

The End of Respectability Politics:
The United States Civil Rights Movement, Liberalism, and the Vietnam
War

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the interplay between the US Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and Liberalism. It examines the positions civil rights leaders and the most significant civil rights organizations of the 1960s took on the Vietnam conflict and tries to make sense of their connection to the liberal project. By charting the long history of African Americans' engagement in the US's wars and exploring how they were influenced by anti-colonial/anti-imperialist leaders, and movements around the world, I seek to understand what ultimately informed the stances that the most prominent civil rights actors of the era assumed during the Vietnam conflict, and why the War proved to be such a seminal moment for African Americans and their relationship with the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was years in the making. At several points along the way I was convinced it would not get done. Without the support of a legion of supporters, I could not have completed it. I would like to thank my exceedingly patient supervisor, Professor Andrew M. Johnston, for his wise counsel and friendship. Working with Andrew has been a privilege and a joy. I count myself lucky for having the good fortune to benefit from his guidance. I would also like to thank my many professors in the Department of History at Carleton University for helping me to become a more rigorous and conscientious scholar: Audra Diptee, Jennifer Evans, Susanne Klaussen, Dominique Marshall, Daniel McNeil, James Miller. And a very special thank you to Graduate Administrator Joan White. Thank you for all you do, Joan!

I am so grateful for my wife, Lana Parris, who has been the most supportive partner I could have ever wished for. She stuck by me throughout what at times must have felt like an interminable process. Lana cheerfully suffered through too many years of hearing about the thesis. I am surprised it did not become the bane of her existence—perhaps it did. Her sacrifice enabled me to work on numerous weekends when we should have been enjoying each other's company, or when I ought to have been minding the children. She provided me with space. During the toughest times she continued to believe in me. I cannot thank her enough. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our kids Parker and Zoë for their patience, for accommodating their absent-minded father, and for inspiring me every day.

Thank you to my parents Hyacinth Harewood and John Harewood for a lifetime of lessons and for the love and support they gave me throughout this long journey. A special thank you to my loyal sister Pat who has always been ever steadfast in her support of me. Thanks to my generous sister Anne for being a wonderful source of encouragement. And thank you to my brilliant sisters Joy and June for always inspiring me.

Thanks to my dear friends Shane Book, David Austin, and David Nyheim for always being there for me.

And thanks to my colleagues at the CBC, particularly Lucy van Oldenbarneveld for encouraging me to get this bloody thesis done!

Finally thank you to the women and men of the Black Freedom Movement in the United States, the protagonists of this project, for teaching me about sacrifice and commitment and resilience and imagination and ingenuity and what it means to be free.

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INTRODUCTION

In the first three quarters of the 20th century the United States participated in four major wars. Each conflict cost tens of thousands of Americans their lives and the US treasury billions of dollars. They had profound effects on the US social and political landscape. The War in Vietnam was like a thunderclap.¹ Never in its history had the prosecution of a war on foreign soil provoked such a rancorous domestic response and rendered the United States so fragmented and polarized. The War in Vietnam divided the leaders and organizations of the Civil Rights Movement and the country's Black community at large.² This brought into sharp relief the generational and ideological fault lines that had long existed beneath the movement's surface and reflected the divergent political philosophies and approaches within the walls of Black America.

¹ There remains contention over what to call the conflict that took place in Vietnam between the United States and the forces from North Vietnam, along with the Viet Cong. To the Vietnamese, the war remains "The American War." In the United States it is known as "The War in Vietnam" or "The Vietnam War." For the purposes of this thesis, I will employ the term The Vietnam War not because of any inherent American bias but rather because it is the term that is most familiar and conventional.

² Throughout this thesis, I capitalize the word "Black" when referring to the African American community, because whenever one speaks of a culture, an ethnicity, or a group of people, the common name or primary label used to denote or identify them ought to be capitalized. Like Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Filipino Americans, Black Americans constitute a bona fide national community—a community with shared cultural practices and histories. What has united members of this grouping and made them unique, has been their racially codified relationship with the state. Throughout their history in the United States, Black Americans have been a marginalized community who have often been both accorded and denied power based on their racialized status. To not capitalize the term "Black" when referring to the Black community in the United States is to reduce "a people" to their skin colour. Such usage diminishes a bona fide community with long and established cultural practices, traditions, and shared experiences. Black Americans have, over the centuries, become a national community. The enslaved Africans from who were kidnapped and brought against their will to the American colonies spoke different languages, engaged in varied religious, spiritual, and cultural practices and were from diverse ethnic communities. Eventually though what these people came to have in common was the struggle they were all forced to endure due solely to the colour of their skin. And so out of those common experiences emerged an identifiable community of individuals who recognized themselves in each other's joy and pain. There is a reason why Black Americans adopted James Weldon Johnson's poem "Life every Voice and Sing" as the unofficial Black national anthem. It's because the song speaks to their collective desire for freedom and affirms their humanity as Black people. In the 1920s W.E.B Du Bois launched a campaign demanding that newspapers editors and magazines capitalize the "N" in Negro when referring to Black People. In 1926 the *New York Times* initially denied Du Bois' request but eventually relented. As a race, a tribe, and a community, Black people ought to have the right to name themselves. Black deserves to be written with a capital B. I also capitalize the word "White" when referring to what I will call the European American community which in the context of the United States constitutes a national community of sorts—again a community with shared cultural practices and histories—and one that has also had a codified relationship with the state.

It also signaled a turning point for Black American leadership and for the relationship between African Americans, the US nation state, and the broader American liberal project.

Black America was profoundly affected by the epic struggle for global hegemony between the world's two superpowers, United States, and the Soviet Union, that began in the wake of the Second World War. The Cold War and the legacy of McCarthyism cast a pall over a generation of civil rights veterans still shaken, a decade later, by the anti-Communist Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s. That history would help to inform the debate over Vietnam that emerged within Black America and the civil rights community in the 1960s.

The U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, which simmered through the 1950s, became a fully-fledged war on August 4, 1964, the same day the bodies of three slain civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney, were found on a farm six miles northeast of Philadelphia, Mississippi. On that day, during what was still “Freedom Summer” in Mississippi—a ground-breaking civil rights initiative spearheaded by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—U.S. jets bombed North Vietnamese hamlets to avenge alleged attacks made on U.S. war ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. American soldiers were then moved into South Vietnam by the tens of thousands.³

The escalation of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in the mid 1960s coincided with the passage of two of the most important pieces of legislation in the country's history. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended legal segregation and disenfranchisement and marked the culmination of an epic struggle waged by millions of ordinary American citizens for equal rights and justice.

³ John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), 369.

As the early phase of the U.S. War in Vietnam intensified, so too did domestic opposition to its prosecution. Martin Luther King Jr., much to the chagrin of President Lyndon Johnson (LBJ), and African American leaders like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Roy Wilkins and the National Urban League's (NUL) Whitney Young, played a galvanizing role among the war's opponents. Yet, opposition to the War did not unify the Civil Rights Movement, but rather exacerbated long simmering tensions between progressive and moderate/conservative forces within it, provoking some of the most fractious debates of the era, and creating deep wounds in the African American community that would prove difficult to heal.

This thesis will integrate and expand the scholarship on the relationship between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Freedom Movement, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and American liberalism. The Civil Rights Movement and the anti-War Movement were among the most important protest movements in 20th century US history.⁴ As mass political struggles, their convergence helped shape and define the discourse of the 1960s, tying together American domestic politics and liberal internationalism in a wholly unique and potent manner.

For all that has been written on the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, the scholarship addressing the interplay between the two is surprisingly modest.⁵ This is ironic given

⁴ The origins of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement can be traced back to the early 1940s but for the purposes of this thesis, the Civil Rights Movement will be understood to refer to the period roughly between 1954-1968.

⁵ In recent years the most comprehensive document that addresses the interplay between the Vietnam War and the US Civil Rights Movement is Daniel Luck's *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: 2014). See also Lawrence Allen Elridge, *Chronicles of A Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press* (Columbia, MO: 2009); Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land: World Affairs and the Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton 2006); Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movement in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: 2005); Simon Hall, "The Response of the Moderate Wing of the Civil Rights Movement to the Vietnam War," *Historical Journal* 46 no.3 (September 2003); Manfred Berg, "Guns Butter and Civil Rights: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Vietnam War, 1964-68," in *Aspects of War in American History*, ed. David K. Adams and Cornelius A. Van Minnen (Keele, UK: 1997), 213-38; Benjamin Harrison, "The Impact of the Vietnam War on the Civil Rights Movement in the Mid-Sixties," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 3 (1996): 261-78; Peter Levy, "Blacks and the Vietnam War," in *The Legacy: Vietnam War in the Historical Imagination*, ed. D. Michael Shafer

the longstanding relationship between African Americans, war, and their quest for full citizenship. I will first, therefore, identify the factors that led race reform leaders to so strongly encourage African Americans to participate in U.S. military campaigns. I will contrast the response of these leaders, particularly in the First and Second World Wars, along with the Korean War, with how civil rights leaders responded to Black engagement in the War in Vietnam. I will then discuss the tradition of Black Internationalism and explain how the NAACP, the pre-eminent U.S. civil rights organization of the era, engaged with the state and approached foreign policy matters, particularly toward anti-colonial movements. And finally, I will explore the various positions that civil rights organizations and their leaders took on Vietnam and why.

The dissertation poses the following questions. What explains the divergent positions taken by civil rights leaders and organizations on the Vietnam War? What was the effect of the Cold War on members of the Black Freedom Movement and their leaders? Why would the NAACP, an organization with a history of working in solidarity with global anti-colonial movements in the 1940s and 1950s, end up becoming a cheerleader for a U.S. war in Southeast Asia in the 1960s? How and why did the majority of African Americans and civil rights leaders go from “closing ranks” and being reliable supporters of America’s wars abroad in both the First and Second World Wars and in the Korean War (the first war after the official integration of the armed services), to eventually “closing ranks” and repudiating the U.S. War in Vietnam? How

(Boston:1990), 209-32; Adam Fairclough, “Martin Luther King and the War in Vietnam,” *Phylon* 45 , no. 1 (March 1984):19-39; Adam Mack, “No ‘Illusion of Separation’: James Bevel, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War,” *Peace and Change* 28 no. 1 (January 2003): 108-33; Herbert Shapiro, “The Vietnam War and the American Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16 (Winter 1989): 117-41; Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, “An African-Vietnamese American: Robert Browne the Anti-War Movement and the Personal/Political Dimensions of Black Internationalism,” *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 491-515; Henry Darby and Margaret N. Rowley, “King on Vietnam and Beyond,” *Phylon* 47 no. 1 (March 1986): 43-50; Thomas J. Noer, “Martin Luther King Jr. and the Cold War,” *Peace and Change* 22 no. 2 (April 1997):111-31.

did the Vietnam War contribute to the demise of the post-war liberal consensus? How did the War in Vietnam affect the way African Americans imagined their relationship with the state?

Much of the scholarship looking at the relationship between the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War has focused on the protean figure of Martin Luther King Jr. and his evolution from fresh-faced civil rights icon in the mid 1950s, to seasoned anti-Vietnam War leader towards the end of his life in the late 1960s. While King plays an integral role in the argument I present in this dissertation, he was, of course, but one player in a social movement that profoundly disrupted American life. I am interested then in the other major civil rights leaders and their organizations as well. While I am aware that histories of the movement have at times privileged a “bottom-up”, grassroots, approach, I believe that a so-called “history from above”, despite its evident limitations, remains both legitimate and of value. As Jonathan Rosenberg has stated, a considerable portion of the American Civil Rights Movement’s “energy and direction” during the 20th century “came from above” and so it is worthwhile examining what it was that informed the long struggle that this diverse group of actors waged.⁶

The thesis argues that the responses of prominent civil rights figures and organizations to the U.S. War in Vietnam were informed by their respective political histories, the material nature of their relationship with the state, the age or era in which they emerged as full-fledged political actors, and the nature of political activities in which they had been involved. At their core, radical groupings like SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) were organizations with divergent histories and orientations. They all engaged in the struggle for civil rights utilizing different approaches and methodologies than more liberal and moderate organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League.

⁶ 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), 3.

The thesis seeks to understand the relationship between civil rights organizations, their leadership, and the liberal project, and how it was affected by the Vietnam War. Liberalism is the political philosophy that has always championed equality, liberty, and fairness, yet has denied equality, liberty, and fairness to those it has deemed sub-human, like Blacks, Indigenous peoples, and other people of colour. It is the political philosophy of the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment that promised equal rights and the consent of the governed, but was complicit in the African Slave Trade, Indigenous genocide, colonialism, and Jim Crow. It is the political philosophy of inclusion that is rooted in racial exclusion. Far from being an anomalous or paradoxical aspect of liberal theory then, racism is a fundamental part of liberalism's DNA.⁷ It is liberalism's inconvenient truth. Yet, despite this tortured history, up until the 1960s, Black Americans had, in the main, retained faith in the US state's ability to play a role in securing their emancipation. Black liberals had insisted that despite its many flaws American liberalism remained the best system for achieving justice and equality for African Americans. Their critics though were not convinced the liberal order was salvageable and that their "freedom dreams" could be achieved within such a structure.

Cold War Liberalism is a term that describes a set of policies that emerged during the Cold War era (1947-1991) to defend and uphold the international liberal order. For American Cold War liberals, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, those policies included support for democracy, equality, the growth of labour unions, civil rights legislation, and anti-communism. Cold War Liberalism was ostensibly driven by the fear of the imminent collapse of freedom in the West. The idea was that totalitarian communist regimes like the Soviet Union represented an existential threat to liberal societies like Britain, West Germany, and the US., and thus for

⁷ Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

liberalism to survive, states had to be more aggressive in defense of their democratic ideals and project military power.

The term “respectability politics” connotes a kind of political practice that seeks not to upend, disrupt, or offend in any demonstrable way the existing political order. Rather, it is a kind of political approach that seeks to preserve the status quo and is eager to gain the affirmation of the politically powerful in the society. Respectability politics is a process by which elite members of marginalized or subordinate groups adopt dominant social norms and behaviors to advance their group’s interests. In the context of 20th century Black America, respectability politics had always been rooted in the notion that Black folks needed to reform themselves or modify their behavior to curry the favour of the White established order and be treated equally. It was a philosophy which was intended to prove that Black Americans were deserving of citizenship rights, and shared the same values, traits, and morals as White Americans. As it was employed in the 1950s and 1960s, during a particularly fraught period of the Cold War era, respectability politics can be understood as a survival strategy utilized by Black liberal organizations like the NAACP to maintain their standing in the eyes of the state. The NAACP’s leaders were intent on proving their patriotism and dedication to the American. At a time of intense anti-communism, NAACP officials were terrified that their civil rights group could be deemed a subversive organization and recognized the importance of being seen to be strict adherents to Cold War Liberalism.

In Chapter One I examine the historical relationship between African Americans and America’s wars up until the conflict in Korea. In Chapter Two, I explore the relationship between African Americans and liberalism through the experiential prism of the two most prominent moderate civil rights organizations of the 20th century—the NAACP and the Urban

League. In Chapter Three, I seek to understand the roots of the anti-Vietnam War stances of civil rights organizations and their leadership by exploring their connection to the struggles waged by anti-colonial movements in earlier decades. And finally, in Chapter Four, I argue that the Vietnam War marked the end of the long liberal reign of “respectability politics” and signaled, thanks in part to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the emergence of a greater self-confidence and sense of citizenship amongst the African American community.

CHAPTER 1:

Saving Face, Place, Space and Race: Charting the African American Relationship with War, the U.S. Military and American Citizenship from World War I to Korea

Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he earned the right of citizenship in the United States.

Frederick Douglass, "Should the Negro Enlist in the Union Army?"
National Hall, Philadelphia (July 6, 1863)

Love of country is the first requisition and highest attribute for every citizen; and he who voluntarily ventures his own safety for that of his country, is a patriot of the purest character.

Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852)

As Brenda Gayle Plummer has suggested, historically, the "price of freedom" for African Americans was to identify unequivocally with the goals of the state. Due to the racism endemic within the structures of the American political system, "Black citizenship within the nation state has been provisional."⁸ Prominent African American leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and civil rights organizations like the NAACP considered equal participation in the military an integral part of the struggle for full citizenship rights, even if those same leaders did not always identify closely with U.S. foreign policy aims. The conceit was that participation in war would make Black people—Black men in particular—more free, more masculine, and more American. Generations of African American men sought to prove their masculinity and fealty to the state by fighting in America's wars, even while their civil rights and humanity were being denied. Extending to the Korean War, the African American community remained divided between a majority, who regarded the right to fight in the military as a legitimate civil rights objective, and

⁸ Nikhil Pal Singh, "Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy," *American Quarterly*, vol. 50 no. 3 (Sept.1998), 508.

a minority who questioned whether military service brought Black Americans any closer to achieving racial justice. Yet, over the course of the 20th century, the US state grew increasingly desperate for military labour and eventually turned to African Americans to fill these positions.

In July 1918 W.E.B. Du Bois, the preeminent African American intellectual of his generation, unstinting proponent of equal rights, and prolific editor of *The Crisis*, wrote what would become one of the most controversial editorials of his career.⁹ In a piece entitled “Close Ranks”, Du Bois conveyed a message to America’s Negro community that was as clear as it was unequivocal: Black Americans should refrain from advocating for equal rights until the Great War came to an end. Du Bois stated: “We of the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom, and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us while the war lasts, forget our special grievances and close ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens...fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills.”¹⁰ It was a remarkably conciliatory statement, particularly for a protest leader so renowned for his militancy.¹¹ Du Bois’ bold accommodationist argument could very well have been uttered by his longtime nemesis, the “Grand Wizard of Tuskegee” himself, the recently deceased Booker T. Washington.¹² To Du Bois’ critics, the editorial was a betrayal of the primary struggle of America’s Black community—the struggle for full citizenship. William H. Wilson a Washington D.C. physician

⁹ Three years earlier in 1915 Du Bois had written an influential article in *The Atlantic* magazine called “The African Roots of War” in which he’d attributed the cause of the First World War in part to the intense competition over the land and resources of Africa.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Close Ranks,” *The Crisis*, vol. 16, no.3 (July 1918): 111.

¹¹ “Close Ranks” was also controversial because of allegations that Du Bois wrote it to curry favour with the U.S. military in the hopes of landing a position with military intelligence. To this day there is a debate as to when, in fact, Du Bois wrote the article, before he sought the job as an agent, or afterwards. Both the original statement and the revelation that Du Bois was in fact interested in becoming a government spy was the cause of much surprise.

¹² Booker T. Washington died in 1915.

reflected the sentiments of many faithful readers of *The Crisis* when he wrote a damning letter to Du Bois in response to “Close Ranks”: “In no issue since our entrance in the war am I able to find so supine a surrender—temporary though it may be—of the rights of man.”¹³

While “Close Ranks” may have left many of Du Bois’ admirers bewildered, his stance can be interpreted as a strategic one that was consistent with the approach employed by many of the United States of America’s most prominent race leaders. Far from capitulating, Du Bois was displaying what some might consider a flexibility and pragmatism that evinced a reasoned response to the volatility of American race relations. Such a dynamic approach was part of a long tradition in African American history.

As both Sterling Stuckey and Wilson Jeremiah Moses have argued, antebellum Black leaders often needed “flexible responses to the ambiguous even anomalous racial realities they faced.”¹⁴ As Moses has noted, in the 19th century Negro leader Alexander Crummell, whom Du Bois considered one of his intellectual forebears, had championed positions that advocated for both Black nationalism and cultural assimilation.¹⁵ “It was impossible to create an ideology that responded rationally to an irrational system.”¹⁶ Du Bois was hopeful that positive gains would ensue thanks to African American engagement in the war, but also fearful of what might occur if they chose not to.¹⁷

Echoing Du Bois, then NAACP field secretary and future race leader James Weldon Johnson described the predicament in which Black Americans found themselves during the First World War: “Even if there can be no sense of patriotism ... the bald truth is that the Negro

¹³ Mark Ellis, *Race War and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 164.

¹⁴ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 203.

¹⁵ Negro was the term used in the 19th century to refer to African Americans or Black Americans.

¹⁶ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 295.

¹⁷ Du Bois, “Close Ranks”, *The Crisis*, 111.

cannot afford to be rated as a disloyal element in this nation. Imagine the results if he should for an instant arouse against himself the sentiment which is now directed against the pro-German element.”¹⁸

Black leaders, newspapers, and civil rights organizations all faced a “damnable dilemma” during the First World War.¹⁹ Should they urge Americans to assert their rights and risk a virulent and violent White backlash or adopt a more conciliatory approach and gain wider support from the general White community? Several other questions abounded: Should African Americans and their leadership support Black participation in the First World War on the side of the U.S. and its allies despite living under increasingly oppressive, undemocratic, and brutal conditions at home? Why would one choose to fight for a state that seemed to have utter disregard for one’s health, welfare, and safety? Black individuals and organizations alike responded to these challenges in myriad ways. In the end, they attempted to negotiate America’s political realities by shifting between tactics of accommodation and protest.

To understand the African American response to the First World War and the wars of the 20th century that would follow, one must go back to the latter part of the 19th century. Historians refer to the period from the 1890s through to the First World War as the Progressive Era. Progressives were social reformers, modernizers, anti-corruption activists, and advocates of science who sought to use the levers of the state to address putative problems of society in an orderly and efficient manner. They believed government could be mobilized to affect positive

¹⁸ James Weldon Johnson, *New York Age*, April 5, 1917.

¹⁹ The phrase “damnable dilemma” is taken from a journal article of the same name written by William Jordan entitled “The Damnable Dilemma”: African American Accommodation and Protest during World War I,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 81, no. 4 (March 1995) 1562-1583.

change and thus be a force for good. During this period, Americans expected their elected officials to take action to regulate and better manage societal affairs.²⁰

For African Americans this progressive moment coincided with one of the darker, more regressive periods in the country's history, one that saw the rise of a virulent White supremacy in the form of a radical, state-sanctioned racial ordering that "dictated where people lived, whether they voted, whom they might love and how they might work."²¹ This was the age of Jim Crow segregation, an era that saw draconian restrictions placed on the possibilities of Black American lives, which were increasingly racialized, codified and constrained.²² In a landmark decision in 1896, the US Supreme Court, under the doctrine of separate but equal, upheld the constitutionality of segregation in the case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. This period also saw a steep rise in the number of lynchings of African Americans, the extension of laws against miscegenation beyond the South, and the rise in the influence of eugenics and racist social science.²³

On the eve of the First World War, much of Black America was under siege. Almost daily, African Americans faced the stark reality of a resurgent Jim Crow in the form of political

²⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Nell Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987)

²¹ Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 14. We can understand "White supremacy" as "a system of social control and political order that undergirded segregation and came to govern African American lives...Jim Crow, as the system came to be popularly known, made a ritual out of asserting the unequal citizenship of people of colour and a virtue out of the exploitative behavior of White America."

²² Jim Crow was a racial caste system which operated between 1877 and the mid 1960s, primarily in the US South and border states. The system of racialized social control arose after the collapse of slavery and manifested itself in a series of anti-Black laws which relegated Black Americans to the status of second-class citizens and enforced racial segregation. The term "Jim Crow" is said to have derived from a minstrel show character that first surfaced in the 1820s.

²³ Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16. This mob violence was a kind of carnival of the macabre; a type of state sanctioned ritualized terrorism in which thousands of citizens participated in grotesque practices such as the roasting and dismembering of bodies and the transmogrification of severed body parts such as noses and knuckles into prized mementos.

disfranchisement and the steady erosion of their civil rights.²⁴ Even when their constitutional rights were under fire, they were ignored by the Supreme Court. By implementing a series of complicated voting and registration procedures, literacy tests and poll taxes, Southern states placed numerous restrictions on African Americans that made it virtually impossible for them to vote. To many Black people, particularly those who had not experienced the depredations of slavery, it was the worst of times—the nadir of their existence in the United States.

In another time, African Americans had regarded the office of the president, and indeed the federal government and Congress, as genuine forces for Black progress. A half century after 1863, the hope and enthusiasm that had emerged out of the Emancipation Proclamation and the era of Reconstruction had greatly diminished, if not disappeared.²⁵ A great number of African Americans took stock of their waning status within the union and concluded that whatever progress had been won through the toil and struggle of previous generations was in peril.

Perhaps most disconcertingly, for the first time since 1848, Black Americans were contending with a southern White supremacist Democrat in the White House whose administration was intent on pursuing a virulently anti-Black domestic agenda, which hearkened back to the days of the Antebellum Old South.²⁶ Indeed, after just two years in office, President

²⁴ Ibid., 16. In a report published by the NAACP in 1919 a year after the end of World War I the author, Franklin Morton, found that in the 30 years between 1889 and 1918, 3,224 Black people were lynched by White mobs. On average, just over 100 Black people were the victims of lynching in America every year for three decades. On average one African American individual was being lynched every 4 days by a White mob for thirty consecutive years.

²⁵ John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classic, 2014); Eric Foner, one of the eminent historians of the Reconstruction era, cites the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, as the beginning of Reconstruction, and the year 1877 as marking its end. Foner notes that some recent studies of Reconstruction now stretch into the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, it is now referred to as Long Reconstruction akin to the Long Civil Rights Movement (commencing in the 1930 and 1940s). Foner refers to Reconstruction as both “a period of time” and “a historical process.”

²⁶ The last southern Democratic president had been James Polk (1845-49) from North Carolina. For the purposes of this paper “White supremacy” is considered to be both the belief in the inherent superiority of people who identify themselves as members of the White race, and a system of domination and control built on the valorization of the idea of Whiteness and the denigration of that deemed to be its opposite, non-Whiteness; a system of power in which

Woodrow Wilson had allowed for the segregation of African Americans in civil service jobs, overseen the introduction of a string of racist bills into Congress, and failed to deal effectively with a rash of pogroms and other extra-judicial killings of Black citizens.²⁷ The 100,000 African Americans who had voted for Wilson in the 1912 election had anticipated a very different kind of commander-in-chief in the Oval Office.²⁸

One of the race leaders most alarmed by President Wilson's contempt for Black Americans was William Monroe Trotter, a prominent newspaper publisher and central figure in Boston's African American community.²⁹ In 1912, Trotter and his paper had heartily endorsed Wilson for the presidency.³⁰ Just two years later in September 1914, *The Richmond Planet* published an appeal to President Wilson on the front page of its paper written by Trotter. In it, he exhorted Wilson to free his "colored fellow citizens millions that they are from repression, lynching, disfranchisement, Jim Crowism and segregation ... not wait until the exigencies of some awful war make their relief an act of expediency rather than justice."³¹ Wilson did not heed Trotter's call.

people derive an array of economic, social, political and psychic benefits, often unbeknownst to them, not due to merit but phenotype.

²⁷ See, Gary Gerstle, "Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson," 93-123, in John Milton Cooper Jr. (ed.) *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War and Peace* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). As president of Princeton University (1902-1910), Woodrow Wilson had maintained the university's racial order by continuing its practice of denying admission to African Americans. Wilson admitted that he found virtue in plantation slavery. He made public remarks in which he referred to Black Americans as "coons" and "darkeys." However, Wilson somehow found space in his conception of American nationality for Europeans (White people) but not for non-Europeans.

²⁸ Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 32.

²⁹ Trotter's father James had been born a slave yet would become a successful businessman, and later the highest-ranking officer in the administration of Grover Cleveland. Like his contemporary and later rival W.E.B. Du Bois, Trotter was an outstanding student who graduated from Harvard University, became an ardent critic of the accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington and in 1901 launched a newspaper called *The Boston Guardian*. Trotter met Wilson on two occasions in the years 1913/1914 during which he admonished an irritated Wilson to abolish segregation in his administration.

³⁰ As noted in Kenneth O'Reilly's "The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson" *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 17 (Autumn 1997): 117-122. W.E.B Du Bois also had high hopes for Wilson prior to his election in 1912. He had regarded Wilson as a "cultivated scholar" of "far-sighted fairness." Du Bois added that the Democratic candidate "has brains," and "will not seek further means of Jim Crow insult."

³¹ William Monroe Trotter, *The Richmond Planet*, September 1914.

When the Great War broke out in Europe in August 1914, few could have predicted the horror that would ensue. The Wilson administration was intent on avoiding the bloodletting raging across the ocean and thus kept the United States out of the conflict for its first three years. Most Americans supported the President's position; they regarded the conflict as not being their fight. Kelly Miller, the prominent Dean of Arts at Howard University, captured the feelings of many African Americans when he said, "this is essentially a White man's war. The American Negro is so far removed from the intimate issues of the European struggle that its effect on him must be secondary and indirect."³² But a mere two years later, Miller and other race leaders would reverse their positions and proclaim their support for America's war effort.

By April 1917, the United States decided to enter the war. President Wilson spoke eloquently about its significance, telling Congress that "the world must be made safe for democracy."³³ But the decision to intervene, involving as it did passionate calls for national unity, presented a dilemma for African Americans and their leadership: Should they join the fight in support of the U.S. and Allied forces, or should they stay home? Why fight for democracy abroad when they were barely able to enjoy its fruits in their native land?

War has long played a critical role in the construction of gender and the establishment and reinforcement of social roles.³⁴ The term gender refers to "a set of cultural institutions and practices that constitute the norms and standards of masculinity and femininity."³⁵ While not all men or women conform to the stereotypes, some of the traits associated with masculinity include physical strength, aggression, and courage, whereas femininity has been associated with

³² Ellis, *Race War and Surveillance*, 1.

³³ On April 2, 1917, President Wilson addressed a joint session of the US Congress seeking a Declaration of War against Germany. Four days later Congress voted to declare war.

³⁴ Christine Chinkin and Mary Kaldor, "Gender and the New Wars" *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 1 Fall/Winter 2013 167-187), 167.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

passivity, empathy, fragility and emotions.³⁶ As a globalized activity mainly fought by men, war has tended to extol the traits associated with masculinity, and thus been the crucible in which young men have “proven” their manhood. By virtue of their participation in war male soldiers have come to be regarded as heroic figures, paragons of virtue embodying the core values of the nation. Thus, for a generation of young men around the globe who came of age in the early part of the 20th century, the First World War became the touchstone, the ultimate test of their manhood.

In serving honourably in the U.S. Army during the Great War, Black soldiers sought to debunk myths about the quality of their masculinity. White political and military leaders were reluctant to assign African American soldiers combat roles because they feared that such experience would ultimately serve to affirm the masculinity of Black soldiers, and enhance their sense of entitlement as American citizens.³⁷ As Adriane Lentz-Smith has argued, “as the war unfolded, the connections among manhood, citizenship, military service, and national belonging ...took on heightened importance.”³⁸ White officials were concerned that African Americans would presume that they were the social equals of whites.³⁹

³⁶ Chinkin and Kaldor, “Gender and the New Wars”, 168.

³⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race: 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) In the aftermath of the African American boxer Jack Johnson’s demolition of his White opponent Jim Jeffries on July 4, 1910, in Reno, Nevada, in a heavyweight boxing championship bout termed the “Fight of the Century,” dozens of mainly anti-Black race riots broke out across the United States. Aggrieved White men, humiliated by their White hero’s emasculating loss to a Black man, unleashed their fury on Black fans who were celebrating Johnson’s victory. These White men experienced Jeffries’ loss as their own personal loss - a devastating blow to their manhood and race. Many had referred to Jeffries as “the Great White Hope.” Johnson had made history two years earlier in 1908 when he became the world’s first Black heavyweight boxing champion. As he was known to “have relations” with White women, the charismatic and confident Johnson became a pariah, one of the most hated figures in the country-the embodiment of White America’s Black nightmare.

³⁸ Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 83. African American service abroad provoked the greatest fears of White supremacists who raised the spectre of what Senator James K. Vardaman called “French-women-ruined Negroes.” White soldiers were particularly perplexed when witnessing Black American men with French girlfriends or frequenting brothels. They were expressing their feelings of sexual inferiority in the presence of Black manhood. Black soldiers were seen as threats to the territory that White men had long occupied and claimed for themselves.

The Progressive era saw a more active and engaged government and military, and thus the ties binding manhood, citizenship and military service became increasingly entwined. As Adriane Lentz-Smith has noted, “mobilization swelled the ranks of the U.S. National Guard and Army from roughly 230,000 at the time of America’s entry to the World War One to almost four million by war’s end.” And so, “for African American communities, this revitalized importance of soldiers as fact and symbol offered a way to reconceptualize and reassert Black manhood to gain equal citizenship.”⁴⁰

Lentz-Smith has noted that “World War I both revived and revised popular notions of manhood.”⁴¹ In a not uncommon refrain from all sides of the war, Lennox McLendon, a White North Carolinian man, wrote this to his pregnant wife: “This is the sort of thing that makes men.”⁴² World War I offered African American men the opportunity to gain honour, dignity, and social status by aligning themselves with the martial project of the nation. To the Atlanta minister, James Bond, “the Black man has nothing to lose and everything to gain” by demonstrating his wartime loyalty to the America. In a sermon entitled “Peace Through War,” Bond suggested that African Americans would gain friends by displaying “heroic manly qualities.”⁴³ Kathryn Johnson, a fieldworker with the NAACP, echoed the sentiment. She believed World War I provided Black Americans with a chance to remake themselves. “What the colored people of this country need” is something which will imbue them with the sense they are men and women. She lamented the fact that too many African American men “considered the White Man [to be a Man] and the Black man “only a Negro.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles*, 81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 82

⁴² *Ibid.*, 82

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

Fighting America's wars was not new to Black Americans. They had donned the uniform of the United States on five previous occasions going back to the Revolutionary War in the 18th century.⁴⁵ And yet, the loyalty and trustworthiness of African Americans had always seemed in question by the state. At the outset of the Civil War the Lincoln administration had expressed its opposition to arming African Americans "to appease the slaveholding states of the upper south that had sided with the Union."⁴⁶ But by 1862, thanks to the lobbying efforts of abolitionists and military necessity, Congress authorized the recruitment of all-Black regiments.⁴⁷ Over 180,000 Black troops constituting about 10 percent of the Union Army fought during the Civil War in segregated units under White command.⁴⁸

To W.E.B. Du Bois, there were practical reasons for Black America to support the war. First, it would teach African Americans how to fight to better protect themselves on the home front. For those who stayed at home, it would expose them to the more lucrative professional trades, thereby improving their financial and social position, and striking a blow against White supremacy. Du Bois was convinced people of colour, particularly Black people, could be the greatest beneficiaries of the war. He was more interested in advancing the "race" than he was in integration per se. To Du Bois, integration was a means to an end and thus Du Bois "the racial integrationist", could coexist with Du Bois "the racial separatist", because the goal was to expand the freedom enjoyed by African Americans.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Five thousand African Americans fought in the War of Independence. Many were enslaved individuals and helped win victory for their masters. When George Washington, a slave owner, took over the reins of the colonial army he prohibited Blacks from serving as soldiers.

⁴⁶ Nina Mjakij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011), xx. The states that Lincoln sought to appease were Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company Inc., 1993), 529.

Such a position was not universal among African American leaders. As if to express their disdain for African American defenders of the War, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, the young socialist editors of *The Messenger*, who were both conscientious objectors, asked why African Americans should sacrifice their lives abroad in defense of a democracy that was not practiced at home. In the November 1917 edition of *The Messenger* they wrote, “Let Du Bois, Miller, Pickens, Grimke etc. volunteer to go to France to make the world safe for democracy. We would rather make Georgia safe for the Negro.”⁵⁰

Joel Spingarn, the White NAACP chairman, friend, and confidant of W.E.B. Du Bois, had a very different approach to the war than Randolph and Owen. He was more sanguine about the possibilities the war could provide for Black communities. He was determined to facilitate Black engagement with the U.S. military. He convinced the military brass to start an exclusive training camp for Black soldiers and Army officers. Spingarn had earned a winning reputation within the Black community for being an individual who was uncompromising in his stance towards segregation and inequality. To Spingarn and Du Bois, the prospect of having a cadre of Black military officers for the first time in U.S. history trumped having to dispense with what both had always considered sacrosanct: their abiding commitment to opposing segregation in all its forms. Spingarn regarded a segregated military training camp as being the first step towards a more open racial policy. Du Bois was eventually persuaded by Spingarn that establishing a segregated officers camp in Des Moines, Iowa would be in the best interests of Black America.⁵¹ Du Bois “envisaged Black soldiers fighting and dying across Flanders Fields led by

⁵⁰ Andrew E. Kersten, *A. Philip Randolph* (New York: Rowman Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 21. Fifty years later Randolph, who still considered himself a pacifist, would find himself supporting President Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam War policy for pragmatic reasons and out of a sense of duty.

