial, which then asked whether it was just or right to continue donate to a "romantic and remote institution" when "our own honest poor" required assistance. The fact that these stories were relatively rare and only developed late in the Jubilees's five year stay in Europe is a testament to the group's salesmanship. *Falkirk Herald*, September 30, 1876. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 3.

[45] *Liverpool Daily Courier*, January 31, 1876. FJSA, Box 3, Folder 1.

[46] *New York Evangelist*, March 11, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.

Johnson, the African American intellectual, composer, and diplomat later called the spirituals "America's only folk music [and] the finest distinctive artistic contribution she has to offer the world" and credited the Jubilees' cultural diplomacy for awakening both America and Europe to the artistic value of the songs.[47]

While some critics focused on the national or racial particularity of the music, others argued that there was a universal quality to the music that transcended racial or national boundaries.[48] The Jubilees possessed, according to one British critic, "one of the those touches of nature that make the whole world kin."[49] Acknowledgement of the universal themes within the group's music provided the group with a springboard to advance a more radical agenda. If audiences related to the past sufferings of African Americans, they might also sympathize with the present aspirations of the race. In other words, recognition of black humanity provided a necessary starting point from which support for black equality might then be secured. The group's on-stage display of musical artistry—along with the off-stage performance of respectability—was meant to facilitate this process. At the time of the Jubilees tours, white supremacists on both sides of the Atlantic preached an all-encompassing ideology of black inferiority that extended to the physical, intellectual, moral, and cultural spheres.[50] Evolutionary civilizationist discourses like racial uplift, though by no means free from racist assumptions, still

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[47] James Weldon Johnson, *The Books of Negro American Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1942), 13.

[48] The Jubilee's success was attributed at variously to the "hot blood of the negro," the "simple and alliterative forms of harmonic expression peculiar to the uncivilized races," and innumerable times to the innate child-like or musical nature of their race. *Volks Zeitung,* no date. FJSA Scrapbook, 1877-1878, Box 8, Folder 1, Nottingham *Journal*, June 7, 1876. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 3.

[49] *The Courier of Argus*, October 10, 1876, FJSA, Box 7, Folder 3.

[50] See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

provided a way to challenge and undermine the more rigid framework of pseudo-scientific racism.

With every performance, the Jubilees fought to be recognized as artists and took every available opportunity to distinguish their music from popular, lowbrow fare. As a result, despite the group's celebrated "genuineness," its musical arrangements and scores actually conformed to European choral standards. Contrary to the frequent assertions that the group's vocal talent simply reflected the natural musicality of their people, White drilled his singers in classical techniques. Just as the singers strived to be seen as educated ladies and gentlemen off stage, they also worked to earn recognition as talented musicians on stage. As representatives of African American potential and enlightenment, they were not satisfied with proving themselves more "authentically" black than minstrels in blackface. They wanted to be counted among the world's best musicians regardless of race.

Like many other American musicians in the late nineteenth century, the Jubilees' quest for legitimacy led them to Germany.[51] Germany had cultivated a reputation for its high musical standards. One journalist neatly summarized the cultural clout of Berlin in late-nineteenth century in a single sentence: "If you can make it in highly critical Berlin, you can make it anywhere."[52] The Jubilees decided to embark on a German tour in 1877 with the intent of winning over the German musical establishment. They would not be disappointed. One German critic wrote that "those who went to the concert with a view to

[51] As Jessica Gienow-Hecht has stated, "what remained peculiar to the American perspective was a complete lack of self-confidence vis-à-vis the international music scene; music had to be imported from abroad, preferably from Germany." Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy*. 65.
[52] Quoted in "The Jubilee Singers From a German Point of View," Unknown Publication, no date, 30. 1877 Scrapbook. FJSA, Box 8, Folder 1.

enlarge their knowledge of ethnology, or to contribute to some charitable undertaking, have unquestionably left with the deep impression of having heard the performances of artists."[53] Other papers went even further by recognizing the Jubilees as technically gifted performers capable of advancing Berlin's own tradition-bound music community. "Our musical ideas have received enlargement and we feel something may be learned of these negro singers, if only we will consent to break through the fetters of custom and long use," the editor of the *Berliner Musikzeitung* wrote.[54] This statement—whose sentiment was echoed by other papers— represented a dramatic reversal of two of the era's fundamental laws of cultural transmission—according to which America received culture from Europe and blacks received culture from whites.[55]

As both living symbols and future agents of the African Americans progress, the Jubilee Singers also favorably impressed their audiences. These impressions were based not only on the group's musical abilities but on the appearance, mannerisms, and life stories of the singers. "All [of the Jubilees] have most intelligent countenances," one paper observed, adding that "as instances of the power and influence of education and refinement,[they] are highly interesting samples of their race."[56] Similarly, after remarking that "the outward appearance of these artists is so dignified, so modest, so seemly," one German commentator explained that his initial reservations had vanished once he realized that the Jubilees were "not public singers, but missionaries, using with

[53] "The Stranger's Guide to Dresden," March 2, 1877. 1877 Scrapbook, FJSA, Box 8, Folder 1.
[54] Excerpt from the *Berliner Musikzeitung*, no date, reprinted in "The Jubilee Singers in Berlin," *The Tonic Sol-Fa Reporter,* FJSA, Box 8, Folder 1.
[55] See for example the excerpt from *Königliche privilegirte Berlinische Zeitung*, reprinted in Ibid.
[56] *Bristol Times*, March 12, 1874. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.

holy zeal their gifts for the kingdom of God, not only among the coloured race of America and Africa, but also among us cultured Europeans."[57]

This missionary work was not only religious but racial, as each Jubilee represented on a personal level the dividends of African American education. Favorable impressions of the singers often led to support for their cause. "The fact that all our visitors are educated (so well, too, that some of our learned dons have been intensely delighted with the knowledge of the classics displayed by the ladies)," one English journalist reasoned, "sets at rest any doubt we may have had as to the wisdom of founding Universities for the negro."[58] Along with the tens of thousands of dollars donated to Fisk University during the tour, these endorsements bolstered the singer's cultural mission to gain international support for African American education.

The European tour also paid less obvious dividends to the Jubilees. Over the course of five years, the Jubilees sang their "dear, old sacred slave songs" for Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria as well as lords and ladies, dukes and duchesses, and other exotically titled members of virtually every aristocratic family in Europe. In Germany, Ella Sheppard reported that Princess Victoria was so moved by the Jubilees that she was unable to sleep and "could think nor talk of anything else."[59] The reception of the Jubilees at various royal courts and world-renowned cultural centers like Berlin's Sing Academie boosted the group's artistic credentials. The cultural

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[57] Excerpt from the *Protestanten-Zeitung* reprinted in "The Jubilee Singers in Berlin," *Tonic Sol-Fa Reporter*, no date, FJSA, Box 8, Folder 1.
[58] *Cambridge Independent Press,* June 17, 1876. FJSA, Box 3, Folder 1.
[59] Diary entry, November 5, 1877. Diary of Ella Sheppard Moore. FJSA. Vault.

cache provided by success in Europe, provided the group with a useful weapon to wield upon their return to America.

Though their performances for European royalty attracted the most attention, the Jubilees' also leveraged their familiarity with the evangelical Protestant missionary movement to successfully navigate British middle class society. Lord Shaftesbury, the head of the Freedmen's Missions Aid Society, the British auxiliary of the AMA, was the group's earliest and most effective boosters in Britain. Shaftesbury praised the singer's "patriotism and self-denial," commended their "exertions to exalt their race," and promised to do all in his power to ensure that, "the affection and respect of the English people would follow them wherever they went."[60] Shaftesbury proved good to his word and the singers soon became fixtures within Protestant moral reform circles. The Jubilees performed at several of the National Temperence League's events including its annual celebration at London's Crystal Palace. They sang for parishioners at the Sunday services of dozens of chapels, and shared the stage during the visiting American evangelist Dwight Moody's revivals. These efforts established the group as "respectable" Christians of the highest character. This reputation "predisposed people to regard them kindly," and led to widespread condemnation in the European press of the "bitter persecution in America, the country of their birth."[61]

The favor the Jubilees enjoyed at all levels of European society helped them expose the irrationality of American fears regarding interracial "social equality." Before they departed Dublin, the local chapter of the Good Templars invited the Jubilees to join

[60] As quoted in the *English Independent*, April 2, 1874, FJSA, Box 7, Folder 2.
[61] *Dundee Advertiser*, October 10, 1876. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 3.

their lodge. As the American branch of the Templars had recently segregated its lodges, the news sparked an international "row" within in the fraternal order and inspired other British lodges to draft resolutions of support for the Jubilees. "We despise the unchristian prejudice of those who would exclude you from taking your place as equals with us in the Good Templar order," began a typical resolution.[62] America Robison, the group's star soprano, wrote that the American representative of the Templars was "pelted with paper balls" in by a crowd in Scotland. She commended the Irish Templars for their determination "to practice what they preached."[63]

The Good Templar controversy demonstrated how the extent to which simple acts could become politicized when viewed through the lens of American race relations. The Jubilees breakfasted with Prime Minister William Gladstone and his family in their London home. In Scotland, the singers drank cold-water toasts with the Earl of Keith. In the British countryside they played croquet, went punting, and drank tea with white friends and patrons around the country. The Jubilees were keenly aware that these interracial social engagements provided a "keen rebuke to the caste spirit in America."[64] Gustavus Pike, the long-time booking agent for the Jubilees, wrote that the symbolic gesture of Gladstone's invitation alone was "worth as much to coloured people the world over as the campaign has cost us."[65]

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[62] Resolution of Lodge 553, quoted in *Rotherdam & Masbro Guardian*, Feburary 10, 1877. FJSA, Box 7, Folder 3.
[63] American Robinson to James Burrus, November 29, 1876. FJSA, Box 1, Folder 12.
[64] J. B. T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 53. Originally published (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1881).
[65] Gustavus D. Pike, *The Singing Campaign for Ten Thousand Pounds: Or, the Jubilee Singers in Great Britain* (Boston: Lee & Shepard Publishers, 1874), 78.

In America, de facto and increasingly de jure discrimination restricted African Americans' freedom of movement. Under these circumstances inter-state travel often became a logistical nightmare for African Americans, as the Jubilees had learned on their earlier tours. In Europe, however, the group booked hotel rooms and purchased train tickets with full confidence that they would not be denied access based on their race. If they encountered racism while travelling abroad, the offender was likely to be "rude American who was lugging his caste conceit through a European tour" or a European who had spent enough time in America to "'catch' its color prejudices."[66] International travel expanded the singers' cultural horizons and provided them with a new perspective on American racism. Just as she preferred the Northeast to the American South, America Robinson told her finance, "I like England better than any country I ever was in because there is not an atom of prejudice here."[67] While they had always considered discrimination unjust, they now had definitive proof of the arbitrary nature of American race prejudice. Their experiences abroad had been both liberating and revelatory. "In England," one of the singers told a British newspaper after the group's first tour in 1874, "we almost forgot that were anything but human beings. But we had hardly landed on our native shores when we were made to feel very keenly that we belonged to a despised race."[68] Returning home in the spring of 1878 after nearly five years of continuous touring would provide a similar shock. It would also mark a crucial turning point in the group's musical diplomacy.

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[66] Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers*, 73. Ella Sheppard recounted one instance when she was "insulted by a scothman" aboard an Edinburgh bound train, but hastened to add that the other passengers had shunned the man and offered her cakes as a token of support. Ella Sheppard diary entry, September 13, 1877. FJSA. Vault.

[67] America Robinson to James Burrus, July 2, 1875. FJSA. Box 1, Folder 12.

[68] *English Independent*, July 2, 1874. FJSA. Box 7, Folder 2. America Robinson shared a similar

On the evening of July 16, 1878, the Fisk Jubilee Singers gave an impromptu concert for their fellow shipmates aboard the trans-Atlantic steamer *Lessing*. After five exhausting years of nearly non-stop touring in Europe, the Jubilees were returning to their native land. To celebrate this homecoming the group opened with a rousing rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" to the general delight of the audience. The singers then moved on to another, more polarizing anthem. With "vim & enjoyment" they took up the melody of the popular Union Army ballad "John Brown's Body," placing special emphasis on the repeated words of the second verse—"John Brown died that the slave might be free."[69] The choice was deliberate. Ella Sheppard, the group's senior female member, explained that the singers had noticed that there "were southerners and especially a 'Virginian' present" in the audience and wanted to send a message. Not surprisingly, the song provoked mixed reactions from the assembled crowd. The Virginian sulked and muttered "Dam[n] John Brown." The rest of the passengers erupted in applause and many wept openly. One woman was so moved that she threw her arms around Sheppard's neck, kissed her, and exclaimed, "I never thought I would or <u>could</u> kiss a negro before! I do thank you. I never <u>felt</u> such music before!"[70]

This brief concert in the waters of New York Harbor showcased the emotional impact of the group's musical diplomacy, but also marked a crucial turning point in the singers' careers as cultural ambassadors. This provocative song selection, a gesture that was unmistakably *undiplomatic* in one sense of the word, represented a larger shift from

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[69] Numerous variations of "John Brown's Body" existed. The version performed by the Jubilees can be found in J.B.T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers; With Their Songs* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1881), 228.

[70] Underlined in the original. Ella Sheppard Moore diary entry, July 16, 1878. (Transcribed by Andrew Ward) FJSA,Vault.

the group's international musical diplomacy to a new campaign of domestic political activism. Not long after the singers disembarked from the *Lessing*, the group officially disbanded. Frederick Loudin, the group's longtime basso, quickly reorganized a new group of Jubilees as an independent troupe no longer affiliated with Fisk for a tour in support of federal civil rights legislation. Loudin, whose commanding on-stage presence and charismatic personality made him a particularly impressive and effective orator, announced his intention to fully engage in the national debate "to define […] the meaning of American citizenship and [determine] the rights and privileges of those thus endowed." He looked forward to the day when African Americans "shall not be excluded from the full enjoyment of the rights of American citizenship" and "manhood shall be measured by its worth, regardless of race, color, or previous condition."[71]

The shift from symbolic goodwill diplomacy to explicit political action that followed the group's reorganization and resumption of touring in 1879 was not an abrupt break. It evolved organically out of the Jubilees' stated mission and prior experiences. Extensive foreign travel and years spent living abroad had supplied the Jubilees with firsthand evidence that American race relations, and the strange alchemy of social customs and prejudices that governed them, did not represent a universal, natural, or divine order but were in fact arbitrary man-made creations. The perceived absence of American-style racism abroad convinced the Jubilees that an alternate model of race relations was indeed possible for the United States.[72] Based on their experiences abroad, the singers' pioneered a rhetorical strategy designed to isolate and delegitimize American

[71] *Inter Ocean* (Chicago), April 29, 1881. FJSA. Box, Folder.
[72] I say "American-style racism" to underscore that the Jubilees did not encounter a utopia free of all prejudice in Europe. However, the freedom of movement, both literally and socially, that the Jubilees enjoyed abroad presented a marked contrast to the overt prejudice they faced in America.

racial prejudice as parochial, backward, and out of touch with the civilized nations of the world. In this sense, travel did not merely provide an escape from American racism, but constituted a powerful weapon that could be used to undermine its core claims.

Loudin and the other Jubilees returned to a different America than the one they left. Reconstruction had officially ended in 1877, and now national "Reunion" and Southern "Redemption" were the watchwords of the day. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 remained in force although, as the Jubilees would soon discover, the law's injunction against racial discrimination in public accommodations and transportation was widely ignored not only in the Deep South of Dixie, but in the Republican Party strongholds of New England and the American Midwest. It was at this key moment, when the color line was being drawn but could still be effectively challenged, that the task of the Jubilees became most urgent.[73]

On the first leg of their 1879 tour the group refused to stay at a Boston hotel after its owner requested that the Jubilees take their meals separately from the other guests. Frederick Loudin addressed the controversy in a ten-minute speech at the Berkeley Street Church. He began by contrasting the Jubilees recent experience of touring Europe, where their color never resulted in inferior service or accommodations, with the humiliation and mistreatment they faced in their native land. "With the severest of sarcasm," Loudin then asked the audience if America was truly "the freest country the sun had ever shone

[73] See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

upon." Loudin concluded his speech with a pledge that he and the other Jubilees would work to "enforce the civil rights bill, and give all men equality before the law."[74]

A few months later, in the neighboring state of Connecticut, the Jubilees ran into more troubles. In Bridgeport, they were refused lodgings by the proprietors of several leading hotels who feared their presence would offend other guests. Loudin once again made an impassioned appeal from the stage placing special emphasis on the absence of such insults abroad. Loudin's "quiet, gentlemanly" delivery, coupled with the "keen and cutting" content of his speech, caused "a thrill of indignation" to run through the crowd. The local press condemned the appearance of "such contemptible negrophobia" in the North and warned hotel owners not to hide behind the supposed prejudices of their customers, who were "not half so mean as they take them to be."[75] Two weeks later, however, as the Jubilees boarded a southbound train out of the state, the conductor asked the singers to pair off so that the white passengers, including several state legislators, would not have to share a seat with them. The Jubilees refused and the conductor relented.[76]

The group then traveled to Washington D.C., where they were scheduled to meet with Secretary of Education Eaton and perform for the President and First Lady at the White House. When they reached the nation's capital, however, the Jubilees could not find a hotel willing to accept their patronage. Finally, the National Hotel agreed to provide them accommodations on the condition that they remained in their own rooms at

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[74] "Black and Red," *The Daily Evening Traveler*, November 11, 1879. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.
[75] *Stamford Advocate*, February 13, 1880, *Republican Standard* (Bridgeport), February 13, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.
[76] *Republican Farmer*, February 24, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.

all times. Fannie B. Ward, a local society columnist, decried the "crowning absurdity" of this arrangement and lamented that a group of talented individuals "as well dressed, and certainly better behaved; better educated, also than the average American" should be subjected to such treatment in the "capital city of THIS MODEL REPUBLIC."[77] In his own letter to the press, Frederick Loudin framed the incident as a revealing study in the "contrast between the capital of a monarchial government and one where 'all men are created equal' (ahem?! so they say)."[78]

The scene was repeated the following month in Pennsylvania. In Lancaster, only the threat of legal action secured a night's lodging for the group. In Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, hotel proprietors turned away the singers from the leading hotels, including one where Frederick Loudin had once worked. Feeling increasingly frustrated with Northern hospitality, the Jubilees looked forward to returning home to Tennessee. The group traveled southwest through West Virginia and Ohio, before reaching Louisville, Kentucky in late May. After finishing their scheduled performance in the city, the singers proceeded to the train station with first-class tickets in hand, only to be told that they would have to sit in the smoking car. Though it meant missing the commencement festivities at Fisk, the group decided to stand their ground and confront the railroad.

The local press praised the Jubilees' integrity and denounced the "hellish spirit of caste" of "the land of the free (?)" where such worthy individuals were "treated like

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[77] Fannie B. Ward, "Captial Chit-Chat," *Forney Sunday Chronicle*, no date. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.

[78] Original punctuation. "F.J. Loudin's Letter," Publication unknown. No date. FJSA, Box 8, Folder 2.

brutes."[79] A local Democrat, whose party had opposed civil rights legislation, urged the Jubilees to take the railroad to court. He saw no logic in allowing "the dirtiest, rudest white person" to sit in first class, while forcing "the most respectable colored people to sit in the disgusting tobacco juice of the smoking car."[80] "We are certainly a superior people," W.S. Wilson, the owner of the Louisville *Commericial*, wrote in editorial dripping with sarcasm, "much superior to the effete nations of Europe."[81] To Wilson, America's racial "superiority complex" was actually a national embarrassment. The situation was eventually resolved by the personal intervention of the railroad magnate George Pullman, who ordered a special car to be placed at the Jubilees disposal.

Though Pullman was praised for sparing the Jubilees the "trouble and expense of a lawsuit," the lack of legal sanction limited the impact of this victory on the wider struggle for civil rights.[82] Even for the Jubilees, the victory proved fleeting, as they continued to face racial discrimination while on tour. The following year hotel owners in Springfield, Illinois, the final resting place of Abraham Lincoln, and Ontario, Canada, once a refuge for runway slaves, denied the Jubilees rooms because of their race. Both incidents sparked controversies in the local press, but Loudin and the Jubilees could not help feeling defeated.

On a broader level, the civil rights tours exposed the limitations of the Jubilees' musical diplomacy. While they could raise awareness of racial discrimination and expose

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[79] *The Bulletin* (Louisville), May 22, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.
[80] Anonymous "Democrat" to Editor of *Commercial* (Louisville), May 21, 1880. FJSA. Box 8, Folder 2.
[81] W.S. Wilson, "How We Show Our Superiority," *The Commercial*, May 21,1880, FJSA, Box 8, Folder 2.
[82] *The Commercial*, May 22,1880, FJSA, Box 8, Folder 2.

hotel owners and railroad officials who perpetuated prejudice, without the commitment of local and national officials to enforce the law, the Jubilees had little chance of halting the creep of Jim Crow. Darker developments stood on the horizon. In 1882, the final year of the Jubilees tour, 49 African Americans were lynched.[83] A decade later the number had more than tripled to 161. The systematic disenfranchisement of African American voters also gained momentum. By 1901, there were no African American representatives in Congress, a figure that would hold for nearly three decades. The historian Rayford Logan famously referred to year as the lowest point in the "nadir" of African American history.[84] What then did the Jubilees' musical diplomacy accomplish?

First, the Jubilees offered a template for future activism in the cultural sphere, which would become more important in the coming decades as African American political power in the United States dropped precipitously. Additionally, they illustrated the way in which African Americans were uniquely positioned to undermine America's international image. By introducing racism as the defining feature of American society and stressing the lack of racism in other countries, the Jubilees developed a rhetorical strategy to make racial prejudice a liability for the United States in the international arena. They also foreshadowed how global publicity could be used to advance a domestic civil rights agenda, even if their own efforts fell short. Indeed, twenty years after the Jubilee's first overseas tour, the journalist Ida B. Wells visited many of the same parishes, churches, and clubs on her own tour of Great Britain designed to rally

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[83] Statistics from, "Lynchings: Whites And Negroes, 1882-1968," the Tuskegee University Archives, accessed as .pdf record.
[84] Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

international moral support for her anti-lynching campaign.[85] The Jubilees fashioned a new form of diplomacy that combined cultural performance, celebrity, and racial activism that operated outside of the official channels of U.S. foreign policy. In the Cold War, State Department officials would attempt to harness African American musical diplomacy to the strategic objectives of the United States.

[85] Michelle Duster, ed., *Ida From Abroad: The Timeless Writings of Ida B. Wells From England in 1894* (Lansing, IL: Benjamin Williams Publishing, 2010).

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New Negroes and New Russians: African-American-Soviet Relations, 1922-1928

In November of 1922, inspired by the stories of other revolutionary tourists like his friend John Reed, the Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay traveled to the land of the Bolsheviks. Upon his arrival, McKay received a hero's welcome and was invited to address a seemingly endless array of meetings. One minute McKay found himself on the floor of a factory speaking with a delegation of female workers, only to be hustled away the next minute to a military barracks on the outskirts of the capital where strapping Red Army soldiers awaited the honored guest. At night, McKay rubbed elbows with Moscow's intellectual elite in the city's smoke filled cafes and beer halls. "From Moscow to Petrograd and from Petrograd to Moscow," McKay later recalled, "I went triumphantly from surprise to surprise, extravagantly fêted on every side […] like a black ikon in the flesh."[1]

At first, McKay's instant celebrity proved unnerving and slightly embarrassing. Only when McKay realized that he was not being welcomed by the Soviets as an individual tourist but "*as a symbol*, as a member of the great American Negro group—kin to the unhappy black slaves of European imperialism in Africa," did he become comfortable in the red-tinted spotlight and begin to recognize the opportunities that his

[1] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York: L. Furman, Inc., 1937), 168.

new found fame afforded.[2] Like other African Americans who traveled abroad, McKay had instantly become an ambassador of his race.[3]

Warming to this role, McKay returned from his "magic pilgrimage" committed to the task of interpreting Soviet Russia for black audiences in America.[4] McKay's enthusiastic endorsement of the "New Russia" placed the poet among the first wave of "political pilgrims" drawn to the Soviet Union.[5] At the same time, McKay's visit reverberated in unique ways. By embracing his role as the symbolic representative of his race, McKay offered a template for an emerging racial diplomacy that blended public relations with international relations in order to bolster the image of the race abroad while furthering African American political goals at home. As McKay explained, African Americans faced an image problem. The majority of Europeans held deeply distorted views of black people that were formed almost exclusively from representations in popular media and occasionally augmented by first hand encounters with the various entertainers and athletes who toured European cities. Without enlisting leaders drawn from the ranks of the emerging New Negro Movement to replace the boxers, jazzmen,

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[2] Italics in the original. Claude McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro: Part 1," *The Crisis* 27, No. 2 (December, 1923): 65.

[3] It was in this capacity, and not as an official delegate, that he attended the Fourth Congress of People's Deputies and delivered a speech on American race relations to the international forum. The official "Negro" delegate was Otto Huiswood, an Afro-Caribbean member of the American Communist Party (CPUSA).

[4] These are McKay's words. He used it for the title of the section of his autobiography devoted to his Russian travels. See McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 121-174.

[5] The phrase has been used derisively to dismiss intellectuals who traveled to the Soviet Union as naïve and anti-American. See Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press 1981). Other, less polemic studies of the "fellow traveler" phenomenon include Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the USSR, 1920-1940: From the Left Bank to Red Square* (New York: Routledge, 2003); David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carol Rassmussen, eds., *Political Tourists: Travellers From Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1940s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008); David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

and vaudeville dancers as the face of the race abroad, McKay argued, the general attitude of "misinformation, indifference and levity" toward the race would persist.[6] With this point, McKay appealed directly to the pretensions and fears of the overwhelmingly middle class readership of *The Crisis* who subscribed to the tenets of racial uplift philosophy and for whom "respectability" was of the utmost importance.[7]

Moving from the cultural sphere to global politics, McKay announced that the time had arrived for "the Negro to use this period of ferment in international affairs to lift his cause out of his national obscurity and force it forward as a prime international issue."[8] McKay tapped into an established tradition of African American international diplomacy, most recently on display at the Versailles Peace Conference, but with roots stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century. The novelty of McKay's pitch for race diplomacy, therefore, was not in the strategy it represented but in its orientation.

The Soviet Union, in McKay's view, was a logical partner for African Americans who had few friends on the international stage. As an ideological rival of the United States, the Soviet Union, like Great Britain a century earlier, fit the familiar adage: *the enemy of my enemy is my friend.* But the poet did not rest his case solely on such coldly calculated realism. As downtrodden, resilient people who had endured the miseries of serfdom and autocracy, McKay suggested that the Russian people could understand the African American experience on a deeper, emotional level. Moreover, the revolutionary generation of Russians, reborn as Soviets, resembled the generation of African

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[6] McKay sincerely, but naively, hoped that the Soviets had shed this European paternalism for true revolutionary solidarity. McKay, "Soviet Russia," 62-63.
[7] At the same time McKay's words signaled that black America's internal culture wars contained an international component and that race diplomacy abroad would be a contested arena.
[8] McKay, "Soviet Russia," 64.

Americans radicalized by the First World War and the concurrent explosion of racial violence in the United States. The so-called "New Negroes" shared with their "New Russian" contemporaries a revolutionary consciousness and outsider status that led each to reject the status quo in international affairs.

Recent history also provided the young Soviet state with insight into the plight of African Americans. Following the Bolshevik Revolution the United States, and to some extent the international community as a whole, treated the Soviet Union as a rouge state. Even as European nations softened this stance and normalized diplomatic relations with the Soviet regime throughout the 1920s, Washington steadfastly refused to recognize the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks, like the various African American delegates who had attempted in vain to secure a voice for their race at the bargaining table, had also been shut out of the Versailles peace talks in Paris. This fact endeared the regime to African Americans who could relate to the humiliation of non-recognition on a personal level.

Along these lines, McKay presented the case for African American-Soviet relations on the basis of a shared political agenda. African American soldiers faced a grim homecoming marred by a surge of racial violence and the continuing humiliation of Jim Crow segregation.[9] Denied basic rights by the same president who so loudly championed the cause of democracy and self-determination for the small nations of Europe, African Americans felt particularly disillusioned at the end of the Great War. For a subset of black

[9] For an in-depth look at the experiences of the Harlem Hellfighters and other African American soldiers in Europe see Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

socialists, progressives, and radicals, the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin's strident anti-imperialism offered an alternative to the hollow promises of Wilsonian democracy.[10]

Soviet-sponsored international congresses provided important forums for the theoretical development of Soviet anti-imperialism in relation to America's black minority.[11] Lenin's writings, including the widely publicized "Theses on the National and Colonial Question," suggested links between that issue and the so-called Negro Question, but stopped short of explicitly endorsing "self-determination" as the solution for the latter.[12] At the 1920 First Conference of the Peoples of the East, held in the Black Sea city of Baku, the American Communist John Reed raised the plight of African Americans "who possess neither political nor civil rights" and warned that capitalists stirred up race hatred to "distract" white American workers from revolutionary class consciousness.[13] Soviet policy toward the peoples of the "East," more than Soviet policy toward America, provided the theoretical as well as the strategic basis of early African American-Soviet relations. Lenin's pledge of Soviet support for colonial independence movements in Asia and Africa despite their bourgeois-nationalist orientation, for example, paved the way for

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[10]Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 86.

[11] Prior to the 1922 congress attended by McKay, congresses in 1918 and 1920, had outlined the Bolshevik commitment to anti-colonialism and established Leninism as a powerful alternative to the narrow Wilsonian interpretation of "self-determination." Lenin himself encouraged the study of African Americans. At the1920 Second International Congress, Lenin asked John Reed to prepare two reports on the "American Negro Problem." See John Reed, "The World Congress of the Communist International," *Communist* 10 (1920): 1-4.

[12] Self-determination for African Americans as a national minority in need of its own state would not become official Soviet policy until 1928 with the advent of the "Black Belt Thesis." V. I. Lenin, *The Rights Of Nations to Self-Determination* (New York: International Publishers, 1951), 83-84.

[13] "Addendum: Speech by John Reed," in John Riddel, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920-First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (London: Pathfinder Press, 1993), 149.

cooperation with middle class African American reform organizations like the NAACP.[14] Under Lenin, the young Soviet Union seemed to promise a genuinely revolutionary break with the old order and a potentially emancipatory vision for African Americans and other peoples of color. [15]

In addition to its ideological credentials, McKay contrasted the openness of the young Soviet regime to fostering diplomatic relations with peoples of African descent to the cold reception given to the race leaders in the halls of power in Europe and America. "Russia is prepared and waiting to receive couriers and heralds of good will and interracial understanding from the Negro race," McKay announced. "Demonstration[s] of friendliness and equality for Negroes may not conduce to promote healthy relations between Soviet Russia and democratic America," McKay conceded, adding only half-jokingly that "the anthropologists of 100 percent Americanism may soon invoke Science to prove that Russians are not at all God's white people."[16] McKay's jest evoked a central tension in African American diplomacy, which historically sought to bolster ties with ideological and geopolitical rivals of the United States. To a large degree, strained relations between the United States and the Soviet Union benefitted African Americans by providing space and motivation for Soviet engagement. By the same logic, U.S.-Soviet accommodation, like Anglo-American rapprochement in the 19th century, threatened to undercut African American diplomacy.

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[14] Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 14-17.
[15] See Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.
[16] McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro: Part 2," *The Crisis* 27, no.3 (January, 1923): 117. For a more detailed take on McKay's Russian travels see Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 25-85.

In the mid-1920s, the Soviet Union developed one of the world's first state-sponsored cultural relations programs. The organizational hub of Soviet cultural diplomacy in the NEP period was the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Nations (VOKS) founded in 1925. Though ostensibly a voluntary non-governmental organization, VOKS, like most Soviet bureaucracies, was subordinated to the party-state leadership and closely tied to the secret police. Within the complex Soviet foreign policy establishment, VOKS represented what one scholar has called a "third dimension," situated between the traditional affairs of state handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the clandestine revolutionary propaganda activities of the Comintern.[17] In this capacity, VOKS operated within the larger constellation of Soviet organizations devoted to culture and foreign policy.[18] VOKS coordinated Soviet cultural exchange in a variety of artistic, academic, and scientific fields. In addition to subject specific "sections," VOKS personnel worked in geographically organized departments run by specialists known as *referentury*. By presenting VOKS as a cultural "society," while maintaining strict party control over its activities, Soviet officials hoped to mask its political agenda and deflect foreign complaints regarding Soviet propaganda.[19]

Originally directed by Ol'ga Danielevna Kameneva, Trotsky's sister and the wife of Politboro member Lev Kamenev, VOKS specialized in planning and managing the itineraries of high-profile individuals and foreign delegations visiting the Soviet Union.

