

COMMENTARY

“Below the Level of Men”: African Americans, Race, and the History of U.S. Foreign Relations

I take no notice of an unhappy species of population abounding in some of the States, who, during the calm of regular government, are sunk below the level of men; but who, in the tempestuous scenes of civil violence, may emerge into the human character and give a superiority of strength to any party with which they may associate themselves.

James Madison, *43d Federalist*

James Madison did indeed take notice of the slave population of eighteenth-century America. Opportunistic servile revolt struck at the very heart of the republic. It further appalled because it reversed the normal order of things and exposed the vulnerability of the master. Madison was also concerned about the “adventurers” and “alien residents” who waited, poised to take advantage of any national weakness.¹ Madison and other eighteenth-century American theorists thought hard about how to preserve unity in a country of immigrants, or during crises when foreign governments could exploit unrest. They understood intuitively the connection between race relations and the national interest.

Since the days of the early republic, this nexus has faded in and out of visibility. Investigation of the relationship has often been hampered by implicit and unvoiced suppositions about how race works in U.S. society and, indeed, about the character of that society itself. Unacknowledged assumptions about what is important to study have sometimes pushed inquiry into unduly narrow channels. Historians of foreign relations often provide an almost exclusive place for the state and official policymakers at the center of their narrative universe. Some manage to find objectivity and benign neutrality in even the most obvious ethnocentric commitments of policymaking elites. It is not uncommon to conflate one’s own authorial stance with those of the individuals under scrutiny,

1. James Madison, “Federalist Paper No. 43,” in *The Federalist Papers*, comp. Clinton Rossiter (New York, 1961), 277.

or to rely almost exclusively on state papers as the ultimate source of authority.²

As a consequence, social forces and nongovernmental actors, especially those representing constituencies often underprivileged in the domestic milieu, slide into marginality. This marginality is not fortuitous, but is imposed by a particular and coherent outlook that resists conceding that interventions by non-state actors occur, can be significant, and are salient to a broad understanding of the forces that shape our world.

Over the past several decades, other historical subfields have been greatly influenced by feminist, deconstructionist, multicultural, and post-modernist scholarship. In contrast, the hermetic outlook of "diplomatic history" long permitted it to remain relatively impervious to these developments. Only recently has the field challenged some of the old truisms by producing fresh interpretations.³ Historians of foreign relations, realizing that they have been somewhat behind, now wish to hit the ground running. In their haste, some have forgotten that they had long resisted perspectives that privilege nongovernmental actors and had silenced their proponents. They now speak of these perspectives as if they have always been normative. They wish to move into the twenty-first century without missing a beat.

But first they must do their homework. Researching the complex links among race, foreign affairs, and particularly policymaking is not simply a matter of "add-race-and-stir." Correlations between race-specific events and issues, foreign affairs, and overall changes in U.S. society and institutions have only received scholarly attention within the past two decades.⁴ This

2. Aspects of these questions are discussed in Charles R. Lilely and Michael H. Hunt, "On Social History, the State, and Foreign Relations: Commentary on 'The Cosmopolitan Connection,'" *Diplomatic History* 11 (Summer 1987): 243-50; Geir Lundestad, "Moralism, Presentism, Exceptionalism, Provincialism, and Other Extravagances in American Writings on the Early Cold War Years," *ibid.* 13 (Fall 1989): 527-45; Walter LaFeber, "The World and the United States," *American Historical Review* 100 (October 1995): 1015-33.

3. Examples include Andrew J. Rotter, "Gender Relations, Foreign Relations: The United States and South Asia, 1947-1964," *Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 518-42; Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," *ibid.*, 543-70; and Brenda Gayle Plummer, "Castro in Harlem: A Cold War Watershed," in *Rethinking the Cold War: Essays on Its Dynamics, Meaning, and Morality*, ed. Thomas McCormick and Allen Hunter (forthcoming).