⁵¹ Levering-Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 530.

Des Moines officers as the high price of full citizenship in America—civil rights through carnage.”⁵²

Opposition to Du Bois’ stance came from all sides. Henry Monroe Trotter blasted what he regarded as Du Bois’ capitulation to segregation, stating that his rival “was a rank quitter of the fight for our rights.” He had “at last finally weakened, compromised and deserted the fight, betrayed the cause of his race.”⁵³ The debate within America’s Black community over whether to agitate for political, social, and economic reform during the First World War exposed the fault lines that divided its media and national leadership. Prominent voices such as Du Bois supported the participation of African American soldiers in the Great War because they believed that by having Black troops demonstrate their patriotism and valour on the European battlefield, it would advance the race struggle at home. In the end “nearly one million Black men registered for the draft during World War I.”⁵⁴ The decision to support the war was also an attempt by these race leaders to recast African American manhood in a manner that would be amenable to the nation and larger White community. Given the hostile climate, the decision to advocate for the participation of African Americans in the First World War was more pragmatic than it was ideological. For a community under siege, supporting the war was an act of self-preservation.⁵⁵ And yet the years following the end of World War One saw the African American community

⁵² Levering-Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 530.

⁵³ Henry Monroe Trotter quoted in Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 531.

⁵⁴ Gerald Early, “The New Negro Era and the African American Transformation” *American Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1. and 2, Summer 2008: Aaron Douglas and the Harlem Renaissance, 10. The United States adopted conscription on May 18, 1917.

⁵⁵ Black Americans seemingly continued to face unequal treatment once inside the army. The US War Department reported that military tribunals executed 32 soldiers during the war on charges ranging from murder to rape. Of the 32, 28 were Black. On August 23, 1917, Black soldiers of the US Army’s 3rd battalion fed up with Jim Crow and poor White leadership, revolted and fought a mini race war in Houston. Sixteen Whites were killed and 12 wounded. Forty-five Black soldiers were found complicit in rebellion and thirteen of them were hanged in December 1917.

face a series of devastating setbacks, leaving many to wonder whether the war effort had been in vain.

“The return of the Negro soldier to civil life is one of the most delicate and difficult questions confronting the nation North and south.”

George Haynes, Fisk University Professor and
Director of Negro Economics for the United States
Department of Labour

About 380,000 Black American veterans returned home from war in Europe with high hopes. After fighting for democracy and against autocracy, these Black soldiers believed they had earned the right to finally be treated as first class citizens. Yet, upon arriving back home on U.S. soil they found little peace, freedom, or prosperity on America’s streets. Instead, they were greeted with contempt, brutality, and terror. Many found themselves taking up combat positions to defend their stricken communities from the wanton violence of White terrorists, and to stay alive. They experienced the American nightmare, the paradox of having fought to save liberal democracy abroad, while being systematically and legally denied it at home.

For Black America, 1919 was a year of mayhem, death, and terror. From April to November a pandemic of anti-Black racial attacks swept across US towns and cities in the South, North, East and Midwest. This pattern of cataclysmic White on Black violence was called “Red Summer”, the “Red” describing the blood that flowed in the nation’s streets during those horrifying months.⁵⁶ White mobs attacked more than two dozen Black communities.⁵⁷ Eminent African American historian John Hope Franklin (1915-2000) considered it “the greatest period of

⁵⁶ James Weldon Johnson, civil rights activist, professor, and author (*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*) coined the term “Red Summer.” As a field secretary for the NAACP in 1919, he organized a protest against the rash of racial attacks.

⁵⁷ The bloodiest incident of White on Black violence during Red Summer happened in Elaine, Arkansas, where it is estimated that over 100 people were killed.

interracial strife the nation has ever witnessed.”⁵⁸ Hundreds of Black people were killed. They died in horrendous ways. They were shot, burned alive and lynched. Of the 53 Blacks who were lynched, 13 were Black soldiers, some still wearing their uniforms. Thousands were injured. Tens of thousands were forced to flee their homes. Churches and businesses were razed to the ground.⁵⁹ Property losses were in the millions.⁶⁰ Cities like Chicago, Washington D.C. and Knoxville were shut down for days.⁶¹ Millions had their lives disrupted.

The White rage that steamrolled across the land was the result of heightened social tensions prompted, in part, by the first wave of the “Great Migration” in which half a million Black migrants from the South relocated to towns and cities in the North, East and Midwest, to escape the poverty, brutality, and history of Dixie and to find some peace.⁶² Northern Whites though often met these Black migrants with violence, objecting to the influx of these Black newcomers into their communities. Some Whites also resented the legions of prideful, dignified Black soldiers who upon returning home from Europe expected social and political equality. The White rage that manifested itself was a reaction then to both the rising social and economic status of Black folks, and the perceived threat this represented to White lives and prospects.

In response to these unrelenting Red Summer attacks, African Americans fought back. They stood up for themselves and their communities. They resisted. They picked up guns, retaliated, attempted to pursue justice, and tried to protect their loved ones and their property.

⁵⁸ Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2011), 12. John Hope Franklin’s father, Buck Franklin, who was a civil rights lawyer, defended the Black American survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre, which occurred two years after the Red Summer. In 2015 his eyewitness account of the attack, a 10-page typewritten manuscript, was discovered and is now housed in the Smithsonian.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² To learn more about the Great Migration see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

Red Summer was an awakening for Black America.⁶³ It marked the beginning of a period of cultural, political, economic, and social dynamism for Black Americans that was unprecedented in US history.

In the wake of Red Summer, the New Negro Movement, which could trace its beginnings to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, continued to emerge as a cultural force.⁶⁴ The term “New Negro” was popularized by African American philosopher Alain Locke after he published a groundbreaking anthology of the same name in 1925, and referred to a burgeoning self-respect, self-pride and self-dependence amongst Black Americans that began flowering at the end of World War I.⁶⁵ Hundreds of thousands of Black American soldiers had returned home emboldened by their experiences fighting in the Great War in Europe, and determined to

⁶³ On May 31 and June 1, 1921, just two years after Red Summer, the Tulsa Race Massacre took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma—known for much of the 20th century as the “Oil Capital of the World.” Over two days, mobs of White Tulsans attacked the Black residents of the prosperous Greenwood district, known as Black Wall Street - one of the wealthiest and most vibrant Black communities in the United States. According to a 2001 state commission, the pogroms led to the murders of an estimated 300 people and injured over 800. Businesses, homes, and other buildings in the neighbourhood were set ablaze and razed to the ground. In the end, 35 square blocks of the community were destroyed. An estimated 10,000 Black residents were left homeless. Property damage has been estimated at over \$30 million in 2020 dollars. About 6,000 Black residents were interned. Not a single White person was charged with a crime. In fact, some of the members of the White mobs had been deputized and given weapons by City of Tulsa officials. Indeed, the term “mob” is a bit of a misnomer as it suggests the assault on Greenwood was carried out in a random, haphazard way when the fact that civilians were deputized suggests it was officially sanctioned and carried out in a systematic and organized fashion.

⁶⁴ The term “New Negro” had appeared in print nearly a decade prior to the publication of Alain Locke’s anthology in 1925. In 1916, Morgan State College Vice President William Pickens had published a book entitled *The New Negro: His Political, Civil and Mental Status, and Related Essays*. “New Negro” had also been employed in the 1880s to refer to the generation of Black men and women who had grown up in the years after slavery. A range of dates have been cited as the beginning of the New Negro Movement. Gerald Early has argued that the Movement began with the imperious Black American boxer Jack Johnson’s history-making capture of the heavyweight boxing title in 1908 against the White Italian Canadian, Tommy Burns (born Noah Brusso), and ended in 1938 with the second fight between German champion Max Schmelling and Joe Louis. It has also been suggested that the New Negro Movement began following the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915, the influential African American educator, author of *Up from Slavery*, and one of the predominant Black community leaders of the 19th and 20th centuries. Washington in many ways was the embodiment of the “Old Negro.” But Washington had himself, at the turn of the 20th century, been considered for a time an exemplar of “the New Negro.” In 1900 he edited the book *New Negro for A New Century*. Hubert Harrison has been cited as having founded the New Negro Movement in 1916 and being one of the most influential intellectuals of the movement of the era. He established the New Negro Movement organization “The Liberty League” and founded the newspaper *The Voice*. He also authored *When Africa Awakens: The Inside Story of the Stirrings and Strivings of the New Negro in the Western World*. Eric Walrond used the term “New Negro” in an article entitled “The New Negro Faces America” and written in 1923, a few years before Locke’s anthology was published.

⁶⁵ The anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, featured the most influential and acclaimed Black writers of the era: Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston.

command the respect they believed they were due from the state and their fellow citizens alike. According to Gerald Early, “the war taught Blacks that Whites were not all-powerful, and that the colonial status of the colored races could be overcome, that there was, indeed, a collective colonial identity that stood in opposition to the West.”⁶⁶ The war experience also elevated Black Americans’ international consciousness. Early has argued that the First World War did not change the condition of African Americans but did change the way they thought about their condition.⁶⁷ It altered how they imagined the nature of their relationship with the state and the duties and privileges of citizenship.⁶⁸

“No one who will not fight to protect his life is fit to live. Self-defense is recognized as a legitimate weapon in all civilized countries.”⁶⁹

A. Philip Randolph, August 1920

To Gerald Early, the New Negro Movement helped redefine Black heroism thanks to the likes of heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson.⁷⁰ Black Americans were transformed during the era from a rural to an urban people. It was a time of institution and collective identity building. An example of such “a construction” was the creation of Negro History Week by African American historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1926. Woodson had co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in September 1915. The Harvard graduate, the son of two Virginia-born enslaved people, launched Negro History Week (forerunner of Black History Month) as a way of changing the dominant racist narrative about Black people, by

⁶⁶ Early, “The New Negro Era and the African American Transformation,” 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁹ A. Philip Randolph, “The New Negro—What is He?” *The Messenger*, August 1920, 73-74.

⁷⁰ Early, 9-19.

instead highlighting the achievements of African people, affirming their diverse stories, and correcting the often distorted, skewed, and baldly misrepresented historical record.

The New Negro was rebellious, assertive, confident, and defiant. He, and she, represented a challenge to the status quo and the conventional racial order. New Negroes were not shy about expressing themselves. An editorial written by A. Philip Randolph in his socialist publication *The Messenger* in August 1920 asserted that the New Negro demanded political equality, supported universal suffrage, the formation of unions to defend his interests, and regarded education as a tool of liberation.⁷¹ Alain Locke noted that the New Negro “resents being spoken for as a social ward or minor, even by his own, and to being regarded a chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sick man of American Democracy. For the same reasons, he himself is through with those social nostrums and panaceas, the so-called solutions of his “problem,” with which he and the country have been so liberally dosed in the past.”⁷²

The Harlem Renaissance saw a flourishing of Black creativity which led to an explosion of intellectual and artistic production in dance, music, literature, poetry, and film. Some of the leading figures of the Renaissance included writers/poets Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Jessie Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston, singer and actor Paul Robeson, singer Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, composer and bandleader Duke Ellington, and philosopher Alain Locke. This revival of Black American culture began in the 1920s and lasted into the mid 1930s. At the time, Harlem was the center of Black life in New York, the mecca of Black America. This “Negro Renaissance,” an aspect of the New Negro Movement, signaled the arrival of a new Black art and the remaking of the Black American spirit. During this time there was also a rise in

⁷¹ “The Negro What is He?” *The Messenger* August 1920, 73-74.

⁷² Alain Locke “The New Negro” in Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 116.

racial entrepreneurship in Black America as exemplified by the likes of hair products magnate Madame C.J. Walker and the sports impresario Rube Foster, the founder of the Negro National League.⁷³ And yet in many other ways, this era of optimism was not only crushed by the economic collapse of the 1930s, but even by the return of prosperity as the United States rearmed for the Second World War. Racial hiring preferences deepened, while the ostensible causes of the war seemed out of step with Black experience.⁷⁴

Went to the Defense factory
Trying to find some work to do.
Had the nerve to tell me,
“Black boy, nothing here for you.”
My father died,
Died fighting ‘cross the sea
Mama said his dying
Never helped her or me.
I will tell you, brother,
Well, it sho’ don’ make no sense
When a Negro can’t work
In the National Defense.

Josh White, “Defense Factory Blues” (1941)

As the Second World War drew closer many African Americans regarded the impending conflict as a “White man’s war.” Given what they had endured during “the Great War” a scant two decades earlier, they questioned what a new global conflict would bring: How might it affect their lives? Would they be permitted to participate as full-fledged members of the military? During the interwar period, the U.S. War Department had produced reports based on experiences

⁷³ Madame C.J. Walker was one of the first female self-made millionaires in US history, and one of the wealthiest African Americans of the era. Rube Foster was considered the Father of Black Baseball. His league, the Negro National League, operated between 1920-1931 as an all-Black league during a time when organized baseball was segregated.

⁷⁴ That Hitler was inspired by American Madison Grant’s *Passing of the Great Race* (1916) is well-known. On the specific link between American Jim Crow and Adolf Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws, see James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

in the First World War that suggested Black officers lacked the courage and intelligence to be effective leaders within the U.S. military.⁷⁵ In fact, by the 1930s American military planners had concluded that segregation was critical to the efficient running of a military organization. They contended Black soldiers “ought to be limited to non-combat roles.”⁷⁶

Yet, in the years leading up to the War, race reform organizations demanded an increase in Black participation throughout the armed forces and challenged the government’s official policy of segregation. In 1937 Charles Houston, counsel to the NAACP and veteran of the First World War, wrote to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) urging him to issue an executive order ending discrimination in the armed forces.⁷⁷ In February 1938, the Committee for the Participation of Negroes in National Defense (CPNND) launched a national campaign to boost the number of African Americans in the U.S. military. The committee, which had branches in 25 states, was established by Robert Vann, publisher of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the nation’s largest and most influential Black newspapers and was supported by such national organizations as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). While the CPNND indicated it was willing to compromise with the government and accept greater representation of African Americans in all branches of the armed forces within a segregated system, the NAACP insisted on nothing less than full integration. Nonetheless, the CPNND condemned the military’s plan to exclude African Americans from the service and warned African Americans that the military “would challenge your right to citizenship.”⁷⁸

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, two years before the U.S. entered the conflict, the U.S. Army was a thoroughly segregated institution. African Americans could only

⁷⁵ Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience During World War II* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 14, 1940.

serve in the four army units that had been established exclusively for them following the Civil War. There were just 3,640 African American soldiers in the army and among them were only five Black officers, three of whom were chaplains.⁷⁹ While 4,000 African Americans served in the Navy, all of them as “mess men,” they were summarily excluded from the Marine Corps and the Army Air Corps.

The Selective Training and Service Act (Burke-Wadsworth Act), instituted on September 16, 1940, was the first peacetime draft in US history. It included African Americans, but had an overall quota that limited their representation in the army to 9 percent, roughly consistent with their share of the population.⁸⁰ Before the passage of the act, 30,000 African Americans had tried to enlist in the US military but had been rejected.⁸¹ On September 27 1940, Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and Arnold Hill, acting secretary of the National Urban League met with Roosevelt to implore him to fully integrate the military and end discrimination within its ranks.⁸² On October 9, 1940, the War Department announced that Black Americans “would be admitted to all branches of the military, although segregation would remain in place.⁸³ Black soldiers could only still serve in Black regiments. President Roosevelt stated that he supported Black participation in the armed forces, as long as they did not exceed 10 percent of the troops and remained in segregated units.⁸⁴ Although there was no “official directive” that articulated its policies towards African Americans, each service had “an unwritten but official Negro Policy that limited the number of Blacks within their ranks and relegated them to labour

⁷⁹ Wynn, *The African American Experience During World War II*, 26.

⁸⁰ In 1940, Black Americans constituted 9.8 percent of the total U.S. population.

⁸¹ Wynn, *The African American Experience During World War II*, 27.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What is it Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the US Military: From World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 23.

units.”⁸⁵African Americans were enlisted “only when and where there were manpower shortages.” This policy represented a shift from the First World War when Blacks were actually “drafted or volunteered at a higher rate than that of whites and other nonwhite troops.”⁸⁶ The push for full African American participation in the armed forces had much to do with dignity and pride but was also about securing jobs and garnering economic opportunity during the Great Depression. For years, Blacks had been systematically shut out of the jobs-rich defense industry. Now they wanted to be included.

The U.S. military was bent on not officially acknowledging the reality of the Black presence in the Second World War. The Black soldier was the embodiment of a radical and an unsettling idea, and thus a threat to many White Americans whose conception of American democracy was rooted in White supremacy. The War Department sought to downplay the military contributions of Blacks and thereby appease those White Americans offended by the notion of heroic gun-toting Black soldiers defending the state. Invariably, Black soldiers were depicted as cowardly and incompetent. As Kimberley Phillips suggests, the “Negro Policy” was a means for the military to maintain “American segregation” writ large through the fiction of Black inferiority; it also reinforced the prevailing racial hierarchy, which was employed as an instrument of control over African American troops.⁸⁷ While White Americans were depicted in military propaganda as gallant, self-sacrificing heroes, Black Americans were conspicuously absent from the official visual narrative of the war: their presence excised and denied.

On January 15, 1941, A. Philip Randolph made a call for 100,000 African Americans to march on Washington “to demand the right to fight and work in defense of their country.” The

⁸⁵ Phillips, 22.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ US Army commanders placed Black soldiers in the stockades to prevent them from going AWOL before they were shipped out to Europe. The policy did not apply to White soldiers who, as a group, had a higher rate of desertion before departure.

initial reaction to this initiative within Black America was tepid. The NAACP did not offer its support, and influential Black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender* dismissed the idea as fanciful. But by March 1941 the NAACP and its leader Walter White had declared their backing of Randolph, and the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) was established. As the organization of the march gained momentum toward the July 1, 1941, date, the Roosevelt administration grew increasingly anxious. It was wary of the prospect of political humiliation and racial violence on the streets of the capital.⁸⁸

On June 25, 1941, just five days before the march was to be held, it was called off after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which decreed a non-discrimination policy when it came to participation in defence industries- though, notably, there was no reference to the armed forces. After 1941, jobs started to open in the defence sector for African Americans thanks to the change in government policy and the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Committee. The order did nothing to address the ongoing matter of segregation in the military. The efforts of the MOWM and the NAACP though did yield appointments of two Black advisors in the War Department, Truman Gibson, and William Hastie.⁸⁹

Less than six months later, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the US into the Second World War and altered the context of Black protest. NAACP leader Walter White pledged that African Americans would offer total loyalty to the fight abroad, while remaining committed to the domestic struggle for racial reform and justice. He was echoing an earlier resolution of the NAACP's annual conference held in June 1940, which

⁸⁸ Wynn, *The African American Experience During World War II*, 34.

⁸⁹ William Hastie's stint with the department would prove to be a frustrating one. Appointed in 1940 as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, he railed against military restrictions on Black service on the front lines, yet his entreaties for the swift integration of the army were rejected. He would eventually resign his post on January 5, 1943, disgusted by the lack of progress in ending discrimination within the military. See Neil Wynn, "The Impact of the Second World War on the American Negro," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2 (January 1971), 45.

expressed loyal support for a future war: “We will do our part and more to defend our country and its principles. We are equally determined to make our country and its practices worth defending.”⁹⁰ In January, 1942, the NAACP’s Roy Wilkins, contrary to what he would argue two decades later during the Vietnam conflict, suggested wartime was not the moment for African Americans to remain silent, but rather a time to speak up about the inherent contradictions of U.S. democracy.⁹¹ In January 1942 *The Crisis* magazine published an article entitled, “Now Is the Time Not to Be Silent,” which demonstrated that—contrary to the Close Ranks editorial it had printed in 1918—the NAACP would continue to speak out about racial injustice on the home front in spite of the country being at war. That sentiment was reiterated at the NAACP’s annual conference held in July 1942: “We will not abandon our fight for racial justice during the war.”⁹²

In a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier* a newly drafted African American soldier James G. Thompson spoke about the struggle of Black troops in the US armed forces:

To demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life? The V for Victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so- called democratic countries fighting for victory over aggression, slavery, and tyranny. If this V sign means [all] that those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory over our enemies within. For surely those who perpetuate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the axis forces.”⁹³

Many African Americans hoped that the war would allow them to show their patriotic mettle by going to battle against Nazi aggression on foreign shores and stake their claim to full citizenship at home. Yet, contempt for the Black soldier was both prevalent and unabashed at the highest levels of the U.S. military. At a meeting of Black newspaper editors and publishers in

⁹⁰ Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, 99.

⁹¹ Wynn, *The African American Experience During World War II*, 40.

⁹² Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, 101.

⁹³ James G. Thompson, “Should I Sacrifice to Live Half-American?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942.

Washington D.C on December 13, 1941, just a week after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Col. E. R. Householder, from the Adjutant General's Office, reaffirmed the U.S. military's official policy of segregation by insisting that the U.S. Army was not "a sociological laboratory." Secretary of War Henry Stimson reiterated his personal view that Black men were "unreliable", incompetent soldiers who were unable to effectively manipulate "weapons of modern war" and "lacked the moral and mental qualifications" for combat.⁹⁴ And so the War Department, despite facing a labour shortage by the end of the Second World War, remained devoted to White supremacy and its traditional "Negro Policy".

On April 3, 1942, a *New York Times* editorial called for America's racial problem to be solved if the country wanted to avoid "the sinister hypocrisy of fighting abroad for what it is not willing to accept at home."⁹⁵ In 1942, African Americans were accepted into the Navy and Marines but only on a segregated basis.⁹⁶ So while the Second World War may have nominally brought African Americans into the American mainstream, they remained on its margins, and thus provisional.

African Americans could not hide the frustration and resentment they felt about the hypocrisy and contempt of the U.S. state. The Trinidadian-born U.S.-based Marxist writer CLR James spoke to that sense of betrayal when he wrote:

Why should I shed my blood for Roosevelt's America, for Cotton Ed Smith and Senator Bilbo, for the whole Jim Crow, Negro-hating South, for the low-paid, dirty jobs for which Negroes have to fight, for the few dollars of relief and insults, discrimination, police brutality and perpetual poverty to which Negroes are condemned even in the more liberal North.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ George Padmore, "All Colored Troops in Africa Labor Battalions," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 28, 1942.

⁹⁵ "A Minority of Our Own," *New York Times*, April 3, 1942, 20.

⁹⁶ In 1942 an interracial grouping met in Chicago and formed the Congress of Racial Equality or CORE. The group included the likes of James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and other members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It adopted the non-violent philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and would be one of the pioneers of the non-violent direct action in 1940s that would become such a central aspect of the struggle in the 1960s.

⁹⁷ C.L.R. James quoted in Maggi M. Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 18. CLR James was one of the

James' question exposed the contradiction at the heart of the U.S. liberal project and begged the question: Why should African Americans in their thousands sacrifice their lives "to defeat systems of domination devised in Tokyo and Berlin while a racialized system of oppression was maintained at home?"⁹⁸ African Americans understood that fighting for democracy abroad could not guarantee them democracy at home, yet, despite a dispiriting array of abuse and insults, African Americans sought to participate in the war as equals to their White comrades.

Even while African American troops were fighting against Nazism, within the US army they faced a plethora of indignities: segregation, racial taunting, physical assaults, and other restrictions. White civilian police, in some of the U.S. towns where there were military bases, regularly attacked Black soldiers. These abuses were ignored and even encouraged by military police.⁹⁹ Black troops were subjected to several forms of racial control in the armed forces, but also resisted through acts of rebellion.¹⁰⁰ Many Black soldiers were so traumatized by the

leading intellectuals of the 20th century. A novelist, orator, journalist, philosopher, and historian he wrote the first novel by a Black West Indian published in Britain, *Minty Alley*, an acclaimed and influential history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, a history about revolution and the conflict between Trotsky and Stalin, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* and a celebrated book on cricket, considered to be one of the greatest sports books of all time, *Beyond a Boundary*. Born in Trinidad in 1901 James moved to Britain in 1932 and worked for a time as a cricket correspondent for the Manchester Guardian. While in England he operated in Pan Africanist and Socialist circles. He counted among his friends, confidants, and comrades Paul Robeson, Jomo Kenyatta, George Padmore, and Kwame Nkrumah. In 1938 he relocated to the United States. Though never a US citizen, he spent 15 years there during which time he organized auto workers in Detroit and sharecroppers in the South and was a leading member of a radical left tendency (Johnson Forest Tendency) that included the likes of Grace Lee Boggs, James Boggs, Martin Glaberman and Raya Dunayevskaya. It was his radical political activity that caught the attention of the government at the height of the McCarthy era. He was deemed a subversive, eventually arrested, and interned at Ellis Island, and deported from the United States to Britain in 1953. He was a major influence on the historian and Prime Minister of Trinidad, Eric Williams, whom he taught in high school, the historian and Guyanese political activist Walter Rodney, Palestinian intellectual Edward Said and dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson.

⁹⁸ Gerald Horne, "US Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy" in Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 45-66.

⁹⁹ Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 71-77. In April 1945, Black officers who were part of the 477th Bombardment Group, the first all-Black Bomber unit, based in Freeman Field, Indiana defied an order by their White commanders to use a separate club for

segregation they frequently encountered, that they described their struggle against Jim Crow in the military as war, the Second World War's second front.¹⁰¹

In the waning months of the World War II, there were signs of change. Prominent African American historian Rayford Logan wrote that "first-class citizenship" for African Americans "included equality of opportunity in the military."¹⁰² While comprising 10 per cent of the US population in 1940 Blacks represented about 13 percent of the army's troops. One million Blacks served in World War Two in a military that remained deeply segregated.¹⁰³ Moreover, White Southerners dominated the officer corps. Nonetheless, throughout World War II African Americans soldiers resisted ill-treatment and challenged the status quo. They denounced the rigid segregation that pervaded the military and the fact that they were "excluded from all prestigious ranks and units," yet still demanded the right to defend their country.¹⁰⁴ As Roy Wilkins, a senior official in the NAACP and future leader of the organization, noted, "certain it is that the Negro soldiers are not fighting and dying to maintain the status quo for their race. Nor will they take kindly, to put it in its mildest form, to surly suggestions as to their

Black officers. The rogue policy violated the army's ban on segregation. The Black officers resisted the illegal order by continuing to enter the club (for enlisted personnel) from which they were banned. Over the course of the next month the military made 162 arrests. Most of the Black officers faced court martial but thanks to the support of the NAACP all of them were released except for two soldiers. Black officers reported being routinely refused admission to movie theatres on bases as well, due to their race. In April 1944 Private Norman Spaulding slashed his wrists in his Washington D.C. home as a way of protesting the fact that he had been refused admission to training in the Army Air Corps because it had reached its racial quota.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰² Rayford W. Logan, "The Negro Wants First Class Citizenship," in *What the Negro Wants*, ed. Rayford Logan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 11-12. Rayford Logan was a member of President Franklin Roosevelt's Federal Council of Negro Affairs, a.k.a. The Black Cabinet, a group of African Americans who served as public policy advisors to the president and his wife Eleanor Roosevelt from 1933-1945. Logan, a veteran of the First World War, was also responsible for drafting executive order 8802, signed on June 25, 1941, that prohibited ethnic and racial discrimination in the nation's defense industry. The order also established the Fair Employment Practice Committee. It had been demanded by A. Philip Randolph and his March on Washington Movement. After the executive order was issued Randolph called off a planned march through the streets of Washington D.C.

¹⁰³ The war was a boon for many African American workers. During the conflict Black unemployment fell from 900,000 to 150,000 and the number of employed Blacks increased by one million. The demand for labour meant that the standard of living for hundreds of thousands of African Americans increased as well.

¹⁰⁴ Manfred Berg, *Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 99.

place.”¹⁰⁵ He added, “their place now is in front of the bullets of the enemy, and below the bombs in enemy planes.” He warned that “bullets or threats of bullets, are not likely to cause them to bow and scrape once they are home. No, the threats of civil war will not turn the trick.”¹⁰⁶

It was not quite that straightforward. Many soldiers returned home to the US to join the Civil Rights Movement. What they encountered when they got home were alarming rates of harassment and violence “from [racist] assaults and beatings to mutilations and murder.”¹⁰⁷ The rapid demobilization of millions of U.S. troops following the end of World War II led to a severe labour shortage in the armed forces, this despite the War Department requiring additional military personnel to sustain occupation forces and a US political presence in an unstable postwar world. As tensions with erstwhile ally the Soviet Union grew, civil rights leaders came to believe “the need for a large Cold War military provided an unprecedented opportunity to end segregation not just in the armed services but in the entire society.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, the War Department remained committed to maintaining its Negro Policy and quota system into the 1940s. The number of Black troops in Europe was cut from 500,000 to mere hundreds, and the majority of African American soldiers were subsequently assigned to labour and transportation battalions.¹⁰⁹ Civil rights organizations including the NAACP, the National Negro Congress and the National Council of Negro Women all lobbied the President and Secretary of War to consider integrated combat units and full equality for Blacks, but were rebuffed by the War Department.¹¹⁰ The Department’s discriminatory policies and disdain for Black troops were

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 63.

¹⁰⁶ Roy Wilkins, “The Negro Wants Full Equality” in Logan, *What the Negro Wants*, 132.

¹⁰⁷ Phillips, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 421-423.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?* 79.

supported by leading politicians. Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland, an unrepentant White supremacist and segregationist, called Black troops “an utter and abysmal failure,” and claimed, “a high-ranking general informed me ... that Negro troops would neither work nor fight.”¹¹¹

Testifying before the US Senate Committee on Armed Services in March 1948, A. Philip Randolph denounced the post-war segregated military. “Negroes,” he said, “are in no mood to shoulder a gun for democracy abroad so long as they are denied democracy at home.”¹¹² To Randolph, the demand for an integrated military was a call for “full manhood,” and “full unqualified, first class citizenship.”¹¹³ Months later, Randolph questioned the morality of African Americans aligning themselves with the White supremacist American project, arguing that African Americans had “a moral obligation not to lend themselves as worldwide carriers of an evil hellish doctrine” abroad.¹¹⁴ He added that he “would advise Negroes to refuse to fight as slaves for a democracy they cannot possess and cannot enjoy.”¹¹⁵

While civil rights organizations pushed for military desegregation, Congress continued to deny their demands. But in 1948, President Harry Truman unexpectedly issued Executive Order 9981 which mandated “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.”¹¹⁶ Despite the order not explicitly calling for the integration of the U.S. army, civil rights leaders celebrated this as if it were a desegregation order.

The Black press trumpeted the historical significance of Truman’s order, while touting the possibilities of a career in the military. In the summer of 1950, James L. Hicks, who wrote

¹¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹¹² Ibid., 106.

¹¹³ Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Excerpt from Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the US Armed Forces, July 26, 1948. Signed at the White House by President Harry Truman. (<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/executive-order-9981-desegregation-armed-forces?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>)

the “Veterans Whirl” column for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, admonished young Black men to consider enlisting in the military, regarding it as a form of racial activism. He insisted, in a peculiarly macabre way, that with military service came respect, honour and opportunity. “If war comes and Junior kills a few men he will be highly respected by the men of his unit. If he kills quite a few men, he will be honored by his commanding officers. If he becomes a great killer of men, he will be taken to the White House and decorated by the President.”¹¹⁷ Hicks added that “the highest paid and most respected killers” were officers and urged Black mothers to encourage their sons to attend ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) to ensure better pay and more respect for the work of killing.¹¹⁸

The U.S. Army went to war in Korea, in July 1950, as it had in “all its wars since the Civil War, racially segregated.”¹¹⁹ Senior White military officers and soldiers alike harboured strong (and conventional) views about the racial inferiority of Black combat troops, regarding them as “unreliable and cowardly.”¹²⁰ It was said by White critics that Black troops often abandoned their duties, “bugged out and left their artillery in place.”¹²¹ It was also alleged that members of the all-Black 24th Infantry Regiment, “would melt into the night” and the next day tell tales of getting lost.¹²² White senior military leaders like General Douglas McArthur and General Edward Ned Almond, considered an expert in “Black troop behavior,” forcefully

¹¹⁷ Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 118.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Melinda Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 168. Blacks and Whites fought together in several northern units of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. The US Army also had racially integrated units throughout the War of 1812. In the 1820s John C. Calhoun, the US Secretary of War, later Vice-President and strong proponent of slavery and White supremacy, banned African Americans from serving in the US Army. The order lasted until the Civil War began in 1861 when segregated units were re-established. The Army did not abandon their official Negro Policy during the Korean conflict. The Navy and Air Force, though, did announce plans for gradual integration. The last all-Black units were disbanded in 1954.

¹²⁰ Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 168.

¹²¹ Ibid., 169.

¹²² Martin Binkin, Mark J. Eitelberg, Alvin J. Schexnier, and Marvin H. Smith, *Blacks and the Military* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1982), 28-29.

resisted the push to integrate the army and continued to regard the Black presence within it with contempt. “The reputation and integrity of the colored people as fighting Americans is on the wings of every bullet, every bazooka shell, every mortar shell, and every artillery barrage which the men of the 24th send in the direction of the enemy.”¹²³

As in previous conflicts, Black troops believed “we couldn’t let our race down. We couldn’t afford to fail.”¹²⁴ They were thus driven to prove their worth as combat troops and as men. Some were humiliated by officers who explicitly challenged their masculinity. In one instance, a White colonel ordered the Black men under his command to “shave their moustaches ‘until such a time they gave proof of their manhood.”¹²⁵ Hicks added that “the entire race” was being judged “by one war effort of one regiment.”¹²⁶

In Korea, as before, Black soldiers were often given the worst assignments, subjected to unrelenting racial prejudice, and blocked from promotion. They were also punished more harshly for alleged transgressions than their White counterparts.¹²⁷ By the end of 1950, fifty-four African American soldiers were accused of displaying misbehaviour before the enemy, while only eight White soldiers were charged with the same offence. ¹²⁸ As one soldier remarked, “we were boys. No one ever referred to us as men.”¹²⁹ The overriding question once again for these

¹²³ Ibid., 135. The 24th Infantry Regiment was an all-Black regiment that was active from 1869-1951 and then again from 1995-2006. The regiment was one of the original Buffalo Soldier regiments that fought during the Indian Wars. During the Korean War the regiment engaged in combat operations throughout the Korean peninsula and performed with bravery and valour. It was often subjected to racially motivated abuse. The regiment was even maligned by its own White division commander, Colonel Thomas D. Gillis who lambasted it and called it to be disbanded because it was “untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment.” By October 1, 1951, the regiment was dismantled.

¹²⁴ Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 169.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 170.

¹²⁶ James Hicks, “Army Passes Buck” 1-2 *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 12, 1950, 1-2.

¹²⁷ Thurgood Marshall went to Korea in 1951 on behalf of the NAACP to investigate courts martial involving Black soldiers, concluding that there was a clear double standard in the treatment of Black and white soldiers. It was not until 1995 that the reputation of the 24th Infantry was officially restored by the US Army. Michael Ollove, “Black Korean War regiment gets tarnish off record,” July 26, 1995, *The Baltimore Sun*.

¹²⁸ Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 171.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 172.

soldiers would be why fight for freedom in Korea when what awaited you back home was nothing more than second class citizenship? Why fight to preserve White supremacy? “Why should the Black man fight when he’s not free?” asked veteran Donald Carter?¹³⁰ Black soldiers often “felt they were stupid to risk their lives unduly because when they got home, they didn’t have the rewards citizenship should have provided.”¹³¹

As Kimberley Phillips has argued, Black leaders had to reconcile the struggle to integrate the military and expand citizenship rights while fighting against racism, colonialism, and their own subjugation at home. In his 1935 magnum opus *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. Du Bois had noted the irony that Blacks could only make their plea for full citizenship rights by sacrificing their lives on the battlefield in segregated units. They could only preserve their humanity through their own death and dehumanization. It was only when “the Negro” fought and killed an enemy soldier, that emancipation became possible. “Negro citizenship” would have been inconceivable without a record of the Negro soldier “as fighter.”¹³² Despite his earlier equivocation during the First World War, Du Bois concluded that African Americans were trapped in the impossible bind of their double consciousness. They had to effectively “murder for their freedom.”