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[17] Jean-Francois Fayet, "VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy," in Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, eds., *Searching For a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010): 33-50.

[18] Conducting Soviet cultural relations required VOKS to closely coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Executive Committee of the Comintern (IKKI), the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), and, after 1929, the state-run travel agency Intourist.

[19] This made VOKS a classic "front" organization. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 40-43.

In coordinating these visits, VOKS relied on a network of foreign friendship associations, like the American Friends of the Soviet Union or the American Society for Cultural Relations with Soviet Russia, to help organize and vet potential tourists. The friendship associations were front organizations directed by a core group of Communist Party members, but with membership representing the full ideological spectrum of "fellow travelers" inspired by the Soviet project. VOKS invited Western celebrities, especially leftist authors, intellectuals, and public figures, to tour the Soviet Union with the expectation that famous visitors would help to enhance the image of the USSR abroad.

Ordinary Americans interested in travelling to the Soviet Union could link up with a friendship organization or later specialized travel agencies, which in turn would contact Boris Skivirsky, the VOKS agent in Washington, D.C. Skivirsky then communicated directly with Kameneva in Moscow to establish the trip's cost, manage visitors' itineraries, and facilitate logistics.[20] Upon arrival VOKS received the delegations and coordinated the details of the visit. VOKS guides and translators closely monitored guests' reactions, reported frequently asked questions, and recorded the answers they provided. Soviet tourism was orchestrated to promote the image of the Soviet Union abroad. By design, VOKS preferred ideologically sympathetic but non-communist foreign visitors who enjoyed influence in their home nations. By targeting leftist "opinion-shapers" whose testimony about Soviet progress would reach a wide audience and appear credible, Soviet officials looked to maximize the propaganda potential of

[20] See for example, O.D. Kameneva to B.E. Skivirsky, April 24, 1926. The State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. 5283, op. 3, d. 27.

Soviet tourism and outsource recruiting.[21] When visitors returned home they were encouraged to share their impressions of the Soviet Union, which VOKS officials closely monitored. These accounts, in turn, attracted more visitors, causing Soviet tourism to boom in the 1930s.[22]

A trip to the Soviet Union appealed to a new brand of tourist eager to witness the construction of a socialist society first hand. Tourists drawn to the Soviet Union were not typical holiday punters. For example, in 1934, a group of British teachers specifically requested that their itinerary include stops at an abortion clinic and a prison.[23] The genius of Soviet tourism lay in the ability of VOKS to cater to the special interests of various visitors. In many respects, Soviet cultural relations with African Americans followed the basic patterns of Soviet engagement with the West in general and with the United States in particular.[24] Throughout the interwar period, African Americans joined their white countrymen in various official delegations organized in the United States. [25] Such racial integration, whether spurred by American Communist organizers or Soviet officials, was notable as it violated Jim Crow social mores and broke with the de facto segregation that governed contemporary private travel agencies, tour groups, and official government

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[21] Writing without access to Soviet archives Sylvia R. Margulies managed to describe with great insight the basic structure and strategic logic of VOKS and Soviet cultural diplomacy. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia*. See also David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 16-17.

[22] By the mid-1930s Soviet travelogues had become a cottage industry as well as a best-selling literary genre. [Stats here]

[23] Hilda Browning, Sec. Society for Cultural Relations Between The Peoples of the British Commonwealth and the U.S.S.R., to I. Amdur, VOKS Anglo-American *Referant*, March 19, 1934. GARF f. 183, op. 8., d. 202.

[24] The Anglo-American sector of VOKS, which handled all visitors from Britain and the United States, was responsible for African Americans.

[25] Later delegations of workers, labor unionists, and/or Communist Party members often included one to three African American members. See "Youth Leaves U.S. For Russia Meet," *Chicago Defender*, August 24, 1929; "Sail to Study Conditions in Soviet Russia," *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1931. "Delegates Off to Study Russia," *Chicago Defender,* April 30, 1931.

delegations. It also provided a venue for African Americans to visit the Soviet Union as racial representatives, a role which many embraced.

While participating in the broader U.S.-Soviet cultural exchange, African Americans interacted with and actively contributed to the Soviet cultural relations apparatus in distinct ways. Two important groups, visitors who toured the Soviet Union and Communists who lived and studied in Moscow, defined African American engagement with the Soviet state. With the exception of two periods—1928 to 1932 when Stalin's hardline foreign policy dictated a shift in cultural engagement and after 1937 when xenophobia and domestic repression sharply curtailed Soviet cultural relations—the Soviet government followed a multi-pronged strategy designed to appeal to the widest possible swath of Black America. In keeping with the broader media strategy that animated Soviet cultural diplomacy, VOKS officials were interested in recruiting African American intellectuals perceived as sympathetic to the Soviet Union who were also credible and popular within their own communities. Given their own limited knowledge of African American culture and politics, Soviet officials increasingly relied on Black Communists living in the Soviet Union to initiate and facilitate Soviet cultural relations with African Americans. [26]

Throughout the interwar period, in fact, African Americans, both in the Soviet Union and the United States, provided the impetus and sustaining force behind African

[26] I use the term "Black" instead of African American to acknowledge that, like Claude McKay, some of the Communists were not American citizens, but Afro-Caribbean subjects of various European empires. George Padmore (Malcolm Nurse) a Trinidadian radical who spent several years in Moscow, is the most prominent example.

American-Soviet relations.[27] From 1924 on, the continuous presence of a small cadre of Black Communists in Moscow affiliated with the Comintern and the Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) accounted for a more overtly political dimension of African American-Soviet relations. Subject to the ideological directives and discipline of the Communist Party these men and women acted at times as political agents of Soviet foreign policy who also contributed to domestic Soviet antiracist propaganda efforts. Within Soviet cultural diplomacy, Moscow's resident African American Communists comprised a reliable welcoming committee for visiting African Americans, while also serving as living testaments to the opportunities available to people of color in the Soviet Union.

KUTV's Moscow campus became a regular "showcase" on the itineraries of visiting African Americans.[28] Visitors routinely met with the handful of black students at KUTV who soon became practiced and effective ambassadors of Soviet race diplomacy.[29] In 1926, for example, a visiting African American student named Thomas

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[27]Soviet officials, especially within VOKS, rarely gave sustained or systematic attention to African American engagement. In fairness to VOKS, the disorganized state of many of the American branches of the Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union (SCR) also contributed to the anemic character of African American engagement. By 1930, the head of the VOKS Anglo-American sector, Isador Amdur, reported that "the spectre of finance is looming ever larger over the activities of the American Societies." Amdur complained that the secretary of the Chicago branch went months without filing reports, while the Philadelphia branch had gone entirely incommunicado and was eventually declared defunct. Isador Amdur, "Report for the Anglo-American Sector," April 1-April 30, 1930; GARF f. 5283, op.8, d. 3; "Report of the Anglo-American Sector, May 1930." GARF f. 5283, op. 8, d. 69; "Report of the Anglo-American Sector, July-August 1930." GARF f. 5283, op.3, d. 275.

[28] In this sense, KUTV was very much the ideological and historical precursor to Patrice Lumumba University. See Michael David-Fox's definitionof Soviet "showcases" and "models." David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 99.

[29] In the 1926 there were ten African American students enrolled at KUTV. For a detailed account of black students at KUTV, see Woodford McClellan, "Black *Hajj* to 'Red Mecca': Africans and Afro-Americans at KUTV, 1925-1938," in Maxim Matusevich, ed., *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 61-83; Joy Gleason

Dabney announced that he had "never met a more enthusiastic group of Negroes," than the black KUTV contingent.[30] William Pickens, an NAACP official who also visited KUTV on his tour of the Soviet Union the following year, echoed this sentiment. Pickens praised the "school for revolutionary ideas" and observed that the African Americans at KUTV were "the most popular fellows in Moscow."[31]

If the KUTV students operated as agents of Soviet cultural diplomacy, Glen Carrington and Thomas Dabney, the two African American members of the first U.S. student delegation to tour the Soviet Union in 1926, represented more traditional non-state actors engaged in race diplomacy. [32] Both men were native-Virginians who had moved north to seize new opportunities. Carrington, a recent alumnus of Howard University, came to New York City in 1925 to pursue graduate studies in social work and was actively involved in the city's bohemian art community.[33] Dabney, a graduate of Virginia Union University in Richmond and a local teachers' union leader, had recently enrolled in Brookwood Labor College, an experimental workers' school located in the sleepy

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Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Soujourners in Search the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 27-48.

[30] Dabney quoted in Glenn Carrington, Journal of Trip to the Soviet Union (1926), n.d., no page numbers. Glenn Carrington Papers, 1921-1971 (GCP), Box 2, Folder 7. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York. A later cohort proved decidedly less popular among their supervisors at KUTV who reported chronic tardiness, laziness, and ideological deviations. "Report on Section 9," November 20, 1932. RGASPI, f. 532, op. 1, d. 439.

[31] William Pickens, "Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 23, 1927. 4th Article on Russia (Paper 11). William Pickens Papers, Reel 4.

[32] The delegation had a total of sixteen members. The "spontaneous" group of university students was organized by the American Society for Cultural Relations with Soviet Russia. *New York Amsterdam News*, July 7, 1926.

[33] Carrington's social circle included many of the up and coming writers of the Harlem Renaissance Carrington was especially close with Langston Hughes and Dorothy West, both of whom would later visit the Soviet Union in 1932. Glenn Carrington, "The Harlem Renaissance—A Personal Memoir," *Freedom Ways: A Quarterly Review of the Negro Freedom Movement* 3, no. 3 (Summer, 1963): 307-311.

hamlet of Katonah, New York.[34] As left-leaning individuals interested in social reform and labor issues, both men fit naturally with other Americans drawn to the fledgling Soviet "friendship" societies.[35] While an unknown VOKS official did make a point of identifying Carrington and Dabney as "Negroes" prior to their arrival, it is unclear whether they were chosen explicitly because of their race.[36]

Once they arrived in the Soviet Union, the first stop for all foreign guests was the Bureau for the Reception of Foreign Visitors, where VOKS provided them with interpreters, guidebooks, contact information of Soviet officials, the dates and times of special events and lectures and detailed itineraries for various cultural excursions and guided tours.[37] While touring the Soviet Union, Carrington and Dabney spent much of their first two weeks in the Soviet Union attending lectures and meetings arranged by VOKS officials. One of these scheduled events provided an early indication of the ways in which Moscow deployed cultural diplomacy not only to promote Soviet achievements, but also to demonstrate Soviet moral supremacy by confronting American racial

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[34] "Labor School Has 2 Negro Students," *New York Amsterdam News,* December 9, 1925; For the college's mission statement see, "Brookwood: Labor's Own School" (New York: Brookwood Building and Endowment Fund, 1927), No. 2, 5; For the broader context of the school see Richard J. Altenbaugh, "'The Children and Instruments of a Militant Labor Progressivism': Brookwood Labor College and the American Labor College Movement of the 1920s and 1930s," *The Education Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 395-411.

[35] The American Friends of the Soviet Union was founded in 1927 much later than national chapters in Europe. It was preceded by the Society for Cultural Relations With Soviet Russia, which organized the student tour. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 86.

[36] The leader of the American delegation did not mention race, but did stress that the group included a student from the Brookwood Labor College perhaps demonstrating that greater importance was assigned to Dabney's class identity. Soviet officials in Moscow did make note of Dabney and Carrington's race but did not discuss the issue in any detail. Elizabeth K. Van Alstyne, Secretary of the American Student Delegation to Soviet Russia, to Julius Woods, April 3, 1926. GARF f. 5283, op. 3, d. 27; Underlining on copy of Elizabeth K. Van Alstyne to O.D. Kameneva, [undated], GARF f. 5283, op. 3, d. 41; and note on "Thomas L. Dabney, Negr." GARF f. 5283, op. 3, d. 56.

[37] Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia*, 60.

discrimination and violence. The event involved a public debate between the prominent evangelical missionary and YMCA official Sherwood Eddy, whose delegation of American academics overlapped with the U.S. student delegation, and a Soviet representative of the newly formed League of the Militant Godless. [38] Carrington, and likely Dabney, joined the crowd of spectators.[39] The debate embodied the widely held belief that a fundamental clash between the values of "Christian America" and "Godless Russia" precluded any normalization of U.S.-Soviet relations.[40]

In the course of the debate with the *Bezbozhniki* (the "Godless"), Eddy was asked to clarify for his Soviet hosts "the relation between lynching and Christianity." The anonymous questioner explained that his confusion stemmed from the simple fact that, "We do not lynch people over here [in Russia], nor deny them justice because of their color or race, but we understand that you do lynch Negroes in Christian America."[41] This well choreographed line of attack revealed the ways in which the views of "ordinary" citizens were mobilized for maximum political impact within Soviet cultural diplomacy.[42] Nevertheless, it also exposed the hypocrisy of America's moralist criticism

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[38] For an institutional history of the Soviet atheist group see, Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
[39] C. Glenn Carrington, Journal of Trip to the Soviet Union (1926). GCP, Box 2, Folder 7.
[40] At the time of the debate, White evangelical Protestants, especially those involved with missionary work in Russia, had made religious persecution a prime obstacle to normalized US-Soviet relations. For the long history of American campaigns against religious persecution in Imperial and Soviet Russia, see David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[41] Sherwood Eddy, *Russia Today: What Can We Learn From It?* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1934), 72-73.
[42] For the close relationship of VOKS to both the party (CPSU) and the security apparatus (OGPU), see David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment,* 57-59; Fayet, "VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy." For the intelligence role of guides in the 1930s, see Fitzpatrick, "Foreigners Observed."

of Soviet persecution of religious groups in a devastatingly effective manner.[43] Eddy did not defend the U.S., but instead conceded that racial violence and discrimination presented a grave challenge to white and black Americans and for Christians everywhere. The nearly five-hour event left the American missionary genuinely impressed by the Soviet government's willingness to engage in open debate and the directly influenced Eddy's subsequent condemnations of American racism. The following summer, while delivering the baccalaureate sermon to the graduating seniors of Howard University, Eddy spoke of the "disease of race prejudice" that continued to plague America, adding that it had been cured "among the people of Russia."[44] Eddy's testimony revealed the success of Soviet efforts to promote the nation's reputation as a colorblind society.

VOKS also planned the itineraries of visiting African Americans to further serve this strategic objective. From Moscow, where they stopped to visit KUTV, the student delegation traveled by boat down the Volga River. In Saratov and Kazan, the capital city of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Dabney encountered substantial populations of Soviet national minorities for the first time.[45] On the basis of his conversations with ordinary citizens and officials and from his impressions of Soviet literacy campaigns in the Caucasus region, Dabney reached the conclusion that in the Soviet Union, "every minority group and race is free to develop its own culture and to worship as it pleases. As a result of this policy racial conflicts have ceased and

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[43] In 1931, when white Southern Baptists issued an appeal to the Soviet government to curtail its anti-religious policies, an editorial in the *Chicago Defender* wondered why there was no outrage at the "discrimination practiced against millions [of African Americans] of the Baptist persuasion by the gentlemen who are so exercised over discrimination in Russia." "If Russia didn't laugh over this resolution, it is hopeless," the author concluded, "its sense of humor is dead as a door nail." *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1931.

[44] *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1927.

[45] Namely, Volga Germans and Tatars.

all peoples are loyal to the Soviet government."[46]

That Dabney's public comments bear a strong resemblance to Soviet propaganda in both its specific content and overall theme was not coincidental. Often the putatively independent statements made by individual travelers or delegations were quite actively manipulated by Soviet and Communist organizations. This active involvement was meant to ensure that visitors presented positive and ideologically correct images of the Soviet Union to foreign audiences, which remained one of the main objective of Soviet cultural diplomacy with the West throughout the interwar years.[47]

Whether or not Dabney received such coaching cannot be conclusively proved, but his later remarks betray a polish and ideological awareness completely lacking in his first interview published in the Baltimore *Afro American* immediately after his return. Running under the unfortunate headline, "Regard Dabney As A Freak In Russia," the article quoted Dabney's description of the unrelenting stares that met him in every town and village he visited on his Russian travels. Though his hosts had gone out of their way to make him feel comfortable, Dabney confessed that as an African American in Russia he had been "as much a show freak as a Scotch Highlander down Greenwillow street, Baltimore."[48] This, of course, was not the intended Soviet message to black America and undercut the utopian image of the Soviet Union as a place where

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[46] Thomas Dabney, "Finds No Race Segregation in Soviet Union," *Pittsburg Courier*, November 27, 1926; "Elaborate Care Given to Workers Impresses Visitor to Russia," *Chicago Defender*, November 27, 1926.
[47] See Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia*, 159; David-Fox, "The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The 'Cultured West' Through Soviet Eyes."
[48] "Regard Dabney As A Freak In Russia," *Afro American (Baltimore)* August 7, 1926.

African Americans blended seamlessly into a color-blind society. In contrast to these unguarded remarks, in his subsequent comments to the Negro Press, Dabney provided disciplined and targeted statements that promoted an unquestionably positive image of Soviet society.

Carrington's journal entries, however, reveal mixed impressions of Soviet society. Even as he dutifully copied various government supplied industrial statistics, marveled at the Soviet literacy campaigns and approvingly noted that all Soviet children were legitimate in the eyes of the government, Carrington lamented of the poor quality of the Soviet press, dismissing its various newspapers as nothing more than "wallpaper." Nor could Carrington ignore the material deprivation he encountered in the New Russia. Unlike later high profile visitors who were treated to lavish meals of caviar and vodka, Carrington could not find a single lump of sugar to put in his morning tea.[49]

Carrington did enjoy his visits to various schools, including an agricultural college, which allowed him to have face-to-face interactions with young Soviet men and women of his own generation. This was precisely the type of international student exchange that Carrington endorsed a few years earlier as General Secretary of the American Federation of Negro Students. The warm reception he received from Soviet students moved Carrington deeply.[50] At various stops, Carrington received personalized messages from the head of the local Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Communist League

[49] He wrote despairingly in his journal,"Hard days. No sugar." Carrington, Undated entry, Journal of Trip to the Soviet Union (1926) in GCP, Box 2, Folder 7.

[50] Carrington's journal indicates that he also met a few Soviet officials, including Olga Kameneva and future NKVD head Nikolai Ezhov, but the extent or nature of these meetings is unclear. He at least was given Ezhov's calling card. Ibid.

of Youth) chapter as well as from individual students.[51] As Carrington quickly realized, these students saw him not as an American but as "the representative of an oppressed nation" and as such reassured him that "the world will overthrow the regime of oppression [and] lynching."[52] Another student named Vashinsky, voiced frustration with the notion, which would become particularly popular among Western tourists, that the Soviet Union was a grand experiment. He asked Carrington to disabuse Americans of this exotic and patronizing view of the Soviet Union when he returned home. "Tell our comrades [there are] no white bears walking around," Vashinksy instructed Carrington, before adding defiantly that socialism in his homeland was not an experiment "but a strong, undefeatable fact." "When you return," he concluded, "say that [you] saw."[53]

Like other American visitors to the Soviet Union, Carrington was expected to act as a witness as well as an unofficial ambassador since diplomatic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union remained nonexistent. Like other African American visitors, Carrington was also compelled to serve as an ambassador for his race. Carrington took each of these roles seriously. While in the Soviet Union, Carrington shared his hope that greater cultural exchange, especially involving students, might ease tensions between the two nations. While American problems required different solutions, Carrington told a student delegation that Americans had much to

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[51] The Komsomol was the Communist Party's (CPSU) elite youth division. It was often charged with leading ideological campaigns and played a crucial role in both the early efforts to build a Soviet society and the "cultural revolution" of the Stalinist era. For the role of the Komsomol in Soviet politics at the time of Carrington's visit, see Anne E. Gorsuch, "Soviet Youth and the Politics of Popular Culture during NEP," *Social History,* 17, no. 2 (May, 1992): 189-201.
[52] Journal entry for July 24, 1926. Journal of Trip to the Soviet Union (1926) in GCP, Box 2, Folder 7.
[53] Undated journal entry. Ibid.

learn from the "inspiration [and] example of proletarian accomplishments in Russia."[54] A joint statement from the American student delegation emphasized class and downplayed racial differences.[55] Carrington summarized the message in his journal: "Two of our group represent the Negro students of Amer[ica], but in a larger way we rep[resent] all the students of Amer[ica], for we hope to break down class lines [and] form a common group because we realize as proletarians, we have common problems."[56]

Carrington expressed even stronger sympathy with the USSR in a letter to a Comrade Trivas, a VOKS guide who worked in the society's Anglo-American section. After lamenting that he had not been able to secure a visa extension in time to stay longer in the Soviet Union, Carrington wrote: "I have the highest thoughts of Russia. She is a great nation, standing up admirably under terrific strain and will, I believe, succeed in demonstrating her real value to the world."[57] Carrington proudly reported that he had made several speeches since his return and had published an article about his trip in the Young Communist League's newspaper.[58] "I do hope that I may some day be of service to you [and] let me know if I can do anything from here," Carrington

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[54] Reply to Student's Greeting, in undated entry. Ibid.
[55] These statements were often written by, or in close coordination with, Soviet and Communist officials. See Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia,* 159-164.
[56] C. Glenn Carringon, Undated journal entry. Journal of Trip to the Soviet Union (1926) in GCP, Box 2, Folder 7.
[57] C. Glenn Carrington to Comrade Trevos [Trivas], November 3, 1926. GARF f.5283, op. 3, d. 57.
[58] Carrington gave a lecture entitled "Eight Weeks in Soviet Russia" in Harlem on December 26, 1926. Though the content of that lecture was not recorded, Carrington seems to have drifted closer to the American Communist Party following his Soviet tour. Christmas Card and invitation, GCP, Box 2, Folder 5.

wrote, adding, "Some day, we may meet in America, but certainly again in Russia."[59] Trivas wrote back to request clippings of any articles that Carrington published and information about the other students' impressions.[60]

Carrington made good on his pledge to aid the Soviet cause in February of 1917 when he shared the stage with Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Moscow's ubiquitous race man, and Mike Gold, the editor of the *New Masses*, at an event aimed to promote the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) held at the A.M.E Church Community House in Harlem.[61] Carrington's statements have not been preserved, but no amount of eloquence could have saved the ANLC from Fort-Whiteman's comically disastrous stewardship of the organization's outreach to Black America. [62] The Chicago branch never exceeded fifty members, and it was one of the nation's largest.[63] Fort-Whiteman, who bluntly told a reporter that he was recruiting African Americans to be trained for the Soviet "diplomatic service," seemed to go out of his way to play into the sensationalized fears of conservative U.S. officials and media outlets that the Soviets were training an African American fifth column to overthrow the government.[64] Most African Americans, on the

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[59] C. Glenn Carrington to Comrade Trevos [Trivas], November 3, 1926. GARF f.5283, op. 3, d. 57.
[60] Trivas to Carrington, November 10, 1926 GARF f. 5283, op. 3, d. 60.
[61] Advertised in the *The Daily Worker*, February 14, 1927. Clipping in Ibid.
[62] For a humorous recounting of Fort-Whiteman's attempts to build support for the ANLC in Chicago, see Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 52-55.
[63] Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism At Its Grassroots, 1928-1935* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 28.
[64] These fears dated back to the Red Scare of 1919, which ushered in a parallel Black Scare. "Bolshevik agitation among the negroes," the *New York Times* warned after race riots swept through Chicago and other cities in the summer of 1919, was now "bearing its natural and inevitable fruit." *New York Times*, July 23, 1919.
"Communists Boring Into Negro Labor," *The New York Times*, January 17,1926.

other hand, dismissed Fort-Whiteman as an eccentric, but essentially harmless, party hack.[65]

In Moscow, however, Fort-Whiteman was considered something of a "fixer," a reliable, versatile agent capable of providing Soviet officials with valuable insight into the social and political landscape of black America. Within the orbit of Soviet cultural diplomacy, Fort-Whiteman became something of a de facto Soviet ambassador to black America. For example, Fort-Whiteman recruited the original cadre of African American students enrolled at KUTV, toured the Soviet Union delivering lectures on racial discrimination and lynching, and taught English language classes to Soviet workers. Given his position as the point man for Soviet race diplomacy, it therefore is not surprising that VOKS charged the Texas-born Communist with identifying and recruiting the first African American intellectuals to receive invitations to tour the Soviet Union in 1926.

Fort-Whiteman had actually started the legwork for this assignment two years earlier. In 1924, under the alias, James C. Jackson, Fort-Whiteman wrote to the renowned scholar and NAACP official W.E.B. Du Bois. Identifying himself simply as "an American Negro, a native of the South, here in Russia making a study of the social conditions," Fort-Whiteman described an idyllic paradise where men and women of various races "live as one big family." The only blemish on the Soviet Union's "perfect internationalism," in Fort-Whiteman's view, was that "the Negro" remained

[65] When he returned to the United States, Fort-Whiteman dressed in high black boots, a *rybashka* style peasant shirt belted at the waist, and a matching military style cap. For an image of Fort-Whiteman in this outfit, identified as "the prevailing style in Russia today," see *Chicago Defender*, March 7, 1925.

underrepresented and misunderstood. Despite this ignorance, Fort-Whiteman contended that "Here in Russia the desire for information concerning the Negro is fervent […] There is no race of which knowledge is sought with such eagerness as the Negro." Fort-Whiteman asked for the renowned scholar's assistance in choosing appropriate educational material. No record exists of Du Bois's response to this mysterious missive, which proclaimed that "one must visit Russia to understand and appreciate the many beautiful social developments which are taking place in this strange land!" Two years later, however, Du Bois accepted an official invitation to tour the land of the Soviets.[66]

The visit was a coup for VOKS. In the fifty-eight-year-old Du Bois, the Soviets secured a visit from an African American intellectual of nearly unmatched stature who possessed widespread influence both domestically and internationally. As co-founder of the NAACP and editor of its monthly journal, *The Crisis*, Du Bois had built a large constituency and commanded a formidable bully pulpit.[67] Du Bois was also an early skeptic of the Bolshevik Revolution. Although he had published Claude McKay's glowing reports from the Soviet Union four years earlier, Du Bois had stopped well short of endorsing the new regime. As a socialist, Du Bois was also no friend of the American Communist Party and had endorsed Wisconsin's "Fighting Bob" La Follette in the 1924

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[66] James C. Jackson (Lovett Fort-Whiteman) to The Crisis/Dr. William Du Bois, July 15, 1924, in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, WHS, Microfilm, Reel 13, Frame 851. In Du Bois's account, three strangers three strangers, who were "probably clandestine agents of the Communist dictatorship," visited his New York office in the summer of 1926 and offered to finance a trip to the Soviet Union. Du Bois accepted on the condition that he receive written assurance that the tour remain strictly investigative and that he be allowed to travel freely under no obligation save that of an objective individual interested in reporting on a momentous historical development. David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 486.

[67] In 1927, the circulation of the *Crisis* was estimated to be 30,000, a figure that in all likelihood represented only a fraction of the journal's total domestic and international readership. *18th Annual Report for 1927 of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (New York: Herald-Nathan Press, January, 1928), 45.

presidential election.[68] Rather than souring the Soviets on Du Bois, these credentials actually made him more attractive from a propaganda perspective. At the same time, Du Bois had proved reluctant to criticize the Russian regime too harshly in public, while in private he openly confessed to feeling a broad sympathy with its goals.[69] Du Bois was inclined to see for himself what was going on in Russia, before passing judgment.

For Du Bois, the Soviet tour promised a chance to once again seize the mantle of the official spokesman of African Americans and reclaim what he believed to be his rightful place as the senior global ambassador of his race. The dramatic downfall of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) who was convicted of felony mail fraud in 1923, removed Du Bois's man rival in the Pan-Africanist movement. Du Bois, whose initial support for WWI drew scorn from black leftists in particular, appeared generationally and ideologically out of touch with the insurgent New Negro movement. Traveling to Moscow seemed to provide a way for Du Bois to answer his critics on the left and provoke his critics on the right, especially the more conservative wing within the NAACP headed by Walter White.

A final factor that contributed to Du Bois's acceptance of the offer to travel to Russia was the potential to use the trip to expand and bolster support for the cause closest to his heart: the international campaign against imperialism and racism. Du Bois had been

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[68] La Follette was the candidate of the Progressive Party.

[69] In December 1925 he resigned from the International Committee for Political Prisoners (ICPP) in response to the committee's publication of anti-Soviet pamphlet entitled *Letters From Russian Prisons*. "With regard to Russia I am especially sensitive," Du Bois explained, "I am not Communist. I hate violence and war. At the same time I believe Russia is trying to do a great and wonderful thing for the economic organization of industry […] I have heard all kinds of stories against Soviet Russia and so many of them have been proven lies that I am afraid to believe anything under ordinary circumstances." W.E.B. Du Bois to Elizabeth G. Flynn, December 23, 1925 in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 15, Frame 756.

intrigued by the anti-imperialist pronouncements of Lenin and wanted to enlist the young Soviet state in the fight against racial injustice in the United Sates. In late 1925, Du Bois drafted an open letter "To The Russian People" appealing for support for the NAACP and its legal defense fund. The letter offered a brief history of the African American people, who as the descendants of slaves, overcame many obstacles to obtain education and property but continued to endure discrimination, persecution, and political repression in the land of their birth. Du Bois then sketched the details of the recent case of Ossian Sweet, a Detroit doctor charged with murder after he shot and killed a member of the mob that had gathered to drive him from his home in the white neighborhood where he recently moved.[70]

"The Detroit case has for the American Negroes tremendous importance," Du Bois explained, "Not only is the fate of this particular Negro at stake, but in a sense, of the whole Negro race." Fortunately, Du Bois wrote, the NAACP had mobilized to rally support for the accused man's defense, which brought Du Bois to the crux of the issue: "We hereby appeal to our friends in Russia and to the friends of true democracy everywhere to help in the raising of this fund."[71] The letter demonstrated Du Bois's recognition of Russia as an ally in the fight against American racism and in significant ways foreshadowed the Communist-led international protests and fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Scottsboro Boys in the early 1930s. It also speaks to Du Bois's evolving

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[70] For a detailed history of the Sweet case see Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

[71] It is unclear whether Du Bois actually sent the letter. W.E.B. Du Bois, "To The Russian People, 1926" [1925] in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 82, Frame 1597. The fund eventually raised 71,000 dollars and, with the help of Clarence Darrow, secured an acquittal for Sweet. David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 98.

view of the possibilities for African American-Soviet diplomacy to help advance his domestic political agenda on the eve of his first visit.