4. See, for example, Jake C. Miller, *The Black Presence in American Foreign Affairs* (Washington, 1978); Bert Lockwood, Jr., "The UN Charter and U.S. Civil Rights Litigation: 1946-1955," *Iowa Law Review* 5 (1984): 901-56; Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany, 1985); Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41 (November 1988): 61-120; Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter with Gandhi* (Boston, 1992); William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941* (Bloomington, 1993); Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War* (New York, 1993); Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to the War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941* (Baton Rouge, 1994); Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*, 2d ed. (Boulder, 1996); and Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

derives in part from the de facto segregation that still characterizes both popular and academic culture. Diplomatic historians study diplomacy. Afro-Americanists and other historians of ethnicity study race. Neither type of historian is likely to talk to the other, but their respective subject matter must be placed in the wider context of modern U.S. history if we are to understand the connection between them.

The immediate aftermath of World War II provides an opportunity to explore the nexus in its broadest manifestations. The late 1940s witnessed the resolution of a crisis that permanently changed global power relations, with profound implications for domestic society. Nazism's assaults on the West, accompanied by an explicit racial agenda, reached its zenith in the death camps of Europe. The intelligentsias of democratic countries subsequently repudiated racist ideologies, and the obsolete science, ignorance, and parochialism identified with them. The Swedish researcher Gunnar Myrdal, brought to the United States as a disinterested social scientist to study and report on race relations, promoted the view that racism involved transient attitudes that represented incomplete modernization. Racism was based chiefly on personal and psychological factors rather than on deep structures within society and would accordingly disappear as soon as the American South and those parts of the nation most affected by its values joined the mainstream.⁵

Although many social scientists would later find Myrdal's ideas unsatisfactory, the 1944 publication of his omnibus study *An American Dilemma* gave African Americans an opportunity to lay claim to the promise of democratic reform. They expected their wartime military service, their considerable bond purchases, and their steady, if skeptical, loyalty to find some reward in a national commitment to the restoration of full civil rights. Elite opinion seemed to endorse these sentiments. Reformers also had the support of an environment in which interest groups, as in 1919 following World War I, sought to have their claims legitimated by the negotiated postwar order.⁶

The heads of state of the allied powers laid out the foundation for that

5. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944); David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of an American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge, 1987), 1, 49, 50.

6. Pertinent material on the black experience during World War II includes Bernard Sternsher, ed., *The Negro in Depression and War: Prelude to Revolution, 1930-1945* (Chicago, 1969); Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *Journal of American History* 58 (December 1971): 661-81; Patrick Scott Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press during World War II* (New York, 1986), 54-56; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 383-406; and Graham A. Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (London, 1987). See also Records of the Department of Commerce, Division of Negro Affairs, Record Group 40, Emmer Lancaster Papers, General Correspondence, National Archives, Washington, DC.

world order at the Dumbarton Oaks conference in 1944. The United Nations Conference on International Organization, held in San Francisco in the spring of 1945, would flesh out the skeleton of a world peace organization. Those who wanted to make San Francisco the apotheosis of change in race relations could not rely on the support of the major countries. They were fortunate, however, in that the effort to create a favorable public for the United Nations gave them an unprecedented opportunity to make demands for human rights. The process through which reformers sought and attained formal observer status at San Francisco reflected Washington decision making about popular involvement in foreign affairs generally. Officials knew that global realities required active American participation in international organization. The task was now to bring the public along. Any binding treaty required Senate consent, and the isolationism of the prewar years did not suit current world conditions.⁷

Despite reservations about open diplomacy, the State Department decided to involve nongovernmental organizations in creating the United Nations. Although President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not want a large delegation representing a variety of potentially conflicting interest groups, he knew that citizen involvement could hasten the acceptance of a greater international role for the United States. Thus policymakers had to strike a balance between conceding too much to the popular will and alienating the public they wished to cultivate.