In addition to their desire to be recognized as full citizens, Black troops joined the US military because it allowed them to escape what was a lack of opportunity in civilian life. The armed forces offered refuge from chronic unemployment. It provided a form of stability that had long been elusive: a steady paycheck; educational opportunities; and despite the racially

¹³⁰ Donald Carter, interview by Nathan Stanley, quoted in “When Black is Burned: The Treatment of African American Soldiers During the Korean War,” online at <http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/stanley/carter.html>.

¹³¹ Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 81.

¹³² W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 104.

motivated indignities that they had to endure, a quality of respect and citizenship that would not have been possible as a civilian.¹³³

For those African Americans who had faith in the institutions of their homeland and believed in the prospects for freedom and equality for all, the Korean War would serve as vindication for their liberal convictions. As *Ebony* Magazine noted, “the Korean War is given real credit for hastening the complete [racial] integration in the army.” On October 20, 1954, the Secretary of Defense, Charles Wilson, declared the abolition of the last segregated unit of the armed forces. NAACP leader Walter White regarded the acceptance of African Americans in combat roles in Korea as a step towards full citizenship. To some observers, the Korean War killed “Jim Crow in the military”, but to White, the war signified much more than that and marked the rebirth of American democracy. Echoing Du Bois, he noted that “once again, as has been true throughout American history, armed conflict and national danger brought the Negro advancement toward his goal of full citizenship.”¹³⁴

White believed the move towards the integration of the army was a sign of America’s progress and its capacity for social transformation. His fellow civil rights leaders applauded the enhanced combat role of African Americans, as they believed it portended an era of profound social change. Despite this progress, African Americans still found it difficult to advance in the military. “If you were Black, to occupy the position of platoon sergeant or first sergeant...was mission impossible.”¹³⁵ Even after integration “while Blacks and Whites fought, slept and ate together in Korea, there was not a corresponding sharing of parity in terms of promotion.”¹³⁶ Some critics argued that Korea was “not the Negro’s war,” and that the US only integrated the

¹³³ The 1950s saw Black labour become less essential to the US economy due to deindustrialization in major American cities like Detroit and the disappearance of skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

¹³⁴ Walter White, *How Far the Promised Land* (New York: Viking, 1955), 96.

¹³⁵ Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 170.

¹³⁶ Samuel L. Banks, “The Korean Conflict,” *Negro History Bulletin* 36, 6 (1973), 131.

army to address shortages in manpower so that they could use Black Americans in its fight “to reduce other coloured people to the same status as Negroes.”¹³⁷

African American newspapers like the *California Eagle* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* opposed the Korean War from the outset. W.E.B. DuBois was outspoken in his criticism of the Korean War, as were Charlotta Bass, publisher of the *California Eagle*, Mary Church Terrell (then in her late 80s) and artist Aaron Douglas. The NAACP had a different take, endorsing the war and condemning North Korean aggression. These clear divisions within Black America about the Korean War would be revealed again a decade later during the War in Vietnam.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many African American race leaders, the forerunners of the fledgling Civil Rights Movement, believed the road to freedom went through the US military and so they advocated for full Black engagement in America’s wars. African Americans who fought in World War One and Two, along with the Korean War, hoped their exploits on the battlefields of Europe and Asia would open the doors of opportunity upon their return home. They hoped their martial heroism would result in the state recognizing their full citizenship and humanity. By fighting for the American state many Black Americans sought to demonstrate their patriotism, prove their masculinist mettle and the worthiness of their Americanness. They hoped their efforts would leave the state with no option but to honour their sacrifice and finally grant them the full citizenship they knew they had always deserved.

¹³⁷ John E. Rousseau, “War with Korea, Not Cure, Patterson Tells Louisiana Negroes,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 3, 1951, 2.

CHAPTER 2

“The Hegemony of Liberalism and the African American Moderate: The NAACP and the Urban League in the Age of Cold War Civil Rights and the Vietnam War”

“As much as anybody in this country the Negro wants to be a good American ... he is also determined to wear the rights as well as bear the burden of American citizenship. He must win not only for himself ... he must win for the nation.”

James Weldon Johnson, Executive Director of the NAACP, 1929

The two leading moderate civil rights organizations in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were champions of New Deal Liberalism and the transformative possibilities of reform-oriented government.¹³⁸ The NAACP became the preeminent organization of the Civil Rights movement and one of the most consequential change agents in the U.S. of the 20th century thanks to its unrelenting advocacy for the rights of African Americans and a series of seminal court victories against racial injustice. It was a standard bearer for liberalism and used the organs of the state to assert the citizenship rights of African Americans. The National Urban League, also founded in 1910 (although its present name dates only to 1920), focused on improving the working conditions and employment opportunities of African Americans.

In the post-World War II era, race reform leaders like the NAACP’s executive secretary Walter White highlighted American hypocrisy by contrasting the United States’ commitment to

¹³⁸ New Deal Liberalism can be understood to be a political philosophy and approach shaped and influenced by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal of the 1930s and implemented amid the Great Depression. There has been an ongoing debate as to what the New Deal was. Alvin Hanson, a leading economist, and prominent figure in the later New Deal, was asked in 1940 to explain the basic principle of the New Deal. He replied, “I really do not know what the basic principle of the New Deal is.” Richard Hofstadter called the New Deal a chaos of experimentation that was largely bereft of ideology, but which maintained a general commitment to pragmatic change. The impetus for New Deal Liberalism came from the recognition that there were inherent flaws within modern capitalism, and that government could be used to address these issues through the redistribution of wealth. The state could manage the economy without managing the institutions of the economy. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 3-14.

defending democratic ideals in the international arena, with its failure to protect the democratic rights of its Black citizens. The NAACP expressed solidarity with anti-colonial and Third World struggles for liberation up to and including the 1950s. Intense domestic pressures provoked by the spectre of the Cold War, caused the leadership of both the NAACP and the Urban League to opportunistically align themselves with U.S. foreign policy goals and present themselves as bastions of anti-communism. The NAACP and the Urban League supported the Johnson administration's pursuit of war in Vietnam so as not to jeopardize LBJ's progressive domestic agenda. The two organizations, which both practiced forms of "respectability politics," would eventually lambaste African American leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and organizations like SNCC, which had denounced Johnson's Vietnam War policy, as imperiling LBJ's transformative domestic plan. As a liberal reformist organization, the NAACP had been scarred by its demoralizing experience with the administration of US President Dwight Eisenhower, which had seen it sidelined and ignored for the eight years that the former General was in the White House. This would play a critical role in shaping the NAACP's later response to the Johnson administration during the Vietnam War.

To comprehend the nature and values of the NAACP and its moderate counterpart, the National Urban League, and to explain the positions they took on the Vietnam War, one must examine their histories and those of the individuals who led them. But even before that, we ought to understand what constitutes the political philosophy that informed them: liberalism. Under liberalism "the citizen" is connected to or engaged with the state and its government through a social contract by which the government exists solely by the consent of the citizen. Each party thus has an obligation to the other. A government's job is to enforce contracts between individuals and groups and provide security by which juridically equal citizens can pursue their

individual interests. At the founding of the United States in the 18th century, Black, Indigenous peoples and women were left out of liberalism's contract. Black and Indigenous bodies were deemed undeserving of the protection of a contract, but worthy of bondage and expropriation.

Liberalism has long stood for individual rights and the rule of law. Many of its early advocates were representatives of an emerging entrepreneurial class who were eager to protect their property from any meddling by the state. Arguably, liberalism's most enduring characteristic may be its inherent malleability. From its origins during the Age of Enlightenment in 17th century Europe, liberalism had been equated with a "faith in reason." The notion emerged as a response "to claims of divine rule by the clergy and royalty of the late Middle Ages."¹³⁹ Early exponents of liberalism included John Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant, David Hume and, in the 19th century, John Stuart Mill. In America, liberalism was heralded by the country's "founding fathers," including Thomas Paine, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson. Liberal thinkers of the 18th century celebrated the virtues of freedom, progress, and rationality. They particularly valued freedom of thought, expression, and religion. A commitment to liberalism implied: a commitment to the freedom of the individual from the restraints of society on human agency; an embrace of self-invention; a belief that all men [sic] are created equal; a notion that people have inalienable rights and are capable of making reasonable choices; a rejection of the traditional privileges accorded to individuals based on caste, creed or heredity; a commitment to the principle of the "consent of the governed."

Liberalism has always been rife with contradictions and thus bound to the most illiberal of policies. It has at the same time embraced freedom and unfreedom, and championed liberty while enforcing exclusion and confinement. As Geoff Mann argues in a review of the work of

¹³⁹ Eric Alterman, *The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (New York: Viking, 2012), 5.

Italian theorist Domenico Losurdo, “from its inception [classical] liberalism has been about asserting the liberty and equality of “the community of the free” over and against those excluded from the community.”¹⁴⁰ Mann has noted that “the historical paradox is only comprehensible when we remember and try to make sense of the simultaneous birth of liberalism and racial chattel slavery.”¹⁴¹ The same Liberal thinkers who were champions of world-historical emancipatory projects were themselves apologists for, or participants in a vicious, inhumane slave trade.¹⁴²

As Losurdo notes, liberal thinkers argued that the enslaved were wild beasts who were guilty of crimes against God. As they had violated the norms of natural law their transgressions justified their subjugation. Enslavement was just punishment for their heresy, abominable practices, and beliefs. The preamble to the US Declaration of Independence, one of liberalism’s iconic documents states that “all men are created equal.” Paradoxically, the rise of liberalism coincided with the spread of chattel slavery. Slavery persisted as the liberal revolutions of the enlightenment era, in France and the United States, succeeded. “Slavery in its most radical forum triumphed in the golden age of liberalism and at the heart of the liberal world.”¹⁴³ In 1700 the

¹⁴⁰ Geoff Mann, review of Domenico Losurdo’s *Liberalism: A Counter History* (London: Verso, 2014) in *Antipode* vol. 44, no. 1 (2012), 266.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁴² Thomas Jefferson, who was a founding father of the United States, the republic’s third president and the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, was a slaveholder. John Locke, the 17th century English philosopher who is considered the Father of Liberalism, and whose language influenced the language of rebellion and resistance in the *US Declaration of Independence* (1776) and in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s seminal text *The Social Contract* (1762) which greatly informed the French Revolution, owned stock in slave-trading companies including the Royal African Company which managed the slave trade for England. He was also the secretary of the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas, a jurisdiction where slavery was constitutionally permitted. In an article entitled “Slavery-Entangled Philosophy” <https://aeon.co/essays/does-lockes-entanglement-with-slavery-undermine-his-philosophy> Holly Brewer argues that to cast Locke as an advocate of or apologist for slavery is incorrect, as it fails to acknowledge that, over time, he arrived at the view that slavery was evil and sold his stock in The Royal African Company. Indeed, his *First Treatise of Government* began, “Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man and so directly opposite to the generous Temper and Courage of our nation; that ‘tis hardly to be conceived, that an Englishman, much less a Gentleman, should plead for’t.” Locke believed that labour should always be based on consent and that the first thing that a person owned was himself and that ownership could not be given away.

¹⁴³ Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 36.

US slave population was 330,000, in 1800 it was 3 million and by 1860 it had reached 6 million.¹⁴⁴

“You will find that no nations in the world have been more jealous of their liberties than those amongst whom the institution of slavery existed.”

Samuel Johnson

As Eric Alterman and Kevin Mattson have argued, the 19th century saw an evolution in the common understanding of liberalism. The (second) Industrial Revolution spawned powerful institutions (corporations and trusts), which “found ways to restrict the freedom of individuals through onerous working conditions in early factories” while extolling the “liberal virtues of self-reliance and freedom.”¹⁴⁵ To address these developments, American philosopher John Dewey, among others, tried to redefine the term to better express the contemporary moment:

[Liberalism] came into use to denote a new spirit that grew and spread with the rise of democracy. It implied a new interest in the common man and a new sense that the common man, the representative of the great masses of human beings, had possibilities that had been kept under, that had not been allowed to develop, because of institutional and political conditions... It was marked by a generous attitude, by sympathy for the underdog, for those who were not given a chance... [And] it aimed at enlarging the scope of free action on the part of those who for ages had no part in public affairs and no lot in the benefits secured by this participation.¹⁴⁶

Rather than emphasizing the individual’s economic liberty from the state, reform movements of the 19th and 20th centuries tended to be socially reconstructive and humanistically liberal. Marcus Raskin suggests these movements sought to create space within the public arena for the traditionally marginalized, and to temper the harsher instincts of predatory capitalism without

¹⁴⁴ Losurdo, *Liberalism*, 35.

¹⁴⁵ Alterman, *The Cause*, 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

revolution.¹⁴⁷ At their core, social reformers of the era believed public institutions must respect the inherent dignity of the individual, while the essential elements of the existing political system ought to be preserved. The challenge was whether there was a model of reconstruction and reform that was up to the task of resolving the contradictions of the society.

As historian Gary Gerstle argues, the rapid rise in scientific knowledge in the late 19th and 20th centuries led liberals to look to the state as a potent institutional instrument that could be rationally employed to rebuild and even reengineer society.¹⁴⁸ The state came to be seen as a primary locus for the launching of emancipatory projects. Liberalism advanced the notion that the powerless needed protection from the powerful, and that the state could serve as a “rational intervenor” in instances where the ability of marginalized subjects to exercise agency could be circumscribed. Its pledge was that through government initiative, social reconstruction could be pursued, participatory possibilities within democracy expanded, and human dignity achieved.

Progressivism was the first modern reform movement in the United States. It sought to bring order and efficiency to a world transformed by rapid growth and technology. All the presidents of the Progressive era (1901-1921), Republicans Teddy Roosevelt and William Taft, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, can be seen as reformers. Under their leadership a consensus emerged that the state could deliver a measure of justice to society. In the early 20th century, Progressivism had been associated with ‘Republicanism.’ However, during the 1916 election, Woodrow Wilson engineered a political realignment by moving the Democratic Party to a more state-interventionist ‘progressive’ liberal form. In the 1920s, the Republicans, led by Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge, returned to a more laissez faire, business-friendly form of

¹⁴⁷ Marcus Raskin, *Liberalism: The Genius of American Ideals* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 16.

¹⁴⁸ Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 99, no.4 (Oct.1994), 1046.

government. Harding and Coolidge believed the federal government should have as little to do with the functioning of people and the economy as possible.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and Herbert Hoover may have been in opposing political parties, but they were both reform-minded presidents. While FDR, the Democrat, is heralded as a talismanic figure of liberalism and helped to redefine the term “liberal” by employing it to describe the ways of his activist government, Hoover, the Republican who preceded him, was also an advocate of limited state intervention in the economy. Ironically, it was Hoover’s decision to adopt a laissez-faire approach to the economic cataclysm that was the Great Depression that proved to be his undoing. Although Hoover believed in reducing the size of government, as Secretary of Commerce (1921-1928) during the Harding and Coolidge administrations, he had come to recognize that there could be a constructive role for the state and pushed through, among other things, the Oil Pollution Act of 1924 that established federal regulations limited oil pollution of coastal waters. He was a pioneer of the first environmental policies in the United States. When the economic crash came in October 1929 Hoover created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which pumped “government supplied capital into the economy.”¹⁴⁹ He also proposed “some of the ideas that later became the heart of the New Deal’s response to the Depression like agricultural loans, deposit insurance, a government home-mortgage agency, and the forced separation of commercial and investment banking.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Lehman, “Hating on Herbert Hoover,” *The New Yorker*, October 16, 2017.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

The Great Depression of the 1930s has come to symbolize the nadir of American capitalism. And yet, the economic conflagration granted a newly fashioned liberalism and its proponents a political opportunity. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal epitomized progressive liberalism's moral crusade to restore "justice, fairness, democracy and equality to their rightful place in the US republic's economic life."¹⁵¹ FDR would best articulate his conception of liberalism in the famous "Four Freedoms" speech as part of his 1941 State of the Union address. In it he identified the rights that all peoples should enjoy including freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Freedom would no longer solely be about the classically liberal idea of protecting individuals from or against the abusive powers of government. Governments could provide positive freedoms too. It was a powerful declaration by the foremost champion of liberalism in the 20th century: The New Deal evinced a model of how government intervention and a progressive public policy could shield millions from penury and privation, open educational and economic possibilities and enable all Americans to lead lives of dignity. Thanks to programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA), The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the National Youth Administration (NYA), Roosevelt instilled a belief, among a beleaguered American population, that government could be a force for good, by providing jobs, skills, hope, opportunity, and forging community solidarity.¹⁵² Prior to the Second World War, this new American liberalism had not made the pursuit of Black civil rights a political priority for the White majority. Marcus Raskin notes that "Blacks learned that to change liberalism and its meaning, they would have to struggle for survival and inclusivity, for social and economic

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1043.

¹⁵² Lyndon Johnson worked in the NYA as a young man in the 1930s. The experience would have a profound effect on his political philosophy and informed his creation and development of the Great Society in the 1960s.

justice ... [and] at the very least they had to find the means to move from the slave to the exploited class.”**153**

From its inception in the first decade of the 20th century, the NAACP dedicated itself to the struggle for civil rights and African American freedom and inclusion within the US state. As Manfred Berg argues, the NAACP was conceived in the spirit of progressive reform.**154** The organization sought to upend the social and political order by securing for African Americans the rights guaranteed them in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution: an end to slavery; equal protection under the law; universal male adult suffrage. The NAACP was committed to ending racial discrimination by using democratic processes. At its core though, it was a reformist organization grounded in liberalism that embraced a democratic nationalism combining the “universalist American creed of freedom, equality and democracy with traditional patriotism.”**155**

The NAACP was founded on February 12, 1909, the centenary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth. It emerged at the tail end of a decade that had seen mounting White supremacist lawlessness, terrorism, and anti-Black violence. Just seven months before the NAACP’s launch, a deadly race riot took place in August 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, the state capital and Lincoln’s hometown.**156** Partly in response to the horror of the atrocity, an interracial alliance of 60 people comprised mainly of White liberals, including Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard, along with seven Black intellectuals and activists led by W.E.B. Du Bois and

153 Raskin, *Liberalism*, 11.

154 Berg, *Ticket to Freedom*, 1.

155 Manfred Berg, “Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anti-Communism” *Journal of American History* June 2007, vol. 94, issue 1, 75-96.

156 The rampage in Springfield was led by local White terrorists. Two Black people were lynched, six killed, fifty injured and thousands were forced to flee the city.

the formidable Ida B. Wells-Barnett, came together to form what became the NAACP.¹⁵⁷ In its early years the fledgling organization focused on two issues that had long plagued African Americans: segregation and lynching. It launched an anti-lynching crusade and proposed legislation that would provide African Americans with a measure of protection from the traumatizing terror to which they had so often been subjected. The NAACP also focused its energies on voting rights, employment opportunity, equality before the law, desegregation of civil institutions and property rights.

The NAACP was determined to expand the legal and political rights of African Americans. It fought against a repressive Jim Crow regime that since the 1890s had systematically stripped Black people of their citizenship rights. In the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War, the imposition of this rigid caste system had segregated all phases of their public lives.¹⁵⁸ W.E.B. DuBois summed up the predicament in which African Americans found themselves when he said, “the forces of hell in this country are fighting a terrific and momentarily successful battle.”¹⁵⁹

If any civil rights organization could lay claim to being the “voice of Black America” in the postwar period, it was the NAACP. Between 1940-46 the Association grew from 355 branches and a membership of 50,556, to 1073 branches and a little less than 450,000 members.¹⁶⁰ According to historian Gerald Horne, by 1946 the NAACP “had become the

¹⁵⁷ Both Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard were descendants of abolitionists. Born into slavery in Mississippi just a year before Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation and three years before the end of the Civil War, Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a pioneering investigative journalist, anti-lynching- activist, early civil rights leader, suffragist, and indefatigable advocate for the rights of African Americans. She eventually moved from the South to Chicago where she continued to document the horrors of lynching and fought against segregation in the public education system. In 2020 she was honoured posthumously with a Pulitzer Prize for her courageous reporting.

¹⁵⁸ Isabel Wilkerson discusses how a hidden caste system has operated in the United States in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020).

¹⁵⁹ *The Crisis*, April 1912, 236-237.

¹⁶⁰ Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro American Response to the Cold War 1944-1963* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 23.

significant barometer of African American political sentiment.”¹⁶¹ The NAACP had gained a reputation as an organization that would fight for Negro rights. During the war, NAACP leader Walter White had demonstrated a commitment to anti-colonialism. As the modern civil rights movement emerged, international issues became aligned with domestic issues. Eventually, the NAACP and its leaders would have to decide whether to support US foreign policy or face the potential destruction of their organization. Walter White would come to support the 1947 Truman Doctrine. He recognized that criticism of US foreign policy was becoming “fundamentally unacceptable” in everyday discourse. According to Penny Von Eschen, White’s support of Truman’s foreign policy was strategic.¹⁶² The NAACP was an organization wholly committed to its self-preservation, and led by a savvy political operator who was a consummate pragmatist and survivor. It was not alone.

The National Urban League (NUL or Urban League) was founded in 1910 as a national community services organization dedicated to assisting African Americans who had migrated from the rural South to the urban North. The Urban League’s mission was to enable Black Americans to achieve first class citizenship by working to “improve the social and economic conditions of Blacks through interracial teamwork.”¹⁶³ The NUL tried to identify and dismantle racial barriers while encouraging self-help amongst African Americans themselves. It believed building bridges and promoting understanding between the races were key factors in facilitating African American success. It attempted to open the doors of opportunity to those Black Americans who had traditionally been relegated to the margins, by linking them to progressively minded Whites with financial means and social currency. The intention was to develop social

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,

¹⁶² Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black American and Anticolonialism 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 109.

¹⁶³ Nancy J. Weiss, *Whitney Young and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 73.

networks that would assist Black people living in urban centres with their search for jobs and social services. The National Urban League taught Black newcomers about sanitation, dress and how to comport themselves in an urban setting. It was dedicated to civic reform and sought improvements to the social welfare and labour system. It employed an array of instruments to achieve its goals: negotiation; research; public education; community organization. Whitney Young, the NUL's charismatic leader throughout the 1960s, labeled it "an action agency."¹⁶⁴

Born in Kentucky in 1921, Young was a trained social worker who graduated from university in 1941 just months before Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan. He eventually joined the U.S. army and by war's end was a decorated veteran, receiving the American Theater Ribbon and three Bronze Service Stars.¹⁶⁵ Young was appointed Executive Director of the National Urban League in 1961. Early in his tenure, he had to come to terms with what Nancy Weiss has described as the "weight of tradition and conservatism of the League's trustees."¹⁶⁶ Before Young, the NUL had largely stood outside of the political arena and did not concern itself with matters of civil rights. Under his stewardship, the League became a more engaged actor, and a "necessary and important ally" in the civil rights struggle.¹⁶⁷ While the Urban League did not participate in direct actions like sit-ins or freedom rides, it sought to play a role behind the scenes. It positioned itself as an organization that could both understand the language of militant Black demonstrators, while communicating effectively with the White power structure. While Young believed the League had to keep its distance from protest, he also recognized it had to be engaged with the struggle for civil rights if it hoped to retain credibility and relevance within the Black community.

¹⁶⁴ Whitney Young, "The Urban League and its Strategy" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 357, The Negro Protest (January 1965), 102-107.

¹⁶⁵ Weiss., *Whitney Young*, 34.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Young was convinced that the American political project could be reformed despite its contradictions. Once during a meeting with Dean Rusk, then the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Young described himself as “a real optimist with great faith that Americans would find ways to resolve the crucial problems of human relations.”¹⁶⁸ He was a moderate liberal, not a revolutionary, who had a gradualist, reformist, integrationist, and pluralistic approach to change. Young insisted that “racial problems in America are manifested in many ways and at many levels, and therefore a multiplicity of techniques and approaches are required to successfully cope with them. No single organization can profess to have a monopoly in this field.”¹⁶⁹

By the 1940s W.E.B. Du Bois, was already in his 70s, however, rather than mellowing with age, his politics had grown more radical. Historian Gerald Horne contends that when W.E.B. Du Bois returned to the NAACP in 1944 to serve as the director of special research, the organization that he’d helped found, like much of Black America, was “avowedly anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist.”¹⁷⁰ But by the time he was dismissed from the organization in 1948 it had morphed into, what Horne argues was, a rabidly anti-communist outfit.¹⁷¹

The anti-communist hysteria of the early Cold War period that pervaded US political discourse in the late 1940s and early 1950s put considerable pressure on the civil rights movement.¹⁷² Beginning in 1946, the NAACP was dogged by charges of communist

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 76. Dean Rusk was US Secretary of State between 1961-1969 serving under both President John F. Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson.

¹⁶⁹ From a policy statement issued by the National Urban League in January 1962 in Weiss, *Whitney Young*, 101.

¹⁷⁰ Weiss, *Whitney Young*, 20.

¹⁷¹ Du Bois resigned from *The Crisis* in 1934 due to both personality clashes and ideological disagreements with his NAACP colleagues, particularly executive director Walter White, over its legalistic approach to fighting racism and his own advocacy of a segregated social-economic system.

¹⁷² See Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964); Roy Wilkins, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: De Capo Press, 1994), 201-211.

infiltration.¹⁷³ Government publications also raised concerns about the NAACP being penetrated by communist operatives.¹⁷⁴ The Association denied the allegations that it was “infested” with communists and distanced itself from figures alleged to be affiliated with “the Reds.” Both the NAACP’s executive secretary Walter White and its chief administrator Roy Wilkins insisted that they would be “utterly ruthless in clean[ing] out the NAACP , and mak[ing] sure that the Communists were not running it.”¹⁷⁵ In the early 1950s the NAACP “sought to distance itself from its erstwhile leftist allies in the labour, civil rights and peace movements.”¹⁷⁶ The Board of Directors issued a directive requiring that local NAACP branches report their attempts to eradicate communist infiltrators.¹⁷⁷ In June 1950 the association passed an anti-communist resolution at its convention in Boston. In the end, the NAACP sided with the anti-communist liberal established order rather than align itself with more radical progressive forces and became less internationalist in outlook than it had been for much of its history. In the face of a domestic anti-communist juggernaut, the NAACP chose self-preservation. Yet, even so, it continued to be targeted by opponents of the Civil Rights Movement who accused it of being awash with subversives. While its leadership was committed to presenting the NAACP as a moderate organization, the truth is that the NAACP, at various points in its history, had taken stances that had placed it outside of the political mainstream.

From its launch, the NAACP had been keen to express its positions on international affairs. In 1910 it condemned the Czar of Russia’s expulsion of Jews from Kiev. Years later, the

¹⁷³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The U.S. Communist Party,” *Life*, July 29, 1946, 84-96.

¹⁷⁴ See Walter White’s objection to a provocative statement by the Governor of Michigan Kim Sigler, NAACP, Press Release, April 4, 1947, box 201, series A, part II, NAACP Records.

¹⁷⁵ Resolutions adopted by the 41st Annual Convention, 23 June 1950, part 1 reel 12, NAACP Board of Directors Meetings, 1944-53 (Washington D.C. 1982), microfilm; NAACP Moves to ban Communists Activity, Press Release, 24 June 1950, part 1 reel 12.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 28.

¹⁷⁷ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 29.

NAACP internationalized the race issue by tying it to the burgeoning Indian Revolution and the Pacific campaign. Race was now “a global, instead of a national or sectional issue, to a greater extent than ever before in the history of the world.”¹⁷⁸ A 1943 NAACP report declared “the [Second World] War had expanded the horizons of thinking people enormously, and sometimes painfully widened with the realization that the United States cannot win this war unless there is a drastic re-adjustment of racial attitudes.”¹⁷⁹ Racial reform became part of the liberal anti-communist agenda.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the Cold War, the rise of the decolonized of the Third World/Global South and the struggle between two world powers, the United States, and the Soviet Union, for global hegemony. Western colonial empires were (grudgingly) dismantled across Africa and Asia, and newly independent nations won their freedom. The ascension of a non-White global statesman like Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, served as a rebuke to long held notions of White supremacy. The rise of anti-colonial movements across the Third World coincided with that of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. As Thomas Borstelmann has argued, the domestic U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the international civil rights movement of anti-colonialism moved on parallel tracks.”¹⁸⁰ At the same time that African Americans were seeking the vote in the American South, Africans and Asians were trying to achieve self-government. Black Americans had long demonstrated a commitment to transnational solidarity, particularly with populations in the Third World.¹⁸¹ They recognized their fight for equality in the United States as part of a larger global struggle against the forces of

¹⁷⁸ Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 86.

¹⁷⁹ Highlights of the Report to the thirty-fourth annual meeting, New York City, January 1, 1943, NAACP papers.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2001), 46.

¹⁸¹ The NAACP gave voice to the African diaspora through the pages of its journal, *The Crisis*, which consistently presented news from the Black World.

imperialism and exploitation. They identified with and were inspired by other oppressed and colonized people seeking liberation, whether they were in India, China, Burma, the Philippines, Malaya, South Africa, Kenya, or the West Indies.¹⁸² U.S. civil rights leaders and their anti-colonialist counterparts followed each other's struggles closely.¹⁸³

To Walter White, "World War Two [had] given the Negro a sense of kinship with other colored and also oppressed people of the world."¹⁸⁴ He maintained that the war had ended forever "the illusion of White omniscience and omnipotence," and asserted that "colored peoples throughout the world [were now] determined once and for all to end White exploitation and imperialism."¹⁸⁵ White insisted that the NAACP would work on the race question at both the national and international level. He believed that "injustice against Black men in America [had] repercussions upon the status and future of people in India, China and Africa."¹⁸⁶ In his keynote address to delegates at the NAACP's 1946 annual convention, Reverend Archibald J. Carey spoke of the moral obligation of African Americans to the global community, arguing, "we must all be citizens of the world...Negroes must lift their eyes from their own problems to see the world around them. They must articulate the hopes... of other little people as well as of themselves."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² As noted in Julia Erin Wood, "Freedom is Indivisible: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Cold War Politics, and International Movements" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2011), 127, "When Kenya gained its independence from England [in 1963] SNCC used the occasion to point out again the similarities between the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles in Africa and the United States. What happened on the African continent mattered to the U.S. civil rights fight. SNCC telegraphed Jomo Kenyatta, the new Kenyan president, extending not only congratulations, but claiming that Kenyatta and the Kenyan independence struggle were "an inspiration for All African Freedom Struggles."

¹⁸³ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 8.

¹⁸⁴ Walter White, "Kinship of Coloured Peoples: People Politics and Places," *Chicago Defender*, March 3, 1945.

¹⁸⁵ Walter White's statement at the NAACP's thirty seventh annual meeting January 7, 1946, NAACP Papers, pt. 1, reel 14.

¹⁸⁶ Walter White speaking on October 23, 1947, as part of a presentation.

¹⁸⁷ Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 169. Archibald J. Carey Jr. (1908-1981) was a prominent African American lawyer, politician, judge, civil rights activist, and clergyman from the South Side of Chicago. He was a renowned orator who influenced Martin Luther King Jr.; indeed, King and Carey were friends. There is speculation that King's "I Have a Dream Speech" was itself inspired by a speech Carey delivered at the Republican National

The year 1947 marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the intensity of anti-colonial politics within the African American community.¹⁸⁸ As historian Penny Von Eschen has argued, “after the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, the criticism of American foreign policy that had been an integral part of the politics of the African diaspora fell beyond the bounds of legitimate dissent.”¹⁸⁹ The Truman Doctrine, proclaimed at a joint session of the US Congress on March 12 1947, was a declaration of America’s new Cold War agenda.¹⁹⁰ It announced that the United States was ready to confront the Soviet communist behemoth and protect “free institutions, representative government, free elections” anywhere in the world.¹⁹¹ The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan ultimately became tests of loyalty, patriotism and anti-communist integrity. The NAACP made a tacit bargain with the Truman administration, acceding to the President’s labour and foreign policy agenda in exchange for greater White House commitment on civil rights.¹⁹²

In a 1948 declaration, the NAACP stated its belief in the solidarity that existed between colonial peoples and African Americans, a type of colour-conscious internationalism. The declaration noted that “in this common struggle we are not alone,” for our allies include “the vast and unnumbered coloured peoples of the world.”¹⁹³ In his own keynote address to delegates at the 1949 NAACP annual conference, acting Secretary Roy Wilkins stressed the commonality that African Americans felt with other colored peoples around the globe.

Convention in 1952, a full decade before King’s iconic address at the March on Washington in 1963. Carey was appointed by President Dwight Eisenhower as the Chair of the President’s Committee on Government Employment Policy. He was the first African American named to the post.

¹⁸⁸ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 107.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ The Truman Doctrine marked a significant departure from Roosevelt’s Second World War policy which had seen the US forge an alliance with Stalin’s Soviet Union.

¹⁹¹ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 107.

¹⁹² The “To Secure These Rights” document which appeared October 29, 1947, called for a federal anti-lynching law, federal protection for voter registration, integration of the military, abolition of the poll tax, prohibition of discrimination in defence industries and a ban on Jim Crow in interstate transportation.

¹⁹³ “Declaration of Principles” adopted by the thirty-ninth annual conference, June 26, 1948, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., microfilm edition, pt.1, reel 12.

The majority of the [world's] people belong to colored races. They have suffered the humiliations and cruelties of the color line. But now there is a surge toward freedom among them. They seek to control their own destinies and to wipe out the colonial system... We offer them every assistance within our power. The race problem is bigger than a few states in the Deep South... It has assumed world-wide proportions and the American Negro is prepared to take his place in the world-wide struggle.¹⁹⁴

Walter White had no compunction about expressing his disdain for the depredations of Britain's imperial project. He criticized the United States government for failing to stand up to imperial powers like Britain as they continued to exploit Black, Brown and Yellow peoples around the globe.¹⁹⁵ White was convinced of the interrelatedness of the global community and its enduring colour line, saying, "whatever happens in America directly affects Southeast Asia. Whatever occurs here has instantaneous effects on the United States."¹⁹⁶

In many respects, the anti-colonialism of the NAACP was initially shared by certain wartime tendencies in U.S. foreign policy. Roosevelt's interpretation of the self-determination clauses of the Atlantic Charter were targeted as much at the British Empire as those under Fascist rule in Europe. There was even a flirtation with what was called the "Jakarta Axiom" under which the US would tolerate Third World nationalism after the war.¹⁹⁷ But by the late 1940s, the room for ideological tolerance was disappearing. After the Truman Doctrine was announced to Congress in March 1947, the Marshall Plan for European Recovery was first proposed in June. Walter White joined the Citizens Committee for Support of the Marshall Plan and endorsed

¹⁹⁴ Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 169.

¹⁹⁵ During a visit to the US by British Labour PM Clement Attlee in which he addressed the US Congress, 1946 the NAACP condemned the UK government for the "slaughter [of] Indonesian and Palestinian youth by British troops."

¹⁹⁶ Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 173.

¹⁹⁷ In the years following the Second World War, the term "Jakarta Axiom" came to signify US tolerance for the neutrality of Third World nations. It meant pursuing a non-aggression policy that entailed respecting the sovereignty of non-aligned states and not pressuring them to choose a side in the Cold War. By the 1970s the Jakarta Axiom was no longer germane in foreign policy parlance. In the wake of the US-backed coup in 1965 in Indonesia that had targeted communists and led to the killing of upwards of 500,000 people, "Jakarta Axiom" would be replaced by the "Jakarta Method", a genocidal approach to communism, that indicated the United States would never allow a Third World country to be neutral. See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2021).

Truman's foreign policy.¹⁹⁸ Although White was an anti-Communist, he had tended to resist red baiting within the NAACP and adopting a "Manichean world view." Von Eschen suggests that as early as 1946, White made the strategic decision to support Truman's foreign policy. She surmises that White had a sense that the Truman administration was becoming hostile to criticism of the U.S. at a time when there were opportunities to influence government on domestic civil rights.

To W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP, the organization he had co-founded, had become a "bourgeois set-up, afraid to do anything that was not respectable."¹⁹⁹ He felt that the NAACP had "sold...out" by aligning itself with "the reactionary, war-mongering... imperialism" of the Truman administration, a regime that equivocated on colonialism.²⁰⁰ In a letter to Walter White, Du Bois wrote, "just as the United States has become international in its action ... so the NAACP is called upon to take a stand concerning Africa, Asia, the islands of the Pacific and the Caribbean."²⁰¹ Historian Carol Anderson contends that the NAACP allowed itself to be seduced by a sweet talking Harry Truman for the purposes of the 1948 election. She argues that the NAACP was most concerned about attaining a kind of Cold War respectability.²⁰²

Gerald Horne asserts that there is merit to the notion that the NAACP was seduced by President Truman's civil rights "sweet talk." In June 1947 Truman had delivered a speech at the NAACP annual convention at the Lincoln Memorial in D.C., becoming the first U.S. president in history to do so. A year later in the 1948 U.S. presidential election, the Black community was a crucial factor in Truman's stunning victory which saw the greatest number of Black votes cast in

¹⁹⁸ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 108.