Du Bois arrived in Moscow in August 1926 and covered nearly two thousand miles traveling "from the Neva to the Dnieper and from the Dnieper to sea."[72] As a distinguished guest, Du Bois was granted audiences with top Soviet officials including the old Bolshevik Karl Radek. Du Bois also met with ordinary Soviet workers, peasants, teachers, and various national minorities whom he identified as "Jews, Tartars, Gypsies, Caucasians, Armenians and Chinese."[73] In Moscow, Du Bois toured the Museum of the Revolution and saved a postcard cataloguing the various punishments meted out by the Tsarist "butchers." The small cartoon illustrations depicting rows of executed men hanging from makeshift beams no doubt conjured the familiar horrors of lynching in Du Bois's mind.[74]

From his hotel window, located in the shadow of the Kremlin on Revolution Square, Du Bois could see the gleaming outline of the golden domes that topped the Cathedral of Christ the Savior as well as the dazzling multi-colored domes of St. Basil's. Each day Du Bois watched a procession of people, who formed a single long line that snaked around Red Square, file into Lenin's tomb for the chance to catch a glimpse of "his dead and speaking face." During the final weeks of his stay in Moscow, Du Bois witnessed the festivities of Youth Day when 200,000 children paraded through the streets of the capital. Though still in the early stages of construction, Du Bois was also struck by

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[72] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *The Crisis* (April 1927).
[73] W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 19, Frame 600. For other receipts, post-cards and notes from Du Bois's 1926 Russia trip see also Frames 601, 603, 580, 590.
[74] W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 19, Frame 612.

the number of new schools he saw in Moscow and commented on the boom of bookstores on every corner. Everywhere, the people seemed to be humming with energy and optimism.[75]

To help bridge the language barrier and avoid reliance on Soviet officials, Du Bois brought personal friends, presumably recent Russian émigrés, to serve as his interpreters.[76] This allowed Du Bois to boast that while in Russia, he followed neither the crowds nor the officially sanctioned program of VOKS, preferring instead to conduct his own deeply personal investigation of the land of the Soviets. "[I] sat still and gazed at this Russia," Du Bois wrote of his attempt to reflect on all that he had seen on his two-month tour, "[so] that the spirit of its life and people might enter my veins." The sensationalized image of Russia borne of its recent history and promoted by a large segment of the American press—"the Russia of war and blood and rapine"—held no interest for Du Bois, especially when compared to what he had experienced first hand during his travels. "I stand in astonishment and wonder at the revelation of Russia that has come to me," he wrote from Moscow, "I may be partially deceived and half-informed. But if what I have seen with my own eyes and ears in Russia is Bolshevism, I am a Bolshevik."[77]

Du Bois returned from his European travels full of enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment and eager to share his experiences. The once cautious skeptic now displayed the zeal of a convert. During the winter of 1926-1927 Du Bois embarked on a speaking tour delivering lectures at a variety of venues throughout New York City and the South.

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[75] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Russia, 1926," *The Crisis* (November, 1926), 8.
[76] Du Bois was fluent in German and French, but did not speak Russian. The identity of his interpreters is unclear. The guides and translators who worked VOKS double as surveillance operatives who reported on the behavior and comments of guests.
[77] Ibid., 9.

In front of an audience at Harlem's St. James Presbyterian Church on the evening of November 16th, Du Bois related the highlights of his trip and described the stunning transformations he had witnessed while in Russia. Du Bois cautioned his audience not to draw general conclusions about Russia based on Moscow alone, a city whose rapid development far outpaced the rest of the vast country.[78] In mid-December, Du Bois addressed a hall full of students at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina instructing them to "watch Russia." Du Bois praised the ambition of the Soviet experiment and made it clear that the social, economic and political developments in Russia directly impacted African Americans.[79] Du Bois noted that the bold Soviet initiatives to meet the needs of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society far outstripped the timid American approach to race relations. The harmony of Russia's various races, Du Bois argued, proved that racial enmity did not have to prevail in America.[80]

These small engagements were only warm-ups for the main event on Du Bois's calendar for 1927: the 18th Annual Conference of the NAACP scheduled for the final week of June in Indianapolis, Indiana. In the conference's prime-speaking slot, Du Bois had decided to deliver an address that connected his Russian experiences to the problem of the color line in America entitled "Russia and Her Race Problem." On Friday evening, Du Bois addressed the 10,000 attendees packed in to the Cadle Tabernacle and thousands more listening to the radio broadcast around the nation.[81]

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[78] "Du Bois Describes Russia of Today," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 24, 1926.
[79] "South Hears Dr. Du Bois Laud Russia," *Chicago Defender*, December 25, 1926.
[80] "Speaks on Russia," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 18, 1926, pg. 8.
[81] The audience for this single speech was exponentially larger than the combined number of people who had seen Du Bois deliver earlier versions at churches, community centers, and

"To us as Negro Americans," Du Bois intoned, "the chief question is: What is Russia's attitude toward the world problems of race?" In order to properly answer this question, Du Bois urged African Americans to consider not only Russia's attitude "toward Negroes in America and Africa and toward the colored peoples of the East" but also her attitude to the myriad races living within the vast borders of the new Russian state. On both the domestic and international fronts of the race question, Russia, according to Du Bois, provided a "clear and unequivocal" answer. Within its stunningly diverse multi-racial, multi-lingual society, Russia simultaneously recognized, "the rights of her constituent peoples to maintain their own languages and their own culture and to have schools, teachers and literature to sustain these" while simultaneously ensuring that "every inducement is held out to make the different groups acquainted with the language and the culture of the leading races in Russia." Du Bois admired the delicate balancing act that Russian nationality policy performed as well as what he perceived to be its benign paternalism.

In its apparent willingness to preserve national cultures, Du Bois contrasted the Russian approach to the American melting pot, which aimed "to make Germans, Irish, Hungarians and Italians ashamed of the race that gave them birth, unwilling to remember their languages and claiming only English descent." Perhaps most importantly, while Jim Crow still reigned in much of the United States, the Russians had rejected racial segregation. Returning to his main theme, Du Bois told the assembled delegates that, "Russia stands for absolute equality of races—political, social and civil […] Not only in Russia but outside of Russia and in her general diplomacy and relations in the world,

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college auditoriums. *18th Annual Report for 1927 of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (New York: Herald-Nathan Press, January, 1928), 26.

Russia has taken a firm stand for racial equality. She has demanded decent treatment for Africans and persons of African descent throughout the world and has gone out of her way to treat Negro visitors with courtesy." Finally, Du Bois concluded by highlighting the potential impact of Russian anti-imperialism for the "colored world," a position that had shaken the "solidarity of white Europe" and which provided the main animus behind the anti-Soviet attitude of the West. "The attitude of Russia on the race question within and without her boundaries is of tremendous significance to us and of such significance to the races of the world that it bids fair overshadow other and in many respects, lesser questions" [82]

Du Bois's enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment also found expression in print, especially on the editorial page of *The Crisis*.[83] "The Worker's State" he wrote, "is the flaming torch lighting the oppressed peoples of the world along the path of freedom and independence."[84] Du Bois did not shrink in the face of backlash to the pro-Soviet stance of his editorials. When one reader, a U.S. Army chaplain serving with the 25th infantry, wrote a letter to the editor chiding Du Bois for his "pacifist-bolshevik" opinions, Du Bois answered with characteristically acerbic wit. Jesus, Du Bois pointed out, was a pacifist. As for the second half of the chaplain's hyphenated slur, Du Bois at first pled ignorance. "I am not sure what you mean by the word 'Bolshevik,'" he began, "If you mean everything that is contemptible and cruel I do not think I deserve the name; but if you mean to apply the word to those people who are striving with partial success to organize

[82] Press Release, June 24, 1927, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 21, Frame 1002; the full text of the speech, incorrectly dated as "c. 1928" is also available on Reel 83, Frame 26-27.
[83] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *The Crisis* (April 1927), 70; "Untitled Editoral," *The Crisis* (May 1927), 75;
[84] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Far Horizon," *The Crisis* (October, 1927), 273.

industry for public service rather than private profit, then I am also a Bolshevik and proud of it."[85]

By the time Du Bois made this toast, William Pickens had wrapped up his own Soviet tour to become the second high profile African American leader to travel to Russia in less than a year. Although Pickens was a protégé and ally of Du Bois, he was also an important intellectual in his own right. Born into poverty in rural South Carolina, Pickens graduated from Yale in 1904 with a degree in classics. After a decade teaching at Talladega College in Alabama, Pickens moved north to serve as Dean of Morgan College in Baltimore. Pickens's geographic migration paralleled his ideological journey away from the conservative racial uplift philosophy of Booker T. Washington to the assertive militarism and economic socialism that characterized the New Negro Movement. [86] Pickens, who was thirteen years younger than Du Bois, was also a charter member of the ACLU and an early member of the NAACP. As one of the organization's most eloquent spokesman and effective organizers, Pickens rose quickly in the ranks to become Field Secretary, the post he occupied in 1926. Within the NAACP leadership Pickens advocated for a greater emphasis on economic issues and worked to push the organization to take an active role on the international stage. As his biographer has observed, Pickens was a gifted "moral propagandist" like his mentor Du Bois rather than

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[85] W.E. B. Du Bois to Louis A. Carter, *The Crisis* (September, 1927), 240.

[86] Sheldon Avery, *Up From Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 20-35. Of the constellation of prominent African American leaders who vied to define the New Negro movement and steer its course, Pickens could claim to have authored one of its foundational texts. William Pickens*, The New Negro: His Political, Civil and Mental Status and Other Essays* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1926).

an pragmatic politician like Walter White.[87] In the 1920s, Pickens's byline appeared widely in the Negro Press and a variety of leftist periodicals like *The Messenger*, *The Daily Worker*, and *The Nation*.

In one such editorial, Pickens defended African American travel to Russia against charges that these tours signaled a sinister Soviet plot to convert America's gullible black population to Communism. "If Russia is only half as bad as American newspapers have pictured it," Pickens reasoned, "the best way in the world to turn any sane man against it would be to let him see it for himself […] [perhaps] Mississippi and New York Newspapers are afraid that if American Negroes see Moscow, they may conclude that it is a darn sight better civilization than what they see in Vicksburg and Yonkers." Pickens concluded by urging his readers to, "Draw your own conclusions, Sambo!"[88]

Pickens, in fact, had already decided to take his own advice. He had accepted an invitation from Lovett Fort-Whiteman to visit the Soviet Union following the International Conference of Oppressed Nations scheduled for the first month of the following year in Brussels.[89] Fort-Whiteman wrote to Pickens in late August outlining instructions on how to obtain a passport. If asked to give a reason for his trip, Fort-Whiteman told Pickens to respond that he was "going abroad for study and observation," and if pushed for further elaboration, he could quite honestly reply that he was "engaged

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[87] Ibid., 90.
[88] William Pickens, "Communism and the Negro," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 4, 1926. The same editorial was also published as "Russia and the Negroes," *Daily Worker*, August 2, 1926.
[89]Fort-Whiteman actually invited three men: Pickens, Hubert Harrison and George Weston. Only Pickens made the trip. Harrison, who was nicknamed the "Black Socrates," was a legendary street corner orator, editor of the Garveyite *Negro World* and an autodidact intellectual. He did not accept the invitation and died suddenly at the age of forty-four in December 1927. George Weston, a Garveyite, also seems to have opted out of the trip. Avery, *Up From Washington*, 116.

in social work and quite naturally interested in the institutions and social usages of other nations."[90] With the blessings of W.E.B. Du Bois and other top brass at the NAACP, Pickens sailed for Europe in November, periodically filing reports on his progress for the Associated Negro Press (ANP).

After a brief stay in London, he spent Christmas in Dresden with American friends. Pickens left Germany and traveled through Poland by train, arriving in Moscow on January 7. The Moscow winter did not dampen Pickens's spirits. Like other American visitors to Russia Pickens was warned to expect food shortages or worse. "[I was led to believe that] I would 'freeze' to death—Bolsheviks would eat me, or something like that," Pickens recalled. Though temperatures daily dipped well below zero, Pickens found the Red capital bustling with activity. During his brief two-week stay Pickens was provided with a full itinerary. He quickly realized, however, that "efficiency"—the watchword of American business culture— was a relative concept. Travel in Soviet Russia, Pickens observed, required the foreign visitor to resign himself to constant delays, mountains of bureaucratic red tape, and hours of waiting in various lines. Despite these glitches, Pickens was received everywhere "with almost embarrassing courtesy" as an honored guest whose status warranted audiences with several high-ranking officials.[91]

In a private meeting with Trotsky, who struck Pickens as "very clever" and more humble than his reputation suggested, the visiting NAACP official discussed African American politics with the famous revolutionary. Trotsky laughed at Pickens's

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[90] Lovett Fort-Whiteman to William Pickens, August 31, 1926. In William Pickens Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, General Correspondence, Sc Micro R-993, Reel 1.

[91] Russia Articles (Paper 9) in William Pickens Papers, Reel 4.; William Pickens, "London to Moscow," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 9, 1927.

description of Garveyism and advised Pickens that paternalistic whites were likely to do more harm than good to the cause of racial uplift in America.[92] In a separate meeting with Mikhail Kalinin, the titular head of the Soviet government, Pickens discussed Soviet policy toward national minorities and came away with the impression that the unique structure of the Soviet Union had successfully provided a great deal of freedom to these groups. On a personal level, President Kalinin was, in Pickens's estimation, "a great big likable boy." Over the course of his visit Pickens met several other well-known Soviet personages including Mme. Kameneva, Trotsky's sister and head of VOKS, and Lenin's sister, Mme. Oulianova.[93] As for Lenin, Pickens saw the goateed visage of the father of the revolution everywhere he went. Beneath the glass of the mausoleum, Pickens glimpsed the "pink red-whiskered face" of Lenin who appeared, "for all the world as if he had fallen asleep a few minutes ago."[94]

Pickens was also invited to a banquet at the Krestintern (Peasant International) held in honor of the Chinese revolutionary forces. Twenty-two Chinese generals attended the festivities, which included many speeches and many more vodka toasts. The Russians, Pickens noted, seemed intent on filming the day's proceedings and took several individual photographs of him as well. Flattered by the attention, it did not seem to occur to Pickens that the Soviets intended to use them for propaganda purposes.[95] On the other hand, after Pickens visited KUTV, he left convinced that it was not an ordinary college

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[92] William Pickens, "Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 16, 1927: pg. 5.; "Who Took the Rush Out Of Russia Asks Pickens!" *AfroAmerican (Baltimore)*, January 29, 1927.
[93] Article on Russia (Paper 9) in William Pickens Papers, Sc Micro R-993, Reel 4.
[94] William Pickens, "London to Moscow," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 9, 1927.
[95] Meredith Roman has analyzed images of African American delegates to various political conferences that appeared, often without captions of accompanying articles, in the Soviet press. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 70-74.

but "really a school for revolutionary ideas." In a familiar refrain, he added that the African American students at KUTV were "the most popular fellows in Moscow."[96] In his subsequent interactions with Soviet students, their keen interest in American race relations impressed Pickens.[97] It is likely that the students received briefings before Pickens arrived as VOKS preferred to leave little up to chance on these official tours and actively worked to prevent spontaneous interaction between foreigners and Soviet citizens. Nevertheless, Pickens was persuaded by Soviet hospitality and his own observations that the color line had no place in the New Russia. "There is less color prejudice in New York than in Mississippi; less in England than in New York; less in France than in England, and not a god's bit in Russia," Pickens declared.[98]

To better understand the Soviet position on religion, Pickens attended a performance of the satirical play "The Ten Commandments" at the Jewish theater and visited an Orthodox church. Although he was raised a Baptist, attended a Congregationalist college, and had belonged to Methodist Episcopal and non-denominational churches, Pickens recoiled at Christian fundamentalism and had publicly criticized the conservatism of Negro churches and ministers.[99] Like many African American intellectuals who traveled to Russia, Pickens was sympathetic to Soviet arguments against organized religion and therefore less bothered by reports of Soviet persecution of Christians than the general American public.[100] In spite of this bias,

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[96] William Pickens, "Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 23, 1927; 4th Article on Russia (Paper 11) in William Pickens Papers, Reel 4.
[97] Article on Russia (Paper 9) in William Pickens Papers, Reel 4.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Avery, *Up From Washington*, 92-95.
[100] This was also the case for Claude McKay, a freethinking rationalist, W.E.B. Du Bois a secular socialist, and certainly for Langston Hughes, who penned his own infamous attack on the

Pickens could not help being moved by the raw emotion of the choir's melodious singing, which to his practiced ears sounded "more like that of the American Negroes than anything else I have ever heard anywhere in the world."[101]

If the soul of Old Russia spoke to Pickens through the choir, he found the spirit of the New Russia on the stages and screens of Moscow's cinema houses and theaters. Pickens was able to see Eisenstein's masterpiece *Battleship Potemkin* as well as a film adaptation of Gorky's "The Mother (*Mat'*)," both of which he found vastly superior in quality to the "sex rot" on offer in American movie theaters. On stage, Pickens attended one of the first performances of Segei Tretyakov's play "Roar, China!" (*Rychi Kitai*). From his seat Pickens marveled at the skill of the cast who seemed to have mastered the mysterious alchemy that combined to great effect "the factors of art and propaganda." In Pickens' interpretation the play, which revolved around the British Navy's response to the death of a white American businessman killed by a Chinese worker, provided trenchant commentary on the "solidarity of the white race against the colored."[102] The performance was a highlight of Pickens's stay and may have inspired his subsequent involvement with the "Hands Off China" movement.[103]

It is more difficult to gauge the broader impact that his brief Russian sojourn—he spent in total only thirteen days there—had on Pickens. Like Du Bois, he never trusted the horror stories he had read about the Soviet Union. "Perhaps even hell is not as bad the opposition reports it to be," Pickens quipped in his first attempt to put his experiences in

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conservatism of the Negro Churches, "Of Cowards and Churches," on the eve of his own Russian sojourn in 1932.

[101] Pickens, "Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 16, 1927.

[102] Pickens, "Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 23, 1927.

[103] Avery, *Up From Washington*, 119.

Russia into writing, adding, "Russia is not any seventh heaven; it has poverty, inefficiency, demagoguery and some robbery." Despite its flaws, however, Pickens had found much to admire in the epic drama of a "plain people, who come up like the bowels of a volcano from the nether regions, now standing there in the sunlight and attempting to achieve their own destiny."[104]

Compared to Du Bois's Russian-themed national speaking tour, which continued into the spring of 1927, Pickens public comments on the Soviet Union were modest and delivered on a far smaller scale. He gave a single public lecture, entitled "What I Saw In Russia," to the Harlem Education Forum.[105] Pickens was actively planning a return trip to the Soviet Union to attend the tenth anniversary celebrations in Moscow. The logistics, however, involved political maneuvering in addition to the more mundane arrangements of trans-Atlantic travel. First and foremost, Pickens needed the NAACP to grant him leave, hopefully with full pay. In the best-case scenario, they would even agree to fund his travel costs. The Board, however, had begun to fear Communist infiltration as well as the domestic political fallout of appearing too pro-Soviet. Pickens tried to address these fears in a letter to the Board Members. "Detractors of the Association [NAACP] and enemies of the colored people will not fail to improve any opportunity to connect the organization with the bogy of 'bolshevism,'" Pickens wrote, adding that he shared the

[104] "Bolshevism as Seen by a Colored American," manuscript, January 27, 1927, William Pickens Papers, Reel 4.
[105] "Pickens to Address Educational Forum," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 16, 1927.

board's hesitation "to give the enemy a dangerous if, even if false, advantage" even though he had "no personal fear of such malignment."[106]

Despite securing a radio-gram invitation from Mme. Kameneva, requesting his presence as an official guest of Soviet government at the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the board continued to stonewall Pickens.[107] Even the board member most sympathetic to Pickens's position, W.E.B. Du Bois, responded coolly to his overtures. Pickens wrote to Du Bois suggesting that they at least send a joint cable to the Soviets and informed Du Bois that he too was invited to attend the celebrations. Du Bois response was swift and to the point. "I do not think if I were you I would press the matter about the Russia trip or anything concerning it," he told Pickens, adding confidentially that the board seemed set against granting him furlough.[108]

Though he was forced to abandon his plans to attend the anniversary festivities, Pickens still hoped to find a way to return to the Soviet Union. The following spring, Pickens placed an advertisement in the Negro press that announced in bold type, "You Ought To See Russia." Pickens announced openings on a tour of the Soviet Union in late June, at the all-inclusive price of nine hundred dollars, for a group of eight "colored liberals." The advertisement ran for two weeks in the *AfroAmerican* but evidently Pickens was unable to fill his group and canceled the tour.[109]

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[106] William Pickens to NAACP Board Members, October 6, 1927 in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 22, Frame 1002.
[107] Announcement in *Opportunity* (November, 1927): 342.
[108] William Pickens to W.E.B. Du Bois September 23, 1927; October 6, 1927, W.E.B. Du Bois to William Pickens October 8, 1927, in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 22.
[109] Advertisement, *AfroAmerican (Baltimore*) April 28, 1928; May 5, 1928.; Pickens may have had at least one prospective tour member. Dr. Lewis McMillan, a Howard and Yale Divinty alumni and former Professor at Shaw University had written to Du Bois asking for information

That summer the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern convened in Moscow. The delegates adopted the now infamous "Black Belt Thesis," which identified African Americans as an oppressed nationality and affirmed their right to self-determination in an autonomous Negro Soviet Republic whose proposed boundaries resembled a Rorschach inkblot spilled beneath the Mason-Dixon line.[110] This seemingly quixotic policy was the brainchild of Stalin who had been Lenin's Commissar of Nationalities before he moved to consolidate his power from his position as head of the Communist Party. The consequences of this policy shift for Soviet-Negro diplomacy presented themselves over the course of several years.

Though elements of the original relationship survived relatively unchanged into the 1930s, the nature of the African American-Soviet relations did undergo immense change as a result of Stalin's rise to power. In the short-term the most significant result of the new policy toward African Americans on Soviet cultural diplomacy was the sidelining of middle class African American intellectuals in favor of party members. Known for its ultra-sectarian turn, the era of the First Five Year Plan encouraged attacks on liberals as "social fascists" and jettisoned compromise or coalition building. Interestingly, for men like Du Bois and Pickens, throughout this period animosity for the American Communist Party coexisted with great admiration for the Soviet Union.

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about planning a trip to Russia. Du Bois referred him to Pickens and the Communist Williana Jones Burroughs. Lewis to Du Bois December 8, 1927 and Du Bois to Lewis December 13, 1927 in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Reel 24.

[110] See Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 315-356.

As a result when in 1930 a YMCA official from Indianapolis wrote to Du Bois asking whether he knew of any opportunities for African Americans to study in Russia, the scholar was pessimistic in his response. He wrote:

> The Soviet government was trying very hard to get hold of Negro students in the years past. Even at present, I am sure they are more than willing to have them, but the Communist Party in the United States has been re-organized and probably no colored student would be sent who did not have their recommendation.[111]

What Du Bois seems to have not understood is that the CPUSA had neither the ability nor the desire to make policy changes independent of the wishes of the Soviet Union. The Soviets had determined that continued outreach to African Americans would proceed exclusively through party channels in an effort to deliberately marginalize ideologically independent "bourgeois" leaders like Du Bois.

Pickens found his vocal support for American recognition of the Soviet Union rewarded by a failed attempt, orchestrated by Communist delegates, to publicly embarrass him by interrupting his speech at the Second World Congress Against Imperialism held in Frankfurt in the summer of 1929. The experience turned Pickens into a committed opponent of the CPUSA and tempered his admiration for the Soviet Union. Pickens's disillusionment even caused him to question the spirit of international solidarity that had once formed the core of Negro-Soviet relations. "These people [Communists] will never understand the Negro and his situation in America," Pickens wrote shortly after his confrontation with the Communist hecklers in Germany, "the Negro in Mississippi will not act against the interests of the Negroes of Mississippi in order to aid white people in Vladivostok, or even to aid black people in Kenya or in

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[111] W.E.B. Du Bois to F.E. De Frantz, September 6, 1930, Du Bois Papers, Reel 31, Frame 37.

Chicago […] Only on the common interests can there be cooperation and unity of action."[112] The cooling of Du Bois and Pickens's attitude toward the Soviet Union corresponded with a growing anti-Communist sentiment. Later, when the CPUSA began to openly attack the NAACP in the midst of the political firestorm surrounding the 1931 Communist-led defense of the Scottsboro boys, both men would for a time become ardent anti-Communists.

On the Soviet side, 1928 also marked a departure from the cultural diplomacy of the NEP years. As a symbol of the leftist internationalism of the Westernizers within the Bolshevik leadership, VOKS presented an ideologically irresistible target for Stalin. VOKS personnel and officials were among the first to feel the effects of his Cultural Revolution. Not surprisingly Kameneva, whose famous brother was now public enemy number one within the Soviet Union and whose husband had been expelled from the Central Committee, lost her position at VOKS. Other prominent officials who had been involved in African American-Soviet relations also found themselves swept up in the turmoil. Karl Radek, the former head of the Comintern who was expelled from the Party and exiled to Siberia. A jazz fan who hosted Du Bois in 1926, Radek likely never received the thank you note Du Bois addressed to "Mr. Karl Radik, The Kremlin, Moscow."[113]

Under Stalin, Soviet foreign policy moved away from the promotion of world revolution and became more insular as collectivization and industrialization dominated the political landscape. Stalin called for the creation of an authentic Soviet proletarian

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[112] Pickens, "For the Recognition of the Soviet Union," *Labor Defender*, November 1928, Quoted in Avery, *Up From Washington*, 120-121.
[113] Du Bois to Radek, August 15, 1927, Du Bois Papers, Reel 24, Frame 514.

culture that adhered to the strictures of socialist realism. These shifts had the effect of making Soviet cultural relations even more one-sided than they had been in the NEP years. The first Five Year Plan coincided with an unprecedented level of Western tourism to the Soviet Union. Stalin's genius for propaganda and passion for bureaucratic centralization helped to pioneer cultural diplomacy for a closed society.

In the ensuing "Red Decade," African American-Soviet relations changed as middle class African American professionals and students came to work and live in the Soviet Union. These men and women figured prominently in a revived campaign to bolster the image of the Soviet Union as a society free of all racial discrimination orchestrated by an African American journalist who himself was drawn to Moscow by the promise of racial equality. While the Soviet Union continued to court prominent artists and intellectuals like Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson, it was the reporting of a relatively unknown journalist from Minneapolis named Homer Smith that elevated ordinary African Americans to the status of race ambassadors.

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Stalin's Man in the African American Press: Race Diplomacy in the Red Decade.

On June 12, 1932, Homer Smith, an aspiring African American journalist from Minneapolis, boarded a transatlantic steamer departing from New York harbor. A few weeks earlier, Smith had abandoned his studies at the University of Minnesota, quit his job, and bid farewell to his family and friends. As he watched Manhattan disappear in the wake of the ship, Smith's thoughts turned to his final destination. He was not bound for London or Paris, but Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union. Like thousands of Americans drawn to the "Red Mecca" in the 1930s, Smith wanted to observe the Soviet "experiment" with his own eyes.[1] Smith had read about the "classless society that was abuilding in Russia," but was most intrigued by Soviet claims to have completely eradicated racism. "I yearned to stand taller than I had ever stood," Smith later explained in his memoir, "to breathe total freedom in great exhilarating gulps, to avoid the hurts that were increasingly becoming the lot of men (and women) of color in the United States." Based on all that he heard and read about the Soviet Union, the communist nation seemed to offer a chance to "escape color discrimination entirely."[2]

Smith's journey, from Minneapolis to Moscow and back, would take a full thirty years to complete. It traced a circuitous route, full of twists and turns, and featured an extended layover in post-war Ethiopia. This chapter will focus on what drew Smith to the

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[1] In fact, one year before Smith's departure, another Midwesterner, John Scott, left the University of Wisconsin and found his way to Magnitogorsk, the rugged industrial city modeled on Gary, Indiana. Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989).

[2] Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia: A Memoir* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964), 1-2.

Soviet Union, why he stayed for more than a decade, and why he left permanently in 1945. Smith provided partial answers to these questions in *Black Man in Red Russia*, a memoir published shortly after his return to the United States in 1963. Like other autobiographies written during the Cold War, Smith's carefully crafted version of events contained distortions, self-serving omissions, and a few outright lies.[3] Nevertheless, in the absence of other sources, many historians have accepted Smith's memoir at face value in spite of its shortcomings.[4] Drawing on previously unavailable Soviet archival materials and declassified State Department and FBI surveillance files, I have reconstructed a more accurate portrait of Smith's journey to the Soviet Union and conclusively determined his formal role within the Soviet foreign policy apparatus.[5]

While his life story is remarkable, Smith's experiences provide a key chapter in the story of how U.S. race relations were internationalized in the interwar period. As the only African American member of the foreign press corps in Moscow, Smith's coverage of the Soviet Union in the African American press comprehensively documented nearly every African American who lived and worked in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and played a major part in shaping the popular narrative of the Soviet Union as a society free

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[3] Smith submitted copies of the manuscript of his memoir in support of his application for reentry visa to the United States and identified himself as an anti-communist and a defector. He was granted the visa after two full decades of denials. "In Re: Homer Hamilton Smith," May 9, 1962, United States Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service. Homer Smith FBI File, Obtained by author in October 2014 via Freedom of Information Act request.

[4] Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919*-1950 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 147-153. Meredith Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*: *African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 152-153.

[5] Both of these source bases are ideologically motivated and require interpretative caution. At the same time, they provided key information left out of Smith's memoir or in the case of Smith's Comintern file, the most record of Smith's life before 1932. Personal Dossier: Homer Hamilton Smith, Russian State Archive of Social-Political History, Moscow [RGASPI] "Autobiography," July 17, 1936; "Gomer Smit-Biograficheskaia spravka," August 25, 1943, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.

of racism for African American readers. Smith's focus on long-term African American residents provides a scholarly framework for viewing African American engagement with the Soviet in the 1930s that is less reliant on the relatively brief tours of famous literary figures, celebrities, or radicals.[6] As an agent of Soviet foreign policy, Smith invites a reassessment of the role of race, antiracism, and African Americans within the U.S.-Soviet relations and challenges the historical narratives surrounding African American engagement with the Soviet Union. Smith was both a pioneer and a propagandist, yet neither of these labels accurately captures the complexity of his lived experience or his humanity. Rather than condemning or celebrating Smith, this chapter uses Smith's Soviet experiences to plumb the centrality of American race relations to US-Soviet relations more than a decade before they became a central flash point of Cold War propaganda battles.

Born Homer Hamilton Smith, Jr. in 1899 in the small town of Quitman, Mississippi, Smith was the only son of Homer and Martha Smith.[7] Like the majority of African American men in Mississippi at the turn of the century, his father worked as a

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[6] In recent years literary scholars have devoted serious attention to African American engagement with the Soviet Union. See Kate Baldwin *Beyond the Color Line: Reading Encounters Between Red and Black, 1922-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Dorothy West's Paradise: A Biography of Race and Class* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012). Historians have focused on celebrities like Paul Robeson or obscure political radicals like the African American Communist Lovett Fort-Whiteman. See David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 282-3; Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*. Roman's *Opposing Jim Crow* is a notable exception.

[7] Smith supplied many of the details in this biographical sketch as a formal requirement for position within the Comintern. I confirmed the family's moves using census records and information provided in Smith's FBI file. "Autobiography," July 17, 1936. RGASPI f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147; D.M. to J.C. Strickland, "Chatwood Hall, aka, Homer Hamilton Smith (True Name)," memorandum, February 8, 1946, 1-2, Homer Smith FBI File, 100-343164-2. Obtained via Freedom of Information Act Request.
"United States Census, 1900, 1910," Homer Smith, Natchez, Ward 2, Adams, Mississippi, United States; citing sheet, family 391, NARA, microfilm publication T624, FHL microfilm 1374744.

sharecropper. His mother was the daughter of a preacher, and raised Homer and four daughters to be God-fearing Christians. During Homer's youth, the family moved frequently, first across the state to Natchez and then three hundred miles north to Memphis, Tennessee. In 1917, the family picked up stakes and prepared to leave once again. This time they joined the hundreds of thousands of Southern-born African Americans streaming into industrial centers across the North and Midwest during the first wave of what historians would later call the Great Migration.[8] The Smiths settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota a growing city with a small but vibrant African American population. By 1920, Southern migrants like the Smiths accounted for nearly half of Minnesota's African American population, which in turn was heavily concentrated in the Twin Cities.[9] Though it could not compete with the burgeoning Black metropolises like Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, or New York, Minneapolis was developing into Minnesota's hub of African American intellectual, cultural, and social life.[10]

Unlike his father who found work stocking goods in a warehouse, Homer Smith, Jr., turned to the United States Postal Service for employment. As one of the only federal agencies that did not draw the color line and one of the few industries with an interracial labor union, the USPS offered a pathway to the middle class for thousands of African

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[8] Pushed by the indignities of racial discrimination and pulled by the promise of industrial jobs, an estimated 300,000 to 1,000,000 African Americans left the South between 1915 and 1920. See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010), 3-5.

[9] In 1920, 83% of Minnesota's 8,809 African American residents lived in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Based on census data presented in David Vassar Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 30.

[10] Carolyn Wedin, "Harlem Renaissance West: Minneapolis and St. Paul, the "Twin Cities" of Minnesota," in Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West: The New Negro's Western Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 140-153.