Accordingly, officials selected forty-two mainstream groups, including the American Bar Association, the American Federation of Labor, the Federal Council of Churches, and the NAACP, among others. These organizations would lack decision-making authority but could appoint consultants to advise the U.S. delegation. The representatives never met as a whole with the entire U.S. delegation but instead convened in smaller groups in meetings chaired by some member of the official delegation. These "consultants" also briefed organizations that had sent emissaries to San Francisco simply to observe and report the proceedings to their constituencies.⁸

Walter White, secretary of the NAACP, W. E. B. Du Bois, the NAACP's director of special research, and NAACP vice president Mary McLeod Bethune attended the San Francisco conference as consultants. They thus

7. William O. Chittick, *State Department, Press, and Pressure Groups: A Role Analysis* (New York, 1970), 25; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 and 21 April 1945.

8. Stettinius calendar notes, 12 March 1945, in *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., 1943-1946*, ed. Thomas M. Campbell and George C. Herring (New York, 1975), 296; Virginia Gildersleeve to Janet Robb, 10 March 1955, and Gildersleeve to Sylvan F. Jaenke, 4 January 1951, Virginia C. Gildersleeve Papers, Columbia University, New York; Chittick, *State Department, Press, and Pressure Groups*, 25, 26; Benjamin Gerig to Du Bois, 21 April 1945, and list of consultant organizations, in W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Papers of W. E. B. Du Bois*, microfilm ed. (Sanford, NC, 1980), reel 58. Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Ralph Bunche and Afro-American Participation in Decolonization," in *Pan-African Biography*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Los Angeles, 1987), 128-30. A full list of the consultant organizations appears in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 April 1945.

joined leaders from such organizations as the League of Women Voters, the Lions Club, and the National Education Association. The NAACP presence resulted not only from White House acknowledgment of black electoral importance but also from extensive work done by African Americans themselves to identify and put forth an agenda. The NAACP consulted groups as diverse as the National Negro Insurance Association, the Knights of Pythias, and the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. White, Du Bois, and Bethune planned to lobby for an international bill of rights, colonial reform, and an end to racial discrimination worldwide.⁹

The chief players at the San Francisco conference, however, had little genuine concern with human rights issues. These were matters forced on them by the attentive public. East-West tensions dominated the meeting. The dissatisfaction of small states over continuing great-power hegemony and the likely impact on the nascent United Nations was another source of tension. Scholars are now beginning to realize, however, that observers and consultants from nongovernmental organizations played a critical role in obtaining democratic concessions from the official delegations at UNCIO.¹⁰

Carol Anderson's extensive treatment of black organizational attempts to effect reform through the United Nations can most profitably be seen in this light.¹¹ The NAACP was not a lone actor in San Francisco. Just as the official U.S. delegation and the State Department experienced pressure from citizens' groups wanting more far-reaching change, so did the NAACP have its own clientele of black American organizations that had no official role to play but nevertheless wished to have their own issues put on the table. The continued reluctance of some major black organizations to grant the NAACP the primacy that Washington officials accorded it further complicated the association's work. Its activism in San Francisco owed much to its struggle to retain and assert its leadership.¹²

A rival organization, the leftist National Negro Congress, organized a petition drive to bring the plight of black Americans to UN attention in 1946. The NAACP borrowed this idea the following year, hoping that its comparative conventionality and better contacts would ensure superior results. As Anderson observes, both groups failed to breach the barrier that

9. Du Bois Papers, reels 58-60, passim; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 April 1945.

10. Chittick, *State Department, Press, and Pressure Groups*, 26; Martin Popper, "The Guild at the Founding of the United Nations," in *The National Lawyers Guild: From Roosevelt through Reagan*, ed. Ann F. Ginger and Eugene M. Tobin (Philadelphia, 1987), 74.

11. In addition to Anderson's article above, see also Paul Gordon Lauren, "First Principles of Racial Equality: History and the Politics and Diplomacy of Human Rights Provisions in the UN Charter," *Human Rights Quarterly* 5 (Winter 1983): 1-26.

12. Miller, *The Black Presence*, 90; *Amsterdam News*, 18 May 1945; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 February 1945; Tuskegee News Clipping File, microfilm ed. (Sanford, NC, 1976); *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 May 1945; Nathan Patrick Tillman, Jr., "Walter Francis White: A Study in Interest Group Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1961); Warren D. St. James, *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: A Case Study in Pressure Groups*, 2d ed. (Smithtown, NY, 1980).

the United Nations had erected against the approach of nongovernmental organizations. One cannot conclude, however, that activists abandoned faith in the UN after 1948.