¹⁹⁹ Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 4.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰² Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*, 273. See also Carol Anderson, "Bleached Souls and Red Negroes: The NAACP and Black Communists in the Early Cold War," in *Window on Freedom*, ed. Plummer, 93-113; and Penny Von Eschen, "Commentary: Challenging Cold War Habits; African Americans, Race, and Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, 20 (Fall 1996), 634.

history.²⁰³ Black voters ended up being the balance of power. In the wake of his election triumph, Truman set up a commission on civil rights. Truman's seduction led ultimately to the removal of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1948 from the NAACP and the rejection of a UN petition entitled "An Appeal to the World".²⁰⁴ Anderson argues that the NAACP had "ceded its leverage to play off the Democrats against the Republicans, jettisoned its international strategy, and discarded its most visionary leader." ²⁰⁵ The association draped itself in the U.S. flag in its quest to attain Cold War respectability and confined itself to a civil rights platform stripped of a substantive economic critique. Du Bois had tried to connect the NAACP's civil rights agenda to the UN's human rights platform, which included not just political and legal rights but also social, cultural, and economic rights. His position was regarded as a hostile one by the U.S. government and economic equality became linked to communism. Walter White was intent on defending the honour of the United States in the face of Soviet charges about the endemic nature of racial discrimination in the United States. Pursuing a civil rights agenda, as opposed to a human rights one, was politically safer.

To Penny Von Eschen, the NAACP had abandoned its previous position and dispensed with the "argument that linked the struggle of Black Americans against Jim Crow with that of Africans against colonialism."²⁰⁶ It was her contention that with the advent of the Cold War, the NAACP emerged as an organization that devoted itself to "a new exclusive focus on domestic discrimination and silence on foreign policy issues."²⁰⁷ Historian Erik McDuffie concurred with Von Eschen's sentiments arguing that "the Cold War abruptly ended the close relationship some

²⁰³ Gerald Horne, *Black & Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963*. (Albany; State University Press of New York, 1986), 93.

²⁰⁴ "An Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and An Appeal to the United Nations for Redress."

²⁰⁵ Carol Anderson, "Bleached Souls and Red Negroes: The NAACP and Black Communists in the Early Cold War 1948-1952," in Plummer, *Window on Freedom*, 93-113.

²⁰⁶ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 117.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.,

African Americans cultivated” with anti-imperialists around the world. The result, McDuffie added, was that “in the face of anti-communist repression domestically, liberal African American leaders in the NAACP and other Black political organizations retreated from any form of militant anti-colonialism.”²⁰⁸ James Roark posited that the anti-communism that pervaded the NAACP and “the African American political center resulted in “most American Black leaders abandoning the cause of the world’s colored peoples.”²⁰⁹

However, not every historian has been as damning in their assessment of the NAACP’s politics. In charting the organizational activities of African American liberals like those in the NAACP, historian Carol Anderson has tried to correct the historical record by suggesting that they were stealth fighters who were much more subversive than people have recognized. Anderson has described NAACP representatives as “bureaucratic infighters.” While the NAACP may have become less vocal in expressing its views on matters of foreign policy after 1947, particularly regarding the anti-colonial struggle, Anderson asserts it is not true that the organization remained silent. She notes that it was often difficult to discern the role Black liberals played in decolonization, and so their contributions have been dismissed or ignored. She insists that while W.E.B. Du Bois excoriated the NAACP for its timidity and the insufficient public support it provided communist and socialist forces around the world, he failed to recognize that the NAACP’s anticommunism was more subtle and less reactionary than he assumed.²¹⁰ In fact, during the struggle for colonial independence, the NAACP consistently provided support to those international activists whom the U.S. government labeled as

²⁰⁸ Erik S. McDuffie, “Black and Red: Black Liberations the Cold War and the Horne Thesis,” *Journal of African American History* 96:2 (Spring 2011), 241.

²⁰⁹ James Roark, “American Black Leaders: The Response to Colonialism and the Cold War, 1945-1953,” *African Historical Studies*, 4 (1971), 265-266.

²¹⁰ Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 61.

“communists” or “security risks.” It condemned North Korea’s invasion of the south but was also critical of US foreign policy in Asia. The NAACP’s main organ, the *Crisis*, argued that the U.S. could not win the struggle in Asia while allying itself with reactionary leaders like Bao Dai in Indonesia, Jiang Jieshi in Formosa, and Syngman Rhee in South Korea.

Moreover, in July 1947, a month after George Marshall’s seminal Harvard address (The Marshall Plan), Walter White and the NAACP, citing the conflict in Indonesia involving the British Army, signed a statement composed by the American socialist Norman Thomas which stated, “no Marshall Plan can save democracy and prosperity if the nations of Western Europe waste their substance in a continuance of an outworn imperialism.”²¹¹

In 1949 the NAACP played a crucial anti-colonial role by disrupting “a brokered deal to divide North Africa and the Horn of Africa among US allies.”²¹² The organization worked through the UN and partnered with various liberal organizations and “Indigenous freedom fighters” to attack White Supremacy, national sovereignty and sought a third way of post-colonial nation building, between the excesses of private capital accumulation and Soviet style institutions.²¹³

The NAACP focused on self-determination, a contested term that in general means a people’s right to choose its own government. This approach was predicated on a respect for human rights and political independence. In the 1950s, the NAACP worked hard to keep the issues of colonialism, human rights, and apartheid at the top of the UN’s agenda.²¹⁴ It advocated for anti-colonial struggles in Southwest Africa, Indonesia and the Italian colonies of Somalia,

²¹¹ Draft Letter to President Harry Truman from Norman Thomas, Attached to Norman Thomas to Dear Friend [Walter White], July 23, 1947, Box A393, File “Post-War World Council, 1946-49,” Papers of the NAACP.

²¹² Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 6.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹⁴ Anderson’s criticism of the critics of Black Liberals is that they equate radicalism with authentic Black leadership. The anti-colonial struggle has been deemed the purview of leftist radicals alone.

Ethiopia, and Eritrea. It used its influence at the UN and within the United States to express its contempt for what White called in a cable written to President Truman, “the perpetuation of imperialism and human bondage.”²¹⁵ White had wanted a guarantee from Truman that the United States would not support colonial empires or suppress liberation struggles. The NAACP challenged the U.S. to demonstrate the anti-colonial democratic ideals that it purported to represent. It employed the “language of freedom, democracy, equality and justice to take on colonialism, racism and White supremacy.”²¹⁶ To Anderson, even during the dark days of the Cold War, the NAACP never abandoned the anti-colonial struggle, rather, she argues that the NAACP’s anti-colonialism had a clarity “not mired by ideological haze.”²¹⁷ It opposed Soviet imperialist moves in North Africa and “mounted a campaign against the US sponsored plan to divvy up Libya, Somalia and Eritrea to U.S. allies.”²¹⁸

Meanwhile, back at home, the United States Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* vindicated the NAACP’s faith in the U.S. legal system and reaffirmed its commitment to the American liberal project.²¹⁹ It also reinforced the NAACP’s unyielding belief in its organizational approach to social change, and, for the time, solidified its position as the dominant actor within the Civil Rights Movement. The NAACP’s legal triumph was a source of pride for the organization, as reflected in a letter written by then executive director Roy Wilkins to Whitney Young, the Dean of Atlanta University and future director of the National Urban League. “We have won our propaganda battle. It is no longer a tenable or fashionable policy to discriminate racially. Those who do so are on the defensive.” Wilkins added, “We have

²¹⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, December 10, 1945, Reel 3, NAACP.

²¹⁶ Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 266.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹⁸ Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 8.

²¹⁹ In a unanimous 9-0 decision the US Supreme Court declared that “separate educational facilities were inherently unequal” and that racial segregation was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution.

nailed down the propaganda victory with legal decisions. All is by no means won ... but as the NAACP looks back as it enters its fiftieth year, it can say truthfully that it hewed to the goals laid down in 1909.”²²⁰ That said, enforcing the Brown decision, not to mention trying to overturn all the other forms of segregation and legal discrimination that persisted in the North and South would require a political struggle. The rising expectations of the Second World War were soon going to meet a Black student movement, that writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin called in 1962 “the very last attempt by American Negroes to achieve acceptance in the republic, to force the country to honour its own ideals.”²²¹

In the heady days that were the mid-1950s and early-1960s, Wilkins and the NAACP were fully aware that they could soon be usurped by a younger and more restless generation and did not hesitate to express their concerns. “If we don’t change our ways, some other organization will come along and take our place.”²²² As the primary arena of the civil rights struggle shifted from the courts to the streets, the NAACP faced competition for the mantle of leadership of the Civil Rights Movement for the first time in its history. Between 1957 and 1961 three civil rights organizations would employ the tactics of non-violent direct action. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) came to the forefront as leading voices of a new more militant generation. For the better part of a half century the NAACP had ostensibly “owned” the civil rights field. Its leaders therefore initially regarded these fledgling organizations with a combination of paternalism, suspicion, hostility, and disdain. Roy Wilkins dismissed SNCC’s

²²⁰ Berg, *Ticket to Freedom*, 166.

²²¹ Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (1962), 75.

²²² John Brooks to Wilkins, November 4, 1958; Wilkins to Brooks, December 4, 1958, NAACP Records III A 266.

leaders as arrogant, and ignorant “doctrinaires”, “upstarts”, “who were still little boys when the NAACP was battling tooth and toenail to knock out Jim Crow.”²²³

NAACP senior officials recognized in these rival groups, threats to their hegemony and their ability to raise funds. The SCLC was launched as the political arm of the Southern Black Church in 1957 by a charismatic young preacher named Martin Luther King, following the historic success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. SNCC was established in 1960 by Black and White college students and assisted by civil rights veterans like Ella Baker and James Lawson.²²⁴ The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the oldest of the three, had been founded in Chicago in 1942 by an interracial group of students. Among them were James Farmer and Bayard Rustin who pioneered non-violent direct-action methods. The group went largely dormant in the 1950s, yet quickly rose to national prominence in 1961 after launching the Freedom Rides.

In the U.S. presidential election of 1952, Republican General Dwight Eisenhower, a war hero, won a resounding victory despite garnering scant support amongst Black voters. He arrived in the White House owing next to nothing to an already marginalized community who, politically, had rejected him. Throughout his tenure, Eisenhower demonstrated little enthusiasm for civil rights issues, and a lack of knowledge about the conditions in which most African Americans lived. The NAACP regarded Eisenhower as a president who “did not understand how Mississippi got to be Mississippi. Or, equally important, how Mississippi stayed Mississippi.”²²⁵ As late as 1960 fewer than 2% of Mississippi’s Black adults were registered to

²²³ The generational divide between the groups was significant. In 1960, Roy Wilkins was 59 years old. The bulk of the member of SNCC members were barely in their 20s.

²²⁴ Ella Baker’s long association with the NAACP began in 1938 and she would serve in various capacities with the organization: secretary; organizer; New York branch president; national director of branches. She would later become the first staff person hired by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and was its executive director.

²²⁵ Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 291.

vote. Eisenhower was convinced that racial difficulties could be solved if African Americans ran for office and seemed oblivious to the danger they faced in the South by performing such an act. Evidently, Eisenhower had little understood of the conditions of terror under which far too many African Americans lived.²²⁶

Eisenhower met with Black political leaders on just one occasion during his eight years in the Oval office: in June 1958, for a total of 45 minutes.²²⁷ Even his advisers rarely spoke up about racial equality. In fact, the strongest supporter of civil rights in his administration, Herbert Brownell, resigned early in the second term. Richard Nixon was the only Eisenhower administration figure who, on occasion, spoke out against racial discrimination.²²⁸ The NAACP was in the political wilderness throughout the Eisenhower years, ostensibly shut out of the White House and the corridors of power in Washington D.C. During the Truman era the NAACP had managed to obtain appointments to the US delegation to the United Nations. After Eisenhower came to office, the NAACP was dismissed as a radical political outfit and effectively cut off from the President.²²⁹ NAACP associates were considered *persona non grata*. If you were vying for a government appointment your Republican *bona fides* counted for little if you were deemed to be “a NAACP man”: you would never get through the vetting process.

As an organization committed to political reform, this was a troubling and unprecedented situation. The NAACP had always had access to the president and the powerbrokers in the capital. The organization faced an existential crisis, of sorts, as it struggled to remain relevant in

²²⁶ Nicholas argues that Eisenhower’s contribution to the civil rights struggle has been lamentably ignored and underestimated and in fact he helped to advance and shepherd the civil rights agenda in a more measured and quiet manner.

²²⁷ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 89. Four Black political leaders were present at the meeting with President Eisenhower. Martin Luther King Jr. from the SCLC, A. Philip Randolph from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the NAACP’s Roy Wilkins, and Lester Granger from the National Urban League. White House staffers regarded Wilkins as being the most militant of the group.

²²⁸ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 88.

²²⁹ Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 330.

the eyes of the public. There was nothing that its leaders like Roy Wilkins could do to garner the kind of attention that the charismatic preacher Martin Luther King of the SCLC did, or replicate the very public actions, youthful energy, and rebelliousness of the activists of SNCC and CORE who, in the age of television, were able to capture the imagination of a viewing audience.

On the other hand, there was growing anxiety in the Eisenhower administration about the political capital its Soviet adversaries gained by the persistence of America's roiling racial conflict, particularly as the US came to see the future of the Cold War competition moving toward the Global South. The Bandung Conference in 1955 worried US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. He regarded the gathering as a "communist road show," an opportunity for the Soviets to "seduce and conquer the Third World."²³⁰ It was no coincidence that Black writer Richard Wright rushed to Indonesia, and soon afterwards published his enthusiastic account of the historic encounter in *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference in 1956*.

As Brenda Plummer has asserted, "civil rights had always been and remained a greater priority for Afro-Americans than foreign policy."²³¹ Upon John F. Kennedy attaining office, the NAACP under Roy Wilkins was more willing to be onside with the administration's gradualist approach to civil rights. In the lead up to the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 that JFK had originally proposed, Martin Luther King, buoyed by the success of the Birmingham campaign, had wanted mass demonstrations in Washington DC. Wilkins though urged patience and caution. He felt that employing quiet lobbying tactics worked best with Congress.

In 1964 the NAACP celebrated the triumphant passage of the Civil Rights bill at its annual convention. By then a resurgent NAACP had become a formidable force in Washington. It enjoyed considerable political sway with both the White House and Congress. Indeed,

²³⁰ Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles and their Secret World War* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2014), 203.

²³¹ Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 210.

President Johnson made himself available whenever Roy Wilkins and other NAACP officials came knocking. Johnson also relied on the NAACP to communicate the importance of a “responsible” civil rights strategy.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was everything that Roy Wilkins could have imagined a president could be. Both Wilkins and Clarence Mitchell, a longtime NAACP lobbyist, regarded LBJ as a leader whose words were supported by deeds. They believed Johnson’s liberal vision of “the Great Society” was what African Americans needed. Wilkins forged a close working and personal relationship with LBJ. When Johnson died, Wilkins would call him “the best [US president] from the standpoint of poor White Americans and of non-White minorities.”²³² In July 1964 Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King called for a voluntary moratorium of all “mass marches, mass picketing and mass demonstrations until after elections.” CORE and SNCC refused. They insisted that demonstrations were necessary to “channel in a militant fashion the justifiable frustration and anger of the Negro Community.”²³³

In the first 50 years of its existence the NAACP became the standard bearer for African American organizations fighting against American apartheid. As a liberal, reformist organization that practiced a form of respectability politics, like the Urban League, the NAACP sought to work within the institutions of American democracy to dismantle a corrosive racial hierarchy. Accused of harbouring radicals amidst the rise of the Cold War, the NAACP’s leadership took every opportunity to demonstrate its anti-communist bona fides. Shut out of the halls of power during the Eisenhower years, the NAACP leaders became enamoured with Lyndon Johnson and his progressive domestic agenda. As the ‘60s wore on, the dominance of the NAACP and Urban

²³² Iwan Morgan and Mark White (eds.), *The Presidential Image: A History from Theodore Roosevelt to Donald Trump* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2020), 125.

²³³ Wilkins telegram to Martin Luther King Jr. et. al. 22 July 1964; statement by civil rights leaders 29 July 1964, NAACP Records III A 247; CORE statement 9 August 1964, NAACP Records III A 202; Wilkins Standing Fast, 303-4.

League within Black communities waned. Both organizations feared that it was inevitable that they would eventually be eclipsed by upstart organizations like SNCC and the SCLC.

CHAPTER 3

“Coloured Cosmopolitanism, Anti-Colonialism and the Radical Internationalist Roots of African American Dissent During the Vietnam War”

O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered, let us show brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow?
What though before us lies the open grave
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the Wall dying but fighting back!

Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”

“That the Negro has no stake in this war...is borne out by the fact that England and France oppress more negroes and colonial peoples than all the Empires of the world combined.” **234**

Richard Wright speaking in 1941 in an interview with fellow Black Communist Angelo Herndon in the Communist Daily Worker

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s, US civil rights leaders gained inspiration not just from their fellow American activists, but also from Third World (anti-colonial) liberation struggles, from India to Cuba, from China to Ghana to South Africa.**235** They recognized that their domestic struggle against Jim Crow and White supremacy was linked to global anti-colonial and independence movements. They established transnational networks and alliances with “colored cosmopolitans,” individuals who fought for the freedom of “the colored world” and yet conceived of a new world that transcended racial distinctions, and with political revolutionaries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. These movements offered African American race reform leaders a sense of hope and possibility. India’s Mahatma Gandhi was a seminal influence on generations of African American leaders from A. Philip Randolph to

234 Richard Wright, *Conversations with Richard Wright* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1993), 26.

235 Between 1945-1960 forty countries with a total population of 800 million -more than a quarter of the world’s population- revolted against colonialism and gained their independence. The term “Third World” emerged during the Cold War to describe countries that were aligned neither with the West or the East. Over time the term came to describe those countries who comprised the developing or non-industrialized world, now known as the “Global South.”

Bayard Rustin, Pauli Murray to James Farmer to Martin Luther King Jr. to John Lewis. Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, and the political projects they led inspired legions of civil rights activists. As Carol Anderson has suggested, by examining “the role of African Americans in forging alliances with their Third World counterparts to dismantle White supremacy,” what is revealed is the often unacknowledged and underestimated circuits of informal power that “transcended national, racial, ideological and historical boundaries” and challenged an entrenched global system.²³⁶

The anti-imperialist politics and corresponding critique of the American capitalist economy that emerged during the 1960s, most notably in the anti-Vietnam war positions of Martin Luther King Jr. and the leaders of SNCC and CORE, were rooted in the anti-colonial politics of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and embodied by figures such as William Alphaeus Hunton, W.E.B. Dubois, Paul Robeson, Claudia Jones and Ella Baker.²³⁷ These civil rights leaders believed in a global transnational solidarity, and championed a democratic ethic that connected domestic and international politics.²³⁸ They rejected the notion of American exceptionalism, and instead advocated for a global coalitional politics in which anti-imperialism

²³⁶ Carol Anderson “The Histories of African Americans’ Anti-Colonialism,” in Robert McMahon ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179.

²³⁷ The terms anti-imperialist and anti-colonial are used in this thesis. Anti-imperialist refers to the resistance to and rebellion against the power of those political projects committed to building empire through exploitation and the expansion of territory. Anti-imperialism as a political movement had its origins in the late 19th and 20th centuries and emerged in opposition to the expansion of European and US colonial empires. It formed the basis for the emergence of movements of national liberation in the 20th century. Anti-colonial refers to those forces hostile to colonial rule.

²³⁸ The age of decolonization that began in the aftermath of the Second World War saw the emergence of African nations as full-fledged sovereign members of the international community. These political victories challenged the notion of White and European superiority and emboldened young activists throughout the African diaspora to imagine new possibilities for their own freedom struggles.

and anti-racism coalesced.²³⁹ But anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism had been longstanding features of political discourse in the United States going back to the 19th century.²⁴⁰

As historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has noted, African American and other racialized minorities in the US have tended to offer the most trenchant critiques of its imperialist projects and have “insisted on the broad principle of the right to self-determination.”²⁴¹ Wrote one 19th century African American observer scanning the contemporary scene, “it is a sorry, though true, fact that whatever the [US] government controls, injustice to the dark race prevails. The people of Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and Manila know it as well as do the wronged Indian and outraged black man in the United States.”²⁴² In the 1890s, some critics of US imperialist adventures were troubled by the apparent reconciliation between the “White North” and the “White South,” and their ability to dispense with their historical enmity, marshal their collective forces and rally around the racist nationalist cause of the USA’s project in the Philippines and the former Spanish colonies. They understood that US foreign policy had implications for life on the Home Front. The editor of the *Norfolk Recorder* wrote in the summer of 1898: “The closer the North and South get together by this war, the harder [the Negro] will have to fight to maintain footing.”²⁴³

Crusading African American Journalist Ida B. Wells writing in the 1890s when “Jim Crow” was consolidating and the gains of Reconstruction had largely been lost, suggested that the US had no business engaging in empire building projects in Cuba and the Philippines, when

²³⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

²⁴⁰ Irish nationalist Bourke Cochran once posed a question on the floor of the US Senate: “Is it part of the principles of our free independent government to proceed to civilize a weaker people by first shooting and then robbing them?” Quoted in, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign People at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 248.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

it had proven itself unable and seemingly unwilling to protect its own African American citizenry from the horrors of White supremacist terrorism. Wells was anticipating the blistering critique SNCC would make in the 1960s of the US War in Vietnam, and the Johnson administration's inability to protect civil rights workers fighting for democracy and liberal values in the South.

The *Chicago Broad Ax (1899-1931)*, a Black progressive weekly newspaper, articulated the disgust anti-imperialist African Americans felt about the idea of fighting on the side of White supremacist "Uncle Sam" as it sought more foreign territory to dominate and control. "We would rather be called traitors than permit ourselves to shoulder a musket for the purpose of deliberately murdering Filipinos who are fighting for liberty and independence."²⁴⁴ John Mitchell, editor of the *Richmond Planet* added, "With the government acquiescing in the oppression and butchery of a dark race in this country and the enslaving and slaughtering of a dark race in the Philippines, we think it time to call all the missionaries home and have them work on our own people."²⁴⁵

In 1900 a group of Black Democrats under the banner of the Negro National Democratic League made an anti-imperialist statement and proclaimed their solidarity with marginalized people everywhere: "We insist that the subjugation of any people is criminal aggression. Whether the people who will be affected by such a policy be or consider themselves Negroes, nor yet because the majority of them are black, is of but little moment. They are by nature entitled to liberty and freedom. We being of the oppressed people ... should be the loudest in our

²⁴⁴ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 250.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

protestations against the oppression of others.”²⁴⁶ Echoes of these anti-imperialist sentiments would continue to be heard in Black America decades later.

In a speech honouring the centenary of W.E.B. Du Bois’ birth in February 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. noted Du Bois’ recognition of the links between Black Americans and Africa, the land of their forbearers, “thus alarming imperialists in all countries and disconcerting Negro moderates in America who were afraid of his Black genius.”²⁴⁷ King added that were Du Bois alive, he would “readily see the parallel between American support of the corrupt and despised Thieu-Ky regime (in South Vietnam) and northern support for the Southern slave masters in 1876.”²⁴⁸ The anti-colonial activists of the 1940s had insisted in engaging in what Penny Von Eschen has called, “a struggle of memory against forgetting.”²⁴⁹ They believed Americans must develop the “moral imagination to create a genuinely democratic world,” and their ability to do so “depended on remembering and bearing witness to the enslavement of Africans, the exploitation of colonial peoples, and the development of racial capitalism.”²⁵⁰

American civil rights leaders who came of age in the 1930s were deeply affected by Ethiopia’s struggle for survival against Benito Mussolini’s army of Italian invaders. The spectre of a marauding European power bullying its way into African territory and imposing its will on the people of an independent Black African nation was distressing to many members of the

²⁴⁶ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 251. The US intervened in Santo Domingo in 1904, sent a commission there in 1908 and set up a military government in 1916. The US occupied Haiti in 1915 during the administration of Woodrow Wilson “to help the Haitian people and prevent them from being exploited by irresponsible revolutionists.” While there, they generally disrespected the country’s inhabitants and ignored the country’s tradition of governance and its constitution. The US army remained as an occupying force in Haiti until August 1, 1934.

²⁴⁷ Martin Luther King Jr. “Honouring Dr. Du Bois” in *The Radical King* edited by Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 115.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴⁹ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 189.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The term *racial capitalism* is a concept that was developed by the African American political theorist Cedric Robinson and refers to the process of extracting value from an individual based on their racial identity. Robinson contended that Marxism had failed to account for the racial character of capitalism. To Robinson, capitalism was racial because racialism had been endemic in Western feudal society. See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983), 3.

global African diaspora for whom Ethiopia was a spiritual center and a beacon of hope and resistance.²⁵¹ The Italo-Ethiopian war that began in October 1935 became a galvanizing event for a generation of Black Americans. It put their struggle for racial justice into international perspective while heightening their anti-colonial and anti-imperialist consciousness. The desecration of Ethiopia's territory by a European power was regarded as an affront to Black people everywhere.²⁵² In 1943, the Black American journalist Roi Ottley underlined the conflict's significance when he stated, "I know of no other event in recent times that has stirred the rank-and-file Negroes more than the Italo-Ethiopian War."²⁵³ As African American historian John Hope Franklin remarked, following Italy's invasion, "almost overnight even the most provincial among Negro Americans became international minded."²⁵⁴ The conflict reinforced a burgeoning sense of Pan-Africanism among the Black American masses that had been inspired, most notably, by Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born Harlem-based founder and leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Ethiopia and Liberia were the only two nations in Africa that had successfully resisted European colonization during the "Scramble for Africa." This intense period of partition involved the invasion, occupation, and division of much of the continent by seven Western European powers between 1881-1914. The colonizing countries included Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Although Liberia gained its independence from the United States in 1847, it was still viewed by European nations as an American colony, and thus they did not attempt to capture it during "the Scramble." Whereas just 10 percent of Africa was under European control in 1870, by 1914 fully 90 percent of the continent was dominated by European nations. In 1896 members of the global African diaspora had been captivated by Ethiopia's decisive victory over a marauding Italian invading force at the Battle of Adwa. Ethiopia's triumph at Adwa was greeted with jubilation throughout the diaspora. It became an enduring symbol of Black African power and resistance to colonialism and White supremacy and was the source of great pride and racial hope throughout the international Black world. The Battle of Adwa was as humiliating to the vanquished Italian army in March 1896, as the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam was to the thoroughly beaten French forces in May 1954 in Vietnam. Inspired by the example of Ethiopia, about 100 Black Americans emigrated there in the 1930s.

²⁵² The Italians used chemical weapons, including mustard gas, against military and civilian targets during their assault on Ethiopia. The use of chemical warfare had been banned in the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Italy was a signatory to the international agreement.

²⁵³ Daniel Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 14.

²⁵⁴ James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can be African: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 27.

²⁵⁵ Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

The vibrant Black American press of the era provided extensive coverage of the war. Ethiopia's struggle to maintain its independence in the wake of the Italian onslaught had a profound effect on shaping the worldview of a generation of future civil rights leaders like Ella Baker. Baker's ideas about the racism endemic in the Vietnam War of the 1960s were informed by her understanding of Italy's pillaging of Ethiopia thirty years earlier.²⁵⁶ She organized SNCC's founding conference at her alma mater (Shaw University) in April 1960 and would become, arguably, the most significant influence on a generation of SNCC's most prominent activists, who would come to form the backbone of African American opposition to the American War in Vietnam.²⁵⁷

The North Carolina-born Baker's internationalism had been shaped by her political activism in her adopted hometown of New York City throughout the 1930s. In 1932, Baker was working as a reporter for the *West Indian News and* immersing herself in Caribbean culture and politics. When England sent troops to the West Indies to quell a strike by oil workers in January 1937 in the then British colony of Trinidad and Tobago, she expressed her solidarity with the workers.²⁵⁸ In October 1935, when Mussolini sent an army of 200,000 troops to annex Ethiopia, Baker joined the international campaign opposing the invasion. She participated in demonstrations, attended meetings, and handed out petitions as part of the American League against War and Fascism.²⁵⁹ On August 3, 1935, the League organized a march in solidarity with the people of Ethiopia, and against an Italian invasion. About 25,000 people walked through

²⁵⁶ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 100.

²⁵⁷ Ella Baker was widely acknowledged as being the Godmother of SNCC. She was a trusted advisor, teacher, and treasured mentor to a generation of future leaders like Bob Moses, Diane Nash, Stokely Carmichael, Julian Bond and Bernice Johnson Reagon. Her ideas about group-centered leadership, organization and the need for democratic social change were foundational for the group and would go on to influence the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s as exemplified by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) which championed participatory democracy.

²⁵⁸ Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 98.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the streets of Harlem during the action. Barbara Ransby, Baker's biographer, surmises that the pioneering activist and community organizer may have been even more engaged in efforts to support Ethiopia than documents suggest, as she had a close relationship with one of the leaders of the Ethiopian aid campaign, Reverend William Lloyd Imes.²⁶⁰ At the time, Ethiopia was top of mind for the leading civil rights organization of the era.

In March 1935, the NAACP urged then US Secretary of State Cordell Hull to preserve Ethiopia's independence and insist that Italy cease its attempts to invade the country. At its annual conference in late June, the NAACP passed a resolution condemning Italian aggression and calling on the US President and the State Department to denounce the Italian government's actions.²⁶¹ In the end, the NAACP's lobbying of both the Roosevelt administration and the League of Nations proved futile. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia was launched on October 3, 1935.²⁶² While many African Americans were deeply troubled by the Italian aggression, not all felt it was of significance to Black America. In mid-July, the *Pittsburgh Courier* said in an editorial that rather than sending funds to support the Ethiopian war effort, Black Americans ought to keep their money at home. "Aframerica has a war on its own hands ... a war against discrimination, segregation, disfranchisement, illiteracy, ignorance, shiftlessness, peonage, ruthless exploitation, bad housing, and bad health. It needs ever dollar it can spare on this war right here."²⁶³

The *Chicago Defender* echoed the *Pittsburgh Courier's* concerns about Black Americans becoming entangled in Ethiopian affairs. In an editorial entitled "Why Go to Ethiopia?", it admonished young African Americans for contemplating volunteering to fight in the foreign war.

²⁶⁰ Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 98.

²⁶¹ Meriwether, *Proudly We Can be African*, 36.

²⁶² The Italo-Ethiopian War lasted until February 1937 during which time Italian troops captured Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. Guerrilla fighting persisted until 1940. Italian troops would occupy Ethiopia until November 1941.

²⁶³ "Helping Ethiopia," Editorial, *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 20, 1935, 10.

“GO to Ethiopia? Why not fight at home? Is there not enough here to fight for. Why don’t you fight lynchings, peonage, bastardy, discrimination, segregation? Why don’t you fight for jobs to which you are entitled? Why don’t you fight for your own independence? If you have money to spend ... If you have the desire to fight ... Why not dedicate both to the task of making America safe for Americans? Yes, you MUST think of Ethiopia. You must be world minded. You MUST realize that you have kinship with all peoples of the world—but above all, you MUST FIGHT to correct evils at home. Think this over young men and women of America.”²⁶⁴

For two of Black America’s most influential newspapers, the Italo-Ethiopian war was a distraction that only served to divert attention from the harsh reality of Black life in the United States. To both broadsheets, focusing on the needs of Ethiopians, who lived thousands of miles away from the US mainland, would do little to advance the cause of justice and equality for Black Americans. Their core argument was that Black Americans must look after themselves first. The Ethiopian cause resonated though with millions of Black Americans, particularly those of the working-class, many of whom had been influenced by Marcus Garvey.²⁶⁵ These Black Americans felt let down by the less than robust positions taken by much of the moderate Black leadership about the war in Ethiopia. One supporter of the NAACP asked why the leaders “remain idle and let the golden opportunity pass to regain our black kingdom ... I ask you in the name of God, why can’t we fight and win one war for ourselves? Think of the wars we have won for the white race.”²⁶⁶

Responding to overwhelming public pressure, the *Pittsburgh Courier* eventually shifted its position on Ethiopia, as did the *Chicago Defender*. The *Courier* took a notably more pan-Africanist stance emphasizing that Ethiopia was the last “truly independent, Black-ruled nation

²⁶⁴ “Why Go to Ethiopia?” Editorial, *Chicago Defender*, July 27, 1935, 1.

²⁶⁵ Marcus Garvey often used the term “Ethiopia” to refer to continental Africa.

²⁶⁶ Meriwether, *Proudly We Can be African*, 43.

in Africa and calling on the global African diaspora to support it.²⁶⁷ The circulation for both papers shot up.²⁶⁸ During the Italo-Ethiopian war there was a surge in interest in contemporary Africa and a rise in Pan-African commitment. The war served to heighten the consciousness and interest that African Americans had in international affairs and served notice to Black American leaders that their communities were engaged with and concerned about matters beyond their borders.

While Ella Baker was dedicated to self-determination and the “racial uplift” of Black people everywhere, she rejected the racial separatism advocated by Garvey, and was instead, like Du Bois, committed to building coalitions across race lines with other marginalized people.²⁶⁹ In an unpublished essay written in 1940 Baker stated: “The Negro’s future will be determined by his own efforts... While we are tugging at our own bootstraps. We must realize that our interests are more often than not identical to that of others. We must recognize the identity of interests and work with other groups.”²⁷⁰ Nearly thirty years later in 1968 she noted that “the logical groups for the Black masses to coalesce with would be the impoverished whites, the mis-represented and impoverished Indians, and the alienated Mexican Americans. These are the natural allies in my book.”²⁷¹ Baker was also later involved in the Puerto Rican solidarity movement and struggle against colonialism in Africa. Despite never having traveled outside of the US, Ella Baker was an avowed internationalist who had an expansive vision of politics and human rights.

²⁶⁷ Meriwether, *Proudly We Can be African*, 43.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 44. “When the *Courier* sent Joel Rogers to Ethiopia as a war correspondent, circulation shot up 25,000. When Rogers received an exclusive interview with Selassie, the issues sold an additional 25,000 copies.”

²⁶⁹ Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 99.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 100.

In August 1946, African American sociologist St. Clair Drake wrote in the *Pittsburgh Courier*; that African Americans had long understood “India’s fight as an integral part of the struggle everywhere against white imperialism and political domination.”²⁷² Anti-colonialism and colored cosmopolitanism connected Black and South Asian freedom struggles. Martin Luther King Jr. later affirmed that connection when he stated that “the strongest common cause of minority and colonial bond of fraternity was the peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism.”²⁷³

The relationship between South Asians and African Americans had spanned generations. Beginning in the 19th century they forged transnational alliances and often shared similar anti-racist and anti-imperialist conceptions of freedom. Booker T. Washington was a source of inspiration for many Indians, including a young Mohandas Gandhi, who was drawn to his views on “self-help and group uplift.”²⁷⁴ Washington’s work was translated into several South Asian languages including Malayalam, Marathi, Urdu, Gujurati and Hindi.²⁷⁵ While Gandhi had great respect and admiration for Washington’s individual achievements, he still retained anti-Black views and identified “Negroes” as less civilized than Indians.²⁷⁶

Marcus Garvey often identified the Indian struggle as being one of many anti-colonial struggles that were part of the racial restructuring of the world. Garvey stated in August 1920, “The world is reorganizing, the world is reconstructing itself. And in this reconstruction Ireland is striking out for freedom; Egypt is striking out for freedom; India is striking out for freedom

²⁷² Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 161.

²⁷³ Martin Luther King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi”, Quoted in King Papers, vol. V, 11.