Americans in the Jim Crow-era.[11] Smith joined the postal workers' union in 1917, which provided the added bonus of allowing him to avoid military service in WWI, as postal workers were among the groups specifically exempted from conscription by Congress.[12] When the Depression hit Minneapolis in the early 1930s, Smith's "safe, secure job" as a postal clerk spared him from the worst effects of the economic crash. [13]

While sorting mail, Smith dreamed of becoming a journalist. At the age of twenty-two, he enrolled in the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism as a part-time student.[14] Soon Smith was writing for the student newspaper alongside future Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Harrison Salisbury.[15] Not content with covering Gopher football, even for "the world's largest college newspaper," Smith adopted the pen name "Chatwood Hall" and began to freelance for the *Twin City Herald*, a local African American newspaper.[16] In January of 1931, when the *Herald*'s editor and publisher, Cecil

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[11] For a comprehensive look at African American postal workers in the twentieth century see Philip F. Rubio, *There's Always Work in the Post Office: African Americans and the Fight for Jobs, Justice and Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 23-51.

[12] Otherwise, Smith almost certainly would have been drafted. "Selective Service Act," H.R. 3545, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States,* 65th Cong., 1st sess., May 18, 1917, 79.

[13] Most African Americans in Minneapolis were not so lucky. David Vassar Taylor writes that in the Depression-ravaged Twin Cities, "the sole Black group possessing economic security was composed of postal workers employed by the federal government." Taylor, "The Blacks," in June Drenning Holmquist, ed., *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 83. Smith, *Black Man In Red Russia*, 1.

[14] University records show that Smith enrolled as an "unclassed student" from 1922 to 1928. The term referred to a person of at least twenty-one years of age who could not meet the standard entrance requirements and gained admission by applying to the Student Works' Committee. University of Minnesota Staff/Student Directories 1922-1928, Smith, Homer, AU (2637) 710 E Lake, So 1399. Records Provided by Erin George.

[15] The two men would meet again when both were covering the Eastern Front during WWII. Salisbury wrote the forward to Smith's memoir. Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia.*

[16] Though it could not compete with larger metropolises like Chicago or New York, Minneapolis was developing into Minnesota's hub of African American intellectual, cultural, and social life. Carolyn Wedin, "Harlem Renaissance West: Minneapolis and St. Paul, the "Twin Cities" of

E. Newman, decided to launch a monthly "news-magazine for the Negro" called *Timely Digest*, he hired Smith as an associate editor.[17]

Smith also illustrated a regular cartoon strip for the *Herlad* called, "Take It Or Leave It." The cartoons combined popular black history with an eclectic selection of racial trivia in the spirit of "Ripley's Believe It Or Not." Smith trumpeted the African ancestry of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, but also introduced his readers to Walter Mahone, whose only claim to fame was an extra finger on both of his hands. The strip's tone varied dramatically from week to week. One frame celebrated the military heroics of Henry Johnson a decorated veteran of the all-black WWI regiment dubbed the "Harlem Hellfighters," while the next week's strip celebrated Sambo Johnson, a black New Yorker whom Smith credited with secretly inventing ice cream.[18] Drawing inspiration from the popular historian and journalist J.A. Rogers, Smith's cartoon chronicled black achievements in literature, art, sports, and entertainment to counter the era's blanket assertions of black inferiority.[19]

In the fall of 1931, Smith's career received a major boost when his article on the "Minneapolis riot" was featured as a cover story in the October issue of the *Crisis*, the

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Minnesota," in Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West: The New Negro's Western Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 140-153.

[17] "New Monthly Magazine," *The Afro-American*, January 31, 1931. Cecil E. Newman was the first African American in Minneapolis to make the "Who's Who in America" list and the first African American publisher to be inducted into Sigma Delta Chi, a professional journalism fraternity. He was later elected president of the Minneapolis Urban League. "Awards to Be Presented to Outstanding Journalists at Ninth Headline Banquet," *The Lincoln Clarion* 24, no. 22 (April 5, 1957).

[18] Homer Smith, "Take It or Leave It…" *Twin City Herald*, February 6, 1932; February 18, 1932; April 2, 1932; April 9, 1932.

[19] Rogers launched his historically themed strip in 1934 called "Your History," which ran in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and many other African American newspapers nationally. He later published a collection of the illustrations in book form. J. A. Rogers, *Your History: From the Beginning of Time to Present* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1940).

monthly journal of the NAACP edited by W.E.B. Du Bois.[20] The exposè detailed in vivid prose the events surrounding a mob's attempt to drive a black family from its Minneapolis home earlier that summer. Smith was well positioned to break the story because the homeowner, Arthur A. Lee, was a fellow postal employee. As in many northern cities, restrictive covenants and homeowner's associations had largely confined Minneapolis's African American residents to a few highly segregated neighborhoods.[21] African Americans, like Lee, who were able to buy homes outside these areas faced harassment, anonymous threats, and even violence.

Shortly after moving into his modest new home, Lee returned from work to find a sign on his front porch that read, "No Niggers Allowed In this Neighborhood. This Means You."[22] Events escalated rapidly as members of the neighborhood improvement association marched to Lee's house where they were joined by a swelling crowd of onlookers. The mob besieged Lee's home for several nights, while the army veteran sat trapped inside clutching his shotgun. In Smith's telling, the atmosphere of this tense standoff resembled a perverse carnival. The crowd shouted obscenities and some even threw rocks and bricks, while the press, city police, and enterprising refreshment vendors looked on. After a final attempt to rush the house on July 15, the crowd dispersed as quickly as it had formed and the neighborhood association retreated under pressure from local politicians and media. While the "Minneapolis riot" had failed to evict the Lees, the incident had once again revealed the tense state of race relations in the American

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[20] Chatwood Hall, "A Roman Holiday in Minneapolis," *The Crisis* (October, 1931): 337-339.
[21] In 1930 two neighborhoods, the near North Side and the Seven Corners, contained 50.2% of the city's 4,176 African American residents. Taylor, "The Blacks," 81.
[22] Hall, "Roman Holiday," 338.

Midwest.[23] For Smith, the Lee family's successful stand against a white mob was a heroic act of resistance against the rising tide of racial discrimination in America.

The *Crisis* article reflected the maturation of Smith's journalistic and political sensibilities. While it is difficult to pinpoint Smith's radicalization, by the time his spirited attack on American racism appeared in print, the journalist had become increasingly active in the left-wing political circles of Minneapolis. Smith connected with radical student groups, attended street rallies, and occasionally dropped by the Communist Party headquarters downtown. In the early 1930s, the American Communist Party (CPUSA) made a concerted push to recruit African Americans and promoted the visibility of its black members by putting them forward as candidates in local, state, and national elections.[24] While Smith never joined the Party, several postal workers later told the FBI that Smith was "quite an agitator" who vociferously proclaimed his "Communistic sympathies [and] frequently defended the position of Russia." According to the same investigation, Smith had openly discussed his desire to move to the Soviet Union.[25] Smith himself later elaborated on his relationship with the CPUSA in a report to Soviet authorities. "I had close contacts with the Party in Minneapolis and rendered as

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[23] In 1925, Ossian Sweet was charged with murder after the African American doctor shot and killed a member of the white mob that had surrounded his recently purchased home in a white Detroit neighborhood. In a celebrated trial, Clarence Darrow won his acquittal. Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civi Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Holt, 2005).

[24] In 1932, Robert Turner, a twenty-five-year-old African American worker from St. Paul, was chosen as the CP candidate for Minnesota Secretary of State. The following year, Asa Mitchell, an African American Party member from Minneapolis ran for alderman of that city's fourth-ward on the CP ticket.. "Young Communist is Candidate for State Secretary," *Twin City Herald*, June 25, 1932. "Crowds Cheer Ford Negro Vice-President Communist Nominee," *Twin City Herald*, September 10, 1932.

[25] Smith's coworkers also noted his intelligence, work ethic, and, until, he left town without giving any notice, his reliability. Memorandum for [redacted], October 17, 1945; Memorandum from D.M. Ladd to J.C. Strickland, "Chatwood Hall, aka, Homer Hamilton Smith (True Name)," February 8, 1946, 1-2, Homer Smith FBI File.

much assistance as I could to the movement," Smith maintained. This assistance took many forms including, "spreading verbal propaganda among Negroes, verbal exposure of reformists, passing literature to Negroes" and, less impressively, giving comrades rides in his car. "The only difference between me and a formal Communist," Smith proclaimed, "is that he has a Party ticket and I have not."[26]

While Smith almost certainly embellished his political involvement to retroactively bolster his ideological credibility—a necessary survival strategy in Stalin's Soviet Union—in early 1932 his interest in the Soviet experiment led him to write to James Ford, the most prominent African American in the CPUSA and the Party's Vice-Presidential Candidate. Smith had heard that Ford was recruiting African Americans to travel to Moscow to work on a film project.[27] Tentatively titled *Black and White,* the film was billed as "the first authentic picture of Negro life in America […] devoid of buffoonery."[28] The African American press celebrated the potential of the Soviet film to provide a positive representation of the race on the silver screen and applauded the project's broader mission to "create closer cultural ties between the Negroes of this country and the workers of the Soviet Union."[29] Interestingly, the film project was organized shortly after a VOKS official in Moscow rejected a proposal from the Afro-Caribbean Communist George Padmore to organize a delegation "of left Negro

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[26] Smith's non-party status made him ideologically suspect in the Soviet Union. He applied for admission to the CPSU but was denied. "Autobiography," July 27, 1936. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147

[27] James Ford to Homer Smith, April 24, 1932. Louise Thompson Patterson Papers (LTTP), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Box 16, Folder 9.

[28] "Cooperating Committee for Production of a Soviet Film On Negro Life," press release, March 18, 1932. LTTP, Box 12, Folder 6.

[29] "Russia To Produce Film of Race Life in America," *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1932. "Stage Stars Embark for Russia to Make Picture," *Chicago Defender*, June 18, 1932.

intellectuals who stand very close to the revolutionary movement" to attend the 15th anniversary celebrations as "an expenditure absolutely beyond our means."[30]

To Smith, who had no training or interest in acting, the film project was a means to an end.[31] While many of the other cast members viewed the trip as an adventure or an exotic vacation, Smith hoped to find a way to remain in Moscow permanently.[32] Smith's master plan, which he immediately put into motion by sending Soviet officials a notarized affidavit attesting to his expertise in "certain departments of advanced American Postal technique," was to secure employment with the Soviet Postal service while serving as a foreign correspondent for the African American press.[33] In his memoir, Smith downplayed any political motivation for his desire to travel to the Soviet Union, citing youthful "wanderlust," Jim Crow, and a dearth of economic opportunities in the United States.[34]

It is clear, however, that Smith was also ideologically invested in the Soviet project. In a letter to Louise Thompson, a young leftist who took over from Ford as the group's coordinator, Smith explained: "Several of my petty-bourgeois and proletarian

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[30] Padmore was kicked out of the Party two years later. George Padmore to Isador Amdur, November 14, 1932; Isador Amdur to George Padmore, December 2, 1932. GARF f. 5283, op. 3., d. 405. An American Communist wrote to Kameneva (who was no longer in charge) requesting they arrange a tour of the Soviet Union for "Negro writers, professionals, and students." Marcel Scherer to Comrade Kameneva, December 17, 1931. GARF f. 5283, op. 3., d. 405.

[31] Wayland Rudd and Thurston Lewis were the only group members with any acting experience.

[32] The novelist Zora Neale Hurston mocked the trip as a passing fad. Noting that several mutual acquaintances from Harlem's literary set had signed on for the film project, Hurston wrote to NAACP chief Walter White, to ask sarcastically, "How is it that you did not go to Russia with the great migration?" Zora Neale Hurston to Walter and Gladys White, July/August 1932, in Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life In Letters* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 168.

[33] Homer Smith to Louise Thompson, May 25, 1932. LTPP, Box16, Folder 9.

[34] In his memoir, Smith claimed to be twenty-two and single when he left for Moscow. He was actually a decade older and married. Smith wrote about the *Black and White* project, but did not disclose that he was part of the cast. Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 10-11.

friends to whom I have casually mentioned a desire to go to Russia, strongly denounced such a move as a 'great mistake,' and expressed the conviction that the Soviet Union is a land of slavery, morons, and poverty (!) so overwhelmed are they by bourgeois ideology and capitalistic press lies."[35] These flourishes demonstrate Smith's familiarity, if not mastery, of Communist jargon and thinking. Despite the project's close affiliation with the CPUSA, political orthodoxy and party membership were not pre-requisites for participation. [36] As with other cultural exchanges, the Soviets preferred sympathetic African American "fellow-travelers" to dyed-in-the-wool Reds.[37] Ultimately, Smith's willingness to pay his own fare, which he financed with a loan from the Postal Workers Credit Union, was probably the most important factor in securing his spot among the motley crew of twenty-two African Americans bound for Moscow.[38]

In July of 1932, the group arrived in Moscow to much fanfare. Including Smith, the group boasted four journalists in addition to the poet Langston Hughes and the novelist Dorothy West who also published non-fiction accounts of the trip.[39] After several weeks of excursions meant to showcase the hospitality of the Soviet government, the cast reported to the Meschrabprom studio. From the outset the film's production was marred by disorganization and delays. One version of the script, written by the German

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[35] Homer Smith to Louise Thompson, (n.d). LTPP, Box 16, Folder 19.
[36] In fact, the most thorough examination of the group's political make-up indicates that Alan MKenzie and McNairy Lewis were the only CPUSA members at the time. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, 248fn48.
[37] Hughes, Louise Thompson, and Smith fit the classic mold of "fellow-travelers" who were central to Soviet cultural diplomacy in the 1930s. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 207-284.
[38] Smith never repaid the $800 loan, which understandably upset his coworkers. Memorandum from D.M. Ladd to J.C. Strickland, "Chatwood Hall, aka, Homer Hamilton Smith (True Name)," February 8, 1946, 1. Homer Smith FBI File.
[39] The groups' other three other journalists were Ted Poston, Henry Lee Moon, and Loren Miller.

director and translated by the African American Communist Lovett Fort-Whitman, resembled a strange amalgam of Stalinist realism and science fiction. Even a last-minute intervention from Langston Hughes could not save the convoluted mess.[40] Set in Birmingham, Alabama, the plot revolved around a band of African American steel workers and domestic servants, led by a white union organizer, fighting to overthrow the ruling classes of both races. In the climatic scene, just as it appeared the African American workers' revolution would be crushed by bloodthirsty bosses and landowners, the Red Army swooped in to save the day.[41]

If the cast balked at this farcical portrayal of the "true character" of African American life, the director was less than pleased with the racial authenticity of his actors. The director's disappointment in the group's collective lack of acting, dancing, or singing skills—the film was a musical after all and African Americans were supposed to posses these abilities innately—was compounded by their physical appearance.[42] "We needed genuine Negroes and they sent us a bunch of *metisi* [mixed bloods]," Smith overheard one of the director's Russian assistants complain.[43] In spite of all these internal problems, a thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations ultimately killed the film project.

Tellingly, the project was abandoned, on the express order of top-party official Lazar Kagonovich, after a Col. Hugh Cooper, an influential American engineer with

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[40] Langston Hughes, *I Wonder As I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), 77-82

[41] Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 140-141.

[42] Only two of the cast members, Wayland Rudd and Sylvia Garner, had professional acting experience. Hughes, *I Wonder As I Wander*, 70.

[43] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 24. Like other Soviet artistic endeavors that featured African or African American characters, *Black and White* inadvertently traded in the racist and paternalistic tropes it claimed to reject. See Maxim Matusevich, "An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans and the Soviet Everyday," *Race & Class* 49, no. 4 (2008): 64-77.

extensive Soviet contacts cautioned that the film could dissuade a new U.S. administration from extending diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union and dissuade private American companies from investing in the Soviet modernization effort.[44] Faced with a decision to back a questionable venture with great symbolic importance or to sacrifice that venture in the interest of securing American recognition, the Soviets hardly blinked. Considering the imminent shift in the focus of Soviet foreign policy toward constructing a broad-based antifascist alliance and Stalin's realist approach to foreign affairs throughout the 1930s, the decision to cancel the film is not surprising at all. The collapse of the film project sparked controversy as cast members split into factions and published conflicting accounts of the film's cancelation. One side accused the Soviets of betraying Black America in order to curry favor with Washington, while the other rushed to the Soviets' defense and suggested that the film had merely been postponed.[45] In the ensuing chaos, a project designed to boost the reputation of the Soviet Union among African Americans and highlight cross-cultural collaboration appeared to have backfired.

While it undermined Soviet-African American relations in the short term, the fallout proved fleeting and limited in scope and by no means signaled the end of the relationship for either side. Nor did it represent more than a temporary, tactical retreat from anti-American propaganda with a racial focus. In fact, the film fiasco inadvertently

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[44] "[I think] we can do without this film [*Black and White*]," Kaganovich wrote, adding that the project had failed to secure permission from the Central Committee in the first place. My translation. (*sto mozhno obojtis' bez jetoj fil'my).* Kaganovich to Stalin, August 3, 1932 as quoted in Kirill Anderson and Leonid Maksimenkov, eds., *Kremlevskii kinoteatr. 1928-1953. Dokumenty* [The Kremlin Movie Theater. 1928-53. Documents] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005), 191 [footnote 3].

[45] Hughes, *I Wonder As I* Wander, 98. Negroes Adrift in 'Uncle Tom's' Russian Cabin," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 11, 1932. "Soviet Film Charge Denied," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1932. See also Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, 139-143; Gimore*, Defying Dixie*, 144-147.

provided the Soviets with something more valuable to its African American cultural relations strategy than a successful propaganda film. In addition to the writer Langston Hughes, who secured permission and a generous stipend from the Soviet authorities to tour Central Asia and publish his observations in a travelogue that doubled as eloquent propaganda for the Soviet civilizing mission, a handful of other *Black and White* cast members decided to stay in the Soviet Union despite the unceremonious termination of their brief film careers.[46] Of those who remained, none contributed more to the development of a streamlined Soviet propaganda strategy tailored to African American audiences than Homer Smith.

True to his original plan, Smith signed a three-year contract as a "foreign specialist" within the Moscow office of the Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs (Narkompotchtel). Smith later boasted of introducing the "simplicity and efficiency" of the U.S. Postal Service into a Soviet system riddled with redundancy, bureaucratic red tape, and petty corruption.[47] By the fall of 1933, under the byline Chatwood Hall, Smith began writing a regular syndicated column in the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most influential and widely distributed African American newspapers in the country.[48] Smith also agreed to serve as the resident Moscow correspondent for the Associated Negro

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[46] See Langston Hughes, *A Negro Looks at Central Asia* (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., 1934). Hughes reworked much of the same material in articles published in the Negro press between 1933 and 1946 (the majority of these articles were published in the 1940s) as well as in the autobiographical travelogue, *I Wonder As I Wander*, published in 1956.

[47] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 10.

[48] For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Smith as the author of all articles written under his pen name "Chatwood Hall." In 1930 the *Defender*'s circulation of 110, 000 was more than twice that of it's nearest competitor the New York *Age*. By mid-decade, however, this number had fallen to 73,000, and nearly went bankrupt in 1938. Meanwhile the *Pittsburgh Courier* soared to 250,000 in 1937 to become the leading African American national newspaper. Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press In The Middle West, 1865-1985* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 40.

Press, a pioneering wire service founded by Claude Barnett that placed stories in dozens of African American newspapers. At the time of Smith's arrival in Moscow only a handful of national newspapers, and not a single African American newspaper, had reporters stationed in the Soviet capital.[49] Before Smith, African American editors had relied on travelers, expatriates, and the "time-honored method of clipping and rewriting" for coverage of the Soviet Union in particular and international news in general.[50] The acquisition of a Moscow correspondent promised exclusive stories from the Soviet Union at a time when interest in the communist nation was at an all-time high.[51]

Smith's open sympathy for the Soviet regime, which he did little to disguise in his columns and much to disguise in his memoir, was not an issue for his employers. On the contrary, American editors deliberately assigned ideological "fellow travelers" to the Moscow desk in order to promote access to the notoriously secretive regime.[52] As a financial investment, a sympathetic journalist provided his employer with a degree of

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[49] Only *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily News*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and the *New York Herald Tribune* in addition to the two major wire services, the Associated Press and the United Press, had reporters stationed in the Soviet Union. Though Smith and the close-knit corps of reporters who formed the heart of Moscow's "American Colony" shared the same profession, they moved in different social circles and rarely interacted. Walter Duranty (*New York Times*), Eugene Lyons (United Press), and William Henry Chamberlain (*The Christian Science Monitor*) were the leading personalities of the American press corps in Moscow. For collective and individual profiles of these men see S.J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty, the New York Times Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Whitman Bassow, *The Moscow Correspondents: Reporting on Russia from the Revolution to Glasnost;* James William Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise: Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937, A Case Study of Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

[50] Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett* (Haworth, New Jersey: St. Johann Press, 2002), 127.

[51] That said, African American interest in the Ethiopian Crisis dwarfed all other international news stories for the period in question.

[52] Walter Duranty, the dean of the American correspondents, for example was known to his critics as "Stalin's Man at *The New York Times*." Eugene Lyons, the United Press correspondent, had a similar reputation, which some have argued was the reason he got the job. See Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist*; Crowl, *Angels*.

insurance against deportation and other measures that the Soviet government used to discourage critical reporting.[53] Beyond these practical incentives, the *Defender* consistently maintained an editorial stance of benevolent neutrality toward the Soviet Union. It did not endorse the Soviet Union or the ideology of communism, but, like many African American newspapers at the time, the *Defender* praised each for its commitment to racial equality.[54] Collectively, the African American press amplified the image of the Soviet Union as a society devoid of racial prejudice in a strategic effort to accelerate change within American society.[55]

The Soviets, for their part, took a keen interest in cultivating sympathetic journalists within African American press, especially those identified as "petite bourgeois" in orientation. When William N. Jones, an editor of the *Afro-American* who also contributed the *Daily Worker*, visited Moscow in the summer of 1935, the head of the VOKS Anglo-American sector sought to design a program to cater specifically to Jones' interests in education, economics, and Soviet nationality policy.[56] Though officials initially pegged Jones as "a man who very much wants to familiarize himself with our

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[53] The heavy censorship imposed on foreign journalists by the Soviet government severely limited the ability of foreign journalists to publish even mildly critical stories. Beyond this external pressure many journalists self-censored and for ideological reasons voluntarily whitewashed the dark side of Soviet industrialization and collectivization.

[54] A 1932 survey of fourteen editors of African American newspapers, which asked for the men to share "their opinion of Communism," elicited a general consensus that while anti-racism was welcome in any ideological form, a mass conversion of African Americans to Communism was unlikely and undesirable. With the exception of Carl Murphy of the *Afro-American* who proclaimed "The Communists are going our way, for which Allah be praised," most of the editors used the question to blame the inequalities of American democracy for any appeal that Communism/the Soviet Union might hold for African Americans. Robert Abbott did not respond to the survey. See "Negro Editors on Communism," *The Crisis* "*Negro Editors on Communism*: A Symposium of the American Negro Press," *Crisis* 39 (April *1932*): 117-19, and (May *1932*): 154-56.

[55] For an in-depth explication of this idea, see Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, 149-151.

[56] I. Amdur, "William N. Jones," August 20, 1935. GARF, f. 5283, op. 3, d. 656.

achievements," guides reported that Jones was mostly interested in the children's puppet theater.[57] The targeted hospitality shown to Jones, whose importance stemmed from his power to influence public opinion and his willingness to portray the Soviet Union in a positive light, fit the normal model of Soviet cultural relations.

In Homer Smith, who lived and worked in Moscow, Soviet officials sensed a greater propaganda opportunity. Through his regular column in the *Chicago Defender* and the stories he sent to the ANP, Smith offered a conduit to millions of African American readers. These newspapers, in turn, influenced the NAACP and other bourgeois organizations, which became the primary target of propaganda under the Popular Front strategy initiated at the Seventh Comintern Congress in the summer of 1935. In this context, Smith's "non-party" status was an asset that provided wider credibility for his writings. Unlike many "fellow-travelers" however, Smith's connection to the Soviet state went beyond emotional or intellectual affinity.[58] In 1935, Soviet officials who had informally provided ideological guidance to Smith for two years, moved to establish "more systematic contact" with the "very useful" journalist.[59]

Smith was first appointed as a researcher (*aspirant*) specializing on colonial issues in the African Department of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), where he had previously taken night classes. The following year, institutional restructuring resulted in Smith's transfer to the Scientific Research Association for the

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[57] Zel'dovan, "Report," August 27, 1935. GARF, f. 5283, op. 3, d. 657.
[58] While he never joined the Communist Party in the United States, Smith did apply for membership in the Soviet Communist Party. B. Sherman, "Recommendation," August 1, 1934. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.
[59] The head of the IKKI 's Press Department stated, "We help indirectly and control his work. This, however, is not enough." My translation. Chernin to Pernomordiku, "G. Smit," nd. [c. 1935] RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.

Study of National and Colonial Problems (NIANKP), a sub-division of the Eastern Section of the Executive Council of the Comintern (IKKI). In this capacity, Smith's propaganda work expanded beyond his regular contributions to the African American press to included articles on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and other colonial issues published in newspapers in the Gold Coast and South Africa.[60]

Smith's official position with the Soviet propaganda apparatus meant he was subject to rigorous ideological discipline and would be expected to hew to the party line in his of coverage of the Soviet Union in the African American press. In the coming years, Smith would repeatedly need to defend himself against charges that his articles were not sufficiently "radical," too focused on racial issues, or overly "bourgeois nationalist" in tone.[61] Adding to Smith's precarious position, his emphasis on racism drew attention from FBI investigators who charged the journalist with using his column to "disseminate Russian propaganda in the form of protests against alleged racial discrimination and inequality in America."[62] For this reason, Smith's writings offer a fascinating window into how racial propaganda became a central and contested issue within the wider arena of U.S.-Soviet relations and about the definitions of propaganda.

As a propagandist, Smith's style was *sui generis*. His reportage used conventional elements of travel writing, race journalism, and Stalinist polemic to "speak Soviet

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[60] "Autobiography," July 27, 1936. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.
[61] 'Kharacteristika [Character Assessment] June 9, 1943, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.
[62] "Re: Investigation into 'Chatwood Hall,' Moscow correspondent of the ANP," Federal Bureau of Investigation memorandum, SAC, Chicago to Director, January 8, 1946. File 100-HQ-335141 (Redacted).
Obtained by author via Freedom of Information Act Request.

antiracism."[63] In his weekly *Defender* feature "A Column From Moscow," Smith acted as a cultural liaison between the African American and Soviet peoples. Smith provided tidbits on daily life inside the Soviet Union for African American audiences. Soviets, his readers learned, did not tip waiters or tuck in their shirttails. Most days the streets of Moscow resembled a sea of red—with scarves, banners, flags, trams, autos, even coffins and hearses all painted crimson—except in the summer months when every Muscovite fled the capital for the comfort of a dacha. Smith described the grandeur of Soviet industrialization and attempted to animate abstractions like Socialism, Communism and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat with simple anecdotes. Smith also paid homage to Alexander Pushkin, the famous Russian poet whose "Negro blood" he had once celebrated in his *Twin City Herald* cartoon strip.[64] Hall visited Pushkin's birthplace, documented the various streets and squares bearing his name, and interviewed one of the famous poet's descendants.[65]

More pointedly, Smith informed African Americans living as second-class citizens in Jim Crow America that the Soviets had banned racial discrimination and extended full citizenship to all national minorities. After pointing out that the jazz musician Duke Ellington chartered a private train car to circumvent segregation when he toured the American South, Smith declared, "Any bull-dozing, color-hating individual who might be so rash and foolhardy as to attempt such tactics in the land of the Socialism

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[63] Roman*, Opposing Jim Crow*, 147.
[64]Smith, "Take It or Leave It…" *Twin City Herald*, February 6, 1932. Pushkin's maternal great-grandfather, General Abram Hannibal was taken captive in East Africa and given to Peter the Great as a gift. The Tsar freed the young boy and raised him at the imperial court as his god son. T.J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 5.
[65] According to on historian, not long after Smith's arrival in the USSR, Pushkin "became the centerpiece of a monumental Soviet cult." David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 282.

would as quick as a flash find that he has only forty-eight hours to get out."[66] Smith's bellicose assertion alluded to a well-publicized incident in which Soviet officials deported two white American engineers after they were accused of a racist attack on an African American engineer named Robert Robinson at a Stalingrad factory in 1930.[67]

Interracial marriage, a theme Smith returned to again and again in his columns, provided another useful foil to contrast Soviet and American race relations. [68] Inter-marriage and "amalgamation" among these hundreds of nationalities, Smith told readers, was both common and socially accepted in the Soviet Union, whereas "a colored husband and a white wife down in Dixie would bring out the lynchers."[69] The issue gained personal resonance for Smith following his marriage to a young Soviet woman in 1937. Though Smith did not publicize his own marriage, a suspicious U.S. official later wondered whether the couple's interracial union was itself a clever Soviet ploy. After all, he reasoned, "on the question of racial equality a white wife of a black citizen is good Russian propaganda."[70]

Smith also reported his interactions with ordinary Soviet citizens, in which he was called upon to act as a cultural interpreter in the opposite direction. Why, an Intourist

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[66] Smith, "Red Russia Wouldn't Permit Jim Crow of Duke Ellington," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), September 23, 1933.
[67] Meredith Roman, "Racism in a 'Raceless' Society: The Soviet Press and Representations of American Racial Violence at Stalingrad in 1930," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 71 (Spring 2007): 185-203; Barbara Keys, "An African-American Worker in Stalin's Soviet Union: Race and the Soviet Experiment in International Perspective," *The Historian* (2009): 31-54.
[68] "Intermarriage Checks Race Friction in Soviet Russia," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), September 22, 1934; "Intermarriage Prevails Everywhere," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), February 16, 1935; "Common In Russia," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), December 26, 1936.
[69] Hall, "Column From Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1934.
[70] Department of State (Lovett) to American Delegation, Addis Ababa, Airgram, December 23, 1947. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.

official wanted to know, were the African American who visited Moscow so many different shades of brown? This, Smith replied cheekily, was a question best directed to the "Southern gentlemen" among the throng of American tourists.[71] Another well-meaning Soviet citizen wanted to know if Smith spoke the Negro language in addition to English and was shocked to learn that there was no such thing. Smith discovered that Soviet preconceptions sometimes proved hard to dispel. After Smith informed a Russian colleague that there were over two hundred Negro newspapers in the United States, the Russian journalist skeptically asked how African Americans had learned the technical skills required to publish a newspaper.[72] In other columns, Smith described how on a crowded Moscow bus two Soviets had stood to allow him a seat, and recounted how a young Russian boy had helped scrub his back at the public bath of a provincial village.[73] These stories of simple kindness nevertheless must have sounded extraordinary to readers accustomed to American social mores and the legal regime of racial segregation.

In the Soviet Union where many people had never encountered a black person, Smith explained that he often attracted a crowd in public. Lest this attention be misread as Soviet rudeness, Smith quickly added that it was motivated by the people's sincere interest in promoting racial equality. Smith maintained that when a Soviet mother pointed him out to her children, she did so not to indicate that he was "as an innately inferior human being to be shunned and ostracized," but rather to teach her children, "that here is our friend, our brother, our comrade, who, except for color, is the same as any other human being." Smith used this scenario—which may or may not have actually

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[71] Hall, "Column From Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, September 7, 1934.
[72] Smith, *Black Man In Red Russia,* 87.
[73] Hall, "Column From Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, December 9, 1933; "Correspondent Compares 'Red' Russia With 'White' America," *Chicago Defender*, February 2, 1935.

happened— to refashion an uncomfortable reminder of his "otherness" into a celebration of Soviet racial tolerance.[74]

Though Smith was not immune to the stylistic deficiencies that afflict the prose of political propagandists in general and was prone to the awkward jargon particular to Stalinism, he was also able at times to deftly promote the Soviet Union in the idiom of "race" journalism. This produced a unique synthesis that served as "double edged" propaganda because it served the agendas of both African American and Soviet cultural relations simultaneously. While Smith continued the earlier convention of reporting on the successes of African American performers abroad, he also adjusted this tried and true genre to include the new "race ambassadors" of the Stalinist era. Smith dutifully reported the arrival of African American tourists in Moscow during the summer months and interviewed visiting Americans of both races. When the tourist season abated, Smith used his column to profile various African Americans working in the Soviet Union. In a series that ran over several months, Smith celebrated the achievements of various "race men" and "race women" in the Soviet Union. Smith's teaser for the series advised *Defender* readers to "watch for forthcoming articles about your former colored countrymen who work in the Soviet Union, unhampered." These human-interest stories combined celebrations of African American professional success, a popular and longstanding feature of domestic "race" journalism, with exotic backdrops throughout the Soviet

[74] Hall, "Column From Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, April 6, 1935. Hall did not mention that even compared to rural Virginia, Tashkent presented a challenging set of living conditions for the African American agronomists stationed there. See Yelena Khanga, with Susan Jacoby, *Soul to Soul: A Black Russian Family 1865-1992* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 72.