Bert Lockwood has described how attorneys filing *amicus curiae* briefs in noted civil rights cases of the late 1940s and early 1950s invoked the UN Charter in their arguments. The NAACP had enough interest to seek and secure permanent observer status, as did the National Council of Negro Women.¹³ The United Nations encouraged hope because it remained a forum for antiracist expression. Secretariat employees refused, for example, to donate blood for UN forces in Korea because they objected to the Red Cross practice of labeling serum by race. The usual Soviet bloc critics were not the only ones issuing reproach. Western Europeans and independent countries with predominantly nonwhite populations also questioned U.S. representatives sharply about lynchings, bombings, and housing discrimination.¹⁴ In 1952 certain Asian and Middle Eastern nations cooperated with Eastern bloc states to pass a General Assembly resolution that initiated an investigation of South African race relations. Ralph Bunche would be one of thirteen commissioners appointed to conduct the study. The U.S. government abstained from voting on this resolution. According to the black-owned *Houston Informer*, Washington feared that the United Nations might try to conduct a similar inquiry into its own race relations.¹⁵

These indications of the UN's enduring utility to reformers, even at the height of the Cold War, suggest that the UN continued to provide symbolic leadership on racial questions. We also know that the NAACP, whatever its rigidities within the domestic civil rights movement and its political compromises in the supercharged atmosphere of the McCarthy years, never backed away entirely from internationalism. It remained a constant critic of colonialism and racism. Each year NAACP conventions passed resolutions urging the liberation of dependent territories and an end to all forms of discrimination. Its journal, *The Crisis*, covered the process of decolonization and monitored the activities of the major powers in this regard. The NAACP gave priority to the burgeoning civil rights movement at home but continued lobbying UN agencies and networking internationally with key nationalist leaders and human rights activists throughout the 1950s.¹⁶

The question of how the Cold War affected the nexus between race and

13. Lockwood, "The UN Charter and U.S. Civil Rights Legislation," *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 April 1952; Claude Barnett to Al White, 18 April 1950, Claude Barnett Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

14. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 September 1950, Tuskegee News Clipping File; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 29 March 1952.

15. *Afro-American*, 13 December 1952; *New York Times*, 23 December 1952; *Houston Informer*, 22 November 1952, Tuskegee News Clipping File.

16. Evidence to sustain this view abounds in the Du Bois Papers; the various issues of *The Crisis*; the Arthur B. Spingarn Papers, Library of Congress; and the NAACP Papers, Part 1, Records of the Meetings of Board of Directors, microfilm ed. (Frederick, MD, 1982).

foreign affairs has long preoccupied many scholars. Indeed, this has been the cardinal issue for some, and the path through which they came to understand the larger salience of the connection. Cold War strategic concerns seemed to bolster colonialism in a world dominated by armed superpowers. Truman's use of executive power to promote civil rights and suppress civil liberties at the same time helped channel organizations into new, and narrower, directions. Cold War era loyalty investigations, with their obsessive focus on personal association and belief rather than on treasonous actions, pointed to society's discomfort with postwar leveling and rapid social change. Committed segregationists consciously used the language of conspiracy and subversion to attack racial integration.

Such pressures forced activists to demonstrate that racial justice was in the national interest. The NAACP, for example, based an anticolonial resolution passed at its forty-fifth convention on the argument that "independence is the best answer to Communist intrigue." If Western states did not have to garrison the Third World, they could commit their full energies to anticommunism. The association also held that governmental commitment to civil rights would lessen the appeal to blacks of subversive doctrines.¹⁷

Foreign opinion still required the United States to justify itself regarding racial bias within its borders. This demand created opportunities for African Americans to be envoys for a country depicted as being on the threshold of significant change, a nation that possessed the will to make reforms and that had indeed embarked upon them. Dependent countries could thus more easily accept client relationships with a state that had not fully abandoned racism and that collaborated with colonial powers. The role of spokesperson did not require that African Americans say nothing critical about foreign affairs at home or about race relations overseas. Rather, they should issue temperate, evenhanded, and optimistic responses. The State Department chose black representatives for informational junkets abroad for their ability to present U.S. society in this light. In 1950, in the same spirit, Chicago attorney Edith Sampson became the first black American alternate UN delegate.