²⁷⁴ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 23. Gandhi’s given name was Mohandas. The honorific Mahatma, meaning great-souled, esteemed, or venerable, was first applied to him in 1914 in South Africa, and has since become the way most refer to him.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* The irony, of course, is that Booker T. Washington regarded Christianity and Western education as the summa summarum (the highest of the high) and would himself have considered India to be part of the world’s “uncivilized regions.”

and the Negroes of the world shall do no less than strike out also for freedom.”²⁷⁷ Garvey often acknowledged Gandhi in his speeches and writings, and pledged the support of the “Negroes of the World” to his cause.²⁷⁸ In 1921 Garvey sent a telegram to Gandhi: “Please accept best wishes of 400,000,000 Negroes through us their representatives, for the speedy emancipation of India from the thralldom of foreign oppression.”²⁷⁹

Garvey’s political nemesis, W.E.B. Du Bois, also established deep connections with Indians and their institutions. Though he would never set foot in India, Du Bois “contributed as much as any other individual to forging solidarity between Indians and African Americans.”²⁸⁰ He formed a strong and enduring relationship with the Indian anti-colonial activist Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the most ardent critics of British imperialism.²⁸¹ The two corresponded and exchanged books regularly.²⁸²

Amongst African Americans and Indians there was mutual admiration for and interest in their respective freedom struggles. Members of the two diverse national communities formed networks that enabled them to stay in dialogue. In August 1921, *The Crisis* (Du Bois was its editor), reprinted an open letter that Gandhi had written to the British people. The following year, *The Crisis* published an article by Syad Hossain in which the author declared that “India must be free.”²⁸³ In October 1925, Du Bois contributed “a short note” to a special edition of *Chand*, a Hindi magazine, in which he outlined the struggles of the “Negro” in America while expressing solidarity with Indians in their pursuit of freedom and independence.²⁸⁴ Earlier that year in June

²⁷⁷ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 48.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸² Lajpat Rai lived in the United States for five years, circa. 1911-1916, during which time he befriended two of the NAACP’s founders, Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard.

²⁸³ *The Crisis* 2, August 1921.

²⁸⁴ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 74.

1925 Du Bois had published two letters from India in his magazine *The Crisis*, both of which expressed solidarity with the African American struggle. The first letter from Abdur Raof Malik from Gujranwala, conveyed the depth of feeling and respect that many Indians had for the plight of African Americans. “The struggle for honorable existence that the American Negroes are now in is one of the great democratic movements of the modern world. We ourselves being sufferers from the oppression[of] alien rulers naturally view the struggle of Negroes with great sympathy.”²⁸⁵

The second letter, written by author and editor Benarsidas Chaturvedi, spoke to the need for transnational collaboration and a colored cosmopolitanism: “The different colored peoples and more especially the Indians and the American Negroes must get into touch and cooperation with each other. I need not tell you that we feel as strongly on colour problems as the people of your race.”²⁸⁶ African Americans had long been inspired by the Indian struggle for independence from British colonial rule.²⁸⁷ As Von Eschen notes, Black American political consciousness was significantly affected by the refusal of Indian leaders to support Britain in the Second World War without an immediate guarantee of independence.²⁸⁸ A *Pittsburgh Courier* editorial asserted that Gandhi had “served notice on the British overlords that freedom for India must come before any co-operation to help England win the war against Germany.”²⁸⁹ The *Courier* reported that in a 1942 survey of 10,000 Black Americans 87.8 percent responded “yes” to the question: “Do you believe India should continue to contend for her rights and her liberty

²⁸⁵ Du Bois, “The Outer Pocket,” *The Crisis* 30, no.5 (June 1925).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁸⁷ South Asian activists who visited United States often expressed solidarity with the civil rights struggle. In 1958, Kaka Kalekar, an associate of Gandhi, travelled to Montgomery, Alabama. Indian newspapers and magazines often offered regular sympathetic coverage of the Civil Rights Movement.

²⁸⁸ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 28.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

now?”²⁹⁰ In September 1942 4,000 people attended a Council on African Affairs (CAA) - sponsored rally for “The Cause of Free India.”²⁹¹ Speakers included Paul Robeson and then New York City Council Member Adam Clayton Powell Jr. At the American Federation of Labor’s 1942 convention, A. Philip Randolph, leader of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, also advocated on behalf of Indian independence. The NAACP’s Walter White lobbied President Franklin Roosevelt and the US State Department, urging the government to intervene in the increasingly fractious conflict between Indian nationalists and the British. African Americans who supported the Indian cause did not do so for reasons of mere “color politics,” but rather because they had an anti-imperialist vision of democracy that extended far beyond their borders.²⁹² A *Chicago Defender* editorial stated “together we say with the millions of the Indian people ... We are entirely opposed to Nazism (and Fascism) but we are also opposed to imperialism with which we have had (and are still having) bitter experience ourselves and which crushes our growth and exploits us.”²⁹³

In the 1940s African American civil rights activists consciously employed Gandhian techniques in their struggle against racial discrimination. They were particularly inspired by Gandhi’s nonviolent civil disobedience (Satyagraha). As Nico Slate suggests, Gandhi was revered not just as a prophet of nonviolence but as “a colored” leader who had successfully employed “radical techniques of mass protest and confrontation” to challenge White racism.²⁹⁴ Gandhi was more than just a symbol of non-violence, he was a model of principled resistance to imperial domination in the great struggle for Indian independence. Gandhi himself had, in fact, borrowed many of his ideas about civil disobedience from American abolitionists like Henry

²⁹⁰ Von Eschen, 28.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid., 30.

²⁹³ Ibid., 31.

²⁹⁴ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 203.

David Thoreau.²⁹⁵ The anti-slavery activism of 19th century Americans circled the world and returned to SNCC activists in the 1960s, who came to see Gandhi as someone who understood the power of grassroots mobilization against racism.

Martin Luther King's commitment to non-violence was manifested most prominently in his anti-militarism, particularly regarding the War in Vietnam. But even before it became evident the United States was engaged in the Southeast Asian conflict, King staked out his commitment to the practice of passive resistance. In 1958, he published an article in the *Hindustan Times*. "If we fail on an international scale, to follow the Gandhian principle of non-violence, we may end up destroying ourselves through the misuse of our own instruments. The choice is no longer between violence and non-violence. It is now either non-violence or non-existence."²⁹⁶ King always acknowledged Gandhi's profound and formative influence on his thinking. Gandhi had advocated using passive resistance and civil disobedience as a means of resisting the unjust laws of a "slave state," which involved the withdrawal of one's cooperation with the state.²⁹⁷

Remember that ours is a non-violent struggle. It pre-supposes humility. It is a truthful struggle and consciousness of truth should give us firmness. We are not out to destroy men. We own no enemy. We have no ill-will against a single soul on earth. We mean to convert by our suffering. I do not despair of converting the hardest hearted or the most selfish Englishman. Every opportunity of meeting him is, therefore, welcome to me.²⁹⁸

On February 2, 1959, the day before leaving on his first and only trip to India, King declared: "This is the great hour for the Negro and the other colored peoples of the world."²⁹⁹ King recognized his journey to India as having both symbolic and material force. It was an

²⁹⁵ In his 1849 antebellum tract *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau would write, "All men recognize the right of revolution; that is the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable."

²⁹⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., "His Influence Speaks to World Conscience", *Hindustan Times*, January 30, 1958.

²⁹⁷ Gandhi's wrote in *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, "I wish I could persuade everybody that civil disobedience is the inherent right of the citizen."

²⁹⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1961)169.

²⁹⁹ Martin Luther King speaking on February 2,1959, King Papers, vol V, 120-125.

opportunity to forge alliances and build networks that could prove vital in the ongoing struggle for freedom.

India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had close personal relationships with some notable African American figures including W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Eslanda Robeson. "Nehru," according to Nico Slate, "would eventually become the most prominent and among the most ardent of Indian supporters of African American struggles."³⁰⁰ He was considered a trusted and reliable friend of Black America and was presented with a life membership in the NAACP.³⁰¹ On the other hand, though, St. Clair Drake has suggested there was reason to be skeptical about the professed widespread solidarity Indians had demonstrated for Black Africans and Black Americans. He argues that "Indian students in the United States had a tendency to shun Negroes as though they were lepers," adding that when "Gandhi and Nehru support the fight against Jim Crow of Indians in Africa, but fail to speak out against the terrible exploitation of Negro native there (some of it by Indians) ... we have reason to fear for the future."³⁰² Drake's message then was to urge observers of the Indian/African American relationship to be aware of potential racial blind spots afflicting various actors and to always to remain, critical, vigilant and thorough in one's analysis.

There is irony, of course, that the United States of America emerged from its own revolt against British colonial mastery in the 18th century. The American Revolution was the first successful rebellion against a colonial power in modern history, and thus served as an example for the world. Through the centuries, the country's leaders had maintained an official ideological commitment to anticolonialism, even during their own imperial engagement with the Caribbean and the Philippines. But American imperialism always wrestled with a domestic tradition of anti-

³⁰⁰ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 85.

³⁰¹ "Nehru Presented Life Membership in NAACP" *Atlanta Daily World*, November 11, 1949, 2.

³⁰² Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 161.

imperial dissent.³⁰³ There were questions, though, at the end of World War II as to whether the now Superpower, which presided over a political and social system of entrenched racial inequality within its own borders, could truly be a beacon of liberty and lend its weight to the global decolonization movement. In his annual address to Congress in January 1941, President Roosevelt employed language that suggested the United States still supported anti-colonialism and advocated for the freedom of all peoples, regardless of hue, when he stated: “Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them.”³⁰⁴ He would expand upon those ideas seven months later in August when he met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill off the coast of Newfoundland to hash out a joint declaration of their aims for the postwar world. The Atlantic Charter included among its propositions: no territorial aggrandizement; no territorial changes made against the wished of people (self-determination) restoration of self-government to those deprived of it.

To anti-colonial activists everywhere, the adoption of the Atlantic Charter by Britain and the United States was an opportunity to debate the future of colonies and to challenge the commitments of the major powers to the Charter’s lofty principles. The question was, did this professed commitment to a high-minded conception of freedom and justice apply to some or to all? Would it include both colonizers and the colonized? The rulers and the ruled? Was the restoration of sovereignty, self-government, and national life applicable to the “coloured races of the colonial empire” or just to the United States and the Nations of Europe?”³⁰⁵ British Prime Minister Winston Churchill effectively answered these questions in November 1942 when he said, “We mean to hold our own. I have not become the king’s first minister in order to preside

³⁰³ Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); Ian Tyrell and Jay Sexton *Empire’s Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

³⁰⁴ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *The Four Freedoms Speech*, January 6, 1941.

³⁰⁵ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 26.

over the liquidation of the British Empire.”³⁰⁶ Churchill insistence that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to colonial subjects seemed to put him at odds with President Roosevelt. African American activists led by Walter White and the NAACP lobbied the White House hoping that this would push the president to bring his great influence to bear and do everything in his power to ensure that the Charter applied to all people. White was adamant that if the Atlantic Charter’s principles were not implemented, it would betray the hypocrisy, cynicism, and racism of the major powers.³⁰⁷

At the beginning of World War II, the United States had 155 African American newspapers which contributed to a growing interest in international affairs in the Black community.³⁰⁸ As the Second World War unfolded, African American political discourse increasingly tried to locate the oppression that Black Americans faced domestically within a global economic context. Another *Chicago Defender* editorial from 1942 connected the oppression of Black Americans and Indians, stating that “Negro America” was as much a victim of American imperialism, greed, terror, and rapacity” as India was the victim of British imperialism.”³⁰⁹

A sizable number of African Americans had concluded that their fate was inextricably linked to the lives and struggles of other colonized, marginalized, and oppressed peoples. The African American sociologist Horace Cayton, writing in 1943, argued that with an outlook gained “through an identification with the exploited peoples of the world...the Negro had placed his problems in a new and larger frame of reference and related them to world forces.”³¹⁰ Edgar

³⁰⁶ Von Eschen, 26.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty.*, 47.

³⁰⁹ “British Hypocrisy and the Atlantic Charter and India,” *Chicago Defender*, August 22, 1942.

³¹⁰ Horace R. Cayton, “An Awakening: The Negro Now Fights for Democratic Rights of All the World’s Peoples,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 27, 1943, 14.

T. Rouzeau, a columnist for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, speculated that the liberation of African Americans might depend on their Indian sisters and brothers. “India’s fate,” he wrote, “may well decide the future of the Black American.”³¹¹ The *Chicago Defender* raised the stakes, insisting that “if India’s cry for freedom is smothered, the position of the Negro people the world over will become increasingly precarious.”³¹² As the Second World War wore on, the head of the NAACP, Walter White, issued a warning to Roosevelt and Churchill, proclaiming that if the problem of the colour line was not solved, “the colored peoples of India, China, Burma, Africa, the West Indies, the United States and other parts of the world will continue to view skeptically assertions that this is a war for freedom and equality.” He added that “the failure to solve this problem will inevitably mean other wars, caused by “the continuation of White imperialist exploitation of coloured people.”³¹³

The trailblazing Black civil rights activist, feminist, and lawyer Pauli Murray also tried to bring the Indian and African American struggles together. Her objective was to use Gandhi’s method and apply it to racial injustice in the United States. As a dedicated student of his works, Murray hoped to launch a Gandhian inspired civil disobedience movement in the US.³¹⁴ She was also outspoken in her support for Indian self-determination. In a letter that she sent to the *New York Herald Tribune* just after the “Quit India Movement” began, Murray proclaimed her support for Indian independence writing, “13,000,0000 of our own Negro citizens” and every “outstanding Negro leader” were intensely interested in how the United Nations handle the Indian question.”³¹⁵ On September 4 ,1942, Murray once again expressed the solidarity of the

³¹¹ Edgar T. Rouzeau, “An Independent India Would Help Black America Get Rights: Fate of India Closely Related to Struggles of Negroes for Enjoyment of Democratic Rights in America,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 4, 1942, 14.

³¹² “British Hypocrisy” and “The Atlantic Charter and India,” *Chicago Defender*, August 22, 1942.

³¹³ “F.D.R., Churchill Asked to Consider Color Problems,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 28, 1943, 9.

³¹⁴ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 206.

³¹⁵ *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 218.

colored world with its Indian sisters and brothers in an article published in *The Call*, the newspaper of the Socialist Party: “The eyes of the colored peoples of the world, including our own national minority of Negroes are fixed upon India today.”³¹⁶

James Farmer, one of the co-founders of the Committee of Racial Equality (later called the Congress of Racial Equality or CORE) and the organizer of the First Freedom Ride, was also influenced by Gandhi, and tried to employ Gandhian tactics in the struggle against racial segregation. Beginning in 1942, CORE became the US American organization that sought to translate Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent resistance or satyagraha (soul force) into the American context.

A. Philip Randolph also utilized Gandhian tactics for his organization, the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), modeling its disobedience campaign on Gandhi’s. Randolph wanted to emulate Gandhi’s success in mobilizing the masses. He expressed his dedication to the cause of Indian independence, which he regarded as a vital component of the global struggle for democracy.³¹⁷ Randolph would often implore his audiences to support the Indian cause, acknowledging that Indians “constitute one of the great oppressed and exploited sections of the darker races of the world.”³¹⁸ In the cause of Indian national independence, they were vital to the stakes for oppressed non-White people everywhere. “Now the darker races are not only fighting for the right to live and the right to be free, they are entering the struggle for power, world power.”³¹⁹

While Du Bois had expressed skepticism about the application of Gandhian civil disobedience in an American context, he too was unequivocal in his support for the Indian

³¹⁶ Ibid., 219.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 217.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 219.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 220.

struggle against colonialism. In addressing his American audience in 1944, Du Bois urged them to “remember we American Negroes are the bound colony of the United States, just as India is of England.”³²⁰ He demonstrated his awareness of the global significance of the Indian struggle: “The greatest colour problem in the world is that of India, with its 389 million colored folk, under the domination of Great Britain.”³²¹

James Lawson, a hugely significant, yet unsung figure of the Civil Rights Movement, was deeply influenced by the work of Mohandas Gandhi. In 1953, just over four years after Gandhi’s assassination, Lawson headed to India to learn from those who had worked alongside the Mahatma during his political struggles, and eventually brought back his learnings to the United States. Lawson befriended Martin Luther King in the wake of the seminal Montgomery bus boycott, and King, recognizing his talent urged him to head South to play a role in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. James Lawson would go on to play a central role as a teacher/mentor in shaping a generation of SNCC activists’ understanding of non-violence. While studying in Nashville he trained a group of remarkable Black college students including Diane Nash, John Lewis, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, and Marion Barry in non-violent civil disobedience. The students studied Gandhi’s teachings and learned about the Indian freedom struggle. John Lewis, one of Lawson’s charges, once gave this advice to protesters in Nashville: “Remember the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, Thoreau and Martin Luther King.”³²² Lawson became the primary tutor of the technique of non-violent action for SNCC and close advisor of Dr. King. For several years he ran workshops for the SCLC on non-violent resistance.

³²⁰ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 219.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC a Generation’s Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 1.

The centrality of anti-imperialism and anti-colonial solidarity to mid-century American Black activism was most clearly seen in the Council of African Affairs (CAA). Founded in 1937 by Paul Robeson, among others, it was the leading US-based anti-colonial and Pan-African organization of its era, a cultural and political grouping that kept the matter of colonial liberation on the US agenda, while maintaining links with both international anti-colonial networks and African liberation groups.³²³ The CAA sought to educate the American public about Africa, was committed to the political liberation of colonized African nations and worked to improve economic and social conditions on the continent. Robeson would be the CAA's chair for most of its existence, but its leaders included W. Alphaeus Hunton, who was appointed to the staff in 1943 and eventually became the organization's executive director, and the ubiquitous Dubois who served as its vice-chair.³²⁴

By the early 1950s, the CAA exemplified a kind of African diasporic consciousness while also espousing anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics. Paul Robeson spoke on behalf of the organization when he asserted in a message to its members and friends that "our fight for Negro rights here is linked inseparably with the liberation movements of the people of the Caribbean and Africa and the colonial world in general."³²⁵ Despite its radical stance, the CAA became the most vital African American organization trying to influence US foreign policy of the era. As Von Eschen has argued, the CAA was at the center of African American opinion on colonialism in the immediate post-War period, when there was a consensus on colonial issues in Black America.

³²³ The Council on African Affairs (CAA) was originally known as the International Committee on African Affairs.
³²⁴ W. Alphaeus Hunton Jr. was born in Atlanta in 1903 where his father W. Alphaues Hunton Sr. was serving as the first Black General Secretary of the Young Christian Men's Association (YMCA). The senior Hunton had been born in southwestern Ontario the son of an escaped slave who had assisted John Brown in his preparation for his abolitionist raid on Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. W. Alphaeus Hunton Sr. had also for a time worked for the YMCA in Canada's capital, Ottawa.

³²⁵ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 20.

Americans were watching as anti-colonial forces gathered in April 1955. The Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, which came to be known simply as the Bandung Conference, was a historic gathering of non-aligned “Third World” nations seeking to reframe and rebalance the international order.³²⁶ The participating countries were committed to national self-determination and refused to subjugate themselves to either the West or East. They were unwilling to passively accept the restrictions of “the Cold War straitjacket” and rejected the hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union. Refusing to be cowed by the world’s two superpowers was easier said than done, but Bandung was a moment of optimism and possibility. It also came only eleven months after the US Supreme Court handed down the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

For some Black Americans, the non-aligned movement provided an opening for a broader conversation about their domestic plight. It was an opportunity to disrupt Cold War orthodoxy, challenge the notion of the US as the world’s singular beacon of freedom and paragon of democracy, and present an alternative vision of global politics. To the African American press, in the wake of the most repressive years of the Cold War, Bandung was a new beginning, “a turning point in world history.” The gathering in Southeast Asia represented a rebuke of White supremacy by the world’s Brown, Yellow and Black races. The *Afro-American* saw the conference as an “undisguised implication” that “the majority of the world’s people think there is an alternative to following blindly the lead of either Russia or the United States.”³²⁷ The maverick African American congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, attended the

³²⁶ The Bandung conference was sponsored by India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia. Neither the US nor the USSR were invited.

³²⁷ “Afro-Asian Conference,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 9, 1955.

1955 Bandung conference, and noted the “worldwide similarities among oppressed peoples.”³²⁸ Likewise, renowned African American novelist Richard Wright was also present for the proceedings, and later wrote an account of what he observed there called *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*.³²⁹ In the weeks prior to the event, he was intrigued at the prospect of attending the historic gathering.³³⁰ Wright wrote about his initial reaction when he first found out the conference would be taking place:

A stream of realizations claimed my mind: these people were ex-colonial subjects, people whom the white West called ‘colored’ peoples ... Almost all of the nations mentioned had been, in some form or other, under the domination of Western Europe: some had been subjected to for a few decades and others had been ruled for three hundred and fifty years ... The despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed- in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. Here were class and racial and religious consciousness on a global scale. Who had thought of organizing such a meeting? And what had these nations in common? Nothing, it seemed to me, but what their past relationship to the Western world had made them feel. This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgement upon the Western world!³³¹

As Von Eschen argues, Bandung represented a kind of vindication for Council of African Affairs leaders and their “support of colonized peoples over bipolar Cold War politics.”³³² The CAA agreed with the proclamation by Indonesia’s President Sukarno that conference participants were “united by a common detestation of colonialism in whatever form it appears, by a common detestation of racialism, and a common determination to preserve and stabilize peace in the world.”³³³ Alphaeus Hunton noted that the “signal contribution of the Asian and

³²⁸ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs 1935-1960*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 252.

³²⁹ Tamara Nopper, “The Illusion of Afro-Asian Solidarity? Situating the 1955 Bandung Conference,” *Black Perspectives* <https://www.aaihs.org/the-illusion-of-afro-asian-solidarity-situating-the-1955-bandung-conference/> June 30, 2015.

³³⁰ As Tamara Nopper notes in her article, “The Illusion of Afro-Asian Solidarity”, two prominent African American radicals, Paul Robeson (actor and singer) and W.E.B. DuBois (scholar and NAACP co- founder), had both wanted to attend the Bandung Conference but their passports were revoked. Richard Wright’s trip, unbeknownst to him, was later revealed to have been financed by the CIA.

³³¹ Nopper, “The Illusion of Afro- Asian Solidarity”.

³³² Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 172.

³³³ Von Eschen, 172.

African conference to the Cold War-weary world” was its demonstration that “it is possible and practicable for Communists, non-Communists and anti-Communists to live together, meet together, speak together and contribute toward the common good of all mankind.”³³⁴ While much has been made of the Asian-African solidarity on display throughout the conference, of the 29 countries that gathered in Bandung to denounce colonialism, racialism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, just six were African: Egypt; Ethiopia; Gold Coast; Liberia; Libya and Sudan. And most Sub-Saharan African countries were absent. In fact, the organizing nations of the conference were all Asian: Indonesia; Pakistan; India; Ceylon (now Sri Lanka); Burma (now Myanmar). The African Americans who attended the conference like Wright and Powell, along with journalists Ethel Payne and Carl Rowan, were there not in an official government capacity, but merely as observers. As Tamara Nopper argues, there was an imbalance of power, prestige, and authority at the conference among the Asian and African regions.³³⁵ They were not operating on the same playing field. Asian nations would retain positions of control and influence over the proceedings of the conference.

In the 1950s, the Nation of Islam (NOI) also provided a site for a Pan African-centred anti-colonial discourse that offered an alternative approach to international politics in a bi-polar Cold War world. One of the Nation’s most charismatic ministers, Malcolm X, became one of the vital internationalist figures in the African American political firmament. As a Black nationalist, “Malcolm” had been attracted to the Elijah Muhammad-led Nation of Islam in part because of its unrepentant anti-American stance. In a Cold War era in which dissenting opinions about American foreign policy were *verboten*, the NOI provided a rare space for an anti-American critique of the Cold War. *Muhammad Speaks*, the Nation of Islam’s influential newspaper,

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Nopper, “The Illusion of Afro-Asian Solidarity”.

became a critical source of information about Africa, the Third World, and anti-colonial movements for its mainly African American readers.

Elijah Muhammad would eventually lay the groundwork for Malcolm X's entry into the world of international diplomacy by initiating correspondence with Egypt's leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. Muhammad sent Nasser a congratulatory note following the successful Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Conference in Cairo that had convened December 26, 1957 to January 1, 1958.³³⁶ This led to the Egyptian government inviting Muhammad to make the hajj in Mecca. In the end Muhammad would send his surrogate instead, Malcolm X, as his envoy. Malcolm arrived in Cairo in July 1959 and quickly began engaging with the heads of "newly liberated Third World nations" establishing a basis for pan-African solidarity between Black Americans and the Middle East.³³⁷ Malcolm emphasized the connections between the oppressed peoples of the Third World and of the United States of America. "The same rebellion, the same impatience, the same anger that exists in the hearts of dark people of Africa and Asia is existing in the hearts and minds of 20 million Black people in this country."³³⁸

Malcolm X made significant connections for the Black American Freedom Movement with anti-imperialist international actors and Third World Liberation movements during his travels to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. He highlighted the link between human rights struggles at home in the United States and abroad, and thus served as an inspirational figure for elements of both the Civil Rights Movement and what would emerge as the Black Power Movement.

³³⁶ Peniel Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 81.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

³³⁸ Peniel Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield*, 122.

The assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the independent Republic of Congo, in January 1961, only months after he had assumed office, sent shockwaves across Africa and around the world. The news resonated deeply with many African Americans, as had the Sharpeville Massacre which had occurred in South Africa in March 1960. The charismatic prime minister was revered as the hero of Congolese independence. He was an ardent Pan-Africanist, who was determined that Congo retain control over its abundant natural resources. Allegations that the United States, Belgium and other Western forces had a hand in his murder, provoked an intense response by African Americans, many of whom were outraged by what they deemed yet another crime of imperialism. They went in numbers to the UN's headquarters in New York to protest Lumumba's death. One of the protestors, the architect and publisher of the radical journal *Liberator*, Daniel Watts, suggested that the Black activists demonstrate in the gallery at the UN Security Council.³³⁹ The spontaneous action at the Security Council session marked the beginning of a significant departure by Negro militants from the old ways of passive, peaceful, largely legalistic protests. To Daniel Watts, at least, this was "a turning point."³⁴⁰ Protesters had included members of groups from a range of Black nationalist organizations like the *Liberation Committee of Africa*, *On Guard*, *the Universal African Legion*, *United Sons and Daughters of Africa*.³⁴¹

Not all Black America was bewitched by Congo's Patrice Lumumba. He was a complex figure. Indeed, due in part to his alleged communist ties and suggestions he had messianic tendencies, he was regarded with a degree of wariness and suspicion in some quarters. It was not

³³⁹ As Brenda Gayle Plummer notes, the demonstration saw more than twenty-four people injured as sixty people stormed the Security Council in what was the most violent protest in UN history. The demonstration also interrupted Adlai Stevenson's inaugural speech as US ambassador to the UN. The incidents were reported in the *New York Times*. "Riot in Gallery Halts U.N. Debate," *New York Times*, February 16, 1961, 1.

³⁴⁰ Richard J. Walton, *Remnants of Power: The Last Tragic Years of Adlai Stevenson* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), 76-77.

³⁴¹ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: Africa Americans in the Era of Decolonization 1956-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 116.

a surprise that mainstream Black leaders, such as the NAACP's Roy Wilkins and Nobel Peace Prize winning diplomat Ralph Bunche, claimed that the protests by Black demonstrators, "didn't represent either the sentiment or the tactics of American Negroes." Bunche denounced the protesters as "hooligans." Yet, despite the utterances of these Black elites, opposition to how the US dealt with the Congo crisis exposed the fissures that existed between the established order of moderate Black authority figures and Black popular public opinion. This moment would be a prelude to the coming Vietnam War. The struggles of decolonization radicalized many of the younger generation of African American activists.

SNCC's internationalism, particularly as it pertained to Africa, was an outgrowth of the extensive social and political networks it developed through grassroots organizing, nurtured on college campuses, and strengthened through international travel and fundraising activity within and beyond the United States.³⁴²

When James Forman became the executive secretary of SNCC in 1961, one of the figures whose internationalism and commitment to Africa helped mold the student-led organization was one of his mentors, the sociologist St. Clair Drake. Forman had first encountered Drake in 1955 as an undergraduate at Roosevelt University in Chicago. At that time in the mid to late 1950s, Drake had recently returned from Africa, and his enthusiasm for the political independence of Ghana and the liberation struggles in Kenya and Algeria "was contagious," according to Forman.³⁴³ Drake encouraged Forman to develop a Pan-African internationalist perspective.³⁴⁴ This bent would eventually inform Forman's work as a SNCC leader, during which time he made determined efforts to forge contacts with African student organizations in the US and on

³⁴² Fanon Che Wilkins, "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa Before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-65" *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 92 No.4, (Autumn, 2007); *New Black Power Studies: National, International and Transnational Perspectives* (Autumn, 2007), 469.

³⁴³ James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries: A Personal Account* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972), 83.

³⁴⁴ St. Clair Drake knew Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's president, independence leader and ardent Pan-Africanist. James Forman was making starting to make the connection between conditions in the US and on the African continent. As the Little Rock crisis became a national one for the Eisenhower administration, Forman noticed the similarities between segregation in the US South and Apartheid in South Africa.

the continent. One of the organizations with which Forman worked closely was the Pan African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA), which was founded in 1961 and brought together continental African student groups from throughout the Americas.³⁴⁵ Forman attended PASOA's Second Annual Central Council Meeting in Columbus, Ohio in 1963 at which conference delegates recognized that the "African revolution is part and parcel of a world popular movement for human dignity and justice" while declaring the need for Afro-Asian solidarity.³⁴⁶ They also asserted their opposition to "all forms of neo-colonialism in Africa, Asia and Latin America."³⁴⁷ Along with his SNCC colleague Stokely Carmichael and other youth leaders from the North, Forman brought to the student movement an unabashed Pan-Africanism that regarded "the American desegregation struggle as the counterpart to Africa's decolonization struggle."³⁴⁸

Forman, like his predecessors in the Civil Rights Movement, connected the domestic struggles of African Americans with those engaged in liberation movements throughout the Third World. He openly noted that they all had the same enemy: White Imperialist America. Forman told the UN Fourth Committee which dealt with colonial issues that African Americans fought against colonialism because "we are in the same box." [Our] "experiences in the United States ... have prepared us to understand the emotional and psychological ordeal of a colonized people."³⁴⁹

SNCC members were at the forefront of the fight in the United States against South Africa's Apartheid regime. In the summer of 1964 in the wake of the Rivonia Trial that resulted

³⁴⁵ Fanon Che Wilkins, 467-490.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 475.

³⁴⁷ Fanon Che Wilkins, 475.

³⁴⁸ St. Clair Drake, "Black Studies and Global Perspectives: An Essay," *Journal of Negro Education* 53:3 (Summer 1984), 229-230.

³⁴⁹ Yohuru R. Williams, "American Exported Black Nationalism: The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, The Black Panther Party and the Worldwide Freedom Struggle, 1967-72," *Negro History Bulletin* 60:3 (July-September 1997), Statement of James Forman, November 7, 1967.

in the conviction of eight South African anti-Apartheid activists including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, SNCC sponsored “a June 4, 1964, picket at the South African consulate in New York, followed by a march to the UN.”³⁵⁰ The defendants were eventually sentenced to life in prison. In the ensuing years SNCC activists continued to organize anti-Apartheid demonstrations. In November 1966, seven SNCC activists were sentenced to five days imprisonment or a \$25.00 fine, after being convicted of resisting arrest and disorderly conduct for taking part in an action in March 1966 at the South African Consulate in New York. As Julia Wood has noted, thanks to their experiences on the African continent, SNCC leaders came to regard the civil rights struggle as being tied to liberation struggles around the world.³⁵¹ John Lewis proclaimed that Black Americans and SNCC “are caught up with a sense of destiny with the vast majority of colored people all over the world who are becoming conscious of their power and the role they must play in the world.”³⁵² Increasingly SNCC activists came to see themselves as being part of a Third World struggle. In fact, for SNCC organizers like Cleveland Sellers, “the Vietnam war solidified his sense that Black Americans were part of the Third World, a colonized people more closely allied with the non-white peoples of Africa, Asia and Vietnam, than they were with White America.”³⁵³ In May of 1966 SNCC established an international wing and called it the International Affairs Commission. The bureau was based in New York, and James Forman became its director. Addressing why he was committed to working on international affairs, Forman said, “I felt that I could inject an anti-imperialist position not only into SNCC, but into the Black movement as a whole.”³⁵⁴ The International Affairs Commission

³⁵⁰ Julia Wood, “Freedom is Indivisible: The Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Cold War politics and International Liberation Movements.” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2011), 250.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 257.

³⁵² Ibid., 258.

³⁵³ Wood, “Freedom is Indivisible,” 273.

³⁵⁴ James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 481.

(IAC) sought to educate African Americans about global liberation movements and develop strategies for SNCC to shine a light on human rights violators around the world.³⁵⁵ The commission brought dignitaries from around the world to the United States to participate in speaking tours like Guyana's former leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan. It also produced position papers on the role of US imperialism abroad. In May 1967, SNCC voted to become a human rights organization that would "encourage and support the liberation struggles of all people against racism, exploitation, and oppression." It adopted a resolution declaring that SNCC was now "working for the liberation not only of Black people in the United States but of all oppressed peoples, especially those in Africa, Asia and Latin America."³⁵⁶

One of the key figures in SNCC's future was undoubtedly Stokely Carmichael. Born in Trinidad in 1941, Carmichael emigrated to New York City with his family when he was 11 years old. As a teenager growing up in Harlem, he was exposed to the writings of leading Pan African figures like George Padmore and CLR James, both of whom were Trinidadian natives. Young Carmichael's anti-colonial sensibilities were also informed by the example of his idol, Paul Robeson. As a high school student in the 1950s, he attended study camps with young Socialists and young Communist groups and became politically engaged.³⁵⁷ While a freshman student at Howard University in 1960, he became an activist in the Nonviolent Action Group, a campus affiliate of SNCC, and subsequently joined the Freedom Rides in 1961. He was jailed that summer in Mississippi's notorious Parchman Penitentiary for his civil rights activities.³⁵⁸ Carmichael officially joined SNCC in 1964 and quickly established himself as one its most

³⁵⁵ Freedom Summer Digital Collection, SAVF-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Social Action vertical file, circa 1930-2002; Archives Main Stacks, Mss 577, Box 47, Folder 13), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/66842>

³⁵⁶ Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 480.

³⁵⁷ Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael {Kwame Ture}* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 557.

³⁵⁸ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 125.

charismatic leaders. By the spring of 1966 he had emerged as SNCC's most recognizable public face. In early May 1966 in a fractious power struggle, the more radical Carmichael, a proponent of the Black Power philosophy and unapologetic advocate of Third World Revolution, replaced SNCC's integrationist chairman John Lewis and assumed leadership of the group. He denounced the Vietnam War as "a racist, imperialistic affair."³⁵⁹ Carmichael's rhetoric captivated young African Americans, but irritated and alienated the civil rights establishment. While still in his mid-twenties the dynamic and effervescent Carmichael became a kind of roving ambassador and emissary for the radical anti-imperialist wing of the Black Freedom Movement. He spent exclusive time with three revolutionary leaders that he admired: at a party Congress in Guinea with Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah; in the Sierra Maestra mountains with Cuba's Fidel Castro; and for lunch at the Hanoi residence of North Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Van Dong with Ho Chi Minh.³⁶⁰ "Ho Chi Minh was a great man," Carmichael would later recount. "He had a real appreciation of our struggle in America."³⁶¹ Reflecting on his trip to North Vietnam at the height of the war, Carmichael remarked: "I was extremely honored. Extremely honored at the opportunity to represent our people's struggle in Vietnam. The Vietnamese showed us every consideration and respect. I realized then that there was no other honorable choice. My duty was to remain faithful to them in their just struggle, and to encourage my people to do so. I vowed never to waver or compromise in my efforts to expose American imperialism's criminal war against those people."³⁶² Carmichael was not the only member of the Black freedom movement for whom international travel was transformational.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

³⁶⁰ Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution*, 586, 601.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 601.

³⁶² Ibid.