Union.[75] Smith was also able to weave, both implicitly and explicitly, a critique of American racism into this classic "soft news" genre.

Each profile contrasted the discrimination that limited the ability of an individual to use his/her talents in America with the exciting opportunities that the Soviet Union had provided. The limited number of African Americans in the Soviet Union—one contemporary observer remarked that there were as many African Americans in Russia as "Baptists in Mecca"—did not prevent Smith from milking the available cast of skilled-workers for maximum propaganda value.[76] Smith introduced readers to Joseph Roane, a young graduate from Virginia State, who discovered that in the dismal job market of Depression-era America his degree in agronomy secured a single offer to work long hours in an "obscure job in a little rural Virginia school [at] a miserly salary." After joining a team of African American agronomists recruited to help modernize agriculture in Soviet Asia, Roane had found rewarding work developing new experimental hybrids of cotton at the Central Plant Breeding Station outside of Tashkent, Uzbekistan.[77]

Another one of the agronomists, John Sutton, had distinguished himself at Tuskegee Institute where he studied under the legendary scientist George Washington Carver. Finding his talents incommensurate with his job prospects, Sutton signed a contract with the All Union Rice Experiment Station and according to Smith, "was

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[75] Smith himself was the subject of a "race man makes good" human-interest story, the genre that became a staple of his Moscow reporting. Loren Miller, "Given High Post As Consultant In New Soviet Postal System," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 8, 1932.
[76] George S. Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 19, 1936.
[77] Hall, "Va. State Grad Doing Well in Russia," *Chicago Defender*, May 30, 1936. Roane was also the proud father of the first "race baby" born in Soviet Asia, Joseph *Stalin* Roane. The middle name was supplied by an zealous Soviet interpreter on the official birth certificate. See Khanga, *Soul to Soul*, 78.

credited with scientific breakthroughs in this field."[78] Likewise George Tynes, a former All-American football star at Wilberforce University in Ohio, left the states to take a position as the "manager of a poultry production farm house in an ancient monastery on the banks of the Volga."[79] In yet another profile, Smith informed his readers that while Bernard Powers never had the chance to build a single bridge or road in his native Alabama because his skin was black, the Howard-trained engineer was busy working on a technically challenging highway construction project located high in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia.[80] Within this framework, the professional achievement of the extraordinary individuals affirmed race pride and demonstrated the superiority of the Soviet system at the same time.

Though the subjects of Smith's profiles were overwhelmingly male, there were also "race women" of note thriving in the Soviet Union. Vivien France, a proud Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority member and alumna of Columbia Teachers' College, had left behind, "America and its silly race prejudice, brutal lynchings, and mass employment," for a position working in the lab of Professor Kislitsyn, head of the Soviet Anthropological Society, where she intended to pursue her interest in the exotic-sounding field of "antrhopophysics."[81] Florence Webster, a graduate of the University of Kansas and the president of the Interstate Literary Society, on the other hand, studied classical piano at the prestigious Moscow Conservatory of Music.[82] Both women, as discussed

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[78] Hall, "Texas Man, Former Student of Dr. Carver, Is Soviet Chemist," *Pittsburgh Courier,* May 22, 1937.
[79] Hall, "Correspondent Compares 'Red Russia' With 'White America' And Thereby Brings Out Some Startling Facts," *Chicago Defender*, February 2, 1935.
[80] Hall, "Huntsville, Alabama Man Is Engineer In Russia," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 14, 1937.
[81] Hall, "What Do You Know of Anthropophysics?" *Chicago Defender,* June 1, 1935.
[82] Hall, "Kansas Girl Blossoms Into Skilled Pianist," *Chicago Defender*, July 11, 1936.

below, had leveraged the propaganda value of their race to convince Soviet officials to support their advanced studies.

Smith's profiles also managed to elevate individuals engaged in work not traditionally associated with middle class professionalism. Lloyd Paterson, for example, had studied interior decorating at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Despite his education, the closest he got to practicing his trade in America was whitewashing fences. He had come to the Soviet Union as part of the *Black and White* cast and decided to stay after the project was canceled. Hall reported that Paterson had become a respected "Red Painter," who together with his Russian wife designed sets for Soviet theaters and had even helped to decorate the Kremlin.[83] Smith performed a similar makeover on Frank Goode, a towering World War I veteran who had found success in the Soviet Union as a professional wrestler in the state circus.

Since Goode's resume represented the type of "race ambassador" that middle class African Americans, Smith included, had long protested and sought to replace with more respectable representatives, it required some creativity and a bit of exaggeration on Smith's part to make Goode fit the role. Smith emphasized Goode's relation to Paul Robeson, who was widely respected as both an artist and intellectual, and recast him as a "Red Gymnast" whose athletic prowess made him "the 'Joe Louis' of the Soviet mat." Smith then quoted Goode's explanation that in the Soviet Union wrestling was neither

[83] "Hampton Grad Stands Out As 'Red Painter,'" *Chicago Defender*, May 23, 1936. Paterson was the father of James Paterson who starred as "Jimmy" in the 1936 film *Tsirk* (*Circus*).

commercial entertainment, nor a debased spectacle for gamblers, but rather "a form physical culture" that possessed genuine social and cultural benefits for the masses.[84]

Goode, who had tried and failed to find a teaching job in the United States, was amazed by the absence of prejudice in the Soviet Union. "The Russians all want dark skins, they envy mine," he wrote to his sister from Astrakhan in Southern Russia, "Think of it…In Harlem all the Jigs yearly pray to Santa Claus for a fair skin."[85]

Smith's Soviet success stories may have inspired ambitious African Americans to try their luck in the Soviet Union, but offered precious little information to navigate the intricate layers of Soviet bureaucracy. Like Smith himself, several African Americans found ways to parlay short visits into longer stays in order to work and study in the Soviet Union. This was not easy as one official noted that VOKS turned away most of the "many Americans who come here as tourists [and] dream of staying for work."[86] Florence Webster, an African American pianist who came to Moscow on tourist visa, was one of the few whose appeal to extend her stay in the USSR succeeded. With the help of Wayland Rudd, a *Black and White* cast member who had remained in Moscow, Webster secured a job at the Technical Institute of Languages and admission to the Moscow Conservatory of Music.[87]

Webster found life in Moscow so artistically invigorating that she encouraged Nicholas Gerren, a fellow classical musician and former classmate at Kansas University,

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[84] Hall, "Robeson's Kin Red Gymnast," *Chicago Defender*, February 1, 1936.
[85] Frank Goode to Eslanda Goode Robeson, postcard, August 19, 1935. ER Papers, Series A: Family Papers, Box 1, Folder "Goode, Francis, Correspondence."
[86] The few who succeeded were employed as English teachers. My translation. E. Scholsberg, "Report for the Anglo-American Sector," August-September, 1931. GARF f. 5283, op. 3, d. 275.
[87] I. Amdur, "Miss Florence Webster," October 13, 1934. GARF f. 5283, op. 3. d. 658.

to join her in Moscow. "Some many wonderful opportunities turn up here unexpectedly," she told Gerren, adding, "this experience will 'make you' [as an artist]."[88] Over the next several months, Webster sent Gerren detailed instructions for negotiating the subtleties of Soviet bureaucracy that highlighted how savvy African Americans could use their race to win preferential treatment from Soviet authorities. After applying for a student visa, Webster told Gerren to send identical letters to the director of the Moscow Conservatory of Music and the People's Commissariat for Education (Narcompros).

In addition to presenting his qualifications and press clippings of his concert performances, Webster stressed that is was "most important [to] state something which will show that you are politically conscious of what studying here would mean to you, belonging to a minority race, Negro." Webster then coached Gerren to list his father's occupation as "railroad worker," presumably to establish his proletarian background.[89] At several points, Webster's instructions turned conspiratorial. She told Gerren to find a particular woman at the Institute of Pacific Relations in New York for "information that I can't write," hinted at "many things that can't be explained in letters [that] you'll understand when you arrive," and urged him not to discuss his plans with anyone.[90]

In June of 1935, Gerren dutifully followed Webster's advice and wrote to the director of the Moscow Conservatory of Music. While Webster had counseled him to tactfully reference his race, Gerren adopted a more blunt approach. "I realize the opportunities that the U.S.S.R. offers to a minority group, and as I am identified with

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[88] Florence Webster to Nicholas Gerren, March 5, 1935. Box 1, Folder 7, Nicholas Gerren Papers (NGP), University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.
[89] Florence Webster to Nicholas Gerren, May 22, 1935. NGP, Box 1, Folder 7.
[90] Florence Webster to Nicholas Gerren, March 5, 1935; Florence Webster to Nicholas Gerren, May 31, 1935. NGP, Box 1, Folder 7.

such a group, I appreciate and want to take advantage of them," he wrote, adding, "I appreciate the unlimited worth and qualities of the U.S.S.R., and I also realize they will be very beneficial to me, a Negro."[91] After a final letter from Webster to the Soviet consul in Washington and some logistical wrangling with Intourist, Gerren packed his violin and arrived in Moscow the fall of 1935.[92] While Gerren never made it into Smith's column, his path demonstrated how informal networks influenced formal Soviet cultural relations and encapsulated the mutually beneficial logic that sustained African American-Soviet engagement in the 1930s.[93] When Gerren returned to the United States two years later, he hailed the USSR as "the greatest country in the world" where young people had "endless opportunities" and never faced a "long period of hopeless waiting as you find here in America."[94]

While Smith's profiles fit a pre-determined pattern and relied on a small sample size to make broad claims about Soviet society and supported sanctioned themes of Soviet propaganda, they did accurately capture an important innovation in race diplomacy during the Stalinist period. Many of the African American workers who Smith's column celebrated as "race ambassadors," did see themselves (and were perceived by others) as fulfilling this role. The experience of the agronomists and engineers stationed in Central Asia in particular demonstrates that the philosophy of racial uplift, which when internationalized provided the foundation of race diplomacy,

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[91] Nicholas Gerren to Director Sherman, June 14, 1935. NGP, Box 1, Folder 7.
[92] Florence Webster to Gregory Gokhman, July 30, 1935. NGP, Box 1, Folder 7.
[93] In another example of this dynamic, Henry Scott, an African American musician living in Moscow, successfully lobbied VOKS to an help Miriam Williams, an African American actress in Finland, come to Moscow for study at a theatrical institute. Henry Scott, "Conversation With Norman," March 2, 1936. GARF, f. 5383, op. 3, d. 726.
[94] "Music Student Here From Russia," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 4, 1937.

greatly influenced the project's inception and implementation in addition to its representation in the press.

Smith helped publicize the work of Golden and the other African American agronomists, but he also drew attention to the region of Central Asia and its peoples in his columns. Though the region remained officially closed to foreigners, Smith encouraged African American tourists to visit Central Asia if given the opportunity. When two prominent African American sociologists arrived in Moscow, Smith publicly admonished them for not making arrangements to visit the "deep South of Russia." "Black tourists," he declared, "ought not to come to this distant part of the earth without seeing how Russian Colored people now live and rule."[95]

The rapid advancement of millions of non-white citizens in these areas infused a secondary "race" angle to Smith's stories that appealed to the longstanding tradition of transnational solidarity within African American society. Smith frequently commented on the physical resemblance of Central Asians to African Americans, but he also stressed the ways in which the historical persecution of these groups, first at the hands of "their emirs, satraps, and mullahs," and later under the Tsarist regime, mirrored the African American experience.[96] Like Langston Hughes, who toured the region after the film project's collapse, Smith thought of Central Asia as the Soviet "South," an inverted double of the American South.[97]

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[95] Hall, "Column From Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, October 20, 1934.
[96] Hall, "Pickers of Cotton Find Russia Fair," *Chicago Defender*, October 30, 1937, pg. 24.
[97] Langston Hughes, "Going South in Russia," *The Crisis*, Vol. 41, No. 6, (June 1934): 162-163.; "Going South…" in *A Negro Looks at Central Asia*, 5-11; This was not the only attempt to introduce the region to Americans through a suggestive geographic analogy. Vice President

This formulation, which superficially rested on the similarity of two cotton-producing regions populated by "darker" races, was designed to subvert and reconfigure conventional notions of "backwardness." If backwardness was not associated with race but with racial discrimination, Smith and Hughes asked, then which "South" was more advanced?[98] Within this framework the American South, represented by the capricious indignities of Jim Crow, the pseudo-slavery of sharecropping, widespread racial violence, and political disenfranchisement, stood in stark contrast to its idealized Soviet counterpart represented by racial equality, political liberation and women's emancipation.[99] Smith used a single photograph of a beautiful "Race Uzbek" girl standing in a field of cotton, artfully captioned, "She Need Not Sue To Enter Moscow University," to convey the moral of this "tale of two Souths."[100]

Like W.E.B. Du Bois, who celebrated the Soviet multi-ethnic state and denounced the American melting pot a decade earlier, Smith believed, perhaps sincerely but naively nonetheless, that the Soviet constitution had solved its "race problem" by extending full citizenship to national minorities and granting autonomy to each national republic. In one

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Henry Wallace, on his 1942 trip to Soviet Central Asia described the region to his American readers as "the wild West of Russia" a bastion of rugged individualism and modern day pioneers. The Iowa native later adjusted his metaphor to frame the region as a Soviet Mid-West, full of "people of plain living and robust minds, not unlike our farming peoples in the United States" Henry Wallace, *Mission to Soviet Asia* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock Inc., 1946), 22.

[98] This creative redefinition anticipated later attempts to forge solidarities among oppressed peoples, from Third Worldism to the more recent concept of a "Global South."

[99] This particular comparison also helps to explain how the Soviet "civilizing" mission in Central Asia, which in hindsight one might expect to have invited comparisons to European imperialism, instead came to be perceived by some African American intellectuals as compatible with the ideals of racial uplift and anti-colonialism. For an insightful comparison of the Soviet Union to European Empires see Adeeb Khalid, "The Soviet Union as an Imperial Formation: A View From Central Asia," in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 113-140.

[100] The photo was taken by Hall, "She Need Not Sue To Enter Moscow University," *Chicago Defender*, October 23, 1937, pg. 24. For a variation on this theme see, Hall, "Soviet Georgia Is Unlike U.S. Georgia," *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1936, pg. 24.

of his less subtle forays into Soviet propaganda, Smith visited the remote region of Abkhazia, a remote part of Soviet Georgia home to a small population of "Negroes" who traced their heritage to the horn of Africa.[101] Unlike other stories pitched to advance African American political or cultural agendas or level a critique against American racism in addition to promoting a positive Soviet image abroad, Smith's Abkhazian report served only to bolster the cult of Stalin. "Now liberated," Hall announced that all Abkhazians, "now love Stalin as their closest and best teacher and truest leader."[102]

While historians have for the most part overlooked or ignored Smith's lapses into this type of heavy-handed Stalinist rhetoric, they did not escape the attention of George S. Schuyler.[103] Schuyler, a brilliant African American intellectual and journalist who reveled in exposing Communist duplicity, pounced on Smith's credibility after he published an adulatory review of the new Soviet Constitution in the September, 1936 issue of *The Crisis*. Smith wrote that Article 123 of the Stalin Constitution, which guaranteed the rights of all Soviet citizens regardless of race or nationality, "comes directly home to the hearts and bosoms of Negroes and other oppressed peoples the world over." [104] An eloquent and enthusiastic polemicist, Schuyler responded with an attack that cut to the heart of the matter. "Mr. Chatwood Hall [Smith]," Schuyler began in characteristically blunt fashion, "is an expatriate parked on the Soviet payroll. His job is to beat out fantastic stories about the Bolshevik Valhalla in the Aframerican [sic] press.

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[101] For the history of this group see Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 75-79.
[102] Hall, "Negroes In Russia Devoted To Stalin," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1937.
[103] Because the rest of her analysis of the coverage of the Soviet Union in the African American press is so insightful, Meredith Roman's failure to recognize or even infer Smith's affiliation with the Soviet propaganda apparatus is particularly glaring. See in particular Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, 152.
[104] Hall, "Full Equality of Races and Nations," *The Crisis* (September, 1936): 268-270.

In earning his vituals and vokda, he frequently produces masterpieces of imaginative writing far surpassing anything written by Jules Verne." Why, Schuyler asked, did it matter that African American performers, who were cheered in Buffalo and Cleveland, were also cheered in Moscow or Petersburg? Schuyler did not dispute Smith's claim that the Soviet Union did not practice discrimination against African Americans.

Instead, he challenged the underlying logic that led Smith and others to extrapolate the superiority of the Soviet system from this single date point. "Mere absence of prejudice," Schulyer observed, "does not indicate Utopian conditions." Nor, for that matter, did the Soviet Union's much vaunted full employment. "It is true that there is no unemployment in Soviet Russia but neither is there unemployment in the Belgian Congo, and for the same reason," Schulyer wryly observed, no doubt savoring this final *coup de grâce*.[105] A minor skirmish ensued with African American Communists like Eugene Gordon rallying to Smith's defense in the press.[106] Schuyler stood his ground and reaffirmed his contention that when Smith and other "Communist Uncle Toms […] poured whip cream all over [the Soviet Constitution]," they not only whitewashed the regime's crimes, but also insulted the intelligence of African Americans.[107]

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[105] Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 19, 1936.
[106] The origins of the feud seem to date to an earlier Schuyler editorial that criticized Russian Communism. the signed open letter following the text of, "Nancy Cunard Criticizes Schuyler For Charging Fascism to Russian Communists," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 21, 1935. Gordon's personal distaste for Schuyler was a lifelong obsession, the record of which fills an entire folder in his papers. He denounced Schuyler as a "black Fifth Columnist," a "Quisling disguised as Uncle Tom [who] must not be allowed to lead the Negro people in a Hitler ambuscade," and scrawled cryptically in a notebook, "What is it that S is scared of? Why did he become a traitor to the Negro people? Who is behind S?" "On George Schuyler." Eugene Gordon Papers, SCRBC, Folder 6.
[107] Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1937.

Schuyler's trenchant critique shorn of its personal barbs reveals a fatal limitation of Soviet-African American relations in the Stalinst era. African Americans sought and welcomed support from the Soviet Union when that support helped advance a set of cultural and political goals. Soviet propaganda, so far as it exposed American racism and undermined segregation as it unquestionably did numerous times in the interwar period, helped advance these agendas. From this vantage point, the question of whether the Soviets pursued this propaganda out of genuinely felt solidarity with African Americans or out of purely selfish motives is irrelevant. To an extent, the same is true of African American praise of the Soviet system, which was often used as a rhetorical weapon to attack American discrimination or expose the hypocrisies of American pretensions of equality and democracy in an era where its non-white citizens faced legal and social discrimination and rampant violence. This, however, should not obscure the hard truth that this strategy carried real moral risks that extracted real costs as Homer Smith's lived experience under Stalinism starkly demonstrates.

By 1936, Smith had settled into a comfortable life in the Soviet Union. His reporting for the African American press and position in the Comintern provided steady income and an official status. In that year, Smith was confident enough in his future that he listed his intended stay as "indefinite" on his passport renewal application.[108] Smith also adapted to the informal economy and the unwritten rules of *blat* (barter) that guided Soviet daily life. Favors, not money, kept the wheels of society turning. Smith used his access to the special shops for foreigners (*Torgsin/Insab*) to trade scarce goods for

[108] "Application for Registration," June 11, 1936. Homer Hamilton Smith File (HHSF), National Archives Record Administration, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57, *Classified Passport Applications*, *Li-Z, 1950-1959*. Acquired via Freedom of Information Request, September 11, 2015.

Russian language lessons and home cooked meals, and to endear himself to his manager of his apartment building.[109] The following year, Smith took another step toward assimilating into Soviet society when he married Maria Petrovna Koshik, a nineteen-year-old Ukrainian who worked as a clerk for an oil company. For a moment it seemed as though Smith had achieved the future he had envisioned when left the United States.

Smith did not have long to enjoy his honeymoon, as the first Stalinist purges began to sweep through Moscow and the rest of the Soviet Union. As a journalist and a Moscow resident, Hall could not have missed the spectacular show trials of former Bolshevik stalwarts like Karl Radek, "The Megaphone of the Revolution," who publically confessed to secretly aiding the exiled Trotsky and favoring his left-deviationist views in January of 1937, the same month of Smith's marriage. During the Great Purge or the Great Terror, as this chaotic two year period became known, mass arrests roiled the Soviet Union for almost two years decimating the top ranks of the party, secret police, and the army and sent millions of ordinary Soviets to labor in the remote camps of the gulag.[110]

In his memoir, Smith pinpointed the arrest and "liquidation" of his former boss and colleagues at the Soviet postal service as the moment his "utter disillusionment" with Stalinism began to solidify.[111] Even closer to home, Smith later told U.S. officials that his

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[109]Smith*, Black Man in Red Russia,* 13-19.
[110] J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, eds., *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 165-196. Anne Applebaum, *The Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 92-120.
[111] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia,* 96.

wife's sister "disappeared" in the purges after a surprise visit by the secret police.[112] Smith witnessed firsthand the abrupt fall of Lovett Fort-Whiteman, the African American Communist whom Hall had known since he arrived in the Soviet Union.[113] After being denounced for making "counter-revolutionary" statements, Soviet authorities first deported Fort-Whiteman to internal exile in Kazakhstan. From there, Fort-Whiteman was sent to the notorious prison camp in Kolyma, Siberia where the once ubiquitous Soviet fixer died in 1939.[114]

The same vicious internecine campaign that had doomed Fort-Whiteman, soon threatened Smith directly. In Feburary of 1937, a breach of conduct identified only as a "serious personal matter" led the IKKI to reprimand Smith. Clearly shaken, Smith penned an obsequious apology to the African American Communist William Patterson, an ally who had previously recommended Smith for propaganda work.[115] Smith promised to never repeat the unnamed mistake, begged forgiveness for showing "ingratitude to those who are doing so much to help me" and pledged to not let anything "interfere with my further development into, and future as, a revolutionary journalist and writer."[116] Smith's timely act of "self-criticism" allowed him to retain his job and remain in the

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[112] Smith was attempting to re-establish his U.S. citizenship. Homer Smith to William H. Beach, American Consul, Addis Ababa. January 26, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[113] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 81.
[114] Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 153-154.
[115] Smith was right to fear for his life. Patterson had initiated Fort-Whiteman's demise by publically charging him with making "counter-revolutionary" statements in 1935. Robert Robinson*, Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books*,* 1988), 361.
[116] Homer Smith to William Patterson, February 13, 1937. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.

Soviet Union, but did not spare him from harassment from the "Black Ravens" of the secret police.[117]

Two days after Smith penned this letter, John Goode, another brother-in-law of Paul Robeson and a long-time fixture in Black Moscow, was unceremoniously denied a return visa to the Soviet Union. Goode, who worked in a bus garage unlike his brother who wrestled in the state circus, was flagged as a "well-known degenerate person with adventurist sentiments" who associated with "suspicious elements" now under arrest by the NKVD.[118] Goode's high profile connections did not prevent Soviet authorities from acting on the recommendations of the William Patterson and other CPUSA representatives in Moscow and blocking him from entering the country. Given the circumstances, this was a kindness.

Smith weathered the storm, but suffered under the pervasive atmosphere of xenophobia that followed in the wake of the purges. Foreigners, and even Soviets with foreign contacts, became suspicious and dangerous figures to be avoided at all costs. Smith claimed that his wife lost her job and was unable to find new work because of her foreign last name. "We were ostracized by all our friends," Smith later told an American official, "they were afraid of what would happen to them for having relations with foreigners or with Russians married to foreigners." Moscow was engulfed by pervasive paranoia stoked by Stalin's obsession with uncovering internal enemies. In late 1938,

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[117] On one occasion, Smith claimed he was waylaid by a black-uniformed officer who took him to a nondescript building and proceeded to use a razor blade to search the inner lining of his jacket, hat, and shoes Smith*, Black Man in Red Russia*, 95.

[118] This was almost certainly a reference to the disgraced alleged "Trotskyite" Fort-Whiteman. "Ashkhanov to Koril'ev, February 15, 1937. Personal Dossier: John Goode. RGASPI, f. 495. op.261, d. 1075. Frank Goode, Robeson's other brother-in-law remained in the Soviet Union, retired from the circus, and spent the rest of his life in the closed city of Gorky.

Smith received an anonymous call summoning him to the Metropole Hotel. When Smith arrived, three uniformed men, who he presumed to be NKVD agents, inspected his American passport and interrogated him about his job and contacts in Moscow.[119]

In simpler times, Smith had boasted that his blackness afforded him special privilege in the Soviet Union. At the height of popular Stalinist paranoia, it marked him, and the other African Americans living in the Soviet Union, as obvious foreigners and potential spies or "wreckers." [120] Many of the African American professionals and students, whom Smith had profiled earlier in the decade, were presented with an ultimatum by the Soviet authorities: adopt Soviet citizenship or leave. The overwhelming majority left. [121] Smith made another potentially lethal mistake when he attempted to intercede with the Comintern on behalf of a group of black engineers whose residency permits were abruptly canceled. Smith threatened to leak a negative story charging the Soviet Union with racial discrimination if the contracts were not honored, a brazen move that backfired spectacularly. Smith was severely rebuked and warned against ingratitude.[122]

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[119] Homer Smith to William H. Beach, American Consul, Addis Ababa. January 26, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[120] David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 303.
[121] The Roanes and all of the agronomists except Oliver Golden chose to leave the Soviet Union when the government issued its ultimatum. Robert Robinson, Frank Goode, Lloyd Paterson, and Wayland Rudd decided to apply for Soviet citizenship.
[122] S. Ani Mukherji, " 'Like Another Planet to Darker Americans': Black Cultural Workers in 1930s Moscow," in Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken, eds., *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 128.

In a bid to stave off charges of disloyalty and protect his wife's family from further persecution, Smith obtained Soviet citizenship in May of 1939.[123] The fateful decision, which under U.S. law functioned as a de facto renunciation of his American citizenship, changed nothing. "I was still a foreigner and my wife remained the wife of a foreigner," Smith bitterly recalled.[124] Smith, who had chafed under the indignities of second-class citizenship in the United States, now faced the hollow equality of Soviet citizenship.

With his future uncertain, Robert Ross, a figure from Smith's past presented a fresh threat to Smith's precarious position. Ross was an African American Communist from Minnesota with whom Smith had lived briefly in the summer of 1936. The spacious three-bedroom apartment they shared, as Smith discovered after moving in, actually belonged to a *stakhanovite* ("shock worker") and his family who were understandably upset about being evicted from their own home. When a conflict erupted, Ross's Russian wife threatened to tell the secret police that the stakhonovite had "raised the national question." Litigation followed, and Smith, who claimed to have moved out almost immediately, testified against Ross.[125] As a result, Ross was exiled to the city of Krasnodar in the North Caucasus region.[126]

Perhaps in retaliation for Smith's testimony, Ross, backed by another Black Communist, accused Smith of harboring "strong petite-bourgeois tendencies" and being

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[123] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow to The Embassy of the United States of America, Moscow, Memorandum No. 909/KU-14, June 14, 1947, copy of translation. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[124] Homer Smith to William H. Beach, American Consul, Addis Ababa. January 26, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[125] Personal Dossier: Robert Ross, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 6744.
[126] Woodford McClellan, "Black *Hajj* to Red Mecca: Africans and Afro-Americans at KUTV, 1925-1928," in Maxim Matusevich, ed., *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 75.

"infected by his own peculiar Negro nationalism." Ross wrote to Smith's superior at IKKI to complain that a recent article presented "an absolutely false picture of the culture of American negroes [that] definitely came from a petite bourgeois-negro nationalist."[127] Ross's accusations did not result in any action against Smith in all likelihood because of the source of the information was a notorious black market speculator who reportedly hosted drunken orgies, sang anti-Semitic songs, and slept sixteen hours a day.[128] Smith had once again escaped a potentially lethal ideological attack just weeks after the German invasion of Poland sparked the beginning of WWII.

A consummate survivor, Smith navigated the treacherous period following the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and was subsequently evacuated to the Southern city of Kuibyshev (Samara) following Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941. At the outset of the war, in another stroke of good fortune Smith was hired as a war correspondent for the Associated Press. In the fall of 1941, Smith returned to Moscow where he dutifully provided American readers with updates from the Eastern Front for the remainder of the war.[129] Throughout this period, Smith retained his position in the Comintern's propaganda wing. In spite of the blemishes on his record, officials within the IKKI praised Smith for his politically sophisticated grasp of Marxism and added paternalistically that he "was very unlike other Negroes in Moscow, or in the USA, in that he was humble, businesslike, and agreeable."[130] Smith's superiors, however, never

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[127] Ross also relayed a rumor that when Smith first arrived in the USSR, he had demanded a job and said that if he was denied, he would tell African Americans that "all the talk about equality in the USSR was a fraud." "Tooney Statement," November 16, 1939. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.
[128] T.C. Slavinia, Report, January 4, 1940. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 6744.
[129] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 147-150.
[130] Spravka, December 1, 1938. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.

fully trusted him or his political views, which they identified as "those of the democratic wing of the black movement in the United States with all its narrow-mindedness." Though Smith had faithfully served in the Comintern's press division for nearly a decade, an official review in 1943 insisted he should only be permitted to work "under constant and unwavering political control."[131]

A year after Soviet victory, Smith decided to leave the Soviet Union permanently. Through his friendship with the Ethiopian Ambassador to the Soviet Union, to land a position as an English-language editor for the Emperor Haile Selassie's Press and Information office while also freelancing for the African American press. In 1946, Smith left Moscow for Addis Ababa. Smith secured a rare exit visa for his Soviet wife who joined him in the Ethiopian capital in 1947.[132] Even before he arrived in Ethiopia, Smith had begun to sound out U.S. officials on the possibility of re-instating his U.S. citizenship emphasizing that he had never been a member of the Communist Party.[133] Smith asked the American consul in Ethiopia to assist him in renouncing his Soviet citizenship, which he claimed he accepted under "indirect duress and pressure."[134] U.S. officials swiftly rejected Smith's bid to regain American citizenship.[135] They determined that Smith had voluntarily expatriated himself and noted that Soviet law explicitly prohibited unilateral renunciation of citizenship without the permission of the Presidium of the Supreme

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[131] Kharacteristika [Character Assessment] June 9, 1943, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 5147.
[132] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 213-216.
[133] Smith apparently visited the U.S. Embassy in Cairo en route to Ethiopia where he explained he had taken Soviet citizenship for "humanitarian reasons." Felix Cole, American Legation Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Secretary of State, Washington, airgram, February 7, 1947, 2. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[134] Homer Smith to William H. Beach, American Consul, Addis Ababa. January 26, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[135] "To the Officer in Charge of the American Mission, Addis Ababa," confidential memorandum, March 26, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.

Soviet.[136] The State Department did not believe Smith, who had figured prominently in an FBI investigation of subversion in the African American Press conducted in 1946.