Helen Laville and Scott Lucas detail Sampson's career in an essay that provides a modest framing story for a thinly veiled attack on what the authors perceive as a revisionist leftist historiography of African American international engagements. They single out two historians, Gerald Horne and Manning Marable, as revisionists, but never make clear what the two are supposedly revising. This is odd: One can only revise a version of history that already exists. If we assume that we lack either established liberal or conservative narratives about black Americans and foreign affairs,

17. *New York Times*, 4 July 1954; Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence," 680-81.

and we assume that Horne's and Marable's radical approaches can be conflated, it is Laville and Lucas who are the revisionists.

It is perhaps more reasonable, and more productive, to lay down the Cold War burden and examine existing work on African Americans and international issues with an unencumbered mind. This rich material, once pulled out of Laville and Lucas's footnotes, reveals itself as scholarship produced by a number of distinguished historians and legal scholars who occupy more than one position along the ideological spectrum. As literature, it has a lengthy history of its own, which did not begin in the 1980s. It certainly cannot be reduced to a single ideological perspective, nor to the writing of two individuals whose scholarship is treated in a reductionist manner and who are then made straw men in yet another stale round of Cold War pugilism.

The Cold War has clearly influenced the direction of studies of race and foreign affairs in the past. It may now be a stumbling block to fresh insights. This becomes clear in the account of Edith Sampson's tenure as UN alternate. In the years before 1960, when the United Nations enjoyed considerable prestige among Americans, delegate and alternate delegate positions were choice patronage plums. Appointments of such African Americans as Sampson and, later, musicians Marian Anderson and Zelma George satisfied minimal black demands for recognition and helped deflect the hostility of America's critics. Such appointments also fulfilled the desire to make the U.S. contingent at the UN more representative of the citizenry at large. Yet black Americans served chiefly as window dressing. Some knew it and played their roles with style. The genial Zelma George, for example, received a hostess's budget and encouragement to give the convivial parties for which she was known.¹⁸

The inner dynamic of the strategy underlying these appointments is perhaps of greater interest than the delegates' predictable defense of the American record. However eloquently they might attempt explanations of racial crimes, Washington continued to undermine its own declarations in its handling of issues, including personnel matters, at the United Nations. Officials saw no incongruity between the naming of persons like Sampson and the simultaneous appointment of segregationist Senator John J. Sparkman of Alabama in 1950, and in 1953, under the nascent Eisenhower administration, of former Secretary of State James Byrnes as regular delegates. The South Carolinian was an outspoken segregationist who also opposed minimum wage laws. On the floor of Congress, he had once defended the practice of lynching. Byrnes's July 1953 appointment occasioned numerous complaints

18. Enoch P. Waters, *American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press* (Chicago, 1987), 503; Horace Clayton to Percival Pratts, 5 December 1958, Percival L. Pratts Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Collection, Howard University, Washington, DC; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 December 1958.

from liberal organizations that the additional selection of Rev. Archibald Carey, a black Chicagoan, as an alternate did little to neutralize.¹⁹

Black conservatives George Schuyler and Max Yergan, however, defended the appointment. According to Yergan, Cold War considerations should take precedence over racial matters. To Schuyler, "carrying our domestic quarrels into the highly charged international arena does not benefit the U.S.A., nor the fifteen million Negroes who rise or fall with it." Neither Schuyler nor Yergan seemed to recognize that the U.S. government itself, by designating a delegate so vulnerable to attack, had aired the national dirty linen.²⁰ Eisenhower realized this, however, and replaced Byrnes in October 1953.²¹

The challenge of global leadership in the 1940s and 1950s made the United States dissociate black civil rights from radicalism. Anti-Communist liberals increasingly appropriated an issue that had often been the sole province of Communists and other leftists. While it was possible to argue, as Schuyler did, that national unity should take priority over racial justice, it was also possible to contend that the two objectives were mutually reinforcing and could be pursued in tandem.