The trip for me was a culmination of my life in several ways. Africa was a black continent; as our homeland, it had always been on my mind. I had also dreamed for years of helping to build an organization to achieve political power in the United States and then to relate it with one or more African countries for common revolutionary purposes.³⁶³

James Forman

In September 1964, a SNCC delegation of eleven members, including its chairman John Lewis, James Forman, Prathia Hall, Julian Bond, Dona Richards, Bob Moses, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Donald Harris and Fannie Lou Hamer, travelled to Africa for the first time.³⁶⁴ The journey to Guinea was the initiative of entertainer/activist Harry Belafonte who had bankrolled it because he felt SNCC members needed a break following several months of intense, exhausting activity that had included: the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project; the unsuccessful attempt to unseat the all-White delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City; and the brutal murders of three of their fellow civil rights workers. The journey was a revelation for the SNCC activists and helped to shift their consciousness. It allowed many of them, who were travelling abroad for the first time, to see the United States from a different perspective.³⁶⁵ As Fannie Lou Hamer put it, “I saw black men flying airplanes, driving buses, sitting behind big desks in the bank and just doing everything that I was used to seeing white people do.”³⁶⁶ Particularly for the women on the trip, travelling to Guinea gave them a greater sense of self-worth, pride and allowed them to “reconceptualize their Black identity” and Africaness. They “experienced a growing sense of identity that was rooted in one’s Blackness, one’s dark skin, one’s kin identify themselves as part of a Pan-African community, and they came to recognize their civil rights and human rights struggle in the United States as being part

³⁶³ Ibid., 410-411.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 406.

³⁶⁵ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 134.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 134.

of a wider global struggle for justice. The trip produced “the internationalization of the SNCC contingent that traveled to Guinea and linked them to a worldwide movement and community.”³⁶⁷

While their SNCC comrades immediately returned home following their stay in Guinea, John Lewis and Donald Harris stayed for several more weeks in Africa, spending time in Liberia, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Egypt. During their sojourn they met with “African nationalist groups and political parties.”³⁶⁸ The trip was a productive one and in the ensuing months and years, led to an increase in SNCC’s “transnational activities” and greater engagement with “developing African nations and national liberation movements” around the world.³⁶⁹ At a staff meeting in February 1965, SNCC leader John Lewis said that the struggle for liberation in Africa and the United States “is one and the same.” He added: “it is a struggle against a vicious and evil system that is controlled and kept in order for a few White men throughout the world ... We are caught up with a sense of destiny ... with the vast majority of coloured people all over the world who are becoming conscious of their power and the role they must play in the world.”³⁷⁰

National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) member Vivian Beamon also noted:

“Independence in Africa jolted the American Negro and helped stimulate our civil rights movement which in turn has helped stimulate civil rights movements in Southern Rhodesia, Mozambique and South Africa.”³⁷¹

African American radicals of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were also captivated by the historic revolutionary achievement of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party. They noted that it was “Chinese peasants, as opposed to the European proletariat” who had launched

³⁶⁷ Carson., 227.

³⁶⁸ Fanon Che Wilkins, 482.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 483.

³⁷⁰ John Lewis paper presented at a February 1965 staff meeting, SNCC Papers, Chair Files, reel 2.

³⁷¹ Plummer, *In Search of Power*, 86.

“a successful” socialist revolution that had shown the way for the Third World.³⁷² The result was the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, and in the ensuing years China had managed to create a unique position for itself on the world stage that distinguished it from either the Soviet Union or the United States.

One of the Black Americans who had been inspired by China’s emancipatory project was Vicki Garvin, a former Communist Party member, dedicated Pan Africanist, and self-described working-class internationalist. Born in 1915, she grew up in a working-class family in New York City. As a teenager she worked with Adam Clayton Powell to secure better paying jobs for Black workers.³⁷³ She attended Hunter College and later Smith College for graduate school, where she was heavily influenced by Marxist economics. She eventually became a union organizer, National Research Director for the United Office and Professional Workers of America, and a founding member of the National Negro Labor Council and Paul Robeson’s newspaper *FREEDOM*. While living in New York, she became close to Malcolm X and helped to organize part of his tour to Africa. In early 1961, after becoming demoralized with McCarthyism and disillusioned with the future of left politics, Garvin moved to West Africa, first to Lagos, Nigeria and then to Accra, Ghana which at the time had become a magnet for African American intellectuals.³⁷⁴ After living for two years in two newly independent African states, Garvin had concluded that while “Black was still beautiful, the masses [still] did not have power.” It was evident to her that “capitalism was still undermining African liberation.³⁷⁵

³⁷² Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (New York: Beacon Press, 2003), 68.

³⁷³ Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution” *SOULS* 1. (4) (6-41)13.

³⁷⁴ Some of the African American intellectuals who called Accra, Ghana home in the 1960s included writer/poet/artist Maya Angelou, novelist Julian Mayfield, literary giant W.E.B. Du Bois, writer Shirley Graham Du Bois, cartoonist Ollie Harrington and artist Tom Feelings. When Malcom X visited Accra in 1964 Garvin, who had established a friendship with him during her time in New York, accompanied him to his meetings with foreign diplomats from Cuba and Algeria.

³⁷⁵ Robeson Taj Frazier, *The East is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 163.

In 1964, Garvin relocated once again, this time to China where she began working as an English teacher at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute.³⁷⁶ She taught African American history and the politics of Black resistance.³⁷⁷ She noted that “the Negro liberation movement is an important part of the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle.” Garvin saw parallels between the Vietnamese struggle for self-determination against the US and the struggle of Black Americans for liberation on the home front. She stated that “whereas internationally Vietnam represents the Achilles heel of America’s vulnerable foreign policy today, the Negro question is its counterpart domestically.”³⁷⁸

Garvin tried to relate to her students the connections between the struggles of American and Chinese women, while helping them recognize the very particular gender, class and race oppression faced by Black women.³⁷⁹ She also discussed how “discourses of female inferiority and practices of male supremacy” functioned in both Communist China and Capitalist USA.³⁸⁰ She noted that patriarchy, male chauvinism, and gender imbalances persisted in both societies. While she would eventually find herself becoming critical of Mao and the cult of personality that surrounded him, she maintained her regard for the progress being made in the country. During her six years in China, Garvin helped to “build bridges “between the Black freedom struggle, African independence movements, and the Chinese Revolution.”³⁸¹

Garvin was certainly not the only Black woman committed to transcending borders and building Third World global anti- imperialist solidarity networks. Claudia Jones was another, an important Communist leader and theoretician. Born in Trinidad in 1915, she immigrated to the

³⁷⁶ Kelley and Esch, 13.

³⁷⁷ Frazier, 172.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 175.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 178.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 177.

³⁸¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 65.

US with her family when she was eight and grew up in Harlem, the epicenter of Black internationalism in the United States. She joined the Communist Party in 1936 and became a powerful public speaker, skilled writer, organizer and activist. Because of her membership in the party, Jones was charged in 1953 at the height of McCarthyism under the Smith Act, which made it a crime to “advocate, abet, advise, or teach the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing the Government of the United States.”³⁸² She was sent to jail for a year and was eventually deported. Denied entry by Trinidad’s government because of the fear that she would cause “trouble”, she ended up relocating to England where she remained an influential figure, particularly in global Black leftist circles.

In 1964, Claudia Jones traveled to China. Though now based in Britain, having been deported from the US, she remained an influential figure in global left circles. Upon her return to England from China, just months before she passed away, she wrote a poem extolling the virtues of China’s socialist project, as to her it signaled the possibility of future revolution. Jones had been clear about the ways in which interlocking systems of race, class, and gender contributed to oppression, but was also convinced that the way to resolve these contradictions was to mount liberation struggles that would build a coalition of forces against imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. She even linked China’s nuclear testing to Third World Liberation Movements. To Jones, China’s successful testing of a nuclear bomb on October 16, 1964, was a world historical event that created possibilities for the world’s anti-imperialist alliance.

Carol Boyce Davies argues that Claudia Jones included in her vision of socialism “an anti-imperialist coalition, managed by working-class leadership, fueled by the involvement of

³⁸² Section 2 of The Alien Registration Act, a US federal statute popularly known as the Smith Act, June 28, 1940.

women.”³⁸³ As a Trinidadian, Jones regarded Caribbean unification, the West Indian Federation, as a form of anti-colonial resistance and a way to ward off the forces of imperialism. In *The West Indian Gazette*, the paper she launched upon arriving in England, she provided space for anti-colonial voices to articulate their positions. She supported self-determination and armed struggle as instruments of liberation. She argued that the struggle for peace and decolonization in the Third World were linked. The struggle against imperialism was the struggle for peace. Jones insisted though that addressing racist colonial systems and sexism went hand-in-hand with socialist revolution. She believed that racism, colonialism, imperialism, militarism and imperialism were all connected. The danger to peace was not nuclear weapons but “the mercenaries, the U.S. imperialists, who wield them and threaten peace in Southeast Asia and the world.”³⁸⁴

Other anti-racist internationalist groups led by women emerged during the height of the Cold War. Sojourners for Truth and Justice was an all-Black women’s anti-colonial, transnational, feminist, civil rights group with an internationalist sensibility that formed in 1951 and lasted about a year. In that time, it attempted to build political solidarities that transcended borders. Members of the group included such prominent figures such as Eslanda Robeson, Shirley Graham Du Bois, newspaper editor Charlotta Bass, poet and actor Beulah Richardson, and left-wing organizer Louise Thompson Patterson. As an organization, Sojourners upbraided the US government for persecuting those who spoke out against racism, colonialism, and the Cold War. It also openly defended Paul Robeson, who had had his passport confiscated in 1950,

³⁸³ Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 31.

³⁸⁴ Zifeng Lui, “Decolonization is Not a Dinner Party: Claudia Jones, China’s Nuclear Weapons and Anti-Imperialist Solidarity” *The Journal of Intersectionality*, (Summer 2019), vol. 3. no.1 Claudia Jones Foremother of World Revolution (Summer 2019), 21-45.

and W.E.B. Du Bois, who was charged as an agent of a foreign principal in the United States in 1951.³⁸⁵

Sojourners was the only communist group organized by Black American women that sought to give Black women an independent voice. It understood Black women's oppression and struggle for dignity and freedom in global terms and tried to forge political solidarity across the African diaspora. The group also worked to build coalitions with progressive White women. It was committed to internationalism, working class solidarity, women's equality and took part in anti-Apartheid demonstrations. ³⁸⁶ Sojourners questioned how the US government could commit billions to prosecuting a war in Korea and draft treaties for peace and freedom for other nations, when it had never protected the lives of its 15 million African American citizens.³⁸⁷

Sojourners recognized the struggle of African Americans as a struggle for human rights and connected it to the challenges confronting other oppressed peoples around the world who were themselves victims of colonialism, imperialism, and White supremacy. They sent a letter to the UN's South African delegation informing its member that the Sojourners were in "full support" of the Defiance Campaign, which was a campaign of civil disobedience against the racist policies of the White supremacist South African government that lasted from April 1952 to the early part of 1953: "We believe that racism is the enemy of mankind and that it must end in South Africa, as well as our own nation so that throughout the world all men and women and children can attain freedom, dignity and peace."³⁸⁸ Sojourners managed to contact ANC Women's League leader Bertha Mkize, and communicate their support for her efforts to end Apartheid. Mkize replied to their letter: "It is very sweet and encouraging" that the Sojourners

³⁸⁵ Erik S. McDuffie, "A New Freedom Movement for Negro Women: Sojourning for the Truth Justice and Human Rights during the Early Cold War," *Radical History Review* (Spring 2008), 82.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 87.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 93.

“have made it possible the link [between African American and African women] we have always wished for [on] this side of the world ... Please give the love of the African women to the Negro Women in the States.”³⁸⁹

Into this ferment, the Cuban Revolution of January 1959 stood as an especially powerful symbol of resistance, and an example of revolutionary and anti-imperialist possibility for members of the Black Freedom Movement. African American leftists were inspired by the revolution’s early successes and enthralled by its leader Fidel Castro and his professed commitment to racial equality.³⁹⁰ To Peniel Joseph, “Cuba became a repository of Black American support for the Third World during the civil rights movement”³⁹¹ In September 1961 Castro arrived in New York to address the UN General Assembly presence, By this time the leader of the Caribbean island-nation had been in power for just 18 months and was not yet a globally-known figure. But his stay in New York would help to change that. After being told by the hotel manager of the downtown Manhattan hotel where they were staying that they could not fly the Cuban flag and having been banned from eating at the hotel dining room, Castro and the Cuban delegation left the hotel and decamped to Harlem, the beating heart of Black America. Over the next week while staying in the neighbourhood “with the people” he won the hearts and minds of Harlemites and African Americans, cementing his place as one of the most significant political figures of the era. Among the parade of dignitaries that Fidel Castro met during his six-day stay at Harlem’s Hotel Theresa was Robert Williams. Unlike Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Soviet Union’s Nikita Khrushchev or India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, Williams was not a head of state. But he had become a powerful figure on the international stage as one of the most

³⁸⁹ McDuffie, 93.

³⁹⁰ Amiri Baraka, “Cuba Libre” 125-160, *The Leroi Jones/ Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1991).

³⁹¹ Peniel E. Joseph (ed.), *Rethinking the Civil Rights: Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

influential African American political radicals of his generation.³⁹² Williams first came to national and international attention in the 1950s as a member of the local chapter of the NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina, and an unusually fearless freedom fighter who had defied the national NAACP office.³⁹³ A former marine with extensive military training, Williams advocated armed self-defence as a means of Black communities defending themselves against White terrorism. He urged Black people to meet the White supremacist violence of the Ku Klux Klan and organs of the state with violence. His unrepentant stance was popular among youth councils and local NAACP branches across the country, but drew the wrath and scorn of the national NAACP leadership which suspended him from the branch. In 1961 Williams and his family were forced to flee the US for Cuba. From his Caribbean base Williams continued to promote Black World Revolution, Third World solidarity and anti-colonialism. He later would spend years living in China where he continued to promote an anti-imperialist, Black nationalist message.

Throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s US Civil Rights leadership would be shaped by global anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements. The example set by Gandhi had a profound influence on both the African American reading masses who were exposed to his exploits in the pages of Black newspapers, and on a generation of Black leaders, searching for a tactical path against the residues of Jim Crow and other tools of White racism. Black Americans felt their domestic struggle was in alignment and solidarity with their comrades in the international arena who were engaged successfully in movements to decolonize their territories and win their independence. From Congo's Patrice Lumumba to Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, from Indonesia's

³⁹² Malcolm X and the poet Allen Ginsberg were among some of the other iconic personalities who paid a visit to *El Comandante's* hotel room during his six days in Harlem.

³⁹³ Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Sukarno to Cuba's Fidel Castro to the efforts of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement, the successes of these bold anti-imperialist international actors captured the imagination of a generation of young African American and inspired them to believe that transformational change was also possible on US soil.

Chapter 4

“On Vietnam: The Decline of African American Fealty to the State, Liberalism, and Respectability Politics: Martin Luther King, SNCC, CORE and the Black Panthers Go to War with the US Empire and its War in Vietnam”

“There is a revolt all over the world against colonialism, reactionary dictatorship, and systems of exploitation. Unless we as a nation join the revolution and go back to the revolutionary spirit that characterized the birth of our nation. I am afraid that we will be relegated to a second-class power in the world with no real moral voice to speak to the conscience of humanity...I am as concerned about international affairs as I am about the civil rights struggle in the United States.³⁹⁴

Martin Luther King Jr., 1961

“Most liberals think of Mississippi as a cancer, as a distortion of America. But we think Mississippi is an accurate reflection of America’s values and morality. Why can’t the people who killed Andrew, James and Mickey be brought to justice, unless a majority of the community condones murder? Sheriff Rainey is not a freak; he reflects the majority. And what he did is related to the napalm bombing of “objects” in Vietnam.”³⁹⁵

Robert Moses, 1965

“Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and the idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized. Let us be dissatisfied until brotherhood is no longer a meaningless word at the end of a prayer but the first order of business on every legislative agenda. Let us be dissatisfied until our brother of the Third World—Asia, Africa, and Latin America—will no longer be the victim of imperialist exploitation but will be lifted from the long night of poverty illiteracy and disease. Let us be dissatisfied until this pending cosmic energy will be transformed into a creative psalm of peace and “justice will roll down like waters from a mighty stream.”³⁹⁶

Martin Luther King Jr. February 23, 1968

On Jan 6, 1966, SNCC became the first major civil rights organization to come out against the Vietnam War. The statement the group issued was bold and categorical. It did not equivocate.

We believe the United States Government has been deceptive in its claim of concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people, just as the Government has been deceptive in claiming concern for the freedom of colored people. The United States Government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens and is not yet truly determined to end

³⁹⁴ Martin Luther King, quoted in Letter from Barbara Lindsay to W.E.B. Du Bois May 16, 1961, *The Papers of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Sanford N.C., Microfilming Corporation of America, 1980).

³⁹⁵ Jack Newfield, “The Question of SNCC,” *The Nation*, July 19, 1965, 41.

³⁹⁶ Martin Luther King Speech at Carnegie Hall in New York City on the 100th Anniversary of W.E. B. Du Bois, “Honouring Dr. Du Bois?” February 23, 1968.

the rule of terror and oppression within its own borders... We ask where the draft for the freedom fight in the United States is?³⁹⁷

Unsurprisingly, the leaders of the two most prominent moderate civil rights organizations of the era, Roy Wilkins, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People NAACP, and Whitney Young leader of the Urban League, who were 20 and 40 years older, respectively, than most of SNCC's members, distanced themselves from the SNCC manifesto. Like another talismanic figure of the African American establishment, A. Philip Randolph, they advocated a "hands off" policy when it came to the war in Vietnam. They "savored their relationship with Lyndon Johnson and remained wedded to Cold War liberalism."³⁹⁸ Staying loyal to a president who, in their mind, had done so much to advance the civil rights agenda was the least they could do. They decried the irresponsibility and radicalism of the ill-disciplined parvenus of SNCC and CORE whom they felt were imperiling the civil rights gains that had been made not on the streets, but in the courts and halls of political power.

It is no exaggeration to say that the SNCC manifesto was the statement of a generation. It reflected its membership who, despite their youth- most were in their twenties- were already battle-hardened veterans of the US civil rights struggle. For six years many of these young warriors for racial and economic justice had been part of the Civil Rights Movement's vanguard, waging war against Jim Crow. They had earned their stripes by fighting on the front lines for the right of Black farmers to vote in towns like Itta Bena and Greenwood in the Mississippi Delta; working to desegregate bus terminals and parks in cities like Selma, Alabama and Albany, Georgia; struggling for their right to full citizenship at lunch counters and at beaches across the Southern United States.

³⁹⁷ "Rights Unit Says U.S. is Aggressor: Questions Capital's Sincerity On Vietnam and Negro," *New York Times*, Friday, January 7, 1966, 2.

³⁹⁸ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 213.

Unlike their elders, this younger generation was much less reluctant to condemn American institutions and values which they believed had consistently betrayed them. And yet despite their domestic concerns, SNCC militants were also more likely to regard their fight against White supremacy and U.S. apartheid as linked to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle of the Vietnamese people. They identified with the existential challenges being faced by Vietnamese villagers who had to endure the incessant bombings of their homes, hospitals, and rice paddies by the world's most formidable empire. They could also relate to the plight of the US soldiers fighting in Vietnam, many of whom were their contemporaries, siblings, and friends. The leaders of the NAACP and the Urban League, though, had more of a generational affinity to the architects of the Vietnam policy than they did to the young Black men fighting the war and losing their lives.

The Vietnam War marked the end of the hegemony of a conventional kind of leadership and respectability politics that had prevailed in Black America for much of the 20th century. Although the NAACP and Urban League would continue to be significant Black political organizations in the US, never again would they exercise the kind of influence over or command the loyalty of the wider Black community in the way they had over the previous six decades. These moderate conservative leaders and organizations were now being taken to task by their own membership in ways that had never been experienced before. Indeed, before SNCC and even Martin Luther King Jr. came out against the war in Vietnam, there was considerable dissension and a backlash in the ranks of the most moderate civil rights organization of them all, the NAACP.

The War in Vietnam was the first foreign conflict in the 20th century in which African American leaders and their organizations did not lobby their government to allow Black

Americans to assume combat roles in the military. It was the first war in U.S. history in which a significant proportion of African Americans, including Black America's most charismatic leader, actively worked to end. This represented a seismic shift for a community that had long sought to achieve full citizenship by leveraging their engagement in the nation's wars. The Vietnam War put the political and ideological fissures within Black America on display for all to see. What did this moment say about how the Black community and its relationship to the U.S. state had changed? What did this say about how African Americans saw themselves? How did this moment come to be?

On November 2, 1964, Lyndon Baines Johnson won the U.S. presidential election in a landslide over Republican contender Barry Goldwater. Johnson garnered 61 per cent of the popular vote, and an astonishing 486 votes in the electoral college. NAACP registration experts estimated an historically high 6 million Black voters cast ballots in 1964, 1.5 million more than in 1960. Between 88-98 per cent of the Black electorate voted for Johnson.³⁹⁹ Less than a year after he had assumed power, following the November 1963 assassination of President Kennedy, Johnson could no longer be dismissed as a mere caretaker or accidental president. In the previous 12 months, Johnson had established himself as a formidable political force, amassing an enviable list of liberal domestic accomplishments, including passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The convincing election victory only solidified his position. Exactly four months later though, Johnson launched a massive intervention in Vietnam that ultimately contained the elements of his political demise.

The U.S. officially began bombing North Vietnam on March 2, 1965, vaguely under the cover of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed by Congress in 1964. But the U.S. engagement in

³⁹⁹ Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, 213.

Vietnam had begun over a decade earlier.⁴⁰⁰ By 1953 the US was supplying the embattled French colonial army with arms and ammunition. It financed the bulk of the cost of France's desperate attempt to maintain a foothold in Indochina. In May 1954 the French army was comprehensively dismantled by North Vietnamese forces at Dien Bien Phu, which led to its withdrawal from Vietnam under the 1954 Geneva Accords. The war had come to an ignominious and humiliating end for France and its Western backers, yet in the years that followed this calamitous imperial defeat, the U.S. would attempt to fill the vacuum in the region left by its French ally. In 1956, then Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy gave an indication of the value the U.S. attached to Vietnam when he said, "Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia. It is our offspring. We cannot abandon it. We cannot ignore its needs."⁴⁰¹

The US intervened in Vietnam ostensibly to thwart the expansion of communism in Indochina. By the end of 1961 there were 3,200 U.S. troops in Vietnam. And that number would rise steadily each year. There were 11,300 by the end of 1962 and 16,300 by the end of 1963.⁴⁰² In the midst of the Cold War, and the struggle for global hegemony, the Kennedy administration was intent on projecting American power and preserving its prestige. In April 1961 presidential adviser Walt Rostow said:

⁴⁰⁰ On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnamese independence in front of a massive crowd of some 500,000. He said: "All men are created equal. The creator has given us certain inviolable rights: the right to life, the right to be free. And the right to achieve happiness." These of course were the words of the American Declaration of Independence. Ho was appealing to the U.S. in the hope that it would support the Vietnamese people in their quest to end French colonial rule. The appeal fell on deaf ears. The U.S. sided with their allies, the French colonizers. The fate of Vietnam had been sealed. The leaders of the world's great powers agreed that Indochina—Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—would remain in the hands of the French. Ho Chi Minh himself had long regarded the U.S. as being a standard bearer for anti-colonialism. In the early part of 20th century while living in the U.S. Ho Chi Minh claimed to have attended meetings of Black activists in Harlem including of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) headed by the charismatic Jamaican-born Pan-Africanist and anti-colonialist Marcus Garvey.

⁴⁰¹ Robert McNamara with Brian Van Demark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 32.

⁴⁰² Jonathan Neale, *A People's History of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2003), 61.

We must somehow bring to bear our unexploited counter guerilla assets on the Vietnam problem: armed helicopters other Research and Development possibilities; our special forces units. It is somehow wrong to be developing these capabilities but not applying them in a crucially active theatre. In Knute Rockne's phrase, we are not saving them for the Junior prom.⁴⁰³

Over the course of the next decade of war, the U.S. dropped millions of tons of explosives on Vietnam. The best estimate of the number of Viet Cong and civilians who were killed is between 1.5 and 2 million. 250,000 soldiers in the South Vietnamese army perished.⁴⁰⁴ Millions of Vietnamese were permanently damaged by the war. Some 58,000 Americans died during the conflict. At the war's height there were 500,000 US soldiers on the ground. Eighty percent of the American soldiers "who saw combat came from blue -collar families."⁴⁰⁵ Most of them were drafted, although some joined because the army represented opportunity and offered an escape from the brutality of their state of living in the United States.

In the wake of Kennedy's election in November 1960, the Black unemployment rate was nearly twice that of White workers, 13.8 percent.⁴⁰⁶ In large industrial midwestern cities like Detroit 39 percent of African Americans lacked jobs.⁴⁰⁷ The young Black men who signed up to fight in Vietnam were often poor and undereducated and lived on the margins of society. By serving in the military and fighting a war, they were guaranteed a steady pay cheque, free college tuition and access to home and business loans, if they survived. Wearing the uniform was a source of pride for many of these young men and an affirmation of their manhood. Ethel Payne, a correspondent for the *Chicago Defender* wrote that "Black men who couldn't find jobs

⁴⁰³ George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) 131. Knute Rockne was a legendary football player and coach at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana from 1910-1930.

⁴⁰⁴ Neale, *A People's History of the Vietnam War*, 75.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁰⁶ Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles & the US Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 191.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

otherwise gravitated to the services because the war did provide employment opportunity ... Blacks have to turn to war to find occupations and find a way of living or dying.”⁴⁰⁸

The Johnson Administration saw the war in Vietnam in gendered and racial terms. It regarded the conflict as providing an opportunity for African American males to prove their manhood. President Lyndon Johnson himself had told the head of the CIA, John McCone, he felt the army offered “Negro boys” the opportunity to move out of the ghetto. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Assistant Secretary of Labour believed that military service offered African American young men the chance “to be inducted into the male American society.”⁴⁰⁹ He added, “given the strains of disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the armed forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change; a world away from women, a world run by strong men and unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance.”⁴¹⁰

The right of African Americans to fight in frontline combat roles had been part of civil rights struggles throughout the World War II and Korean War eras. By 1967 the fight for African American representation within the military was no longer a major preoccupation, rather, somewhat ironically, there were now questions about whether there was too much representation; questions about why a disproportionate number of African Americans were fighting and dying in Vietnam; questions about why once they were in the military Blacks were disproportionately assigned to combat units. This, of course, was a sea-change for the service, because from the Civil War to World War Two, White U.S. military leaders and policy makers

⁴⁰⁸ Phillips, *190*.

⁴⁰⁹ David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1964-1968* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 136.

⁴¹⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan to Harry McPherson. “The Underrepresentation of Negroes in the Armed Forces,” As of July 16, 1965, Selected Civil Rights Files of Harry McPherson, CRDJA, Part I, Reel 11,0391-95.

had been reluctant to put Blacks in combat roles: they doubted their abilities. But now, their Black bodies were required to fight a war in Indochina. While they made up just 11 percent of the U.S. population in 1965, Black Americans accounted for nearly 25 percent of all combat deaths in Vietnam.⁴¹¹ As the death toll mounted, many Black troops far from being proud of their service and the social progress it represented, questioned their presence in the war and concluded that they were in Vietnam because they were poor and Black. They surmised, like the heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali, that they were being exploited and fighting a war that was not their own. Black trooper John Macdonald cynically described himself as “a handyman. Something good to have around to help the White man fight his dirty wars.”⁴¹² The truth was that Black Americans had been struggling not so much for the right to fight for the United States of America, but for the right to be treated equally as full U.S. citizens in every domain; they had been struggling for their humanity.⁴¹³ By 1968, the percentage of Black soldiers in the US army would decline by almost half, but Blacks still represented 13-14 percent of all fatalities in Vietnam.⁴¹⁴ Blacks also made up more than half of dishonorable discharges and 90 percent of inmates in Long Binh Jail in Vietnam.⁴¹⁵

At the same time, by 1967 domestic support in the U.S. for the war was plummeting. The anti-war movement was growing apace. In October of that year, in a coming-out party of sorts for the movement, a massive anti-war demonstration took place in Washington DC. By

⁴¹¹ Michael L. Krenn, *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington D.C. Potomac Books Inc., 2006), 94.

⁴¹² Phillips, 191.

⁴¹³ In 1967 over 150 race rebellions (riots) took place in cities across the United States during what became known as the “Long Hot Summer of 1967.” The most notable were in Newark, New Jersey (July 12-17) in which 26 mainly Black people were killed and hundreds injured, and in Detroit, Michigan (July 23-28) in which 43 mainly Black people died, over 1,000 were injured and 400 buildings were destroyed. Both major uprisings were triggered by cases involving police brutality. See Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), Dan Georgakas and Marvin Sukrin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Detroit: South End Press, 1998), Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the US Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 95.

November 1967, 57 percent of Americans objected to Johnson’s Vietnam policies.⁴¹⁶ Black American public opinion was much more decidedly anti-war than White Americans. A late 1967 poll showed a higher number of African Americans wanted the United States to exit the war quickly. By 1969, over half of Blacks polled believed the War to be immoral, whereas just one third of Whites believed that to be the case.⁴¹⁷ Civil rights leaders and their organizations were at the center of a vigorous, fractious, and ultimately polarizing debate that took place in Black America about the Vietnam War.

“We were young. We had energy. We had brains. We had technical skills. We had a belief in people and their power to change their lives. We were willing to work with the most dispossessed, the sharecropper, the day laborer, the factory worker, and the mill hands... we knew what we were doing was important not only for the South but for our sister and brothers in the North and throughout the world.”⁴¹⁸

James Forman on SNCCC

“SNCC has never visualized the struggle for human rights in America in isolation from the worldwide struggle for human rights.”⁴¹⁹

James Forman

In February 1960 a group of four Black college students sat down at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and refused to get up until they were served. This was not the first sit-in of the Civil Rights Movement, but the act of defiance was a seminal moment in the direct-action movement in the South, garnered national and international attention, and helped

⁴¹⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 242.

⁴¹⁷ Krenn, 96.

⁴¹⁸ James Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries: A Personal Account* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 385.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 487.

launch a countrywide movement.⁴²⁰ In the year following the events in Greensboro, some 70,000 demonstrators staged 800 sit-ins in 100 cities across the United States. The sit-in movement electrified a generation and helped kickstart the 1960s. To historian Howard Zinn, these young courageous rebels were clearly on “the front line of the Negro assault on the moral comfort of white America.”⁴²¹

In May 1960 the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was born. SNCC was at the vanguard of the first major social movement in American history led by young people. In three short years SNCC had 150 full-time employees and had become one of the most dynamic and consequential forces of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of the activists at the forefront of SNCC and CORE were contemporaries of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old boy from Chicago who had been lynched near Money, Mississippi in August 1955. They had been marked by the horror of his grotesque murder and disfigurement. These young activists were the children of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. They had been teenagers when the boycott was launched in December 1955 to protest the indignities Black people in Alabama and across the country were forced to endure daily. The boycott represented a collective refusal to respect the order and discipline of an entrenched system of White supremacist power and control. This generation of young people, most of whom were born in the early 1940s, had been formed in the crucible of some of the most extreme events of racial violence of the post-Second World War era in the United States. They were unapologetic, bold, and fearless activists for change who were not going to let anyone turn them around. They were willing to publicly demonstrate a lot longer and speak a lot louder than their parents’ generation ever could have fathomed.

⁴²⁰ The four North Carolina AT& T students who took part in the Greensboro sit-in were Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond. Previous sit-ins had also taken place in 1939 at the Alexandria Library in Alexandria, Virginia, and in 1958 at the Dockum Drug Store in Wichita Kansas.

⁴²¹ Howard Zinn, “The New Abolitionists” in Irwin Unger ed. *Beyond Liberalism: The New Left Views American History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Xerox College Publishing, 1971), 326.

Naturally, most of SNCC's initial work focused on desegregation in the South, from the sit-ins to the Freedom Rides of 1961, and the voter registration campaigns in 1962. But in the late summer of 1964, Bob Moses, a revered figure in the movement, spoke out against the War in Vietnam at a memorial service for the three murdered SNCC activists, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. Moses excoriated the federal government for sending American troops to Vietnam to defend freedom while refusing to protect civil rights workers in the South from White violence.

SNCC believed that it had been promised additional protection by the federal government as it increased its voter registration efforts in Mississippi in 1962, but the help never came. In his speech delivered during the March on Washington in August 1963, SNCC president John Lewis lambasted the federal government for the chronic lack of protection of civil rights workers. "What did the federal government do when Albany's deputy sheriff beat attorney C.B. King and left him half-dead? What did the federal government do when local police officials kicked and assaulted the pregnant wife of Slater King, and she lost her baby?"⁴²²

Civil rights activists felt they had placed their faith in the federal Department of Justice and had been abandoned. They were also dismayed by the shabby way they had been treated at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Atlantic City in 1964. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which challenged the legitimacy of the all-White Mississippi delegation at the DNC, had been rebuffed by senior party officials. MFDP members felt they had been manhandled by Johnson and the party elite. For the activist Civil Rights Movement, Atlantic City was the moment that represented the "end of the innocence." The refusal of the Democratic Party to recognize the MFDP destroyed any remaining belief they might have had in

⁴²² John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 217.

American liberalism. For Forman, “Atlantic City was a powerful lesson. No longer was there any hope, among those who still had it, that the federal government would change the situation in the Deep South.”⁴²³

To the militants of SNCC, the U.S. intervention in Vietnam disqualified the country from engaging in any constructive actions elsewhere, be that Latin America, Asia, or Africa. Bob Moses denounced the federal government for being willing to send troops thousands of miles away to Southeast Asia to fight for freedoms, while at the same time refusing to provide young civil rights workers in the South with basic security to protect them from White vigilante violence.⁴²⁴ Even before 1964’s Freedom Summer, SNCC had had their confidence in the federal government shaken. In 1962, while engaging in voter registration efforts, SNCC activists thought they had been promised protection by the Justice Department, but it never came. Federal leaders seemed more concerned about possibly alienating Southern Democrats than they were about taking a strong stand in support of civil rights and protecting the constitutional rights of African Americans. All of this led to a general disillusionment with federal government amongst SNCC members.

Young civil rights workers in the South were dismayed by the lack of federal assistance they were afforded considering the terror and intimidation they faced daily. The federal government’s seeming indifference and prolonged inaction served to erode the faith that these young people had in government and liberal institutions. While President Johnson may have been lauded in some quarters for his leadership on civil rights, movement activists expressed their disappointment at his inaction despite their pleas for help. They had endured “years of

⁴²³ Forman, 394.

⁴²⁴ As noted in Doug McAdam’s book of the same name (*Freedom Summer*, Oxford University Press, 1988), during Freedom Summer volunteers experienced an extreme level of violence. Four people were killed, 80 were beaten, over 1000 arrested and 60 homes, businesses and churches were burned or bombed. Despite their requests for protection, civil rights workers were told that the federal government didn’t have the power to do so.

jailings, beatings and visits to the morgue to identify the bodies of victims all the while waiting for the federal government to act” to shield them from racist violence.⁴²⁵

The non-intervention policy led SNCC supporters and young activists to grow increasingly disillusioned not merely with the Democratic Party, but with American democracy and the liberal project more generally. They also framed their lack of personal security in terms of the growing willingness of the government to defend the national security of other countries. There was surely something deeply hypocritical about the U.S. government sending African Americans 8000 miles away to the other side of the world to “win freedom” for the Vietnamese people and “defend democracy,” while it was unwilling or unable to protect and defend African Americans who were fighting against Jim Crow and trying to bring democracy to the US South. SNCC activist Courtland Cox recalled, “we felt that playing by the rules was not enough, that the power was aligned to maintain itself and that in fact the sense ... that if you did everything right, they would be on your side, people said no. Just not going to happen.”⁴²⁶

In 1965, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) called for draft resistance. Months later SNCC would become the first national civil rights organization to come out against the war. Prominent SNCC and SCLC leaders like James Bevel and Diane Nash joined the anti-war movement.⁴²⁷ SNCC officially began to discuss the war in Vietnam at a meeting in November 1965. According to Forman, “Until that year most of us including myself had

⁴²⁵ Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movement in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 15.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴²⁷ James Bevel was part of SNCC in its early days. As a student at the American Baptist Theological Seminary, he became one of the leaders of the Nashville Student Movement along with Diane Nash (his wife at the time), John Lewis, Marion Barry, and Bernard Lafayette, all of whom were trained by Reverend James Lawson. In 1962 Bevel began working full-time for SCLC’s Citizenship Education Program in the Mississippi Delta and in 1963 he became SCLC’s direct tor of Direct Action and Non-Violent Education. Throughout this period, he would work closely with SNCC.

considered the war not irrelevant, but simply remote. Its importance to Black people had not come home to us.”⁴²⁸

Earlier that year one of SNCC’s most respected leaders, Bob Moses, who had just turned 30, began working with forces in the peace movement. This anti-war and Civil Rights Movement connection led to a rising consciousness about Vietnam among SNCC workers. Moses believed that SNCC must link the Black struggle with the anti-war struggle. African Americans had established a tradition of resisting the USA’s wars and the draft, going back to the Second World War, but it had tended to be on the margins of civil rights discourse. Black Americans were being sent into the Vietnamese theatre to secure a level of freedom there that they were still yet to enjoy at home. The war was very present in the lives of SNCC members. Many of the young men had either registered for the draft or received draft notices. John Lewis had noted that most of the young Black men in SNCC, about 85 percent, “were eligible and exposed to the draft.”⁴²⁹ For them, the Vietnam War was not theoretical, it was a hard reality.