These records, though heavily redacted, clearly demonstrate that U.S. officials considered Smith a potential Soviet spy and security risk. An internal review of Smith's reportage concluded that he used the African American press "to disseminate Russian propaganda in the form of protest against alleged racial discrimination and inequality in the United States."[137] The author of the report singled out Smith's *Chicago Defender* profiles of African Americans thriving in the Soviet Union as ironclad evidence of his status as a propagandist.[138] The Bureau identified Smith's criticism of American racism, and not his lavish praise for Stalin, as proof positive of malicious and propagandistic intent.[139] Such a formulation presumed African American disloyalty and willfully ignored the reality of American racial injustice. The FBI's assessment of Smith also spoke to elevated importance of race to global politics at the onset of the Cold War. Smith's rejection came at a moment when the Truman Administration had begun to identify domestic race relations as a boon to Soviet propagandists and a major hindrance to U.S. foreign policy objectives. Smith, who would later reinvent himself as anticommunist, highlighted the power of African American to damage the reputation of the United States

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[136] This Soviet statute did not prevent the U.S. from granting asylum to scores of Soviet dissidents and defectors in the decades to come. "Board of Review: Case of Homer Hamilton Smith," United States Department of State Passport Division, memorandum, November 4, 1947; "Subject: Citizenship Status of Homer Hamilton Smith," The Foreign Service of the United States of America, confidential memorandum, March 30, 1948. HHSF, NARA, RG 59, Entry UD 07D 57.
[137] D.M. Ladd to J.C. Strickland, "Chatwood Hall, aka, Homer Hamilton Smith (True Name)," memorandum, February 8, 1946, 1. Homer Smith FBI File 100-343164-2.
[138] Ibid, 3.
[139] This is apparent in the FBI's wider investigation of the African American press. While they correctly identified Smith as a propagandist, longstanding paranoia concerning African American subversion led them to falsely accuse dozens of African American journalists, editors, and newspapers of printing Communist propaganda.

abroad. Smith's case also suggested a potential solution to check future Soviet propaganda: enlist African Americans to bolster and defend the United States on the world stage. The State Department's adoption of this novel tactic harnessed African American race diplomacy to the nation's fledgling cultural relations strategy. African Americans, who had long engaged in international affairs as non-state actors, would figure prominently within U.S. Cold War diplomacy as state actors.

5

Edith Sampson's Cold War and the Peril of Propaganda

"This provides the cardinal rule for the propagandist. He must be ready and able to deliver what he promises, even if the promise is only by implication, lest the long-run reaction turn out to be the reverse of what he sought." –Oren Stephens, *Facts to a Candid World,* 1953.[1]

The years immediately following the Second World War witnessed two revolutionary developments in U.S. foreign relations. The first was the formal incorporation of cultural diplomacy as a vital instrument of American foreign policy. The second, which was intimately connected to the first, was the recognition by U.S. foreign policy makers that domestic race relations were damaging America's reputation abroad and jeopardizing the nation's foreign policy objectives. Together these developments led the State Department to alternately adopt, suppress, and coopt the strategies and tactics of African American race diplomacy.

The unorthodox career of Edith Sampson, an African American attorney and clubwoman from Chicago's South Side who rose to international prominence in the early Cold War, encapsulated both the promise and limitations of African American entry into the official channels of U.S. diplomacy. Sampson helped to shatter the notion that American racism was an internal issue not to be discussed outside of the United States and popularized cultural relations as an effective means of advancing U.S. foreign policy. As her star rose, Sampson became a weapon within America's Cold War arsenal deployed to counter

[1] Oren Stephens, *Facts to a Candid World: America's Overseas Information Program* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1955), 27.

Soviet propaganda and constrain African American dissent. This chapter seeks to complicate existing portrayals of Sampson as a "stooge" of the American government and situate Sampson's diplomacy in a longer tradition of African American race diplomacy aimed at projecting an image of African American progress and achievement to the world.[2]

Compared to other developed nations, the United States arrived late to the arena of formal cultural relations. Its first formal foray into state-sponsored cultural diplomacy came in the late 1930s in support of FDR's Good Neighbor policy. Under various auspices, cultural diplomacy became institutionalized throughout World War II as the demands of wartime mobilization forced the United States to abandon its traditional hands-off approach to cultural relations.[3] Under the euphemistic banner of "information," the Office of War Information (OWI) coordinated efforts to bolster morale on the home front while targeting foreign populations beyond enemy lines with leaflets and radio broadcasts on the Voice of America (VOA) network.[4] In the context of "total war," both

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[2] Gerald Horne's critique of Sampson essentially reproduces contemporaneous attacks on Sampson from African American Communists and leftist radicals whom Horne has championed in his prodigious scholarship. Ironically, Horne denies African American anti-Communists like Sampson agency in the same way that outdated attacks on African American radicals as "dupes" of the Soviet and American Communist Parties erased the agency of those actors. Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Madison, New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 173. For the most sympathetic treatment of Sampson's career see Helen Laville and Scott Lucas, "The American Way: Edith Sampson, the NAACP, and African American Identity During the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 20: No. 4 (October 1996): 565-590.

[3] The Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), headed by Nelson Rockefeller, focused on U.S. cultural outreach to Latin America. The Office of War Information (OWI) headed domestic and foreign propaganda efforts during the war. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which gathered intelligence, engaged in espionage, and disseminated propaganda might also be included under the broad umbrella of America's wartime "information" programs. The basic portfolio of the OSS would later be transferred to the Central Intelligence Agency.

[4] The scope of the OWI's foreign propaganda campaign was impressive. Between June 6, 1944 (D-Day) and and May 8, 1945 (VE-Day), the OWI dropped more than three *billion* fliers.

cultural relations and propaganda formed an integral part of America's grand strategy for victory.

Despite these contributions and President Truman's support for the development of a robust information apparatus, a significant portion of the American public and much of Congress found little to recommend such an enterprise in peacetime. To these critics, a state-sponsored information service was, at best, an unnecessary waste of taxpayer money. At worst, it was a potential prelude to totalitarianism, a Trojan horse that would destroy cherished American liberties and individualism.[5] Republicans, especially those from traditionally isolationist Midwestern states, and several Southern Democrats vocally opposed the newly formed Interim Information Service (IIS) in particular and cultural relations in general. Even the word "culture" itself, which since the New Deal had become linked in the minds of conservatives to all manner of unsavory leftists, drew resistance from some quarters.[6] Resounding Republican victories in the mid-term congressional elections of 1946, in which the G.O.P. gained control of the Senate and House of Representatives for the first time in more than a decade, placed the future of American cultural diplomacy in limbo.[7]

The escalation of the Cold War the following year, however, changed the underlying political calculus. In an historic address to Congress on March 12, 1947,

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Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 53.

[5] For an in-depth account of the controversy surrounding the place of "information" services in the early post-War period, see David F. Kugler, *The Voice of America and Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

[6] Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press), 121.

[7] The Democratic Party had controlled the House of Representatives since 1933.

Truman argued that civil wars in Greece and Turkey were symptomatic of a larger clash between two irreconcilable "ways of life," in which the United States was morally bound to defend "the free peoples of the world."[8] The martial rhetoric of what became known as the Truman Doctrine cast the emerging US-Soviet rivalry as a battle of ideals and prompted supporters of cultural diplomacy to pitch their programs as "psychological warfare" to former skeptics. Nevertheless, opposition persisted. Representative Forest Harness, an Indiana Republican, remained concerned that the State Department's "Government propaganda" techniques, originally developed for foreign audiences, might be directed at the American people, a prospect "not only disapproved by the conscience of representative government, but [also] positively unlawful."[9]

Fully aware of the anti-democratic overtones of the word propaganda and eager for congressional appropriations, the modernizers within the State Department, at least publically, continued to apply the neutral term "information" to U.S. campaigns to influence global public opinion. As Truman ramped up the Cold War abroad, the president simultaneously created a loyalty program for federal employees designed in part to blunt congressional attacks on the State Department by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).[10] In this politically charged atmosphere, U.S. cultural

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[8] Of course, this speech was not the first to articulate a gathering ideological clash between the Soviet Union and America. Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, which he delivered in Truman's home state of Missouri, came a year earlier. Harry S. Truman, Address to Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947, 80th Congress, 1st Session, Document 171. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp

[9] Rep. Harness, statement on July 25, 1947, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 93, *Congressional Record*, 10298-10299.

[10] Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 180-182.

diplomacy survived by emphasizing its utility as a weapon to match Soviet propaganda efforts.

Truman endorsed the new direction in U.S. foreign policy when he signed the United States Information and Education Exchange Act, better known as the Smith-Mundt Act, into law on January 27, 1948. The USIE, and its successor the United States Information Service (USIS) and the United States Information Agency (USIA), would serve as "a national foreign information program in time of peace and as the essential nucleus for psychological warfare in periods of national emergency or the initial stages of war."[11] As the Cold War intensified, defense and foreign policy experts stressed the size, sophistication, and reach of the Soviet propaganda machine and it was consistently cited—and later exaggerated—to press for the expansion and consolidation of America's information program.[12]

In tandem with the institutionalization of U.S. cultural diplomacy, race moved from the periphery to the center of U.S. foreign policy. Once again, WWII provided the catalyst. In early 1941, Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" revived Wilsonian rhetoric in an effort to frame the Allied cause as morally just and urgent. For African Americans, the most significant of these freedoms was the "Freedom from Fear." While Roosevelt had protection from oppression under totalitarian governments in mind, African

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[11] "United States Information and Education Exchange Objectives In Next Five Years," November 2, 1949. Department of State, Office of Public Affairs. National Archives Record Adminstration (NARA), College Park, Maryland, RG 59, Entry 57D459, Box 3, Folder 164.
[12] Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 7.

Americans recognized that the phrase also provided a platform to attack racial violence and discrimination within the United States.[13]

Capitalizing on the state of national emergency, the labor leader A. Philip Randolph successfully pressured Roosevelt to desegregate the defense industries by threatening a mass protest march on Washington if no action was taken.[14] Once the United States entered the war, African Americans linked victory against foreign fascism directly to the victory against "fascism at home" in the popular "Double-V Campaign."[15] While WWII, in which nearly one million African American soldiers served in segregated units, did not bring an immediate end to Jim Crow, it undermined its foundations by exposing the inherent contradictions of fighting to exterminate Nazism as an existential evil, while upholding white supremacy in the United States.

In an influential 1944 study of American race relations, the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal articulated the international dimensions of America's "Negro problem." Myrdal warned Americans that in the nation's coming bid for leadership in the post-war world it could no longer afford to neglect its international reputation. The U.S. had to reject the comfortable parochialism that characterized its isolationist stance in the interwar period by taking decisive action to address racial injustice, which Myrdal called

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[13] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Message to Congress," January 6, 1941 (Reading copy). fdr.libary.org/documents/ 356632/390886/readingcopy.pdf

[14] Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 359-364.

[15] The *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the campaign, which quickly mushroomed nationally. The slogan originated from a letter to the editor. James G. Thompson, Letter to the Editor, *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942; "The Courier's Double 'V' for a Double Victory Gets Countrywide Support," *Pittsburgh Courier,* February 14, 1942.

"America's greatest and most conspicuous scandal."[16] Myrdal paired blunt criticism with an optimistic belief that America possessed the civic and moral resources to face this challenge. "America is free to choose," Myrdal concluded, "whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity."[17]

Three years later in the summer of 1947, the veteran diplomat George F. Kennan included a variation on Myrdal's central theme in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* under a pseudonym. Success in the struggle with the Soviet Union, Kennan wrote, would depend on whether "the United States can create among peoples of the world generally the impression of a country […] which is coping successfully with the problems of its internal life." "To avoid destruction," the widely discussed article concluded, "the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation."[18]

Racial discrimination gained additional relevance to U.S. foreign affairs as the first wave of decolonization, which began in 1947 with the independence of India and Pakistan, dramatically altered the geopolitical landscape. American racism, both formal and informal, threatened to derail U.S. attempts to establish and maintain positive relations with the new nations of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.[19] As former colonies gained independence and sent officials to Washington, D.C. or New York, racist

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[16] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 1020.
[17] Ibid., 1022.
[18] While Kennan did not refer overtly to race relations, it was undeniably the most pressing "problem" of the nation's "internal life." The article is better known as the earliest theoretical blueprint for the policy of "containment." Mr. X [George Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 582.
[19] "America's Caste System," *The Times of India*, July 26, 1947.

incidents considered commonplace when visited on African Americans presented a diplomatic minefield and a public relations nightmare for the U.S. government.[20] As the Cold War intensified, American racism continued to provide the Soviet Union a ready cudgel to discredit America's claims to moral superiority.

As Truman moved to confront the spread of Communism abroad and retain the presidency in 1947, his handpicked civil rights committee published *To Secure These Rights*. The groundbreaking report advocated broad civil rights reforms including anti-lynching legislation, voting rights, and desegregation of the armed forces.[21] On July 26, 1948, Truman acted on the final item by issuing an executive order that ended Jim Crow segregation in the military and affirmed arguments that racism hindered U.S. preparedness in the Cold War.[22] Truman's civil rights agenda sparked significant backlash. At the Democratic National Convention two weeks earlier, in response to the inclusion of a plank affirming the party's commitment to civil rights in the party's platform, a bloc of Southern segregationists broke way to form the Dixiecrat Party.[23] In spite of the revolt, Truman won the 1948 election by a razor thin margin, secured by unprecedented African American support.[24]

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[20] For several examples of these incidents during the Kennedy Administration see Dudzaik, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 152-168.
[21] President's Committee On Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947).
[22] President Harry S. Truman, "Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Equality in the Armed Services, Executive Order 9981," July 26, 1948. www.trumanlibrary.org/9981
[23] Karl Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 127-130.
[24] Truman received more than 75 percent of the African American vote in 1948, the first year that a majority of African Americans identified as Democrats. According to Republican analysts, if Dewey had received 15 percent more of the African American vote, he would have defeated

Historians generally agree that foreign policy considerations supplied a key motive for the Truman Administration's embrace of civil rights reforms. As Mary Dudziak has persuasively argued, by 1948 a consensus had begun to solidify among U.S. foreign policy makers, including orthodox realists like Dean Acheson, that racial discrimination had direct bearing on the national security interests of the United States.[25] And yet, there was no clear agreement on how exactly to formulate a strategic answer to this problem. Similarly, many officials within the State Department agreed with Stanford Professor Oren Stephens, that the future of diplomacy was one in which "government-to-government relations [will] have been replaced to a considerable extent by people-to-people relations."[26] This uncertain reality, in which race held a central place within U.S. foreign policy calculations and citizens were both targets and instruments of national foreign policy, demanded a new kind of diplomacy and new type of diplomat.

Edith Sampson, a successful, middle-aged African American attorney, stepped forward to become an unlikely spokesperson for American cultural diplomacy and one of its most dynamic practitioners. Born Edith Spurlock on October 13, 1901 in Pittsburgh, Sampson was the seventh of eight children in a large, working-class family.[27] Her father, Louis, worked as a shipping clerk at the Enterprise Cleaning and Dyeing Company. Her mother, Elizabeth, worked nights as a waitress for a local catering business and sold

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Truman. Leah Wright Riguer, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 26.

[25] Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 80-82.

[26] Stephens, *Facts to a Candid World,* 16.

[27] The following biographical sketch is based on four pages of typed autobiographical notes entitled, "These Things I Remember Well," in Edith Spurlock Sampson Papers (ESS Papers), Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Box 1, Folder 1. In a letter to her sister Blanche, Edith confessed that most of her childhood was "like a closed book" whose details remained foggy. Edith S. Sampson to Blanche Morris, September 19, 1951, ESS Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

handmade hats and wigs.[28] An active member of the Lucy Stone Suffrage League, Elizabeth imparted a strong sense of civic engagement to her youngest daughter. Like many African American families, the Spurlocks's social life revolved around the Church. Each Sunday, Edith attended the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church and then walked a mile to the mostly white Cavalry Episcopal Church, which hosted Sunday school classes and sewing lessons for local children of both races.[29]

One of the churchwomen helped Sampson get a position with the Associated Charities of Pittsburgh, which in turn, sent her to study at the New York School of Social Work.[30] After one of her classes, the progressive jurist George Kirchwey told Sampson that she possessed a keen legal mind and encouraged her to attend law school. Sampson subsequently moved to Chicago with her first husband. While raising two nieces and working full time for the YWCA, Sampson attended night classes at John Marshall Law School and earned a Master's in Jurisprudence from Loyola University. After passing the Illinois bar, Sampson worked her way up through Chicago's criminal justice system from a probation officer in juvenile court to Assistant States Attorney of Cook County, becoming the first African American woman to hold the office.[31] Sampson's upbringing and hard-earned success imbued her with the values of respectability, self-sufficiency, and race pride widely shared by her generation of middle class African American strivers.

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[28] The catering business was Packard's. For a profile of Mrs. Louise M. Packard, the founder of the catering business, see, "When There's A Big Party, Society Folks Call Caterer," *The Pittsburgh Press*, November 23, 1934.
[29] Sampson, "These Things I Remember Well, 2. ESS Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
[30] Previously known as the New York School of Philanthropy and later renamed the Columbia University School of Social Work.
[31] Sampson was also the first woman to earn an advanced degree from Loyola University. Edith Sampson, "I Like America," *Negro Digest* 9, no. 2 (December 1950): 7. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 109.

Relatedly, Sampson's religious faith provided the foundation for an ideological conservatism marked by staunch anti-Communism.[32]

Sampson's diplomatic career began on the last Saturday of June in 1949 on a temporary stage erected on the tarmac of New York's newly constructed Idlewild Airport next to the gleaming Boeing 377 Stratocruiser Clipper *United States*. As an officer of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Sampson joined twenty-five other representatives of various American professional, fraternal, and advocacy groups as participants in the First 'Round-the-World Town Meeting and Town Hall Seminar. The whirlwind 35,000-mile tour planned stops in twelve world capitals, where the American delegates would host forums in conjunction with local representatives to discuss the most pressing issues of the day.[33]

The tour was the brainchild of George V. Denny, the longtime host of the popular radio program America's Town Hall Meeting of the Air. The weekly show featured notable panelists who debated current event topics and fielded questions from listeners and a live studio audience. It was self-consciously modeled on New England's iconic colonial town meetings, which the artist Norman Rockwell had recently used as a symbol

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[32] Ideologically, Sampson most closely resembled her friend and contemporary George S. Schuyler, a prominent conservative intellectual and pioneering journalist. They bonded over a shared loathing of Soviet and American Communism. For both, rabid anti-communism led at times to a tolerance, or in Schuyler's case an embrace, of reactionary forces. See Jeffrey B. Leak, ed., *Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), Jeffrey B. Ferguson*, The Sage of Sugar Hill: George S. Schuyler and the Harlem Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univeristy Press, 2005).

[33] The tour's seventy-two day itinerary was as follows: New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Ankara, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Karachi, New Delhi, Manila, Tokyo, Honolulu, San Francisco, Washington, D.C.

of American democracy in his wartime illustration "Freedom of Speech."[34] Denny fervently believed that radio should be used to facilitate an exchange of ideas, strengthen democratic values, and promote civic education. He envisioned the world tour as a way to expand this vision globally at a formative moment for American international leadership in the post-war world.

The tour represented one of America's first post-war experiments in "person-to-person" diplomacy. At a moment of heightened tension and looming nuclear conflict, the humanistic idea that cultural exchange promoted goodwill and peace gained renewed resonance. The Town Hall members hoped that by directly engaging with other ordinary citizens abroad they would demonstrate that "the American people—and not merely their government—are concerned with the problems of other people."[35] ABC vice-president Ivor Kenway celebrated the tour as a welcome escape from the suffocating norms of formal diplomacy. "While the diplomats of the world fence about," the Town Hall delegates would foster international goodwill in "an atmosphere that is not messed up with protocol, official instruction, and the necessity of jockeying for position."[36]

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[34] Each program opened with a town-crier intoning "Oyez! Oyez! Town meeting tonight. Bring your questions to the town meeting" while his bell tolled in the background. America's Town Hall Meeting of the Air, "Will the Demands of Organized Labor Promote Recovery," June 14, 1935. Audio file 350614, archive.org/details/ATMOTA; Norman Rockwell, "Freedom of Speech," *Saturday Evening Post,* Feburary 20, 1943. Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings were widely reproduced in a successful poster campaign to sell war bonds. David M. Kennedy, *The Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 470.
The tour's official promotional pamphlet, with captions in English, French, German, Italian, Turkish, Hebrew,

[35] Department of State, *The Record: International Exchange* 6, No. 2 (March-April, 1950): 14. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 193.

[36] America's Town Hall Meeting of the Air, broadcast from June 24, 1949. "Round-the-World Tour Kickoff," audio archived at http://www.wnyc.org/story/round-the-world-tour-kickoff/.

Despite the repeated insistence that the tour was a private venture completely independent of the U.S. government, the State Department played a vital behind-the-scenes role.[37] Advances in the fields of public opinion polling, psychology, and public relations in the early post-war period lent scientific legitimacy to innovations in the traditional forms and functions of U.S. diplomacy. As a result, intellectual trends nurtured in the faculty lounges of Ivy-League universities and the boardrooms of Madison Avenue steadily gained purchase among Foggy Bottom's foreign policy elite.[38] America's tradition of voluntary boosterism provided fertile soil for the World Town Hall tour's hybrid private-public approach to cultural diplomacy and compensated for the nation's lack of a sophisticated cultural relations apparatus in 1949.[39]

Although Sampson had never left the country before the world tour, like many of her NCNW members she was encouraged from a young age to proudly identify as a representative of African American achievement. As an African American woman who had climbed to the top of the male-dominated legal profession, Sampson self-consciously viewed her participation on the tour as a way of opening new doors previously closed to women of color.[40] Sampson felt uniquely situated to tap into "the common bond of friendship and understanding [that] exists between the darker nations of the globe." At the same time, Sampson declared her intention to promote inter-racial understanding

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[37] Laville and Lucas, "The American Way," 569.
[38] For a representative selection of this thinking see Wallace Carroll, *Persuade or Perish* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948); Charles Thompson, *Overseas Information Service of the United States Government* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1948); Edward W. Barrett, *Truth Is Our Weapon* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1953).
[39] Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).
[40] "As President of the World Town Hall Seminar, I have had entrée into many circles where doors heretofore have been closed and have taken every opportunity in these new places to sell women of color." Edith Sampson to Dr. Dorothy Ferebee, August 9, 1950. Box 9, Folder 188.

within the Town Hall delegation, which included the segregationist mayor of New Orleans and an American Legion official from North Carolina, by using the tour as a platform to "enlighten our fellow-Caucasian travellers on the minority group problem in our own country."[41]

The group's other African American representative, Walter White of the NAACP, promised to provide an unvarnished and unflinching assessment of American race relations that encompassed both "the seamy" and "the encouraging" aspects of the issue.[42] White had decades of international experience and as head of the NAACP had framed civil rights reform as a liberal anti-communist prophylactic since the early 1930s. White's prominence should have made him the de facto spokesman for African Americans on the tour.[43] Because of White's blonde hair, blue eyes, and light skin, however, the delicate task of delivering this balanced narrative fell primarily to Sampson, whom foreign audiences had no difficulty identifying as African American.[44]

Sampson's ability to emotionally connect with other women of color played out in dramatic fashion in Karachi. After Sampson's speech, which focused on the hard won achievements of African American women, Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, the wife of

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[41] Libby Clark,"U.S. Race Policy Bared to World," *Pittsburgh Courier,* September 17, 1949.
[42] Walter White, "World Town Meeting of the Air Gets Underway," *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1949.
[43] Sampson took the place of Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder and president of the NCNW, who was not well enough able to travel. She was selected, in part, because she was wealthy enough to pay her own way.
[44] White's features allowed him to "pass" as white. Earlier in his career White used this ability to fearlessly report on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the South. Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 54. On the tour, White travelled with his white South African wife, which further led foreigners to misread his race. Sampson recounted that many foreigners were shocked to discover that White was, in fact, "a Negro." C.W. Greenlea, "Atlantans Learn of Distrust of American Democracy Abroad," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 3, 1950.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, rose to offer five thousand dollars to cover all of Sampson's expenses on the trip. Sampson, who had paid her own way because the cash-strapped NCNW lacked funds, graciously accepted the gift and then announced that she would like to donate the same sum to the All Pakistan Women's Association. "One simple act of human sisterhood" Walter White declared, "cemented a more lasting bond between East and West than a thousand pompous speeches."[45] Khan herself later thanked Sampson and the other Town Hall women for providing "frank, free, and lively discussion, and the making of personal contacts, which in the long run, make so much difference in establishing understanding and goodwill."[46] In this way, Sampson's "woman to woman" diplomacy contributed to forging a U.S-Pakistan military alliance, which was sealed the following year during the Khans official state visit to the White House.[47]

At virtually every stop, from London to Manila, the Town Hall panelists received questions about race relations in America.[48] Audiences in the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent expressed particular concern about racial discrimination and violence in America, which were covered extensively in the local press.[49] At the Town Hall meeting

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[45] "Mrs. Sampson Wins Hearts in India," *The Chicago Defender*, September 17, 1949.

[46] Khan added "You, as a representative of the Negro people, made a special appeal to us who have lately, and with so much suffering and sacrifice, attained our national freedom." Begum Liaquat Ali Khan to Edith Sampson, January 11, 1950. ESS Papers, Box 3, Folder 69. Khan presented Sampson with a sari embroidered with gold when she visited the United States with her husband the following year. *New York Amsterdam News*, May 27, 1950. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 193.

[47]Chester Williams, the tour's director, used the phrase in a letter to Mary McCleod Bethune. *The Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1949. For the origins of the U.S.-Pakistan alliance see Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 132-133.

[48] According to White, the race question was "the most caustically and frequently asked question, and usually the first." "Foreign Peoples Curious About U.S. Race Problem," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1949.

[49]A sample of representative contemporary coverage from *The Times of India* supplies ample evidence. "Racial Bias In Washington," *The Times of India, June 5, 1949; "*U.S. Anti-Lynch

in New Delhi, Sampson tackled the issue head-on. She opened her prepared speech by repeating the question she had heard most often during the tour, including from her hosts in India: "Do Negroes have equal rights in America?" After a brief pause, Sampson spoke frankly, "My answer is no, we do not have equal rights in all parts of the United States." Lamenting the "considerable misinformation" about African American life, Sampson pointed to her own life as proof positive that African Americans could succeed in the United States. Sampson then proceeded to name a litany of famous educators, scientists, politicians, poets, musicians, and athletes as evidence of the race's wide-ranging achievements.[50] "Does this mean I am satisfied? Or that Negroes in the United States are satisfied?" Sampson asked. "No, not by a long shot! We will never be satisfied until racial barriers are lifted and we have full and complete integration."

Sampson then pivoted to link American racial reform to the nation's credibility as leader of the free world. "From an international standpoint, we in the United States must realize the importance of cleaning up our own backyard." In order to secure support from wavering nations, win the confidence of "Asia's dark-skinned millions," and fight communism, America had to begin to "practice what it preaches, but fast!" Sampson ended with an impassioned plea to "wipe out the last vestige of separation of races by

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Bill*," The Times of India*, June, 11, 1949; *"* 'America Becoming A Police State,' Reactionaries Blamed*,*" *The Times of India, July 19, 1949.*

[50] It is worth noting that Sampson's list of African American heroes skewed heavily in favor of more conservative figures. She touted Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Mary McLeod Bethune and conspicuously omitted W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Josephine Baker, individuals with whom she would clash in the coming years.

eliminating in every country of the world any trace of discrimination because of race, color, or creed."[51]

The New Delhi Town Meeting was a defining moment that helped to lift Sampson from relative obscurity to the world stage. Sampson won glowing endorsements from her fellow Town Hall World Seminar members, who unanimously elected her as the group's president.[52] In the United States, thousands of people throughout the nation listened to Sampson's speech on ABC's special weekly broadcast of the tour.[53] Coverage in the African American press, as well as Chicago's two largest newspapers, praised Sampson's ability to promote positive relations abroad while speaking out against injustice at home.[54] Walter White declared Sampson "the most valuable salesman of American democracy on the Town Hall Tour" and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, who

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[51] *Town Meeting: Bulletin of America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 577th Broadcast, September 13, 1949, "What Are Democracy's Best Answers to Communism?" (New York: The Town Hall, Inc., 1949), 10-11. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 192.

[52]Even Chep Morrison, the mayor of New Orleans and an ardent segregationist, sang Sampson's praises. "I am convinced that the Negroes of America, to say nothing of the world, were well represented by this hard-hitting, courageous, and brilliant woman," Morrison said of Sampson. John C. Carpenter, "Stop Me If," *St. Louis American*, March 25, 1950. In ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 193. With no apparent sense of the irony, Morrison later named a segregated playground in Samson's honor. Chep Morrison to Edith Sampson, July 16, 1951in ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 197.

[53] The number of listeners is difficult to pinpoint but could have easily reached six figures. ABC carried the popular program on 265 stations nationwide. A fundraiser for the tour generated $45,000 from 18,000 listeners. "American Town Meeting Views Of Countries Visited," *Statesman* (New Delhi), August 17, 1949. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 92.

[54] "Mrs. Sampson Wins Hearts in India," *The Chicago Defender*, September 17, 1949; Libby Clark, "U.S. Race Policy Bared to World," *Pittsburgh Courier,* September 17, 1949; Ray Falk, " 'Aunt Edith' Meets World Leaders," *The Sun Times* (Chicago), undated clipping, in ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 194; "Woman Lawyer Finds a Cure for Socialism," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1949. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 109.

travelled throughout India the following year, claimed Sampson's speech had "created more good will and understanding in India than any other single act by any American."[55]

If Sampson's prepared remarks showcased her eloquence, the question and answer session highlighted her razor wit and intellectual agility.[56] Sampson responded to a convoluted question peppered with Marxist buzzwords with withering condescension, "Well, my dear young man, I think you want to put a question, but it isn't sufficiently intelligent for me to understand it."[57] In response to a flurry of questions about African American inequality in the United States, Sampson alternately conceded the persistence of racial discrimination and confidently asserted that concrete progress was being made, citing the Fair Employment Practice Commission and a recent Supreme Court decision banning racially restrictive covenants in housing.[58] In her final statement, Sampson urged the United States to build on this momentum by stepping up the pace and volume of reforms so that the nation could "take her proper place in world affairs today."[59]

Two of Sampson's comments to the audience, however, sparked controversy. The first, which the historical record indicates Sampson probably never said, was Sampson's alleged retort to a heckler: "I'd rather be a Negro in America than a citizen of any other

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[55] Walter White, "Foreign Peoples Curious About U.S. Race Problem," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1949. William O. Douglas, *Strange Lands and Friendly People* (New York: Harper, 1951), 262. See also William O. Douglas to Edith Sampson, May 22, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 3, Folder 70.

[56] Nearly two decades later a woman from Louisiana wrote to tell Sampson that she would "never forget how you answered the questions put to you in Pakistan and India," adding, "I gloried in your patriotism and fine common sense." Martha G. Robinson to Edith Sampson, December 18, 1968 in ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 105.

[57] *Town Meeting: Bulletin of America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 577th Broadcast, September 13, 1949, "What Are Democracy's Best Answers to Communism?" (New York: The Town Hall, Inc., 1949), 16. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 192.

[58] The case was *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 US 1, (1948).

[59] *Town Meeting,* "What Are Democracy's Best Answers to Communism," 22.

land."[60] After *Time* magazine included the quote in an article published nearly a full year after the original exchange supposedly occurred, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published a scathing editorial by Percival Prattis. Prattis, who had known Sampson for more than thirty years, informed Sampson that their mutual friends had been "utterly disgusted" by her behavior in the "Indian incident." Couching his words as a hard truth, Prattis told Sampson she had "missed a chance to speak out for her race and had apologized for the acts of white Americans against Negro Americans."[61] If this public shaming stung Sampson, she did not let on. On the contrary, two months later she published an article in *Negro Digest*, titled simply, "I Like America."[62]

Ironically, another provocative Sampson comment, which Sampson indisputably did say, was made in response to an audience question about Paul Robeson's reported assertion at the World Peace Conference in Paris that African American men would not take up arms to fight communism—a statement Robeson's biographer has persuasively

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[60] This version of the quote was published in *Time* and again in Edith Sampson's obituary. *Time* 56, Issue 9 (August 28, 1950): 16; *New York Times*, October 11, 1979. The World Town Hall transcript does not contain the quote. Walter White, who was there, wrote a press challenging another version of the quote in which Samspon allegedly said she would "rather be a Negro in the poorest part of Mississippi than an Untouchable in India." White flatly denied Sampson or anyone else made "so undiplomatic a statement" and complained of the damage such an erroneous report could inflict on U.S.-Indian relations. Walter White, "How Not To Win Friends," press release, August 24, 1950. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 214.