The question of how to structure the U.S. delegation to the United Nations reveals more about the dynamics of the connection between race and foreign affairs and the difficult process of internal reform being experienced in U.S. society than do accounts of the delegates loyally playing their expected roles. We need now to take a broader view, which we can approach through Michael Krenn's highly original account of the internal debates about race and representation that surrounded the Brussels World Fair. Krenn demonstrates how an issue that had, on the face of it, merely symbolic importance, took on larger overtones. Ranking officials argued about which photographs to use in an exhibit detailing America's pain and progress on the racial front and how they should be displayed. Their sensitivity to the subtlest nuances of display evokes current controversies over museological exposition. We see in their correspondence a fascinating portrait of an establishment still unwilling to come to terms with change.

Krenn nevertheless tends to recapitulate the shortcomings ascribed to U.S. exposition planners. Just as officials failed to consult African Ameri-

19. Channing Tobias, "Building Better Human Relations Is Everybody's Business," address to the 1952 annual conference of the National Urban League, Cleveland, 2 September 1952, Records of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, Schomburg Center, New York Public Library. On Edith Sampson see "Edith Sampson Goes to Austria," *Ebony*, October 1951, 80-82; J. D. Ratcliff, "Edith Sampson . . . Thorn in Russia's Side," *United Nations World* 5 (March 1951): 25. On Sparkman, George S. Schuyler, "The Byrnes U.N. Appointment," syndicated column, 29 August 1953, typescript in George S. Schuyler Papers, Schomburg Center; and *New York Times*, 24 and 7 July 1953.

20. *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 September 1946, 8 August 1953, Tuskegee News Clipping File; *New York Times*, 28 and 31 July 1953.

21. Schuyler, "The Byrnes U.N. Appointment," *Atlanta World*, 18 October 1953, Tuskegee News Clipping File.

cans about the exhibit's content, Krenn relegates African American viewpoints to the footnotes of his essay. This back-door treatment fails to fully reveal the depth of feeling among black Americans about how Washington's contribution to the Brussels fair represented—or misrepresented—U.S. race relations. It also renders invisible those contacts that officials did establish with opinion makers in black communities. This marginalization is an artifact of an approach that simultaneously places government and its agents at the center of any historical inquiry about social process and displaces non-governmental actors and their influence.

Conservative legislators worried about the possible negative impact that candor about racial conditions might have. They concerned themselves with the minutiae of photographic display and labeling in "The Unfinished Business" pavilion but were curiously blind to other aspects of media representation. As late as May, officials had scheduled the screening at the fair of only one U.S. film that featured blacks. This was King Vidor's 1929 *Hallelujah!* a story about a cotton picker that the *Pittsburgh Courier* described as "the epitome of all we deplore where race presentation is concerned!" However reassuring *Hallelujah!* may have been to Dixiecrats hoping to sell the world a nostalgic portrait of the Old South, the film was simply out of step with present-day realities. Planners would have more success in retailing black entertainers to European audiences. They signed up opera singers Leontyne Price and William Warfield, jazz singer Sara Vaughn, and calypsonian Harry Belafonte for appearances in Brussels.²²

Thurston J. Davies communicated his wish to employ black guides at the fair to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. He believed it "not only desirable but essential" that African Americans be represented. Accordingly, a dozen young black people, most of them college students, worked as exhibition guides in Brussels during the fair. Guides received a shipboard orientation en route. Several were assigned to "The Unfinished Business" pavilion. The contingent, which also included Puerto Ricans and Hawaiians, ate and slept together. Officials screened prospective white guides for their willingness to work and live with persons of color. Commissioner-General Howard S. Cullman deemed the guides "informal ambassadors" for the American way of life.²³

The guides were important because they would be highly visible to Brussels fair visitors, most of whom were Europeans. World tensions during the 1950s still centered on Europe. While there was an increasing tendency to enact Cold War strife in the periphery, as exemplified by the Guatemalan, Indochinese, and Suez conflicts, the Hungarian revolt of 1956 and the Berlin crisis demonstrated the continued preeminence of Europe in U.S. calculations. For Europeans, the race question not only exposed the

22. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 May 1958; *Baltimore Afro-American*, 4 April 1958; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 24 May 1958.