SNCC’s “Statement on Vietnam” came out in early January 1966. It was the first time a civil rights organization had taken a public stand against the war and had been triggered by the murder of Sammy Younge, a 21-year-old Black man. Younge was slain in Tuskegee, Alabama by a 68-year-old White gas station attendant when he tried to use a White-only bathroom. He had served in the US Navy for two years between 1962-64 and had been an active member of SNCC while attending the Tuskegee Institute in 1965, making him the first Black college student to be murdered for his civil rights activism. Younge’s murderer, Marvin Segrest, was acquitted by an

⁴²⁸ Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 445.

⁴²⁹ Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*, 241.

all-White Jury on January 4, 1966. Three days later, on January 6th, SNCC proclaimed its official opposition to the Vietnam War.⁴³⁰

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee has a right and a responsibility to dissent with United States foreign policy on issues when it sees fit. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee now states its opposition to United States involvement in Vietnam on these grounds:

We believe the United States government has been deceptive in its claims of concern for freedom of the Vietnamese people, just as the government has been deceptive in claiming concern for the freedom of colored people in such other countries as the Dominican Republic, the Congo, South Africa, Rhodesia, and the United States itself. The murder of Sammy Younge in Tuskegee, Alabama is no different than the murder of peasants in Vietnam for both Younge and the Vietnamese sought and are seeking, to secure the rights guaranteed them by law. In each case the United States government bears a great part of the responsibility for these deaths.

Younge was murdered because United States law is not being enforced. Vietnamese are murdered because the United States is pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law. The United States is no respecter of persons or law when such person or was run counter to its needs and desires.

We recall the indifference, suspicion, and outright hostility with which our reports of violence have been met in the past by government officials. We question then the ability and even the desire of the United States government to guarantee free elections abroad. We maintain that our country's cry of "preserve freedom in the world" is a hypocritical mask behind which it squashes liberation movements which are not bound and refuse to be bound by the expediencies of United States Cold War policies.

We are in sympathy with and support, the men in this country who are unwilling to respond to a military draft which would compel them to contribute their lives to United States aggression in Vietnam in the name of the "freedom" we find so false in this country.

We take note of the fact that 60 percent of the draftees from this country are Negroes called on to stifle the liberation of Vietnam, to preserve a "democracy" which does not exist for them at home. We ask, where the draft for the freedom fight in the United States?⁴³¹

SNCC was unlike any other civil rights organization of the era. It was audacious, consistent, and uncompromising. James Forman described the organization this way: "It

⁴³⁰ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 114.

⁴³¹ Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), *Statement on the War in Vietnam*, January 6, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A89 Vietnam Organizations 1966-69, Library of Congress.

constantly stood in opposition to the Republican and Democratic parties while others sought favors from the two-party system. It vigorously attacked the Kennedy administration for its inaction in the field of civil rights while others thought that discussion and conciliation with the executive branch could win concessions ... It argued for a basic revolution in American society while others always advocated change within the present system.”⁴³²

At its May 1967 conference, SNCC, in a recorded vote, officially stated its increasingly internationalist commitments: “[We] [encourage] and [support] the liberation struggles against colonialism, racism and economic exploitation wherever these conditions exist and that those nations that assume a position of positive non- alignment express a point of view most consistent with its own views. Therefore, although our names indicated the original form of our struggle, we do not foreclose other forms of struggle.”⁴³³

In June 1967, a resolution was adopted at a staff meeting of SNCC that declared itself in the tradition of “Malcolm X”, a human rights organization working for the liberation not only of Black people in the United States but of all oppressed people, especially those in Africa, Asia and Latin America.”⁴³⁴ SNCC had come to define itself as an anti-imperialist organization.

Forman spoke to the essence of SNCC’s project:

All the people and nations with whom we would want to have international associations were against racism, capitalism, and imperialism in addition they were striving in the main to build socialist societies. I was never able to get SNCC to declare itself for socialism, but I did not worry about that too much at the time. To have achieved the realization that our fight was against racism, capitalism and imperialism represented a major victory in itself.⁴³⁵

It was a position, however, that pulled SNCC further away from the older civil rights groups. Of course, partly this was strategic. According to James Forman, “Relations between

⁴³² Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 362.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 481,

SNCC and other civil rights organization had always been stormy because, from the beginning, SNCC developed as an antithesis to all the other civil rights groups.”⁴³⁶ The students had long felt that “the legalistic pace of the NAACP was too slow and ineffective.”⁴³⁷ As a SNCC leader, Forman regarded the NAACP as “fully plugged into the American system.” He added, “it’s red-baiting can be seen as just a variation on the position of the entire liberal establishment.”⁴³⁸ But this was more than a statement about means. At its heart, SNCC’s differences drew from its perception of America’s wider complicity in maintaining the global colour line in the name of capitalism. To the extent that the NAACP and the Urban League continued to believe that American liberalism was redeemable—simply a blind spot in an otherwise virtuous creed, as Gunnar Myrdal contended—SNCC was bound to see them as part of the assimilationist problem. But just as SNCC was leaning toward open opposition to the Vietnam War, it was joined by King himself. It just took the Nobel laureate some time to get there.

I want you to believe that the sentiment of the overwhelming majority of the people of my country, as of the people of all other lands, favors the speediest possible achievement of peace and justice in Vietnam.

Martin Luther King Jr. writing to Ho Chi Minh,
August 9, 1965

When Martin Luther King Jr. stated, in August 1965, that the Vietnam War must come to an end, he drew the ire of President Lyndon Johnson and officials in his Democratic administration. “They told me I wasn’t an expert in foreign affairs ... [that] I knew only civil rights and should stick to that.”⁴³⁹ King faced criticism from both allies and detractors alike but

⁴³⁶ Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 361.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Quoted in Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York, 1982), 376.

was adamant he had a duty to move beyond civil rights, saying, “I’m much more than a civil rights leader.”⁴⁴⁰

In the first half of 1965, King was preoccupied with the passage of the Voting Rights Act and was therefore cautious in his commentary about Cold War policies, not wanting to jeopardize support for civil rights.⁴⁴¹ He was not yet as fixated on the war as his younger colleagues in SNCC, some of whom had already joined the anti-war movement. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had a much more tenuous connection to the war than SNCC activists, many of whom knew young Black men who had gone to Vietnam to fight and had not returned home. And yet on April 17, 1965, King was in Boston for the North’s first mass civil rights demonstration and replied to a reporter’s question about the shift in the New Left from a focus on civil rights to peace issues, by saying, “I have no objection to civil rights leaders speaking against the war as against segregation ... One cannot just be concerned with civil rights ... It is very nice to drink milk at an unsegregated lunch counter—but not when there is Strontium 90 in it.”⁴⁴² The demonstration in Boston was happening in the wake of the first major anti-war rally, organized by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Women’s Strike for Peace—that had taken place in Washington D.C., that same day.

King first publicly expressed grave concerns about the war only a few months later, in the summer of 1965. The SCLC had, at that point, not yet taken an official anti-war position. Indeed, there were significant divisions amongst the SCLC leadership. Andrew Young, its executive director and one of King’s closest confidants, was a critic of the peace movement, but other

⁴⁴⁰ David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2009) 135.

⁴⁴¹ The Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Johnson on August 6, 1965. King was present for the signing of the landmark legislation. On the same day in Washington DC at nearby Lafayette Park, an anti-war demonstration led by the likes of David Dellinger, Staughton Lynd and Robert Parris (aka Bob Moses) took place. King had refused to endorse the demonstration. Just over a week earlier Johnson had announced he would be increasing the number of troops in Vietnam by more than 60 percent from 75,000 to 125,000.

⁴⁴² Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 152.

figures, including Coretta Scott King, Hosea Williams, James Lawson, and Ralph Abernathy all showed support for it. As these leaders saw the effects that the massive expenditure on the War was having on President Lyndon Johnson's signature domestic initiatives like the Great Society programs (which had been announced in the spring of 1964), their commitment to Johnson and his liberal project waned.⁴⁴³ King was devastated by the wanton destruction of the lives of the Vietnamese people. He thought the war was deeply immoral. He regarded the brutal conflict in Southeast Asia as a war on the poor and marginalized in America, as it sent many of them to fight and "die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population."⁴⁴⁴ The conflict also denied these young people access to the vital domestic resources and programs that could have allowed them to realize their full human potential. King was further offended at the notion that young African Americans were travelling thousands of miles away from home to secure the very things like democracy, freedom, and justice, that remained elusive at home. He was sympathetic to the anti-colonial struggle waged by the Vietcong against White imperial domination and saw its relationship to the U.S. Black freedom struggle. He viewed Ho Chi Minh as more of a Vietnamese nationalist than a communist, a revolutionary who sought self-determination for his people.⁴⁴⁵

"In a real sense, the Great Society has been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam."

Martin Luther King Jr.

⁴⁴³ The Great Society was a set of major domestic spending programs instituted by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson in 1964-65 aimed at eradicating poverty and racial injustice. The programs addressed matters of education, rural poverty, transportation, and medical care. The Great Society can be seen in the tradition of the New Deal agenda of Roosevelt in the 1930s. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are regarded as two of the most significant domestic achievements of the Great Society.

⁴⁴⁴ King, *The Radical King*, 204.

⁴⁴⁵ Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68* (New York, NY: Simon Schuster, 2006), 326.

Speaking to his Ebenezer congregation in Atlanta on February 6, 1966, King stated: “It is just as evil to kill Vietnamese as it is to kill Americans.”⁴⁴⁶ This was a profoundly radical statement at the time. However, for much of 1966 King kept relatively quiet, failing to offer the kind of full-throated support for the anti-war movement that many activists, including his SNCC allies, were hoping to hear. Finally, though, in April 1966 King travelled to Miami for a SCLC semi-annual meeting where he hoped to persuade the SCLC executive board to agree to “a stronger condemnation of American military policy [in Vietnam] than it had endorsed the preceding August.”⁴⁴⁷ King managed to get the strongly worded declaration of the SCLC’s opposition to the U.S. Vietnam policy that he had been seeking. The resolution stated: “SCLC as an organization committed to non-violence must condemn this war on the grounds that the war is not the way to solve social problems.” He added, “The intense expectations and hopes of the neglected poor in the United States must be regarded as a priority more urgent than pursuit of a conflict so rapidly degenerating into a sordid military adventure.”⁴⁴⁸ He announced on April 13 that the SCLC had adopted a resolution calling for the U.S. government to end its support for the South Vietnam military junta.” On the CBS program *Face the Nation*, King insisted, “we have got to find a good faith way out of Vietnam as soon as possible.”⁴⁴⁹

King implored civil rights activists to resist the war in Vietnam but also to oppose what he believed to be an odious U.S. foreign policy that bred racial and economic injustice. He called for an end to the bombing and a unilateral cease-fire, negotiations with the South Vietnamese, and the removal of all troops in compliance with the 1954 Geneva Accord. At an SCLC planning meeting in Frogmore, South Carolina on November 14, 1966, King said the Vietnam War was a

⁴⁴⁶ David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. (New York, NY: William Morrow and Co, 1999), 461.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁴⁴⁹ Transcript of *Face the Nation*, May 29, 1966, MLK Papers, box 10, Martin Luther King Center.

sign of the moral sickness of a society that could “condone poverty amid unparalleled affluence.” He added “we are living in a sick nation that will brutalize unjustifiably millions of boys and girls, men and women in Vietnam.”⁴⁵⁰

King’s moment of reckoning with the nation came five months later. On a cool spring evening inside the chapel of New York City’s Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, King would make the most profound statement about the war in his life. Many, including John Lewis, called it his finest speech. In his address before a rapt audience of 3000 people on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, King said the war had rendered America’s commitment to civil rights and justice “broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political things of a society gone mad on war.” He added the United States had become “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”⁴⁵¹ He blasted the U.S. policy of supporting corrupt and inept governments and condemned the decision to prop up “one of the most vicious modern dictators, our chosen man, Premier Diem.”⁴⁵² King’s intention in speaking unequivocally about what he believed to be a heinous war, was to break the silence around the conflict and to move beyond what he called a “smooth patriotism.”

King argued that the violence being perpetrated in Vietnam was affecting the US government’s ability to take a non-violent approach to solving chronic issues of poverty, racial justice at home. “As I have walked among the desperate rejected and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action ... But they asked- and rightly so- what about Vietnam?

⁴⁵⁰ Speech to Frogmore Planning Meeting, November 14, 1966, Martin Luther King Papers, box 11, Martin Luther King Center.

⁴⁵¹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 470.

⁴⁵² Martin Luther King Jr., *The Radical King*, edited by Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 207.

They asked if our nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government.”⁴⁵³

The war was “doing more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population.”⁴⁵⁴ King could not reconcile the fact that young poor Black Men from places like Southwest Georgia and East Harlem were travelling thousands of miles from home to try to win a freedom in Southeast Asia that they could scarcely find in their hometowns in America. “So, we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.” ⁴⁵⁵

King's opposition to the war did not initially win him broad support within the Black community. He was rebuked by the likes of pioneering baseball star and civil rights activist Jackie Robinson, newly elected Republican Senator Edward Brooke, his former confidant Bayard Rustin, and the influential conservative African American publication the *Pittsburgh Courier* which criticized him for “tragically preaching the wrong doctrine.”⁴⁵⁶ The *Courier* asserted that King's anti-war stance would sabotage African Americans “access to the corridors of power.”⁴⁵⁷ Fellow Nobel Prize recipient Ralph Bunche, the highest ranking African American in the United Nations Secretariat, called King's proposal to merge the Civil Rights and

⁴⁵³ Martin Luther King Jr. Speech at Riverside Church in New York City, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break Silence*, April 4, 1967.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ “Dr. King's Tragic Doctrine,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 16, 1967, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ “Dr. King's Inherent Rights,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 27, 1967, 6.

anti-War Movements, a “serious tactical mistake” and said that King should “either quit the Civil Rights Movement or the anti-Viet[nam] war demonstrations.”⁴⁵⁸ Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* lambasted King for having fused “two problems that are distinct and separate.”⁴⁵⁹ According to the *Post*, “many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence.”⁴⁶⁰

King did have his supporters though, including CORE’s Floyd McKissick who said his “Beyond Vietnam” speech was a sign that “Dr. King has come around and I’m glad to have him with us, no question about that.”⁴⁶¹ Some newspapers as well lauded him for his powerful intervention. The *Detroit Free Press* suggested the speech would bolster the anti-war coalition and lead to greater African American opposition to the war.⁴⁶² In the African American *Chicago Defender*, King was described as a “good example to follow,” and the paper acknowledged that regarding the war, African Americans were slowly moving to King’s side of the ledger.⁴⁶³ But that was not initially obvious. A Harris poll conducted in May 1967 suggested that 73 percent of Americans disagreed with King’s position on the war, and 60 percent thought it would damage the civil rights movement.⁴⁶⁴ Nearly half of African Americans disagreed with him, with just 25 percent agreeing with him.⁴⁶⁵

Undeterred, on April 16, 1967, King spoke at an anti-Vietnam rally on the same platform as Black Power leaders Stokely Carmichael of SNCC and Floyd McKissick of CORE. The directors of the NAACP, like Ralph Bunche, had previously called King’s decision to merge the

⁴⁵⁸ “Bunche Disputes King on Peace,” *New York Times*, April 13, 1967, 1, 32.

⁴⁵⁹ “Dr. King’s Error,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1967, 20.

⁴⁶⁰ “A Tragedy,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 1967, A20.

⁴⁶¹ Floyd McKissick quoted in Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, 423.

⁴⁶² “As We See It,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 6, 1967.

⁴⁶³ Sam Washington, “Negro Opinion on Viet is Shifting: Majority Favor Pull-out,” *Chicago Defender*, April 22-28, 1967.

⁴⁶⁴ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 203.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

Civil Rights and the Peace Movements and to stand alongside militant leaders, a “serious tactical mistake.”⁴⁶⁶ At its quarterly meeting, the NAACP passed a resolution which stated that, “We are not a peace organization nor a foreign policy association. We are a civil rights organization. The NAACP remains committed to its achieving equal rights and equal opportunities for all Americans.”⁴⁶⁷

The Summer of 1967 saw deadly urban uprisings in Newark and Detroit. Dozens were killed and thousands of buildings were burned. In mid-August King declared that the SCLC would work to defeat any presidential candidate who did not oppose the Vietnam War including President Johnson. He was adamant that, “as long as the war in Vietnam goes on, the more difficult it will be to implement the programs that will deal with the economic social problems that Negro people confront in our country and poor people generally.”⁴⁶⁸ But before that promise could be realized, King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel. He was in the city to support sanitation workers who were fighting for respect and a living wage. His position on the Vietnam War remained consistent up until his untimely death. The moral clarity of King’s stance over several years was in stark contrast to that of his often-vocal critic and longtime head of the Urban League, Whitney Young.

As the Executive Director of the Urban League from 1961 to 1971 Whitney Young had had a relationship with President John F. Kennedy that was not particularly close.⁴⁶⁹ With JFK’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, it was a different story. According to Young, “I suppose we visited on the phone at least once a week and in person at least once a month.”⁴⁷⁰ While

⁴⁶⁶ “NAACP Decries Stand of Dr. King on Vietnam” *New York Times*, April 11, 1967, 1.

⁴⁶⁷ *New York Times*, April 11, 1967, 1.

⁴⁶⁸ *New York Times*, April 2, 1967, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ Nancy Weiss, *Whitney Young, and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 144.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

President Johnson's closest ties with a civil rights leader were with Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, the second in line was Whitney Young. The administration leaned on the Urban League Executive Director for strategic advice on how to work with the movements and its leaders. Johnson used Young as a sounding board to test out his ideas⁴⁷¹

In August 1965, the same month, King called for a halt in the US bombing campaign and advocated for a negotiated settlement with North Vietnam, Young's National Urban League passed a resolution at its convention in Miami that the league "would not divide nor divert its energies and resources by seeking to merge domestic and international issues where armed conflict is involved."⁴⁷² Young believed King's position on the Vietnam War was fundamentally misguided. Like Roy Wilkins, he thought it was an error to link the War and civil rights, as they were separate issues that could not be conflated without serious risks to Black progress. In March 1966 Young met with King and Forman to make his position known. "Johnson needs a consensus," he told them. "If we are not with him on Vietnam, then he is not going to be with us on civil rights."⁴⁷³ Forman snidely dismissed Young's concerns as the bleating of a corporate shill. "We understood that, given the corporations from which Whitney got support, his position on the war in Vietnam had to be different from ours ... I told Brother Whitney that it was indeed sad if civil rights organizations had to go around trying to please this person in the White House and then that one, hoping to win some concessions."⁴⁷⁴

Young justified his support for Johnson's Vietnam policy by citing his ambitious domestic agenda. "Those who criticize LBJ over Vietnam must realize that his domestic program—Medicare, urban aid, anti-poverty programs, aid to education, and countless other far-seeing

⁴⁷¹ Weiss, *Whitney Young*, 149.

⁴⁷² Fred Powledge, "Young of the Urban League Says Negroes Seek Lasting Changes." *New York Times*, August 3, 1965, 16.

⁴⁷³ Forman, *Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 369.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

measures mark the beginning of a new era in American life.”⁴⁷⁵ These were the things that would ultimately change Black lives. Young believed Martin Luther King’s opposition to the War would do nothing but alienate President Johnson and sabotage the entire movement. He could scarcely imagine any progress in the civil rights agenda being made without the backing of their Democratic ally in the White House. At one point in a heated exchange about the war between Young and King in February 1967, the SCLC leader told the Urban League Executive Director: “Whitney, what you are saying may get you a foundation grant, but it won’t get you into the kingdom of truth.”⁴⁷⁶

After King delivered his historic speech at the Riverside Church in New York in April, Young released a public statement: “I believe strongly that the urgent domestic problem of civil rights and the issues of the war in Vietnam should remain separate ... The masses of Negro citizens have as their first priority the immediate problem of survival in this country...The limited resources and personnel available to civil rights agencies for work in their behalf should not be diverted into other channels.”⁴⁷⁷

Young, perhaps not surprisingly, became the first civil rights leader to go to Vietnam. He made two trips there, first in July 1966, and then again in August 1967.⁴⁷⁸ While noting the lack of Black officers, he suggested that the conditions of Blacks in the military had improved considerably since World War II and the Korean War. Despite being denounced by Black and White anti-war activists for being Johnson’s “errand boy” and derided as an “Uncle Tom”, Young did not waver in his support for President Johnson. The Urban League raised \$35 million

⁴⁷⁵ Whitney Young, “Liberals and Civil Rights,” *New York Amsterdam News*, March 26, 1966, 12.

⁴⁷⁶ Weiss, *Whitney Young*, 159.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

per year, of which just 1 percent came from African Americans. Young was ultimately faithful to his well- heeled patrons.

By 1969, after Johnson had left office and Republican Richard Nixon became president, Young changed his tune on Vietnam. He told an interviewer, “Dr. King was probably more right than I was, because it is hard to separate the war from the domestic problems in terms of the resources of the country and the manpower and all this.”⁴⁷⁹ Young acknowledged the personal distress the Vietnam conflict had caused him. His daughter, Marcia, who attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, was an ardent anti-war activist who had gone on a hunger strike to demonstrate her opposition to the conflict.⁴⁸⁰ The war had taken a toll on Young’s family life, as it had on African American families across the country.

In October 1969, just before a massive antiwar demonstration in New York City, Young denounced the Vietnam War as a “moral and spiritual drain” that diverted the nation from “the urban and racial crisis- at the very time that the crisis is at flash point.” He added, “The agony of Vietnam has twisted America’s soul.”⁴⁸¹ He eventually came to support the moratorium against the war. But to many of his critics Young’s turnaround was too little to late. His personal loyalty to President Lyndon Johnson, and his commitment to a Cold War liberal Vietnam agenda earned him the enmity and resentment of many Black leaders, even in death.⁴⁸²

CORE was the oldest of the direct-action civil right groups. It had been founded in 1942 by James Farmer, a Black minister and labour organizer and James R. Robinson, a White pacifist who tried to apply Gandhi’s techniques of non-violent resistance to the problem of US racism.

⁴⁷⁹ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 234.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Stokely Carmichael famously made disparaging remarks about Young soon after it was announced he had died by drowning in Lagos, Nigeria on March 11, 1971. He said in front of an audience in San Francisco, “Some blacks love the slave master so much that even when they die in Africa, they have their body shipped here,” in *ibid.*, 235.

CORE was at center of the organization of the Freedom Rides in 1961. By 1964, CORE was changing and turning away from a focus on integration towards a more Black nationalist bent, and the liberation of the most marginalized and neglected elements of Black America. Its activities shifted from concentrating on expanding middle class opportunities, to connecting more with lower-class so-called Black “ghetto” communities. These changes also signaled a progressively critical take on the liberal establishment and the hegemony of corporate liberalism.

In April 1965 James Farmer, CORE’s national director, appeared on CBS’s news program *Face the Nation* and spoke about the need not just to be concerned about domestic matters but international ones as well: “I think as American citizens, persons who participate in the civil rights movement have not only a right but a duty to be interested in all activities of our government-domestic policies outside of the civil rights and foreign policy.”⁴⁸³ Two months later, Farmer was one of the sponsors of an “Emergency Rally on Vietnam” held at New York’s Madison Square Gardens, an event which included the likes of Coretta Scott King, Bayard Rustin, and actor Ossie Davis. At a news conference in North Carolina in 1965, he affirmed his belief that it was appropriate that civil rights activists be engaged in issues of peace. Within CORE, the organization’s policy making body, the National Action Council, officially endorsed “efforts across the country to gain peace in Vietnam and wage war on discrimination.”⁴⁸⁴

CORE’s 1965 annual convention in Durham, North Carolina, in the first week of July, was organized under the theme of “The Negro Ghetto -An Awakening Giant” and chaired by Floyd McKissick. It signaled CORE’s adoption of Black Power as its animating idea, putting more of an emphasis on self-defense than direct action, and becoming more engaged in organizing poor Black communities. As CORE’s attention shifted to economic injustice in the

⁴⁸³ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 26.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

urban north, it also took up the issue of Vietnam. Predictably, there was division as to how the organization should approach the war. But it was Farmer himself who started to make the moral and economic connection between the rising costs of the war and funding for the promised war on poverty. He admonished the Johnson administration for what he regarded as its misguided Vietnam policy, saying it was not possible for the U.S. government to “mount a decisive war against poverty and bigotry, while it is pouring billions down the war against people in Vietnam.”⁴⁸⁵ That said, while Farmer was unequivocal in his personal opposition to the war, he was also opposed to CORE becoming formally engaged in the anti-war movement.⁴⁸⁶ He was reluctant to further alienate the Johnson administration. He also worried that such a decision might jeopardize public (meaning White) support for the Civil Rights Movement, but that it even could jeopardize support within, what he labeled as, the “ghetto community” that was a vital constituency of the organization.

CORE’s membership temporarily passed a resolution calling for US troop withdrawal from Vietnam that won by just ten votes. It was the first time in its history that CORE had assumed an official position on a non-racial issue.⁴⁸⁷ And it took this stance contrary to its founder’s wishes. In the end though, after much lobbying by Farmer, the resolution was withdrawn, and CORE decided against taking an official antiwar position. Nonetheless, several of its members became active in the antiwar movement. Moreover, once McKissick assumed the directorship in January 1966 at its convention in Baltimore, CORE changed tack again and finally and officially embraced racial separatism and opposition to the Vietnam War.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 92.

⁴⁸⁶ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 82.

⁴⁸⁷ Inge Powell Bell, *CORE and the Strategy of Nonviolence* (New York: Random House, 1968), 189.

⁴⁸⁸ “Core Will Insist on ‘Black Power’: Delegates Also Oppose War in Vietnam Offer Aid to Draft Resisters CORE Adopts Policy Insisting on ‘Black Power.’” July 5, 1966, *New York Times* (1923-Current File) (New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, 1966).

A. Philip Randolph, a pioneering civil rights leader, founder of the first all-Black labour union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and a lifelong socialist, believed in coalition politics and saw the Democratic Party as a vehicle for reform. Randolph's position on Vietnam was hard to pin down, and somewhat ambiguous but, in the end, he became an advocate of President Johnson's Vietnam policy. During the 1964 election he became an ardent supporter of and brooked no criticism of the President and the Democrats. This represented a significant change in posture for Randolph who, just fifteen years earlier, had rebuked the country's two main parties. He had come to believe that cooperating with White allies and the federal government was the only "feasible way of delivering power to an essentially powerless people."⁴⁸⁹ He had high hopes in the promise of The Great Society and felt that the War on Poverty offered working people an opportunity for better employment, education, and public services.

Randolph's position on Vietnam, however, was more complex. He had been an early critic of the Vietnam War, and at a 1964 rally had inveighed against US foreign policy. As a self-proclaimed pacifist, he had also signed the Declaration of Conscience against the War in Vietnam. But his pacifism was, he felt, a personal position. In the end, he implicitly supported Johnson's Vietnam War policy both for pragmatic reasons and out of loyalty. Randolph, like others, believed it was "tactically unsound for a civil rights leader, or a leader of the peace movement, to attempt to assume a position of leadership in both."⁴⁹⁰ In the fall of 1966, he explained his position. "It was unfair to the Negro masses for the civil rights leaders to abandon the Mississippi-Alabama front and leave it exposed to the racists of the George Wallace stripe and turn the Negro's attention and plunge him into participating in demonstrations to end the war

⁴⁸⁹ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 88.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

in Vietnam.”⁴⁹¹ Randolph’s political confrere, confidant, and mentee Bayard Rustin would adopt a similar posture on Vietnam.

As a leading pacifist and civil rights activist, Bayard Rustin spent much of his life living his ideals. He was also an openly gay Black man and conscientious objector, who had spent 28 months in jail during the Second World War for refusing to serve in the US military. Rustin was one of the most brilliant organizers and strategists of his generation. In the 1940s he led the youth division of Randolph’s March on Washington Movement (MOWM). He was active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a Christian non-violent protest group and forerunner of CORE. He participated in the 1947 Freedom Ride which inspired the more famous rides of 1961. He tutored Martin Luther King Jr. on Gandhian non-violence during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and became one of his chief advisers. Rustin was instrumental in the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and served as one of the principal organizers of the March on Washington in 1963. He mentored young activists from SNCC and was a board member of two of the leading pacifist organizations in the US: The War Resisters League and Turn Toward Peace. It is because of this extraordinary pedigree that Rustin’s choice to support Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam War Policy seems an especially curious decision. But it also reveals a great deal about the dilemmas of Black liberation politics, and the contradictions of national and international moral commitments.

In August 1964, two days after the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Rustin participated in a peace rally in New York City, commemorating the bombing of Hiroshima. In his address he rebuked the U.S. government for its Vietnam policy. He acknowledged the devastation being caused by the war to the Vietnamese people, but he argued that the challenges

⁴⁹¹ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 88.

facing African Americans were so overwhelming, that King's focus on Vietnam did a disservice to the gravity of the domestic situation.

Martin and I did differ, but not regarding any division in principle between concern for human rights abroad and those at home. Our disagreement was on tactics. I argued that he had a moral obligation to oppose the war in Vietnam and, further that she should do so by becoming active in Clergy and Laity Concerned, but that his notion that he could combine the civil rights and peace struggle was an error ... I may have been wrong in tactics but surely, I never urged Martin to abandon the peace movement.⁴⁹²

In February 1965, in an essay for *Commentary Magazine* called "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," Rustin laid out a tactical political road map for the Civil Rights Movement. He argued that the future of the Black freedom struggle "lay in a realignment of the Democratic Party."⁴⁹³ He knew coalition politics required compromise. "The future of the Negro struggle depends on whether the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the effective political majority in the United States."⁴⁹⁴ He felt that by aligning it with the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, the interests of the Black freedom movement would be advanced. Rustin's strategy meant that any sharp criticism of the Vietnam War was not possible. He believed that offending President Johnson over the war, which had clearly come to consume him, could have consequences for the socially and economically progressive Great Society program which Rustin felt was a boon for Black America. In his view, it was more politically prudent to "hold your tongue", than to denounce the president.

Rustin believed it was possible, in theory, to pursue a policy of both "guns" for the War in Vietnam, and "butter" to meet the country's domestic needs. Privately, though, he was

⁴⁹² Letter written by Bayard Rustin (A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund) to William S. McFeely (Harvard University), December 29, 1986, Papers of Bayard Rustin, Box 46 Martin Luther King, Vietnam Position 1965-67, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹³ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 86.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

growing concerned that Johnson's commitment to the war would start to divert precious resources from much needed social investment at home. But Rustin still had faith in the possibilities of America's global project. He worried about the ramifications of withdrawing from Vietnam and leaving the territory vulnerable to the emergence of a totalitarian regime.⁴⁹⁵

Bayard Rustin insisted that King had made an error by conflating the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War Movements. He did not think that pacifism had a political value; rather, it was a personal moral position that he did not believe could be "politically organized." He believed more in defending freedom than he did in defending peace.⁴⁹⁶ "Negroes should not try to express their position on peace through the Boy Scout organization, the Red Feather campaign or civil rights organizations. They should do this through established peace organizations and not place civil rights organizations in double jeopardy."⁴⁹⁷ Rustin would later explain that his difference with King was not "a division in principle between a concern for human rights abroad and those at home, but a division on tactics." He added, "I argued that he had a moral obligation to oppose the war in Vietnam and that he should do so by becoming active in Clergy and Laity; but that this notion that he could combine the civil rights and peace struggles was an error."⁴⁹⁸ Rustin suggested that he "would consider the involvement of civil rights organizations as such in peace activities distinctly unprofitable and perhaps even suicidal."⁴⁹⁹ No peace movement in America could be successful if it became publicly identified with groups that were actively cheering for the victory of the Viet Cong.⁵⁰⁰ Rustin ultimately held that the American liberal

⁴⁹⁵ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 243.

⁴⁹⁶ Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 300.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁵⁰⁰ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 83.

project could be salvaged: that reform could be achieved within the US political system. Similar debates were occurring within the NAACP.

Over his decades-long tenure as the head of the NAACP between 1929 to 1955, Walter White evolved from a staunch anti-imperialist to a Cold War sympathizer, a journey that would presage the NAACP's and Black moderates' support for the Vietnam War. Roy Wilkins, who replaced White as the NAACP's executive secretary in 1955, cared much less about international affairs than his predecessor. To Wilkins, democratizing the South was a greater priority than eliminating colonialism and ending racial barriers abroad.⁵⁰¹ His NAACP would be loyal both to the "American Creed" and to the institutional framework of the American political system, because it had to be from within that system that political change would come.⁵⁰² Wilkins was a patriot who thought American political culture could be redeemed in spite of its contradictions, and that African Americans would eventually take their rightful place within it.

As the dominant and oldest Black social and political organization in the United States, the NAACP had its critics, some of whom regarded it as an anachronism. To SNCC leader Cleveland Sellers, born in 1944, the NAACP was of a different era. "Our parents had the NAACP," he added, "we needed something more." For Sellers' generation of freedom fighters, "the NAACP's approach was too slow, too courteous, too deferential and too ineffectual."⁵⁰³

But for all its deficiencies, the NAACP had been the preeminent civil rights organization in

⁵⁰¹ Plummer, *In Search of Power*, 253.

⁵⁰² The American Creed is a statement that establishes the core elements of American political faith. It was first formulated by Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States. It includes liberty, equality, individualism, populism and laissez faire. "The American's Creed" was the title of a resolution that was passed in the House of Representatives on April 3, 1918. It was first written by William Tyler Perry as an entry in a patriotic contest: "I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, a democracy in a republic, a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies."

⁵⁰³ Cleveland Sellers, quoted in Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 145.

America since its inception in 1909 for a reason: It had gotten results. Its accomplishments, including its groundbreaking 1954 Supreme Court victory in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, had undeniably helped to improve the lives of generations of African Americans in material ways. After the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, Wilkins continued to champion the NAACP's approach.

Wilkins and Lyndon Johnson had a lot in common. They had both been born in the first decade of the 20th century. They were both paternalistic in their manner. They were social outsiders who became consummate political insiders, and who shared a belief in “legislative lobbying litigation and voter registration as the path to equality.”⁵⁰⁴ They did not place much faith in mass demonstrations. Most importantly, Wilkins and Johnson liked and respected each other. They also needed each other and so were exceedingly loyal to one another. They had each other's backs.

Lyndon Johnson was, not unsurprisingly for a White Texas Democrat, much better able to understand and relate to “the courteous middle-class representatives of the NAACP and the National Urban League than he could the angry young Blacks who would tell it like it is and call him a MF [motherfucker].⁵⁰⁵ LBJ never trusted SNCC and CORE. And over the years he grew increasingly suspicious of King. LBJ also did not believe in mass demonstrations. He saw Congress as the place to make real social change and Wilkins responded to that.

Like Wilkins, but unlike a typical Cold War era president, Johnson was more interested in leaving his imprint on America than on the world. He wanted to revitalize the Homefront materially, by eliminating poverty, and morally, by ending racial discrimination. In a televised address in March 1965 Johnson said, “I do not want to be the President who built empires, or

⁵⁰⁴ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 177.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

sought grandeur, or extended dominion.”**506** In his first 18 months in office Johnson would appoint more African Americans to executive branch positions than all other previous US administrations combined.**507** By enacting the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, he helped to eradicate legal barriers to racial equality in the United States. He also helped achieve comprehensive immigration reform. To his African American admirers like Roy Wilkins, Lyndon Johnson was “the Great Emancipator”, the Abraham Lincoln of the 20th century, the most consequential U.S. president for Black Americans in the nation’s history. Johnson’s agenda so inspired Wilkins and the NAACP executive team that the NAACP ended its traditional neutrality and backed Johnson and the Democrats in the 1964 election.