[61]The timing of the editorial suggest Prattis was responding to the account of the exchange published the previous week in *Time.* P.L. Prattis, "The Horizon," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 2, 1950. Eslanda Robeson wrote, but did not publish, an open letter to Edith Sampson in which she told her "many of us were surprised, embarrassed, and bitterly disappointed" with her reported comment in India. Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Negroes Ask: Why Not Tell The World Our Troubles?" 1951. Eslanda Robeson Papers (ER Papers), Box 13, Folder "Undated fragments, synopses, notes." Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

[62] The article was framed as statement of Sampson's personal credo but also rehearsed the themes and slogans of popular and official anti-communist rhetoric. Sampson, "I Like America," *Negro Digest* 9, no. 2 (December 1950): 3-8. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 109.

argued was badly misrepresented in the press. [63] Sampson rejected the implication that African Americans would not rally to the nation's defense and claimed "only a lunatic fringe in America" shared Robeson's views.[64] Sampson's comments amplified attacks on Robeson's patriotism not long after the House Committee on Un-American Activities had raised the specter of Communist infiltration of civil rights organizations earlier in the summer and less than a month after white rioters had violently disrupted Robeson's benefit concert in Peekskill, New York.[65] While many African Americans continued to revere Robeson, for Sampson and other African American anti-communists his open sympathy for the Soviet Union irredeemably tainted his civil rights advocacy. By refuting Robeson's alleged statement, Sampson believed she was not only defending the honor of African American men, but also signaling the loyalty of African American women to the ideological fight against communism.[66] The Cold War, and the emerging liberal consensus that folded civil rights reforms into a broader anti-communist agenda, exposed and heightened the ideological dimensions of intra-racial fault lines that divided African American elites.[67]

In light of Sampson's polarizing reputation among her contemporaries and subsequent historians, it is important to note that in its original context the New Delhi

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[63] Robeson also immediately denied the accuracy of his quoted remarks. Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 314.
[64] "What Are Democracy's Best Answers to Communism?"18. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 192.
[65] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist infiltration of Minority Groups*, 81st Cong., 1st sess., July 13, 14, 18, 1949, 427-455.
[66] Andrea Friedman has astutely observed that narrative frameworks linking African American citizenship to military service "left precious little space for black women to demonstrate their loyalty." Friedman, "The Strange Career of Annie Lee Moss: Rethinking Race, Gender, and McCarthyism," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (September 2007): 456.
[67] Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off The Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

speech registered as a strong rebuke of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.[68] Except for the Prattis piece, most editorials in the African American press commended Sampson for exposing American racism, not apologizing for it.[69] Others newspapers explicitly cheered Sampson for providing "an antidote for the poison which Paul Robeson has been spreading."[70] Next to a story about Sampson, the *Chicago Defender* ran a cartoon captioned "Still Trying to Work His Con Game," in which Stalin attempted to sell his signature "Ol' Doc's Cure All" to an African American man. The man waved off the bottle labeled "Red Russia," exclaiming, "Who you kidding'? There's no better brand than USA!"[71] While this overt display of patriotic anti-communism may have been an attempt to preemptively assert loyalty in a politically repressive atmosphere, it captured the authentic worldview of African American conservatives like Edith Sampson.

As the Town Hall delegation celebrated the completion of its world tour in the fall of 1949, racism marred the group's triumphant homecoming when the management of the Carlton Hotel in the nation's capital refused to serve the group because of Sampson's presence.[72] Rather than becoming demoralized, Sampson used the bitter irony of the incident to amplify her admonition that Americans needed to "clean up our own

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[68] Sampson's strident anti-communism was certainly not representative of the political priorities of the African American population as a whole, but neither for that matter was the brand of radicalism favored by a small group of African American leftists. Consider the following account of the New Delhi speech. "[Sampson] lashed out bitterly against the State Department, which she accuses of having missed the boat and told only half the story of the Negro problem abroad." Libby Clark, "U.S. Race Policy Bared to World," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 17, 1949.
[69] "She is no apologist for abuses of democracy at home," another plainly stated. "Mrs. Sampson To Battle Reds, *The Chicago Defender*, September 2, 1950.
[70] "No Prejudice of Her Own," *The Toledo Blade*, October 26, 1949. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 109.
[71] Henry Brown, "Still Trying To Work His Con Game," *The Chicago Defender*, September 9, 1950.
[72] Venice Spraggs, "Town Hall Group Hits Racial Snag In Capital At End of World Tour," *Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1949.

backyard," which became the central theme of a national speaking tour the following year.[73] For the first half of 1950, the intrepid Sampson crisscrossed the United States from Los Angeles to Detroit and Dallas to Jacksonville. In these cities, and many small towns in between, Sampson shared her impressions from the World Town Hall tour in scores of public presentations.[74] At each stop, Sampson stressed that racial discrimination presented a major obstacle to American efforts to win allies among the two-thirds of the world's peoples who were not white. In Des Moines, Sampson warned a group of Iowans, "You have got to open these closed doors, end segregation, if you are going to save yourself."[75] At the conclusion of the tour, Sampson personally delivered the World Town Hall delegation's final report to President Truman. It included a polished reprisal of what she considered to have been the trip's core insight: "Our world leadership is abbreviated and delimited by [foreign peoples'] consciousness of the gap between our vaunted passion and our miniature performance and delivery in the field of human relations."[76]

While the president hardly needed to be convinced of the merits of this argument, the energetic lawyer from Chicago had captured the Truman Administration's attention.[77]

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[73] In an Emancipation Day speech in Atlanta, Sampson closed with the familiar line. "Atlantans Learn of Distrust of American Democracy Abroad," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 3, 1950.
[74]Edith Sampson, "To the Members of the Committee of International Relations of the National Council of Negro Women," ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 188.
[75] "Race Bias Held Costly To U.S.," *Des Moines Register*, April 18 , 1950. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 192.
[76] Edith Sampson, "The Seminar Reports…" in *The Story of an American Institution Fifteen Years of America's Town Meeting of the Air* (New York: The Town Hall, Inc., 1950), 72. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 194.
[77] As previously noted, the president's administration and much of the wider foreign policy establishment had come to view race relations as America's "Achille's heel" by 1949. Chester Williams, a UN and State Department official who would become Sampson's biggest booster in Washington, even referred to racism as the "Achilles' heel of the U.S." during a public event in South Hadley, Massachusetts, echoing Sampson's comments to the same audience. "U.S. Must

Sampson's blunt acknowledgement of the imperfections of American society and first hand experience with racial discrimination lent her subsequent defense of U.S. democracy credibility and depth. At the same time, especially in front of foreign audiences, Sampson's public criticism of U.S. policies bolstered the image of the United States as a society that valued first amendment freedoms and provided a vivid contrast to the Soviet Union's brutal repression of internal dissent and state-controlled media. For this reason, U.S. officials saw great propaganda value in Sampson's three-part rhetorical strategy, which combined concessions that U.S. race relations needed to improve, recitations of racial progress, and anti-communist assertions that such progress could only take place in an open democratic society. The emphasis varied, but these three ingredients provided a remarkably stable template for State Department's information strategy to deal with race first set in motion by Truman's "Campaign of Truth," in which Sampson would play a starring role.

Spurred by the Korean crisis amid mounting domestic pressure to counter Soviet propaganda, Truman called for a "campaign of truth" to "promote the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery" in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 20, 1950.[78] Earlier that month the National Security Council issued "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" (NSC-68), a top-secret paper that recommended a massive "psychological offensive" to complement the expansion of America's traditional military assets.[79] In conjunction with NSC-68,

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Clean Up Racial Problem to Sell Democracy," *Union Leader* (New Hampshire), September 11, 1950. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 92.

[78] "For A Campaign of Truth," *New York Times*, April 21, 1950.

[79] NSC-68, primarily written by Paul Nitze, favored an aggressive information strategy that framed the Cold War as a zero-sum ideological battle and emphasized the size, sophistication,

Truman's address legitimized propaganda as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy and pushed the architects of American cultural relations "to shift from public relations to psychological warfare."[80] For Senator Alexander Wiley, Truman's hardline was a welcome departure from the policy of containment, which the Wisconsin Republican had derided as "pantywaist diplomacy."[81] The ascension of foreign policy hawks, however, did not completely vanquish advocates of soft power within the State Department and the two factions coexisted uneasily within America's push to "win friends and influence people" abroad.[82]

In the fall of 1950, with the Campaign of Truth in full swing, Truman named Sampson as an alternate delegate to the US Mission to the UN, explicitly touting her appointment as "an answer to Soviet propaganda regarding the Negro."[83] Mary McCleod Bethune, Langston Hughes and others praised the nomination, but took issue with the implication that Truman chose Sampson for her propaganda value rather than her merits.[84] Sampson's appointment to the UN, which followed the African American

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and reach of the Soviet propaganda apparatus in order to justify a massive expansion of U.S. information programs. "NSC-68," April 7, 1950. NARA, RG 59, Entry 57D459, Box 3, Folder 60.

[80] Stephens, *Facts to a Candid World,* 6.

[81] Quoted in Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 95.

[82] Wallace Carroll to Edward Barrett, "Psychological Implications of NSC-68," June 6, 1950. NARA, RG 59, Lot 58D459, Box 10, Folder 164.

[83] "Report Chicago Negro Woman to Get U.N. Post," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 19, 1950.

[84] Mary McLeod Bethune, "Many Sampsons, Many Bunches Needed for Results," *The Chicago Defender*, September 2, 1950. Hughes asserted that while "all decent minded citizens rejoice that so able a woman will represent us in so important a position […] nobody thinks that a handful of jobs or a half dozen important appointments are going to solve the race problem." Langston Hughes, "What Was Fashionable in the 20's Will Be Fashionable in the '50s For Another Reason, *The Chicago Defender*, September 9, 1950. For more positive coverage see "Mrs. Sampson to Battle Reds," *The Chicago Defender*, September 2, 1950. "Mrs. Sampson—So Far, So Good," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 2, 1950. "Sampson Warns US On Jim Crow," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 11, 1950.

diplomat Ralph Bunche's successful UN peace mediation efforts in the Mideast, built on a long tradition of patronage appointments that served as "token gestures" meant to win African American support.[85] Sampson's appointment offered benefits beyond domestic political calculations. Truman recognized the UN as a venue where domestic race relations threatened to spill into the international arena and hoped that Sampson might forestall unwanted leaks. Three years earlier, November of 1947, the NAACP arranged for the Soviet Union to submit a meticulously researcher petition on racial discrimination in the United States to the UN Commission on Human Rights after failing to convince the US Delegation to proactively sponsor the report.[86]

Sampson's appointment to the UN, as would become increasingly clear, was not simply a means to thwart Soviet mischief in that body but also a way to check unsanctioned African American efforts to focus international attention on U.S. race relations. Sampson's official status as a representative of the United States at the UN and on subsequent state-sponsored goodwill tours, coincided with repressive measures specifically designed to curtail African American criticism of the United States abroad. In addition to FBI surveillance and legal persecution, the State Department blocked African American dissidents from traveling abroad by denying passports to Paul Robeson, W.E.B Du Bois, and others.[87]

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[85] Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 88.
[86] Sampson's organization, the NCNW, was among the dozens of Afican American organization to endorse the petition. Brenda Gayle Plummer, *A Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 180-182.
[87] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 195; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 124. The U.S. government also actively harassed the African American performer Josephine Baker whose French citizenship offered only partial protection. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 67-76.

Sampson's peripatetic diplomatic career and carefully constructed "image" reveal the gendered dimensions of the U.S. government's multi-faceted campaign to control international discussion of U.S. race relations, counter Soviet propaganda, and project a narrative of African American progress. While technically an alternate delegate, Sampson instantly became one of the most visible members of the US delegation. Newspapers around the world, but especially in the newly independent nations of the global south, ran stories and photos of Sampson. An internal report noted approvingly that Sampson was among the most photographed members of the entire UN and second only to Eleanor Roosevelt in the volume of mail she received.[88] Sampson attended numerous dinners, receptions, and social functions that filled the social calendar of the international diplomatic community. As "the life of the party [capable of] introducing that informality and good humor that diplomats really yearn for," Sampson thrived in these informal settings. Her "relish for the personal touch" opened fruitful channels for diplomacy and even rallied unexpected support for American interests at the UN.[89] Sampson's social skills and photogenic charm, which were implicitly cast as feminine virtues that mostly operated outside her official duties, received far more notice from U.S. officials than the more traditional diplomatic spade work she completed on important topics such as radio jamming and repatriation of prisoners of war.[90]

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[88]Sampson endeavored to answer the heavy correspondence personally, a task that "kept several secretaries busy." "Restricted: Press Comment on Mrs. Sampson's Appointment to the UN Delegation." ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 210.

[89] "Record of Sampson's Performance: September 1950 -October 1952," n.d., 5. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 210.

[90] Traditionally, the informal diplomacy of socializing at fancy dinners and cocktail parties fell to the wives of diplomats and daughters of diplomats. Molly M. Wood, "Diplomatic Wives: The Politics of Domesticity and the 'Social Game' in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1905-1941," *Journal of Women's History,* 17 (Summer 2005): 142-165.

In other ways, Sampson's race, gender, and age were weaponized from the moment of her appointment. At the UN, Sampson's celebrity placed Soviet diplomats in an awkward position. If they avoided or snubbed Sampson, they risked appearing ungentlemanly or racist. If they greeted her warmly, or attempted to prove their own anti-racist bona fides, they risked handing U.S. officials a ready-made propaganda opportunity. From a public relations standpoint this was a lose-lose proposition that flummoxed Soviet and other Eastern Bloc officials.[91] Sampson exploited this dynamic and took great pleasure in provoking Communist officials.[92] In one instance, Sampson reportedly presented Julius Katz-Suchy with piece of homemade pumpkin pie, explaining to the baffled Polish delegate, "I understand they don't eat well in your country."[93] She told Communist jokes to the Czechoslovakian delegate and successfully ambushed Andrei Vishinsky, the Soviet foreign minister, in the hallway of the UN. In full view of the international press, Sampson thanked him profusely for releasing German prisoners of war, whose existence the Soviet government had officially denied. Vishinsky, aware that he had inadvertently walked into a trap, feigned incomprehension, apologized for his "very bad" English, and hurried away.[94] While the veracity of these stories is dubious,

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[91] The Polish delegate Julius Katz-Suchy, for example, reportedly walked by another diplomat having his picture taken with Sampson and sardonically remarked "Do you have to prove are against discrimination too? "Record of Sampson's Performance: September 1950 -October 1952," n.d., 3. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 210.

[92] "I like to irritate the soviets," Sampson later told a reporter. "Mrs. Sampson Terms U.N. Walkout by France Childish," *Chicago Daily News*, October 7, 1955.

[93] This story, in particular, demonstrates how gendered imagery helped promote Sampson as an anti-communist folk hero. Stories that referred to Sampson by the affectionate nickname "Aunt Edith" further promoted this image. Ray Falk, " 'Aunt Edith' Meets World Leaders," *The Sun Times* (Chicago), undated clipping, in ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 194. See also *Edith Sampson: United Nations Delegate*. USIS. 1950. NARA. 306.1538.

[94] Ernie Hill, "Vishinsky Hastily Forgets His English," Undated Clipping , CDN (Paris). ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 109.

they represent the centrality of Sampson's reputation for making Communists uncomfortable to her public image as a "thorn in Russia's side."[95]

Sampson, a provocateur who relished the fight, leaned into this role.[96] Sampson considered attacks from communists to be a badge of honor and evidence that her work was hitting the mark.[97] This had the practical effect of inoculating her against charges that she was a "notorious itinerant preacher of the American imperialists [who] camouflaged [the] bloody crimes of the American KKK gangsters," in the florid prose of one Communist editorial.[98] On the other hand, Sampson's tendency to ascribe all criticism to agents of a global communist conspiracy promoted a persecution complex that precluded introspection.[99] In this sense, Sampson was precisely the type of committed "crusader," whom some Americans felt the State Department sorely lacked.[100]

On her speaking tours, Sampson seemed to thrive on conflict. Claude A. Barnett, the founder of the Associated Negro Press who watched Sampson deliver a lecture in Copenhagen in 1952, described her as a "doughty scrapper" and marveled at the way she "sallied forth, stepped in front of enemy charges and heckling and told the story of Negro

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[95] "Edith Sampson: A Thorn in Russia's Side," *Readers Digest* (September, 1951): 3-7. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 224.
[96] "Speaker Tells NCC Meeting U.S. Is Hope of Free World," *Durham Morning News*, August 25, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.
[97] Edith Sampson to George Schuyler, May 25, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 3, Folder 72.
[98] The United States High Commissioner For Austria Language Section, Translation 750, *Die Oesterreichische Zeitung*, June 6, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 225.
[99] After one tour, Sampson wrote to US Ambassador to Denmark to inform her that "Communists in your area do not want the 'truth' to be known […] have seen fit to follow me home with their brickbats, threats and intimidations." In a rare moment of vulnerability, Sampson then confessed that she sometimes felt "so feeble and handicapped, for I realize that I am just one person and that my lone voice is likened unto 'a voice in the wilderness.'" Edith Sampson to Eugenie Anderson, March 16, 1952, Box 11, Folder 228.
[100] An aggrieved citizen who had returned from a European trip wrote told Senator Herbert Lehman, "We need crusaders, not job holders." J. Anthony Marcus to Hon. Herbert H. Lehman, December 28, 1950. NARA, Record Group 59.

progress."[101] In the Netherlands where Sampson had stopped en route to Scandinavia, officials from the U.S. Embassy, "rather regretted that no one from the audience 'baited' her while she was on the platform, since she obviously was equipped to take on hecklers in a dramatic, convincing way."[102] In Vienna the previous year, at a meeting hosted by a Quaker group, the editor of a Communist newspaper loudly disrupted Sampson's talk. As he stormed out of the hall, Sampson blocked his exit, embraced him, and exclaimed, "I like you, darling, and I think can convince you that I'm right."[103]

In contrast to her image as an ideological warrior, in U.S. occupied Germany and Austria Sampson was touted in the local press as "the Guardian Angel of the Prisoners of War," a reference to her diligent work on the issue at the UN.[104] Recast in a more traditional feminine role with religious overtones, these stories hailed Sampson as the maternal protector of a vulnerable group. Relatives of prisoners of war in Germany sent more than one hundred letters to Sampson as a result of several short radio segments she recorded for the Voice of America, bolstering this image. In an effort to capitalize on Sampson's popularity, the U.S. Army commissioned a brief documentary film clip of Sampson raising the issue of prisoner repatriation in the Committee of Three to be shown in Germany and Japan.[105] In 1950, as part of a concerted effort to craft and disseminate a narrative of African American success and progress, the United States Information

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[101] Claude A. Barnett to Howland Sargent, Assistant Secretary of State, March 27, 1952, 2-3. ESS Papers, Box 3, Folder 197.
[102] "The Hauge," Marshall W.S. Swan, Public Affairs Officer, February 13, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 237.
[103] Untitled report on Sampson's Austria trip, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 237.
[104] A more literal translation of the headline is "Black Angel of the Prisoners." "Der schwarze Engel der Gefangenen," *Stuttgart Nachrichten,* December 1, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 237.
[105] "Restricted: Press Comment on Mrs. Sampson's Appointment to the UN Delegation." ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 210.

Service (USIS) produced a short biographical film focused on Sampson's various achievements. [106]

Edith Sampson: United Nations Delegate presented Sampson's life story as a classic American tale of triumph over adversity. Foreign audiences, the USIS hoped, would interpret Sampson's life story as a shining example of "the opportunities in the United States for people of all races and creeds." With this didactic objective in mind, it is somewhat surprising the film made almost no direct mention of Sampson's race.[107] Instead, the script emphasized the economic obstacles that Sampson overcame on the road to success.[108] While the film celebrated Sampson as a successful professional woman with advanced degrees, in other ways it scrupulously worked to preserve the era's gender norms. From the film's opening line, the narrator sought to feminize her activities in the male worlds of law and diplomacy by emphasizing her work with children in the juvenile court system, identifying her expertise as "domestic relations," and repeatedly referring to Sampson as a "housewife."[109] Sampson herself often cited her background as

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[106] Other African Americans featured in USIA films included the diplomat Ralph Bunche, soprano Marian Anderson, and star athletes Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, and Rafer Johnson. Melinda M. Schwenk, "'Negro Stars' and the USIA's Portrait of Democracy," *Race, Gender & Class* 8, No. 4 (2001): 116-139. For USIS efforts in Africa see, Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire,* 128-133.

[107] The exception was a brief description of Sampson's participation in the World Town Hall Tour of 1949 at the end of the film. In each of the twenty countries she visited on the tour, the narrator explained, Sampson "described American life from the Negro's point of view and attempted to correct some of the erroneous impressions about the life of the Negro in America." Perhaps the directors felt that the racial aspect of Sampson's story was so visually apparent, that it required no further exposition. *Edith Sampson: United Nations Delegate*. USIS. 1950. NARA. 306.1538.

[108] This Horatio Alger narrative echoed a performance review that praised Sampson for "express[ing] a vibrant note of a youthful country where a poor girl can become a great lady" in her work at the U.N. "Record of Sampson's Performance: September 1950 -October 1952," n.d., 5. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 210.

[109] This gendered language echoed an earlier *New York Times* profile that introduced Sampson as "a criminal lawyer, housewife and civic leader" who enjoyed "interior decorating" and relaxed

a social worker as crucial to her success as a goodwill ambassador, because it made better attuned to "the problems of ordinary people."[110] Little about Sampson's professional or private life, however, resembled that of a typical American woman.[111]

For this reason, the film's director struggled to portray Sampson as a "remarkable woman" who nevertheless fit into all of the familiar and conventional roles expected of a middle aged, middle class married women. Moments in the film that highlighted Sampson's independence and authority, such as a shot of Sampson dictating a memo to male secretary at her law office, were offset by deliberately contrived domestic scenes that reinforced the era's gender norms. In one such snapshot, Sampson is shown seasoning a homemade dish at the stove in her kitchen. "Like any good housewife [Sampson] puts up her own jellies and preserves, and is justly proud she has never lost her culinary skills," the voiceover narration announced, as the camera cut to a beaming Sampson holding up a jar of pickles.[112] In the film's closing scene, Sampson, now transformed into "Aunt Edith," showed a group of small children a photo scrapbook

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"in the kitchen undisturbedly canning bushels of pears and peaches." "U.N. Debut Made By Mrs. Sampson," *New York Times*, September 28, 1950. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 215.

[110] Edith Sampson, "World Security Begins at Home," *Journal of Home Economics* 43, no. 7 (September, 1951): 517. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 192

[111] At twenty, Sampson married her first husband Rufus Sampson, a filed agent for the Tuskegee Institute. Later, when he was unemployed, Edith paid his medical school and law school tuition. Her second marriage Joseph Clayton with whom she shared a legal practice was by accounts a happy equitable union. Sampson's U.N. position and subsequent travels on behalf of the State Department necessitated long absences from Chicago. Clayton suffered from severe asthma and rarely accompanied his wife. He died in 1956. Sampson proudly declared, "Neither of these husbands ever paid a month's rent for me or supported me in any fashion." Sampson, "These Things I Remember Well," 3. ESS Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

[112] In the background a younger African American woman, identified as a cook "who has been with [Sampson] for years," looked on silently. Space prevents a full analysis of this imagery—so shot through with racial and class signifiers—but one reading suggests it positions Sampson not simply as an ordinary housewife, but an ordinary *white* housewife who relies on the labor of an African American domestic servant. *Edith Sampson: United Nations Delegate*.

documenting her various travels.[113] The internal contradictions of the USIS film reflected a larger identity crisis within U.S. information policy, which attempted to combine psychological warfare and goodwill person-to-person diplomacy into a single unified strategy with little success.

What did foreigners, who were the intended audience, make of the film? In 1951, the State Department boasted that USIE films reached 200 million people annually. Every minute a USIE film played somewhere in the world reaching more than 600,000 people each day.[114] These impressive statistics communicated the global reach of U.S. information programs, but did not answer if, in fact, such prodigious output successfully spread American ideals and bolstered U.S. prestige. It is notoriously difficult for historians to properly gauge or measure audience reception of media in general and propaganda in particular. U.S.I.A officials generally envisioned their information campaigns as closed systems in which the desired message or idea was conveyed directly and efficiently to a target audience in a target nation.[115] In the specific case of *Edith Sampson: UN Delegate*, however, an internal report provided a detailed catalogue of audience response to the film, which was screened for hundreds of Brazilians in six different cities in the spring of 1953. Audiences included elementary school children, military officers, high school and university students, medical professionals, Catholic

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[113] Sampson had no children of her own, but did raise two nieces after the death of her sister. Sampson, "These Things I Remember Well," ESS Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
[114] "IMP'S Part in the Campaign for Truth, July 1951." NARA, RG 59, Box 4, Folder 43.
[115] As Danielle Fosler-Lussier has pointed out, this "one-way" model assumed that the United States could control not only the delivery but also the reception of its propaganda. Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music In America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 4 -5.

priests, housewives, middle-class office workers, cigarette factory workers, and many ordinary poor Brazilians who attended public screenings.[116]

The author of the report informed U.S. officials that the general reactions were "more unfavorable than favorable" as audiences showed little interest in the film, talked loudly throughout the screening, left before the nine minute film ended, or, in one disturbing instance, spat directly at the screen. While half of the 233 viewers in one survey claimed to have liked the film, its ability to change people's opinions of African American life was by no means clear. In a different survey, almost two-thirds of those who liked the film agreed that "the Negro has many possibilities to be somebody," a substantial increase from thirty-nine percent before the film.[117] At first glance this spike appeared to be a resounding success, but on closer inspection it is evident that most of these respondents had already believed this before seeing the film and that the increase came from people who previously answered that "the Negro has some possibilities to be somebody."[118] Among those who disliked the film, the author conceded it had produced a "very small" net positive effect of just five percent.[119] The film's biggest triumph, according to the report, was informing audiences that Edith Sampson was an American delegate to the U.N., a basic fact communicated by the film's title.

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[116] Octavio da Costa Eduardo, "Edith Sampson, UN Delegate, A Report Submitted to the American Embassy," March 16, 1953, 1. NARA, RG 306, P78, Box 87, Folder "IEV BR9."
[117] Among those who disliked the film only a quarter agreed with this statement. "Table V," in Ibid., 11.
[118] The film did effectively reduce the number of people who chose the most negative answer: "the Negro has very few possibilities to be somebody." However, once again this success relied on those who liked the film. Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

Several negative comments, reproduced verbatim in the report, more conclusively revealed the film's failure in its central objective of persuading audiences to accept a positive narrative of African American progress and potential. "This is American propaganda," one viewer declared matter-of-factly. "This is something the United States wants to sell us," another remarked. In Porto Feliz, a young Afro-Brazilian woman, who might have been expected to identify with Sampson, was equally dismissive. "What interest can this Negro woman have for me?" she asked bluntly. Another young man in Puerto Alegre voiced a position shared by many middle-class viewers. "The United States are an un-democratic nation as shown by the Ku-Klux-Klan, an organization to fight the Negro," he stated, adding, "Edith Sampson's example is not enough."[120] Twenty-four percent of 117 respondents who reported that they did not like the film, or liked it only a little, gave their reason as: "The film does not say the truth about the situation of the Negro in the US, Edith Sampson is an exceptional case."[121]

This critique cut to the core weakness of the USIS film series in which extraordinary African Americans served as avatars of broad racial progress. Viewers, the report concluded, might be willing to accept Sampson's success story in isolation, "but refused to generalize taking it as an example that any Negro would have the same opportunity and would not be discriminated against."[122] Brazilians, no strangers to racism within their own nation, required more substantial and sustained evidence of the United States' commitment to ending racial discrimination. Rather than a failure of the film or an outlier response of a particularly savvy audience, the Brazilian report pointed to a

[120] Ibid., 6-10.
[121] Ibid., 11.
[122] Ibid. 12.

fundamental flaw of U.S. strategy. U.S. diplomacy was far more concerned with projecting the "image" of improving race relations than the much harder task of eliminating systemic legal and de facto racial discrimination from American society.

The public relations orientation of the State Department also severely hamstrung Sampson's direct engagement in cultural diplomacy, though officials on the ground roundly praised her efforts. In the spring of 1951 and again in early 1952, Sampson travelled extensively in Europe as a goodwill ambassador under the auspices of various State Department programs. The trips represented the State Department's adoption of person-to-person diplomacy as one of several approaches being pursued within a massive inter-agency campaign to "explain American progress against discrimination" to foreign publics.[123] Sampson served this cause by delivering dozens of speeches in US on American race relations with titles like: "The Negro in American Life," "The Political and Intellectual Standing of the American Negro," and "The Problem of the American Negro."[124] Even if Sampson chose "A Day in the Life of a United Nations Delegate" as the subject of her remarks, the audience questions invariably turned to U.S. race relations.[125]

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[123] By the spring of 1952, the nascent effort had yielded a "Negro kit" comprised of various print and visual media for distribution to U.S. information centers and embassies around the world. S. Shepard Jones to Ambassador Chester Bowles, "Secret" memorandum, March 12, 1952. NARA, RG 59, Lot 54D349, Box 1A/Secretary of State for Public Affairs. Subject Files.

[124] The content and themes of these speeches mirrored those of similarly titled official USIS publications such as *The Negro in American Life* [undated, 1950?] and *Americans of Negro Descent: An Advancing Group*," September, 1947, reprinted June, 1950. NARA, RG 59, Box 86, Folder "Negroes."

[125] The listed titles represent a sampling of the speeches given by Sampson on her trip to Austria in the late-spring of 1951. After "The Problem of the American Negro," Sampson added parenthetically: "(Again, Again, and Again)." Edith Sampson to Chester Williams, June 5, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 224.

Far more than her oratorical skills, officials valued Sampson's ability to engage with ordinary citizens and audiences. Sampson's tightly packed schedule included formal meetings with local dignitaries and organizations, but also placed Sampson in contact with school children, housewives, and workers. Chester Williams, a State Department official who had known Sampson since they traveled together on the World Town Hall tour, described her as a "dramatic personality with unusual magnetism in personal and group relations." In order to cater to these strengths, Williams recommended keeping Sampson's speeches short in order to maximize interaction with the audience.[126]

Subsequently, State Department officials in Stockholm marveled at Sampson's ability to generate a lively discussion among the usually reserved Swedes. "We planted many questions to start the ball rolling," one official confessed, "but so many questions developed from the audience that she finally had to break them off."[127] In Vienna, Sampson's hosts at the Austro American Institute of Education (AAIE) hailed her as "America's Ambassador 1951 Style," and noted Sampson's uncanny ability to connect with people of many different backgrounds. According to the AAIE's report, after meeting Sampson, the proverbial Viennese man on the street was left with the impression of "a woman who knows our problems and who does not sell us any propaganda stuff."[128] This statement, of course, belied the entire purpose of Sampson's entire visit, but represented a high compliment in a nation inundated by propaganda since 1938.

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[126] "Edith Sampson's Scandinavian Trip," Chester Williams, Public Liaison Officer, to Henry Arnold, Director Public Affairs Bureau, December 29, 1951, 3. Box 11, Folder 231.
[127] John V. Lund, Acting Public Affairs Officer, to Albin Johnson, Public Affairs Officer, American Embassy Stockholm, Sweden, January 15, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 231.
[128] A.M. Scheemminger, "Report on Mrs. Sampson's Vienna Program," June 21, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 224.

The praise heaped on Sampson by enthusiastic officials concealed the crumbling façade of the State Department's public relations approach to the international dimensions of race. Sampson's visit to Austria in May of 1951 overlapped with an campaign coordinated by the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) to focus global attention on the cases of Willie McGhee, the Martinsville Seven, and the Trenton Six, all of which involved African American men facing execution following convictions for rape or murder by all-white juries.[129] Like the Scottsboro Boys who became an international leftist cause célèbre two decades earlier, the men's plight shone a spotlight on racial injustice in the United States.[130] Sampson was caught flatfooted and offered a mealy-mouthed response. Sampson assured Austrians that these incidents "did not represent the general administration of justice, but the exception," and blamed "enemies of America" who cynically sensationalized incidents of racial violence and injustice in order to distort the reality of African American life.[131] Sampson, whose speeches oscillated between reminding audiences of how far African American had come since the days of slavery and optimistic predictions for the future, proved ill equipped to deal with the present. Sampson could travel the world, but she could not outrun incidents of racial discrimination or violence, whose pace would only accelerate as the civil rights

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[129] All of the Martinsville Seven defendants were executed. Four of the Trenton Six were freed, while the remaining two were sentenced to life. Willie McGhee, whose death was covered in the Socialist and Communist newspapers of Austria, was executed in May of 1951. "Another Negro Executed in America," *Arbeiter Zeitung*, May 9, 1951; "Another Innocent Negro Executed," *Der Bend*, May 8, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 9, Folder 224. See Eric W. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995).