23. *Baltimore Afro-American*, 4 April 1958; *Ebony*, July 1958, 48–52.

hypocrisies of their neighbor across the Atlantic but also bore a relation to a dying colonialism. Three of the powers present at the exposition—Britain, France, and Belgium—owned important African real estate. Britain's colonies were represented only in the Commonwealth Court exhibit. France, in contrast, chose to make its empire visible in the form of detailed displays and African docents. Belgium mounted a Congo exhibit that featured a model African village with Congolese enacting rituals of daily life. Some observers found the setting zoological and offensive. A correspondent for *West Africa* noted that the Belgian Catholic missions pavilion included African staff, but the Belgian government seemed determined to keep most Congolese locked away from exposure to modern influences and from the nationalist impulses then sweeping the African continent. The mock-up village, inviting the "ethnographic gaze" of white spectators, represented an unchanging Congo.²⁴

These facts would suggest a further context in which to examine U.S. concerns about foreign reaction to Jim Crow. Like the United States, the imperial powers would benefit from a general perception that they practiced racial equality and could accommodate themselves to an emerging postcolonial order. Indeed, the timing was critical. The Brussels exposition was the first effort to convene the world's peoples since 1939. France was in crisis: The creation of the Fifth Republic accompanied major insurgencies in North Africa. Belgium in 1958 witnessed the emergence of politician Patrice Lumumba in a Congo scarcely prepared for autonomy. Britain, struggling to repair relations with the United States after the Suez debacle, had come to a new realization of its dependence on U.S. military capability in Europe and elsewhere. All things considered, the West was on its best symbolic behavior in Brussels, but as Krenn has shrewdly deduced, that was not enough. The subsequent history of worldwide civil rights and national liberation movements suggests that the pace of change required acceleration, and that it could no longer take place solely on the metaphorical level.

The contributions by Anderson, Laville and Lucas, and Krenn to the work on black Americans and foreign affairs are timely and often insightful. The essays focus on the critical years 1945 to 1958, when the contours of both the modern United States and contemporary African American communities were being shaped. They are also varied in their approach. All could use more attention to the broader contexts in which the events they relate occurred. Without such context, historical scholarship on this subject may appear to consist only of interesting but disconnected episodes.

Part of the broader context in which external developments occur is

24. Geoffrey Warner, "The Anglo-American Special Relationship," *Diplomatic History* 13 (Fall 1989): 487–89; G. Wyn Rees, "Brothers in Arms: Anglo-American Defence Co-operation in 1957," in *Post-war Britain, 1945–64: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Tony Gorst, Lewis Johnman, and W. Scott Lucas (London, 1989), 203–20; "Expo 1958," *West Africa*, no. 2151, 12 July 1958.

found in a society where race has always been a source of conflict. Thomas Jefferson realized this when he called the Missouri Compromise "a firebell in the night." Jefferson was talking about slavery rather than about race. His message nevertheless presaged the high future cost that Americans were to pay for continuing a system of racial hierarchy. "Those whom the constitution of the State has not admitted to the rights of suffrage," in Madison's words, could prove to be America's Achilles' heel. Race and race relations, a subject of lively interest to social scientists in the first half of the twentieth century, went into eclipse after World War II. It is now witnessing a revival as historians, sociologists, legal scholars, and literary critics seek to gain theoretical insights on race that will rival the grand theories of class.²⁵ This presents an opportunity for historians of U.S. foreign relations to examine race not only in the light of African American engagement with global issues but also with regard to the histories of other U.S. peoples of color. They might also query the racialized identity that has so profoundly informed our national idea of citizenship.

25. Among such works are David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York, 1992); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York, 1994); and Richard Delgado, ed., *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia, 1995).