[130] William Patterson, an African American Communist who studied in Moscow in the early 1930s and a leading member of the CRC, had also been actively involved in the Scottsboro campaign spearheaded by the CPUSA's International Labor Defense (ILD).

[131] Edith Sampson, "World Security Begins at Home," 516.

movement gained momentum and communications technologies advanced over the next decade.

Just after Sampson's return from Europe, in July of 1951, a white mob prevented an African American veteran and his family from moving to Cicero, Illinois while the police looked on. For two days the mob ransacked the home, burned furniture, and rioted until the National Guard restored order. For Sampson, the events struck close to home, literally and figuratively, and she publically denounced the "un-American members of that community" whose actions and indifference caused America to "[lose] prestige throughout the civilized world."[132] "What's happening here in America?" she implored, "Do not forget that our nation bears the torch of liberty that is expected to light the way for the other nations of the world. Don't let that torch grow dim through acts like Cicero. Keep the torch bright."[133]A month after Sampson published this appeal to American exceptionalism, she found herself pressed into action on the international front to put out a fresh fire.

The impetus was the submission of a paper entitled "We Charge Genocide" to UN delegations in New York and Paris by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Patterson on behalf of the CRC in December of 1951.[134] The action seemed to confirm persistent fears of African American collusion with the Soviet Union and prompted the State Department to

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[132] Edith Sampson, "What Price Cicero?" *Negro Digest* (November 1951): 31.
[133] Ibid. 35.
[134] William Patterson, ed., *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). See also William Lorenzo Patterson, *The Man Who Cried* Genocide: An Autobiography (New York: International Publishers, Co. 1971), Gerald Horne, *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

solicit a full-court press from "outstanding Negro leaders" to publically rebut the CRC. Establishment figures like the diplomat Ralph Bunche, the historian Rayford Logan, and the director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund Channing Tobias, rallied to the cause behind the leadership of NAACP President Walter White. [135]As a UN delegate and the frequent antagonist of the CRC, Sampson was a logical choice to repair any damage done to America's fragile reputation abroad. After revoking the passports of Du Bois, Patterson, and Robeson, the State Department enlisted Sampson to counter the influence of the CRC on a European tour that would focus on Scandinavia.[136]

In her efforts at damage control on this tour, Sampson's discussion of racism became increasingly tame, defanged by her defensive insistence on Communist misrepresentation and ebullient portrait of African American progress. While the State Department was pleased with Sampson's performance, one official did note a Norwegian's dismissal of Sampson's speech in Oslo as "the most obvious kind of propaganda."[137]Eslanda Robeson compiled an outside report on Sampson's Scandinavian tour that quoted the "over-fed" Sampson insisting that African Americans were prospering in the United States, only bought "big, black shiny" Cadillacs, and owned expensive homes.[138] If the CRC had used inflammatory language to draw attention to American racism, Sampson trivialized atrocities with a shockingly blithe comment.

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[135] Anderson*, Eyes Off The Prize*, 192.
[136] Elizabeth Hearn to Edith Sampson, February 26, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 230.
[137] Untitled report on Edith Sampson's Scandinavia trip, no date. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 223.
[138] I was not able to verify the specific statements Robeson attributed to Sampson, but their general tenor fits other summaries of her speeches prepared by U.S. officials. Comments on Sampson's weight were a recurrent theme of CRC attacks. Eslanda Robeson, "Mrs. Edith Sampson Tells Europeans Negroes Are Happy, Almost Free," draft for *Freedom*, June, 1952. ER Papers, Box 13, Folder "Writings By."

Sampson told a group of Finns that "here and there [there would be] a bombing of a Negro's home and a lynching every now and then, mostly then."[139]Sampson then guaranteed that full citizenship for African Americans would come in "five to ten years," a timeframe that could be interpreted as a reflection of Sampson's gradualist philosophy or of her misplaced optimism. Sampson's pledge also violated "the cardinal rule for the propagandist." As Oren Stephens, whose book was later issued to all new USIS officials, explained, the propagandist "must be ready and able to deliver what he promises, even if the promise is only by implication, lest the long-run reaction turn out to be the reverse of what he sought."[140]

Sampson's comments in Scandinavia, which one historian has characterized as "betray[ing] the cause of black equality," further fueled her reputation—especially among leftist African Americans—as a naive Pollyanna.[141]In a *Pittsburgh Courier* opinion poll conducted in the summer of 1952, nearly fifty-eight percent of those asked by the newspaper if they considered Sampson "as a leader of or spokesman for" African Americans, answered no. The demographic breakdown showed that Sampson fared slightly better in rural areas and among women. Other respondents, however, not only denied that Sampson was representative of the majority of African Americans, but

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[139] "Mrs. Sampson's Speech in Finland," January 14, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 31. Sampson's response mirrored official thinking on how to handle the issue of racial violence. An information officer stationed in Vienna explained "If some one says we lynch a hundred negroes a year; we say that there have been lynchings, that there have been years with no lynchings at all, that racial discrimination is yielding to systematic attack in this country, that the negroes are an 'advancing group,' etc. And what is this if not precisely what we have been doing in our information program? Certainly it isn't by coincidence that it happens to be the truth." C.H. Opal, "The Problem of American Culture: A Propaganda Inquiry Into a Stereotype," January 15, 1951. RG 59 Entry 5342 Box 1, International Information Administration, Field Program For Austria, Folder 6000.

[140] Oren Stephens, *Facts to a Candid World: America's Overseas Information Program* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1955), 27.

[141] Anderson, *Eyes Off The Prize*, 204.

charged that she "did have the interests of the Negro at heart," was an "apologist" for racism who spoke in, "'Uncle Tomish' or Aunt Jemima-like platitudes." The analysis of the survey data pointed out that Sampson polled strongest among "professional men," a detail that served to subtly erode Sampson's position as a representative woman.[142] The tone and timing linked of this poll suggest it was part of a wider effort by allies of the CRC to discredit Sampson by portraying her as out of sync with the views of African Americans, but it also reflected a genuine popular backlash against Sampson's brand of state-sponsored race diplomacy. [143]At the same time, from a historical perspective, Sampson's political views fell squarely in the mainstream of middle class African Americans of her generation and the strategy of Cold War liberalism embraced by mainstream civil rights groups like the NAACP and Sampson's own NCNW.[144]

In the early 1950s, Sampson remained committed to the incrementalist approach to civil rights. Sampson espoused the maxim "a part of something is better than all of nothing," but also used her prominence to press for concrete reforms.[145] At the height of her diplomatic career, Sampson actively supported federal civil rights legislation and testified on behalf of the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Act.[146] While Sampson

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[142] The precise breakdown was 57.5 percent ("no"), 26.5 percent ("yes"), with the remaining 16 percent as either "undecided" or "no comment." "Popularity Hits Low in Poll," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 26, 1952.
[143] Not surprisingly, the Robesons were the most critical of Sampson and those who followed her model of diplomacy. See Eslanda Robeson, "Mrs. Edith Sampson Tell Europeans Negroes are Happy, Almost Free," draft for *Freedom*, June, 1952. ER Papers, Box 13, Folder "Writings By."
[144] For a full discussion of how the NAACP adopted this strategy and of its consequences for civil rights activism in the early Cold War, see Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize.* Other historians have defended Sampson's ideas as "broadly representative of many of her contemporaries" see Laville and Lucas, "The American Way," 568.
[145] Sampson*, "*I Like America," 4.
[146] "List of Witnesses Appearing On Behalf of Senate Bill No. 67, The Proposed Illinois Fair Employment Practice Act Before the Senate Industrial Affairs Committee," April 5, 1951. ESS Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

defended gradualism as a moderate stance marked by perseverance from those who considered it a "dirty word," she also expressed admiration for direct action tactics employed by a younger generation of activists including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[147] Later in a candid commencement address to the George Williams College class of 1969, Sampson conceded that for most of her adult life she belonged to "the Establishment." As an African American woman, however, Sampson maintained that her position within these elite circles was never full secure. This led her to identify as an "infiltrator [who] plays by establishment rules, but only [to] gain leverage in our attempt to change those rules."[148] As Sampson's self-chosen term, "infiltrator" offers a more nuanced lens for interpreting Sampson's diplomatic career than the pejorative terms assigned to her by some historians.[149]

Though she never publically criticized the State Department, Sampson was not blind to the deficiencies of America's official race diplomacy strategy. In 1952, when Sampson did not receive an invitation to a reception honoring the visiting Austrian ambassador held in her hometown of Chicago, she was personally hurt. After all, she had toured the nation one year earlier and had befriended the ambassador and his wife. At the same time, Sampson recognized a major contradiction of the U.S. government's cultural relations strategy in the snub. "Our program is inconsistent," she told Walter Donnelly, the U.S. High Commissioner to Austria, "we go forth to tell people in other countries

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[147] Edith Sampson, "Which Way From Little Rock?" *The Ethical Outlook* 44, no. 2 (March-April 1958), 51. ESS Papers, Box 5, Folder 13. Laville and Lucas, "The American Way," 578.
[148] Edith Sampson, "The Years Between Us," Commencement Speech George Williams College, June 8, 1969. ESS Papers, Box 20, Folder 335.
[149] Gerald Horne has used "stooge," "hired gun." Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Madison, New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 173.

about the American way of life and about that changing status of the Negro in the United States, yet when foreign visitors come to see democracy in action there is no planning attempted so that they might meet Negro groups and visit Negro institutions."[150] Like her NCNW colleague Dr. Nancy McGhee, who returned from a goodwill tour of Europe in 1955 "depressed" by the lack of African Americans foreign service officers in ordinary positions "where they can be unmistakably seen and heard as part of the United States missions abroad," Sampson felt the State Department's strategy underutilized Black America.[151] Sampson, along with other NCNW officials, also vocally opposed a State Department sponsored tour of the musical *Porgy and Bess*, contending, "the story of a Negro woman prostitute and her paramour, a pimp, does not convey a real picture of the American Negro and does him and the United States a disservice."[152]

In her role as an infiltrator, Sampson also proposed innovations in U.S. cultural diplomacy. Her own vision for U.S. outreach to the global South drew inspiration from

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[150] Edith Sampson to Walter Donnelly, June 2, 1952. ESS Papers, Box 3, Folder 72.
[151] "Report of Dr. Nancy McGhee," quoted in Helen Laville, " 'A woman's place is in the Cold War': American women's organizations and international relations, 1945-1965," PhD. Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1998. 207-208. For a comprehensive discussion of the NCNW's international engagement in the Cold War, see Helen Laville, "Spokewomen for Democracy: The International Work of the National Council of Negro Women in the Cold War," in Paola Boi and Sabine Broek, eds., *Crossroutes—the Meanings of 'Race' in the 21 Century* (Munster, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2003), 125-138.
[152] Howland Sergeant to Mr. Russell Riley, "Your August 19 Memorandum on Correspondence with Mrs. Edith Sampson Concerning 'Porgy and Bess,'" September 17, 1952. RG 59 Lot 58D459, Box 10, Folder 163. Dr. Helen Edmonds, "National Council of Negro Women, Incorporated, President's Report, 1956," Helen G. Edmonds Papers, 1936-1995, 56-57. Digitized by James E. Shepard Memorial Library at North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina. James Baldwin called *Porgy*, "a white man's vision of Negro life […] It assuages their guilt about Negroes and it attacks none of their fantasies." Baldwin, "On Catfish Row," in *The Price of the Ticket*: *James Baldwin Collected Non-Fiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 179.

the American South and Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute.[153] In a public lecture delivered in early 1951, Sampson described the ingenious method utilized by the famed Tuskegee agronomist George Washington Carver to introduce the latest scientific discoveries of his laboratory to the poor farmers of Macon County, Alabama. Carver converted a horse drawn wagon, donated by a man named Jessup, into a "mobile unit of technical assistance," from which he staged practical demonstrations throughout the rural parishes of the state. Stressing the need for the United States to demonstrate a real commitment to the economic development of Asian and African countries, Sampson called for "a fleet of 'Jessup wagons'" that the government could deploy "in 'Macon counties' all over the world." To man the wagons and lead the practical demonstrations, Sampson recommended interracial teams of scientists. In addition to offering technical expertise, Sampson asserted that these "young Carvers" would also provide a vivid demonstration of "the power of cooperation" between black and white Americans.[154] Sampson concluded by repurposing Booker T. Washington's famous injunction for African Americans to "cast down your buckets where you stand" into a call for international action.[155] When Sampson pitched the "Freedom Ship" program to the State Department, officials expressed support for the general concept, but balked at providing

[153] Other officials adopted U.S. development efforts in the South, especially the rural electrification programs undertaken by the TVA during the New Deal, as a model for global development. Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

[154] Sampson envisioned converting the amphibious landing ships used in WWII as "Freedom Ships" that would land the mobile demonstration trucks rather than tanks. "Address by Mrs. Edith S. Sampson," Town Hall Morning Lecture Series, January 13, 1951, 6-7. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 214.

[155] Scholars have begun to reexamine the internationalism of Booker T. Washington's "Tuskegee Idea." Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

any formal support.[156] While Sampson's vision appeared quixotic, it drew on deeply rooted traditions of race diplomacy and anticipated use of soft power in U.S. foreign policy most notably through the Peace Corps. The doomed Freedom Ship initiative also showed that Sampson recognized the importance of developing a positive appeal to the "billion and a half colored peoples in various parts of the world" that went beyond opposition to Communism as the State Department struggled to adapt to the geopolitical realities of decolonization and the end a bi-polar Cold War.[157]

In April of 1955, the weight of each of these developments was dramatically illustrated as delegations from twenty-eight nations descended on the Indonesian city of Bandung for the inaugural Afro-Asian Conference. Neither the Soviets, nor the Americans were invited to the landmark conference where Nehru, Sukharno, and others called for unity among former colonized peoples and advocated for non-alignment in the Cold War. This message alarmed Washington, especially considering the presence of the Chinese premier at Bandung. In the zero-sum thinking of many top American officials, non-alignment signaled a threat to American interests that had to be checked. With U.S. officials excluded from the conference, a handful of African Americans including Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Richard Wright, still managed to attend.[158] Although Powell Jr. traveled as a private citizen and against the wishes of the State Department, the New York Democrat defended the racial record of the United States and trumpeted reforms like the Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling in *Brown v.*

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[156] W.C. Johnstone, Jr. to Chester Williams, "Freedom Ship Project Proposed by Mrs. Edith Sampson," n.d. [1951?] ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 227.
[157] "Address by Mrs. Edith S. Sampson," Town Hall Morning Lecture Series, January 13, 1951, 4. ESS Papers, Box 10, Folder 214.
[158] Wright, a literary celebrity living in Paris, visited Bandung both as an African American exile and a journalist, eventually publishing a laudatory account.

Board the previous year in a performance modeled directly on Sampson's previous race diplomacy. That the State Department actively tried to block Powell from delivering this spirited defense of American democracy underscored its anxiety regarding Bandung in particular and the incoherence of its strategy regarding race in general.

Just after Bandung concluded, Sampson reprised her familiar role as a goodwill ambassador and lecturer on an eight-week tour of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Iraq and Turkey sponsored by the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME).[159] Sampson's trip was timed to bolster the newly formed Baghdad Pact and stall the momentum of the non-alignment movement.[160] While her report recorded many questions about U.S. race relations, American racism was not the only cause of mistrust. Sampson noted the widespread feeling in the Arab countries that the United States could not be trusted due to the high level of Jewish influence in New York and Washington. While such popular anti-Semitism was hardly surprising, Sampson seemed genuinely disturbed by the frequency and intensity of anti-American sentiment expressed in the Arab countries. After visiting a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Sampson wrote that "resentment against the USA and Israel increases daily." The camps, Sampson warned, were "festering spots of bitterness" that hindered American influence in the region. [161]

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[159] Ostensibly, the AFME operated as a private organization founded to promote cross-cultural understanding, but was secretly funded by the CIA to foster a "moral alliance" against Communist incursion in the region. Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 113-119.
[160] Sampson's report urged American policy makers to adopt a less hostile stance toward non-alignment. "America's best interests lie in helping free-minded nations to help themselves: and on their own terms, not necessarily ours." Rather than strong-arming neutral states, Sampson argued the U.S. should offer aid without forcing them to take sides. "Mrs. Sampson Reports On Trip To Middle East," American Friends of the Middle East, press release, September 24, 1955. ESS Papers, Box 11, Folder 249.
[161] Ibid.

Sampson's report unintentionally illustrated one of the biggest limitations of her own diplomacy. If foreign populations primarily based their opinions of the U.S. based on local concerns and U.S. foreign policy actions, could reassurances of American racial progress have any real impact? The full consequences of this tension would unfold over the next decade as U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, Latin America, and Africa rendered Sampson's brand of goodwill diplomacy increasingly obsolete abroad at the same time that that mass civil rights protests, black power ideology, and white backlash rendered her gradualism obsolete at home.

In the final analysis, scholars should recognize Sampson's inclusion within the lily-white and male-dominated foreign policy establishment as a historic moment when race diplomacy was formally recognized as a vital force within U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, Sampson's career provides a bracing illustration of the costs of this recognition. By 1955, the State Department had fully domesticated middle class race diplomacy and in the process sapped its effectiveness. Sampson, who played a key role in promoting U.S. race relations as a global issue with national security implications, found herself explaining racial injustice abroad rather than exposing it to the world. It is hard to disagree with Eslanda Robeson's assertion two years later that "it would be well for our Government to stop spending brains, energy and money to 'explain' the situation; it must go to the heart of the matter and correct the situation."[162]

[162] "Daniel Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong Spokesman," For International Life (Moscow), October, 1957 in ER Papers, Box, Box 13, Folder "Undated fragments, synopses, notes."

Epilogue:

"You Can't Betray A Country You Don't Have"
Race Diplomacy and the Specter of Treason

"*The romance of treason never occurred to us for the brutally simple reason that you can't betray a country you don't have [...] we did not wish to be traitors. We wished to be citizens.*"
–James Baldwin.[1]

In early 1958, the Interdepartmental Escapee Committee of the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), composed of high-ranking officials from the State Department, Defense Department, Justice Department, Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S. Information Agency, took up the "problem" of Homer Smith.[2] After more than two decades living outside the United States, the African American journalist had requested permission from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to return so that he could visit his sick mother in Chicago. A special appeal was necessary because, although he was born in Mississippi, Smith had acquired Soviet citizenship in 1939, which automatically terminated his U.S. citizenship. Since leaving the Soviet Union for Ethiopia in 1946, Smith had repeatedly communicated his desire to renounce his Soviet citizenship and resume his U.S. citizenship to various American officials. In 1955 he had accomplished the former, but three years later had made no progress on the latter. And so Smith languished in legal limbo; he was officially a "stateless" person.

Historians of the United States, as Linda Kerber insightfully observed, have generally treated statelessness as an exotic category "belonging to other national

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[1] James Baldwin, "Introduction," *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press), xv.
[2] Mr. Joseph S. Henderson, Director, Visa Office, Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, Department of State to John Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Homer Hamilton Smith," March 13, 1958. NARA RG 59, UD 07D 57, *Classified Passport Applications, Li-Z, 1950-1959*. Obtained via Freedom of Information Act Request September 11, 2015.

histories."[3] Smith was certainly not the typical "stateless" person, a classification designed in direct response to the massive dislocation of peoples in the aftermath of WWII and most commonly associated with European Jewish refugees. But statelessness was not simply a legal category for African Americans, it was also a potent metaphor for the alienation and trauma they had long experienced in the land of their birth. Smith could therefore claim statelessness as part of his racial and national inheritance. While the 13th and 14th Amendments ended de jure African American statelessness in the early years of Reconstruction, African American citizenship remained systematically circumscribed by legal and extralegal discrimination. By the time that Smith applied for reentry to the United States, the legal foundations of Jim Crow had begun to crumble, but had not yet decisively collapsed. Smith seems to have concluded that second-class citizenship was better than statelessness.

In his carefully constructed memoir, Smith couched his original decision to leave the United States as an "escape" from the daily humiliations of Jim Crow discrimination.[4] In 1958, however, Smith wished to be seen as an "escapee" from the Soviet Union and a loyal American willing and able to combat Communism in the United States. Smith's journey from sympathy to disillusionment followed a familiar narrative arc popularized by a string of confessional autobiographies written by ex-Communists.[5] As a native born American who had voluntarily expatriated himself, Smith made an unusual and awkward "escapee," the term for defectors and refugees from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union

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[3] Linda K. Kerber, "The Stateless as the Citizen's Other: A View from the United States," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (February 2007), 7.
[4] Smith, *Black Man In Red Russia*, 1.
[5] For a fascinating analysis of this genre see John V. Fleming, *The Anti-Communist Manifestos: Four Books That Shaped the Cold War* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009.)

coined by the State Department. The OCB issued Smith a temporary six-month visa, but in light of his hefty dossier denied his subsequent request to remain in the United States. Smith finally secured permission to emigrate to the United States as a "non-preference quota Ethiopian" in 1962, likely through the combined intercession of the State Department and CIA who overruled the FBI's objections.[6] Even then, Smith's U.S. citizenship was not restored.

Smith's precarious position illuminates the manner in which the ever-shifting epistemological terrain of treason and national loyalty destabilized African American race diplomacy from its inception. Denied full citizenship in the United States, African American activists turned to transnational networks and foreign states and effectively internationalized their struggle. But the ultimate objectives of race diplomacy, free exercise of rights under the U.S. Constitution and equality under American federal and state law, depended on U.S. governmental action and therefore were not things a foreign state could confer. By brokering alliances with geopolitical and ideological rivals of the United States, African Americans left themselves open to cynical charges of disloyalty. White supremacists, who tarred civil rights as a communist plot in the mid-twentieth century, employed the same logic as earlier reactionaries who decried abolitionism as "sedition."[7] These formulations, which presumed African American political activity to

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[6] While heavily redacted documents and a non-committal response from the CIA to a FOIA request prevent a definitive conclusion regarding the U.S. government's change of course regarding Smith's case, in previous debates the State Department had advocated for allowing Smith to return to the U.S. SAC, Chicago to Director, FBI, "Homer Hamilton Smith, aka Chatwood Hall," October 28, 1965," memorandum. Homer Smith FBI File (100-34316414).

[7] A fully developed articulation this attack can be seen in an 1839 polemic written by an anonymous "Northern Man." *Abolition a Sedition* (Philadelphia: Geo. W. Donohue, 1839; repri; New York: AMS Press 1973). See also David Brion Davis, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 86-87.

be subversive by definition, proved remarkably durable and worked to delegitimize and stigmatize African American diplomacy.

Accused of treason for attempting to claim citizenship, African Americans faced a classic double bind. James Baldwin unpacked the fallacy of this logic with characteristic precision. "The romance of treason never occurred to us for the brutally simple reason that you can't betray a country you don't have," Baldwin explained. "Treason draws its energy from the conscious betrayal of a trust," he continued, "as we were not trusted, we could not betray."[8] From the antebellum period on, the U.S. government worked to exert a claim on African Americans as nationals, while steadfastly refusing the privileges of citizenship. If lack of trust from the government precluded treason, lack of trust in the government also complicated African American diplomacy on behalf of the United States.

In the fall of 1957, the jazz musician Louis Armstrong, one of the State Department's leading goodwill ambassadors, publicly rebuked the White House's initial response to the crisis unfolding in Little Rock, Arkansas where white protesters and National Guardsmen blocked nine African American students from integrating Central High School.[9] "The way they are treating my people in the South, the Government can go to Hell," Armstrong told a stunned AP reporter in North Dakota, adding "It's getting so bad a colored man hasn't got any country." Armstrong's comments echoed nineteenth century abolitionists like Frederick Douglass who also identified as men without a

[8] Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket*, xv.
[9] For an in-depth account of Armstrong's goodwill tours see Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). For Little Rock as a foreign policy crisis see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 115-151.

country. In the same interview Armstrong indicated that he was no longer willing to undertake a scheduled goodwill tour of the Soviet Union on behalf of the U.S. government. Armstrong's spontaneous protest caught the State Department off guard as officials openly worried that Soviet propagandists would "seize" on the trumpeter's words.[10]

It also surprised the African American press, who noted Armstrong had steadfastly avoided making political statements in the past and regularly performed for segregated audiences throughout the South. When Armstrong's road manager attempted to walk-back his remarks, however, "Satchmo" stuck to his guns and confirmed the accuracy of the statements attributed to him earning him widespread praise on the editorial pages of African American newspapers, while radio stations, jukejoints, and record stores across the South announced an impromptu boycott of Armstrong's music.[11] Eslanda Robeson wrote that Armstrong had "explained in crystal clear, forthright, and colorful language exactly how [African Americans] felt."[12] The *Chicago Defender* declared Armstrong's words "had the timing and effect of an H-Bomb…They have reverberated around the world."[13] In another column, Harlem City Councilman Earl Brown hailed Armstrong as a whistle-blower and contrasted his open criticism of U.S.

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[10] "Louis Armstrong, Barring Soviet Tour, Denounces Eisenhower and Gov. Faubus," *New York* Times, September 19, 1957. Earl Brown, "Satchmo Blows Hot," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1957.

[11] "Satchmo Mad; Blisters Ike in School Fight," *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1957; *New York Times,* September 22, 1957; "Aim Dixie Boycott at Satch, Others," *Chicago Defender*, September 23, 1957; "Satchmo Tells Off Ike, U.S.!" *Pittsburg Courier*, September 28, 1957; Enoc P. Waters, "Adventures in Race Relations," *Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1957; Robert M. Ratcliffe,"Telling Off Louis Armstrong's Critics," *Pittsburg Courier*, October 19, 1957.

[12] Eslanda Robeson, "Daniel Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong Spokesman," for International Life (Moscow), October, 1957. ER Papers, Box 13, Folder "Undated fragments, synopses, notes."

[13] "Ole 'Satchmo' Shook the World," *Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1957.

discrimination with so-called "ambassadorial Uncle Toms" like Edith Sampson, whom the State Department deployed to defend U.S. racial progress abroad.[14] In similar fashion, another editorial castigated the singer Nat Cole for questioning the prudence of Armstrong's political stance. "In these crucial days, when even silence is a betrayal," the author declared, "Uncle Tom mouthings are utter treason."[15] When Eisenhower deployed federal troops to break the impasse on September 25, less than a week after Armstrong's initial comments, the musician received credit for spurring the president into action. "If you decide to walk into the schools with the little colored kids, take me along Daddy," Armstrong told Eisenhower in a widely publicized telegram.[16]

Armstrong's truth-telling moment demonstrated how African American empowered by the State Department to serve as goodwill ambassadors could wield significant power when they deviated from the playbook that had governed officially sanctioned race diplomacy since the Truman administration. It also underscored the complex interplay of racial and national loyalty within African American diplomacy. For many African American journalists, Armstrong's denunciation of the Eisenhower administration's foot dragging was an act of racial allegiance that "emancipated" the jazzman from the ranks of the "ambassadorial Uncle Toms."[17] By contrast, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, who dismissed Armstrong as politically naive from the pulpit of his Harlem church and on national television, was criticized as a shameless self-promoter woefully out of touch with his constituents.[18] Little Rock starkly demonstrated just how

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[14] Earl Brown, "Satchmo Blows Hot," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1957.
[15] Afred Duckett,"N.Y. Scribe Writes," *The Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1957.
[16] Izzy Rowe, "Ike Wins Satchmo's Applause!" *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 5, 1957.
[17] Brown, "'Satchmo' Blows Hot," *New York Amsterdam News,* September 28, 1957.
[18]Ibid.; Alice A. Dunnigan, "Washington Inside Out," *Pittsburg Courier*, October 12, 1957.

far the interests of African Americans had diverged from the U.S. government in general and the State Department in particular by 1957.

This chasm would only grow over the next tumultuous decade as the civil rights and black freedom movements heightened racial conflict domestically at the same time that American military interventions in Africa and Asia escalated racial conflict abroad. In this new environment, African American protest continued to seek international inspiration and support. Unlike with Great Britain in the nineteenth century and the Soviet Union in the interwar years, however, the orientation of race diplomacy splintered and failed to find a single focal point. The convergence of U.S. foreign policy objectives and African American demands for civil rights that originated in WWII began to unravel in the multi-polar world ushered in by Bandung. Domestic battles over the pace and enforcement of racial reforms, which came to a head in the Little Rock crisis, further destabilized state-sponsored race diplomacy and exposed the fatal limitations of Cold War liberalism. The next era would witness a resurgence of independent African American internationalism as African American leaders across the political spectrum came to reject U.S. foreign policy. The State Department hewed to its public relations management of the American crisis in race relations and resisted genuine integration of the diplomatic ranks.

If to write African American history is to write the history of a "homeless people," as Robin D.G. Kelley poetically quipped, then to write African American diplomatic history is to write the history of a stateless people.[19] This dissertation has

[19] Robin D. G. Kelley, " 'But a Local Phase of a World Problem: Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1046.

argued for African American statelessness, both on a figurative and literal level, as the genius behind the development of a distinct tradition of diplomacy. From a practical standpoint, formal exclusion from the regime of state diplomacy encouraged African Americans to embrace innovative strategies and locate alternative international spaces. Deemed to possess "no rights which the white man is bound to respect" by the highest court in their native land, African Americans embarked initially on mission to secure what the philosopher Hannah Arendt has famously called "the right to have rights."[20]

On a fundamental level, African American diplomacy in the nineteenth century remapped the boundaries of human compassion and political activism. The global anti-slavery movement, as Adam Hochschild has argued, "was the first time a large number of people became outraged, and stayed outraged for many years over someone *else's* rights."[21] This accomplishment was all the more impressive since African American diplomacy aroused British outrage on behalf of people of a different race who lived thousands of miles away. After the Civil War, African American musical diplomacy inspired international recognition of African American humanity, progress, and artistic achievement while raising massive sums for Fisk University. While these efforts failed to translate into domestic political gains, race diplomacy sustained a vital source of moral sympathy for African American activism abroad.

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[20] *Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857). The "right to have rights" the centerpiece of Arendt's theorization of statelessness and human rights in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As a Jewish refugee, Arendt herself endured more than a decade of statelessness before eventually becoming an American citizen. Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1994), 296.

[21] Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets, Slaves, and Rebels in the First Human Rights Crusade* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 5.

In the twentieth century, African American race diplomacy overcame deep institutional resistance from the U.S. State Department to make domestic race relations an issue of international concern. In fostering an unorthodox relationship with the Soviet Union, African Americans gained legitimacy as statesmen and international actors. More than two decades before African Americans joined U.S. cultural relations initiatives as state actors, they engaged in state sponsored cultural diplomacy in the Soviet Union. African Americans lent visibility and credibility to Soviet propaganda attacks on America's moral hypocrisy. Contrasting Jim Crow America's rampant racial injustice with the Soviet Union's supposed elimination of racial prejudice, African Americans exposed race relations as America's "Achilles heel." U.S. vulnerability on this front fueled the State Department's belated embrace of state-sponsored cultural diplomacy and the simultaneous recruitment of African Americans, whose power to promote, as well as to damage, the nation's image abroad hit home in the early Cold War.

The formal incorporation of African Americans within the nascent cultural relations apparatus following WWII represented the culmination of the long journey of African American race ambassadors from stateless people to state actors. Reframing civil rights as a national security concern with serious foreign policy implications helped to legitimize the internationalization of domestic race relations. At the same time, the State Department sought to domesticate African American race diplomacy by coopting its middle class practitioners and suppressing its more radical independent strains. In theory, aligning the interests of African American reformers with the foreign policy objectives of the United States could result in a mutually beneficial arrangement. In practice, African American interests were subordinated and subsumed by the anticommunist tunnel vision

of Cold War policy makers. While African Americans continued to serve within the State Department's information programs after 1955, the most prominent and effective African American leaders directly opposed U.S. foreign policy.[22] Two decades after the columnist W. E. Harrison advocated for a pragmatic realist approach to race diplomacy in 1937 by asserting "the Negro has no eternal friends nor enemies [for they are] adults on the international front," his words gained renewed resonance.[23] African Americans had learned not to rely on any one state to safeguard their interests, especially their own.

[22] For example, while Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and Angela Davis differed ideologically and in their approaches to civil rights activism each opposed the war in Vietnam.
[23] W.E. Harrison, "The Periscope," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 7, 1937.