To Wilkins, not supporting President Johnson’s administration was political suicide for the Civil Rights Movement, as it risked sabotaging fundraising potential and alienating White liberal supporters. Wilkins still believed in the greatness of America and extolled its “reservoirs of strength.”**508** He revered the US Constitution and had an abiding faith in America’s political institutions. Although aware of his country’s contradictions, he was a patriot, who was committed to working within the American system to make change. Wilkins was an integrationist who was disdainful of racial separatism. He despised Pan-Africanism and was suspicious of internationalists who identified with the struggles of the Third World.**509** He was a committed yet pedantic democrat with autocratic tendencies. The head of the NAACP was also a consummate conservative bureaucrat and pragmatic deal maker.**510**

506 Borstelmann, 178.

507 Ibid., 179.

508 Roy Wilkins’ speech at the March on Washington, August 28, 1963.

509 Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 216.

510 In the late 1950s, the Eisenhower administration had considered Wilkins to be the most militant of the Black leadership and refused to meet with him for years.

Wilkins was also an avowed Cold War liberal and zealous anti-communist. During the Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the NAACP had been suspected by government publications of having been infiltrated by communists. While the NAACP objected to such accusations, the organization's leadership constantly felt compelled to show their anti-communist credentials and their commitment to the state. In the early 1950s Wilkins had displayed his fealty to the Cold War ethos when he said, "The Negro wants change in order that he may be brought in line with the American standard...which must be done to preserve and strengthen that standard here at home, but to guarantee its potency in the world struggle against dictatorship and Stalinism abroad."⁵¹¹ He genuinely believed communists posed a threat to the NAACP's reputation for respectability and could potentially jeopardize its access to the White House. He targeted local branches of the organization that he believed had come under communist influence.⁵¹²

The NAACP thus grew more conservative, even reactionary, in the years following the Second World War. That conservatism alienated, what NAACP radical activist Robert Williams called, the most militant students who would become the "most militant agitators for our democracy."⁵¹³ There had long been impatience with the approach of the NAACP amongst local branches across the country, particularly among its young progressive members. Between 1965-69 the NAACP's policy on the Vietnam War was to have no policy at all. Wilkins had argued that if the Civil Rights Movement went "off on a foreign policy kick" it would "weaken its effectiveness in discharging its major responsibility."⁵¹⁴ In a letter written on February 11,

⁵¹¹ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 216.

⁵¹² Wilkins often depicted any opposing force or dissenting voice within either the NAACP or the civil rights movement itself as communist.

⁵¹³ Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1999), 69.

⁵¹⁴ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 84.

1966, Paul Jennings, the President of the International Union of Electrical Radio and Machine Workers, wrote to Wilkins announcing the launch of a humanitarian project intended to help resettle some of Vietnam's one million refugees. "Planned as a Refugee Resettlement Village, the intent is to provide a degree of dignity and sanctuary to those made homeless through the ravages of war."⁵¹⁵ Jennings requested that Wilkins participate as a member of a public committee supporting the non-partisan humanitarian initiative. Wilkins though seemed keen to maintain the NAACP's distance from the project however innocuous it was. Here was his response:

The members join me in expressing utmost sympathy with the project, but they were unanimous in stating that because of many factors involved and the lack of clarity on any topic having to do with Vietnam, the NAACP had best not identify itself with this or any other project.⁵¹⁶

A few months later in April 1966, Arthur Carter, President of the Mamaroneck-Larchmont Branch of the NAACP in Mamaroneck, New York, wrote Wilkins to ask for his guidance in determining whether the local branch should support a local 6th grade teacher, Arthur Rosenberg, who had been terminated by the school board after publicly protesting US policy in Vietnam. Carter was being pressured by a vocal minority of the NAACP branch members who wanted the NAACP to advocate for Rosenberg. John Morsell, NAACP Assistant Executive Director responded curtly: "The Mamaroneck- Larchmont Branch should not involve itself in the matter of Arthur Rosenberg's tenure as a teacher."⁵¹⁷ It was a typical response from the NAACP.

⁵¹⁵ Paul Jennings to Roy Wilkins, February 11, 1966, NAACP Papers, Group 4, Box A88, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁶ Roy Wilkins to Paul Jennings, March 22, 1966, NAACP Papers, Group 4, Box A88, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁷ Letter from John Morsell, Assistant Executive Director of the NAACP, to Mr. Arthur Carter, President Mamaroneck-Larchmont NAACP, April 19, 1966. Group IV NAACP Records, Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966, Library of Congress.

On April 10, 1965, the Flint branch of the NAACP unanimously adopted a resolution on Vietnam calling for the US government to mediate the conflict and withdraw its forces from the country. It was a powerful and prescient resolution that presaged Martin Luther King's public declaration about the war, years later, and was an indication of the significant divisions that existed within the most conservative civil rights organization in the land. The statement sought to establish the NAACP as an organization not exclusively focused on the home-front and the civil rights of US citizens but also the human rights of all the citizens of the world. Americans had a duty to be concerned with matters beyond their borders. The resolution showed just how evolved and outward-looking members of the NAACP's grassroots were compared to their cloistered leadership.

The NAACP is concerned not only with the constitutional rights of all Americans, but with the human rights and needs of the people of the world. Our constitutional rights will mean little if we live in a world devastated by war, or in a country which arrogates to itself the role of international policeman of the entire world when it constitutes only 4% of the world's population. We urge our national executive, President Johnson, to use his influence to mediate the civil war in Vietnam in order that a peace conference between the Government of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) of South Vietnam may establish a government of all the South Vietnamese people. We urge the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam so that the Vietnamese people may settle their own destiny. **518**

In an internal memo to NAACP staff in reference to the Flint Branch's Vietnamese resolution, the Director of Branches, Gloster Current, a Wilkins loyalist and staunch anti-communist, wrote that "the left wing in America is having a field day. Its most recent project is to create problems over our country's Vietnam policy. The resolution adopted by the Flint, Michigan Branch is a case in point."**519** Clearly, the Flint Branch's statement had struck a nerve. Four days after the resolution passed on April 14, 1965, Assistant Executive Director of the

518 NAACP Flint Branch Executive Board Resolution on Vietnam, April 10, 1965, Group III NAACP Records Box A 328 Vietnam War 1964-65, Library of Congress.

519 NAACP Memorandum from Gloster Current to Staff April 22, 1965, Group III NAACP Records Box A328 Vietnam War 1964-65, Library of Congress.

NAACP, John Morsell, replied to the Flint Branch's statement with a stark warning, a kind of cease-and-desist order from the organization's national office. Morsell stated that the Flint executive's position was not an official position of the NAACP.

The Resolution on Vietnam adopted by members of Flint Branch Executive is without standing in that it does not reflect any official policy position of the NAACP. It should not be released to public and if it has been I am directing its public repudiation by branch officers. Any branch is free to adopt and submit a recommendation for policy considerations in accord with provision of NAACP constitution but where no such policy determination has been made branches are not free to use name of association in connection with positions of their own. Flint Branch officers cannot be unaware of the controversial nature of the position they are taking and of the fact that unless and until it reflects the majority view of the NAACP Convention, they have no right to promulgate it as an NAACP stand.⁵²⁰

In an undated draft version of a memo written in 1965, Wilkins addressed branch, state conference, youth council and college chapter presidents of the NAACP. He stated that as the NAACP was a civil rights organization, it would not be considering any resolution dealing with the Vietnam War at its annual convention in Denver that was to take place in June. He reminded members that units of the NAACP were not authorized to participate in anti-War demonstrations. They could go on their own, but they could not use the NAACP name in any way to suggest that they supported the demonstration.

In another memo written to all local branches of the NAACP and made public on August 4, 1965, Wilkins issued a stern warning to NAACP members that they did not have the right to represent the organization in any official capacity at an upcoming civil rights/anti-war demonstration in Washington D.C. called the Assembly of Unrepresented People.

The NAACP, officially as an organized body, has never called for the crashing of the White House or taking over the National Capitol. It has not passed any resolution opposing US policy in Vietnam. Organized units of the NAACP, therefore, have no authority for participating in such a gathering. NAACP leaders, mindful that it is difficult

⁵²⁰ Letter from John Morsell Assistant Executive Director of NAACP to Harold Hayden, President of Flint Branch April 14, 1965, Group III NAACP Records Box A328 Vietnam War, 1964-65. Library of Congress.

for the public to disassociate them from the organization, are requested to heed this advice.⁵²¹

There would be numerous protests and resignations within the NAACP due to its “non-policy policy” on Vietnam. Grassroots support for the organization shrank. There was disgust and dismay among members and longtime supporters of the NAACP, who condemned its refusal to denounce the war. They were outraged and incredulous that the hallowed civil rights organization to which they had contributed for decades could get things so wrong and betray their core principles. Journalist and activist Henry Wallace wrote the following scathing rebuke to Lucille Black, Secretary for Membership NAACP, on December 1, 1965:

We realize that not only the NAACP, but other civil rights groups have also refused to fulfill their naturally assigned roles in opposing US genocidal policies in Vietnam. We feel that it is inexcusable that the Negro, oppressed, insulted, and often reviled by a good percentage of the White establishment in this country is lending support, by commitment or by silence to the Johnson administration’s poorly camouflaged aggression against the Vietnamese people. This is particularly true in view of the fact that the war is being conducted with such savagery against the entire population—young old, women and children—only because they are colored or, in the words of the GIs, “gooks.” To put it mildly, it is tragic in the extreme for the Negroes to fight and kill and perhaps be killed for the power structure of the White man’s war against colored Asians. You might lose some contributions and even be called names for demanding “Peace now! along with “Freedom Now” but you would speak for humanity and uphold your honor and dignity, which a worth much more than the crumbs you might lose from the White man’s segregated table for chit chats with President Johnson which are conducted only to water down your militancy.⁵²²

John Morsell, the NAACP’s Assistant Executive Director, answered Wallace on January 10, 1966:

As a matter of organizational principle, we have been equally firm over the years in hewing closely to the line of our mandate working from the civil rights or Negro Americans. Our national policies are set by the delegates to our annual conventions, and they rarely deal with issues which do not have a clean and close relationship to the functional commitment of the Association. Freedom in Africa, for example has long been

⁵²¹ Memorandum to NAACP Staff from Gloster Current NAACP Records Box A 328 Vietnam War 1964-65. Library of Congress.

⁵²² Letter from Henry Wallace to Mrs. Lucille Black Secretary of Membership NAACP, December 1, 1965, Group IV NAACP Records, Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence, 1966. Library of Congress.

regarded as a proper field for expression of NAACP views on the national level. On the other hand, except for the 1964 anti-Goldwater resolution, we have never departed from political non-partisanship.⁵²³

Henry Wallace replied by trying to expose what he considered to be the hypocrisy of the NAACP's position on Vietnam.

It seems to us that if you do not have the willingness or the courage to condemn US crimes against humanity in Vietnam that you would at least confine yourself to denouncing those in Mississippi and elsewhere in the US instead of attacking Mr. Lewis. How can you be so quick to denounce Negro violence (proved by White violence) in Watts and yet back so unreservedly US violence in Vietnam where Negro soldiers, whose enemies are in the US, not half-way round the world, are killing and being killed in a much higher proportion than White soldiers, many of whom wouldn't drink a beer with them or invite them to their homes after the war is over, if it ever is?⁵²⁴

Wallace went on to accuse the NAACP of selling out the Black community and effectively doing the duplicitous bidding of the Johnson administration. "The NAACP is fast becoming the leading Uncle Tom of the civil rights movement. You are jumping through President Johnson's hoop so regularly and humiliatingly that you have become little more than an Administration houseboy."⁵²⁵

An irate Wallace eventually demanded that his name "that of my wife and those of our five children be removed from the NAACP Honor Roll and mailing list."⁵²⁶ He was not the only one.⁵²⁷ Matters came to a head after SNCC publicly proclaimed its opposition to the Vietnam War for the first time on January 6, 1966, the NAACP issued a statement denouncing this "assault" on US foreign policy and condemning SNCC's call to resist the draft. The NAACP dismissed the SNCC militants as juvenile and reckless. According to Roy Wilkins they were

⁵²³ Letter from John Morsell, Assistant Executive Director of the NAACP, to Henry Wallace, January 10, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records, Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence, 1966. Library of Congress.

⁵²⁴ Letter from Henry Wallace to Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, January 13, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records, Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence, 1966. Library of Congress.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ As noted on page 221 in Lucks' *Selma to Saigon*, Victor Slidell a member from Cambridge Massachusetts was so outraged by the NAACP's rebuke of SNCC's antiwar statement that he resigned from the association and told Roy Wilkins that the money he would normally have sent to the NAACP would now be going to SNCC.

“contemptuous of all others, Black and White, who did not fit a doctrinaire formula of thinking and acting.”⁵²⁸

The NAACP leadership’s disdain for SNCC’s call for an end to the war, demonstrated their class privilege, and exposed a generational divide within Black America. Leaders like Wilkins, who was in his mid 60s and extolled the virtues of military service despite never having served himself, could not relate to the predicament poor, Black Southern men in their 20s faced when drafted to fight a war that was not of their choosing. Roy Wilkins became a party to the Johnson administration’s scheme to sideline Black organizations like SNCC that were against the war. To Wilkins, they represented an existential threat to the Civil Rights Movement, exposing all civil rights organizations to charges that they were somehow “communist sympathizers.”

The NAACP leadership’s “non-position position” on Vietnam was met with disappointment and dismay by many of its supporters. Some long-time members were bewildered by the NAACP’s intransigent, tone-deaf, colonial approach to Vietnam. They expressed a deep sense of betrayal. Henry S. Smith of Colton California had been a member of the NAACP since the notorious Scottsboro cases of the 1930s.⁵²⁹ He railed against what he regarded as the NAACP’s propaganda in a letter written to Roy Wilkins dated January 16, 1966.

You may be unaware of one very valid reason the NAACP is losing members ... The fact that the organization which I supported for years has refused to take a stand against our glorious leaders’ war in Vietnam. You must keep in mind that those of us who were involved in the Scottsboro cases in the Thirties, and up until the present time in civil rights are also, in most cases, interested in civil rights for the people of All of Vietnam ... the right to choose, if they wish, ANY form of government ... The NAACP has apparently not taken a stand against the “you Vietnamese are better dead than Red” policy which the American White leaders are trying to shove down the throats of the

⁵²⁸ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 220.

⁵²⁹ The Scottsboro Boys case was a major court case and civil rights controversy involving nine African American teenagers, one as young as twelve, who were accused of raping two White women on a freight train in 1931. Despite testimony from doctors who examined the women and declared that no rapes had taken place, an all-White jury convicted them. The case became a metaphor for the racial inequities in the US judicial system and garnered national and international attention.

Vietnamese. Please don't send me any more of your "freedom propaganda ... Since April of last year, I realize that much of it is rhetoric and hypocritical. **530**

On January 25, 1966, Wilkins replied, insisting that such foreign policy matters were outside of the NAACP's field of vision.

We here are free to admit that whereas we know something beyond polemics and slogans as far as the civil rights struggle is concerned, we know very little except slogans so far as foreign policy and particularly Southeast Asian Policy is concerned... We cheerfully permit others who feel they are competent in this field to take positions on foreign policy (which they can do as individuals, since their errors will affect no one but themselves. **531**

In a note to Mrs. Irene H. Smith, President of the New Jersey Conference of NAACP branches Wilkins reiterated his determination not to conflate Anti-War Efforts and Civil Rights Campaigns. As he had stated before:

We recognize that many members and officers of NAACP have strong feelings on Vietnam. But we believe they should express themselves through peace organizations or church groups or various committees that are concerned primarily with war and peace. We believe members have joined NAACP principally because it is a civil rights organization carrying on a program for the civil rights of Negro Americans under our government. Many of them are members of other organizations through which they express their views on other issues. We believe we have a duty to those who choose the NAACP as their civil rights organization to keep it in the civil rights field. **532**

In February 1966, the Greenwich Village-Chelsea branch of the NAACP, which had the reputation as being the leading opponent of the war within the organization, proposed a forum to discuss the relationship between the Peace and Civil Rights Movements. The national office of the NAACP quickly scuttled those plans and called for the event's cancellation. The branch president Edwin Peets was unrepentant in his criticism of the conflict in Vietnam. He urged local NAACP branches across the country to engage in a debate about Vietnam and its debilitating

530 Letter from Henry S. Smith to Roy Wilkins Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, January 15, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966, Library of Congress.

531 Letter from Roy Wilkins to Henry S. Smith, January 25, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966, Library of Congress.

532 Note from Roy Wilkins to Mrs. Irene H. Smith, President of New Jersey Conference of NAACP Branches (Atlantic City) May 20, 1966, Group IV, NAACP Records, Box 89, Vietnam War 1966-67, Library of Congress.

effects on the Civil Rights Movement.⁵³³ The resolution was rejected by the NAACP's leadership, which framed the call for debate as being the work of communists, not as a campaign that was born out of American democratic traditions. Gloster Current, the NAACP's Director of Branches, referred to the Greenwich Village branch of NAACP as a "notorious hotbed of radicalism." Though he had criticized Wilkins' coziness with Johnson, He attacked King's referencing the "gangrene of Vietnam," in the spring of 1966, as evidence of how "the left wing is at work to influence our resolutions."⁵³⁴

Many of the NAACP's supporters were appalled by the immorality of a conflict that had devastated the people and despoiled the land of Vietnam. They could not fathom how the NAACP, which purported to be a defender of human rights, could display such callous disregard for the sanctity of the lives of Vietnamese people. They were mortified that the organization they had long championed for its commitment to humanity and justice, could be so indifferent to the suffering of others. On March 14, 1966, Joseph Stern from Astoria New York tried to capture these sentiments in a letter he wrote to Roy Wilkins:

In explaining their reasons for not taking a position on Vietnam the NAACP has recently indicated that there can be no disagreement concerning the objectives of the civil rights struggle, but that men of good will can and do disagree over the issues involved in Vietnam. Does anyone feel that there is a necessity for: "Poisoning rice crops and defoliating trees; Bombing of schools hospitals, villages and ex-cart bridges? Napalming and setting fire to homes and "structures"? ... Has denial of food to the unemployed people who have sought to vote, the bombing of houses and churches, the application of cattle prods to genitalia, the imprisoning of Northern agitators, the dispossessing of tenants, the use of tear gas and clubs against demonstrators in Selma and elsewhere, made Negroes more tractable more anxious to negotiate with the white power structure and respect America more? Why should dark-skinned Asians accept these horrible deeds any

⁵³³ Resolution by Greenwich Village- Chelsea Branch of the NAACP, signed by Edwin Peets, President, and Betty Tatum, Secretary, approved by the Branch at its regular membership meeting April 27, 1966. Group IV NAACP Records, Box 89, Vietnam War, 1966-67, Library of Congress.

⁵³⁴ Memo from Gloster Current to NAACP Staff, April 14, 1966, Group IV, NAACP Papers, Box A88, Library of Congress.

more than do Negroes. Or does the NAACP feel that Asians are second-class citizens and are not entitled to the equal rights that Negroes aspire to.⁵³⁵

Roy Wilkins responded to Stern's letter on March 17, 1966, rather dismissively. He maintained that the NAACP's primary concern was with civil rights as it affected African Americans. He insisted that people joined the NAACP to engage in that struggle alone.

The NAACP has no right to assume that its members who have signified their support of the Negro civil rights fight will want their civil rights organization to commit them to a stand on the Vietnamese war ... our members who are wildlife conservationists do not expect that the NAACP will take a public stand on wildlife conservation. There are at least a million organizations of one type or another in the United States dedicated to attaining this or that objective. We believe we ought to concentrate on our main objective and allow the other to concentrate on theirs.⁵³⁶

At a staff meeting in March 1966, Current, inexplicably turned on his boss and asserted that Wilkins' chummy relationship with White House was costing the organization members and becoming a public relations disaster. Wilkins was irritated by this unusual rebuke from one of his loyalists and called the charge offensive. Current apparently backed off but did not change his mind about the problems that Wilkins' intensely close alliance with the Johnson White House was causing for the NAACP.⁵³⁷

With opposition to the war increasing in Black America, the NAACP became more focused on calling out dissenting voices within the organization as well as the war's critics throughout the movement, including SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC's King. In response to King's Riverside address in April 1967 Wilkins said: "If I am going to cry about something, I am going to cry about the murder of Wharlest Jackson in Natchez, Mississippi, rather than about civilians

⁵³⁵ Letter from Joseph Stern to Roy Wilkins, March 14, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966 Library of Congress.

⁵³⁶ Letter from Roy Wilkins to Joseph Stern March 17, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966 Library of Congress.

⁵³⁷ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 222. Wharlest Jackson was the treasurer of the Natchez, Mississippi chapter of the NAACP and a Korean War veteran. On February 27, 1967, he was assassinated by a car bomb.

in Vietnam.”⁵³⁸ Wilkins denounced King for lending respectability to an anti-war coalition that included communists. Some of King’s other critics, including conservative journalist Carl Rowan, suggested that King himself had fallen under the influence of communists.⁵³⁹

For over 60 years, going back to the war of 1898, African Americans had attempted to translate their engagement in wars abroad into advances in civil rights at home. To Wilkins and his acolytes, King was not pragmatic enough, and thus failed to serve the interests and meet the needs of African Americans who were hungry for material progress. This harsh critique of King though caused a backlash and led to a steady flow of criticism of Wilkins’ leadership from the NAACP’s own members. NAACP members of the Greenwich Village Chelsea Branch made clear their objections to the attacks on King and lambasted the NAACP’s leadership:

We feel that the time has come when the National Office and the main official must be restrained from making unwarranted attacks on other civil rights leaders. Especially bearing in mind the recent castigatory references made by our National leadership to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and to Rep. Adam Clayton Powell. We feel that the entire NAACP membership is done a disservice each time that Mr. Wilkins speaks out in the name of the NAACP, without assuring himself that the views he is expressing are held in general agreement by the membership he is representing.⁵⁴⁰

In the runup to the NAACP’s 1967 convention in Boston, internal critics of its Vietnam policy sought to force a debate about the war. The Greenwich Village- Chelsea Branch of the NAACP entered the fray and expressed both its horror with the conflict and fear that it risked “bringing us closer to the brink of nuclear war.”⁵⁴¹ The branch also lamented the disastrous effects that the billions spent on the Vietnam War effort were having on the domestic War on Poverty.

⁵³⁸ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 223.

⁵³⁹ Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike: Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2007), 95.

⁵⁴⁰ Resolution by Greenwich Village-Chelsea Branch in 1967, Group IV, NAACP Records, Box E9, Annual Convention, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

The war effort had sapped resources from the War on Poverty and other programs necessary for justice and opportunity in the United States of America.⁵⁴² The renegade branch presented a resolution that called for an immediate ending of the bombing of North Vietnam: “We most urgently demand; Cessation of bombing of North Vietnam. De-escalation of the war generally. Cessation of use of the cruelest weapons and tactics: napalm, anti-personnel bombs, burning of villages.” ⁵⁴³ At the summer convention a group of dissidents and militants who called themselves the “Young Turks” set up a picket line outside the Sheraton Boston Hotel and challenged Roy Wilkins’ support of the Vietnam War. Wilkins ultimately survived the challenge to his leadership. Months after the convention, Steven Kidd from the Youth division of NAACP’s New York branch, condemned NAACP policy on Vietnam, arguing that the war was “morally unacceptable” and Wilkins “the most paranoid leader Black people have.”⁵⁴⁴ Wilkins did not once mention Vietnam or the War that was raging there during his speech to the NAACP Convention in July 1967.⁵⁴⁵

The Michigan State Conference of the NAACP also adopted an anti-war resolution introduced by the Ann Arbor Chapter. It noted the devastating effect the war was having on domestic anti-poverty programs, the high number of Black casualties, and the unwillingness of South Vietnamese Army to fight. It called for the halt of all bombing and de-escalation.⁵⁴⁶ The NAACP’s Youth Council in New Orleans, reflecting the generational divide that emerged in the organization, expressed support for King’s Riverside speech.⁵⁴⁷ The Council’s vice president, Raymond DuVernay, had been jailed earlier in the year (1967) for draft resistance.

⁵⁴² Resolution by Greenwich Village- Chelsea Branch in 1967, Group IV, NAACP Records, Box E9, Annual Convention, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 224.

⁵⁴⁵ 191

⁵⁴⁶ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 100.

⁵⁴⁷ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 100.

The National Youth Work Committee of the NAACP echoed some of the misgivings that young African Americans and other minority youth had about the war: “Another grave concern to us is that of the present system of the military draft with all of its inherent and actual injustices to minority group youth.”⁵⁴⁸ In October 1967, the New York NAACP, led by younger activists, adopted its own antiwar resolution during the state convention.⁵⁴⁹ In 1968, the Mississippi NAACP followed with an anti-war declaration of their own. Charles Evers, a local field secretary who was running for Congress said, “I am against this war. I will not have our people fight for someone else’s freedom when they are going to have to come home and have to fight in this country for their own freedom.”⁵⁵⁰

This internal discord over the war contributed to the erosion of support for the NAACP in Black America. A 1969 survey suggested that just 20 percent of African Americans thought it was doing an excellent job, a drop from 80 percent in 1965.⁵⁵¹ Over 85 percent of African Americans disagreed with NAACP and instead believed that the war had siphoned resources away from the campaign on poverty.⁵⁵² In spite of the shift in African American public opinion the NAACP organization seemed frozen in time. Indeed, even after Lyndon Johnson announced he would not be seeking reelection, the NAACP remained opposed to the anti-war movement.⁵⁵³

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, polls suggested an overwhelming majority of African Americans opposed the war. A Harris poll said just 9 percent of all Americans supported Nixon’s

⁵⁴⁸ National Youth Work Committee of the NAACP Press Statement, February 24-26, 1967, Group IV, NAACP Records, Box E9, Annual Convention, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴⁹ Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 100.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 225.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

decision to send troops to Cambodia.⁵⁵⁴ Following the revelation of Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia in June 1970, the NAACP and the National Urban League finally issued a joint statement demanding the immediate termination of the war. A few months after the killing of four student protesters at Kent State and two more students at the historically Black Jackson State College in Mississippi, the NAACP and Urban League demanded an end to the war. Two years later Wilkins claimed, falsely, that "an end to U.S. involvement in the Indochina war" had long been integral to NAACP policies and programs.⁵⁵⁵ This was clearly an attempt to either revise or rewrite history, but the damage may already have been done.⁵⁵⁶ Despite being invited, Wilkins refused to attend the January 20, 1969, inauguration of Republican nominee Richard Nixon. This unprecedented action signified a marked shift in philosophy and strategy within the NAACP. Fifteen years earlier, even four years earlier, the prospect of being shut out of the halls of power would have terrified the NAACP, but no longer.

As we can see by examining the archival correspondence between NAACP members and senior leaders, the organization's membership increasingly demonstrated a lack of deference to authority. And Black leaders themselves openly displayed less respect for the power of the state. The fear of alienating the state was no longer the preoccupation among Black moderate organizations that it had been prior to the beginning of the War in Vietnam.

⁵⁵⁴ Lucks, *Selma to Saigon*, 226.

⁵⁵⁵ Berg, *Ticket to Freedom*, 247.

⁵⁵⁶ On July 1, 1966, Wilkins wrote to a Sergeant Robert Hollis who had been inquiring as to whether the NAACP had investigated the welfare and equality of Negro troops in the Republic of Vietnam. Wilkins said that the NAACP had made no investigations but "the reports we have received all indicate that Negro troops in the area have no complaints stemming from racial discrimination. Whatever discomforts they have to endure and whatever sacrifices they are called on to make appear to be the same as those which confront all American servicemen in the area." Wilkins' response, which suggested he was unaware of the racial oppression that many soldiers had to endure within the US army, betrayed either his ignorance, incompetence, or indifference to the plight of African American soldiers. He would only have had to do some investigating of his own to determine what was occurring. Letter from Roy Wilkins to Sergeant Hollis July 1, 1966, Group IV NAACP Records Box A88 Vietnam Correspondence 1966 Library of Congress.

CONCLUSION

The Sixties was the decade of the Democrats. For eight consecutive years the Democratic Party dominated the US federal political arena, occupying the White House and controlling both Houses of Congress. Despite deep internal rifts that only intensified as the decade progressed, the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) advanced an ambitious liberal agenda that led to the implementation of some of the most socially progressive legislation in American history. Under the stewardship of John F. Kennedy and later Lyndon Johnson, the Democrats championed a form of liberalism that reshaped and reformed the nation in ways that had not been seen since the reign of FDR in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁵⁷ And yet, in spite of the many heady liberal projects advanced by President Johnson, culminating in the passage of two historic pieces of civil rights legislation in the mid 1960s, his foreign policy agenda in Southeast Asia would eventually face opposition from powerful forces within the African American community, a constituency for whom the President's "Great Society" and "War on Poverty" projects were perhaps most intended to benefit.

The NAACP's and Urban League's response to the Vietnam War was the embodiment of a Cold War liberal approach to the conflict. The two civil rights organizations, which were predominant in Black America in the 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s, were intensely anti-communist and expressed support for the broad foreign policy goals of the US state, including the War in Vietnam. Partly this was so as not to jeopardize progressive measures taken on the domestic front, but much of it was based on a genuine solidarity with those progressive elements of American political culture that many African Americans clung to as the basis of their claims to political equality. It might be said that this wing of the civil rights movement accepted the de

⁵⁵⁷ Kennedy was a late convert to welfare liberalism, especially—famously—in Civil Rights because he also saw it as the potential death-knell of the Democratic Party. He only made his turn in June 1963, forced by southern intransigence and after being embarrassed by Martin Luther King Jr..

Tocqueville-Hartz thesis that America's racial flaws were exceptions to the rule of a creed anchored in liberty and equality.

As a result of an increasing sense of confidence in their place in America, African American men no longer felt obliged to prove their manhood or fealty to the state, or to White America for that matter. This shift represented a kind of revolt against what W.E.B. Du Bois had once called the "Double Consciousness." In earlier generations the deployment of African Americans in disproportionately large numbers on the battlefield would have been regarded as an achievement worthy of celebration. However, African Americans were now living in an era in which, thanks to their sacrifice and struggles, they had secured their basic civil rights as American citizens. The brutally violent experiences that SNCC and CORE activists had had on the ground in the South, ostensibly without the protection of the federal government, led to their disillusionment and skepticism about the possibilities for transformation within a liberal order. African Americans had also increasingly lost faith in the prospects of war as a vehicle for emancipation. They had returned from earlier wars hoping for civic peace and freedom only to be disappointed, rudely confronted by the persistent reality of racism, Jim Crow, and intensified White Supremacy. In the First and Second World Wars, African Americans had lobbied to be accepted in the army; in Vietnam, African Americans voiced concern about their becoming cannon fodder and questioned the disproportionate number of them fighting and dying for a state that was not fully committed to their humanity. Never had so many prominent African American leaders been so outspoken in their criticism, or expressed such contempt for American foreign policy, and all of this despite the paralyzing legacy of the Red Scare and McCarthyism and at the height of the Cold War. This was an unprecedented expression of confidence in the bona fide

Americanness of their citizenship. It also suggests that they no longer felt that the transactional nature of their relationship with the liberal state would yield results.

For Lyndon Johnson, one of the most able US legislators of the 20th century, the passage of the twin acts of the mid 1960s, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, were the crowning achievements of a long political career and portended the emergence of the “Great Society” he had long imagined as his most enduring legacy. Yet, five days after the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Watts went up in flames. The West Coast urban uprising blindsided Johnson and revealed a profound alienation existing amongst segments of African American youth. This social explosion was deeply troubling to Johnson and King. The President was particularly aggrieved by the conflagration which he regarded as a betrayal by the very people whom he had tried to help. Just a few days earlier, the two political titans had celebrated an historic civil rights achievement; yet now, they were left to ponder the consequences of some of the worst urban uprisings or rebellions to hit the continental United States in the 20th century. As Watts burned, Johnson was formulating a plan for the deployment of ground troops in Vietnam that would ultimately cause his political demise and stoke the flames of division that would scorch his nation in the years to come.

If the logic of falling dominoes seemed to trap him in southeast Asia, President Johnson’s “true love”, his progressive domestic agenda embodied by the Great Society, would eventually be eclipsed, to his everlasting regret, by the exigencies of the Vietnam War. By the late 1960s, the conflict there would dominate public and political discourse, and commandeer the bulk of the administration’s focus and the nation’s limited treasure, hastening the decline of the Civil Rights Movement as a coherent and ostensibly unified entity. The Vietnam War was a disruptive force that signalled the symbolic end of a dynamic civil rights era, but it also portended the ending of

old hierarchies and ossified political relationships, launching an epoch of realignment and new possibilities for the Black Freedom Movement.

In *Selma to Saigon*, Daniel Lucks argues that the Vietnam War arrived at a most inopportune moment for the Civil Rights Movement, thwarting its progressive and reformist agenda by shifting the country's and government's focus from the devastated streets of America to the battlefields of Southeast Asia. To Lucks, the Vietnam conflict contributed to the fracturing of the Civil Rights Movement, the collapse of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and the end of the New Deal Coalition. He concludes that the War in Vietnam was a disaster for Civil Rights, the Black Freedom Movement and thus Black America.

In *War: What Is It Good For? Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military*, Kimberley Phillips contends that in the wake of the Second World War, "mainstream civil rights leaders and organizations tied blacks long struggle for full citizenship to the nation's new Cold War militarism."⁵⁵⁸ Radical race reform activists though, like Claudia Jones and Paul Robeson, who critiqued US "imperialist" wars and advocated for peace, were disciplined in myriad ways: public sanction, imprisonment, economic reprisals and deportation.⁵⁵⁹ Phillips notes that it was ordinary African American citizens who, through their anti-war dissent, challenged civil rights leaders and their organizations to adopt a more critical view of war and expand their notion of racial justice and Black freedom. So, while it is true that charismatic and powerful civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins exercised considerable influence over the debate about Vietnam, they themselves were influenced by their followers and other ordinary members of civil society.

⁵⁵⁸ Phillips, *War: What Is It Good For*, 231.

⁵⁵⁹ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*; Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*.

As Jonathan Rosenberg has suggested in *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*, the committed activists of the Sixties had more options when it came to choosing approaches to reform than activists of earlier generations. The Vietnam War changed the view of the United States as a “beneficent force in international politics.”⁵⁶⁰ Rosenberg also argues that there is a relationship between the post-Second World War success of the Civil Rights movement, the emergence of American globalism and the increasing global preeminence of the United States. Race reform leaders often conceived of the struggle for domestic civil rights as part of a global struggle for freedom, justice, and independence. They saw themselves working within an international context.

To Simon Hall, author of *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements of the 1960s*, the reluctance of the NAACP and the Urban League, the putative moderate wing of the Civil Rights Movement, to oppose the Vietnam War was a result of their pragmatism, anti-communism, Cold War ideology and organizing experience. Hall contends that the passage of both the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act reinforced the belief of these two conservative race reform organizations in the goodness of America. They were convinced that a coalition with liberal Democrats like Lyndon Johnson was the only way forward for African Americans still seeking to be recognized as full and equal citizens of the United States.

On the other hand, some historians see little good in the war and lament its far-reaching and corrosive domestic effects. Benjamin Harrison writes that the Vietnam War was a devastating military imbroglio that diverted attention from a seminal moment of domestic reform, and ultimately contributed to the dismemberment and factionalization of the Civil Rights

⁵⁶⁰ Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 214.

movement.⁵⁶¹ Harrison argues the violence that the War spawned in Southeast Asia contributed to an uptick in violence on America's streets. He contends the racial inequities exposed by the military draft provoked desperate actions and extreme rhetoric by putative Black militants. The non-violent practice that had prevailed amongst civil rights workers gave way to what Harrison calls an "imprudent stridency." He suggests conservative organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League were least affected by the Vietnam War whereas younger progressive groupings like SNCC, the SCLC and CORE were torn apart by the polarizing debate on the conflict.

Another civil rights historian, Robert Cook, like Daniel Lucks, believes the Vietnam War played a critical role in the collapse of the Civil Rights Movement in the late Sixties as "the intensification of US military intervention in Southeast Asia contributed to the decline of the Civil Rights coalition."⁵⁶² It is my contention that the conclusions of Lucks, Cook, and Harrison, fail to recognize the inherent possibilities that emerged from the putative decline of the Civil Rights Movement. Although Black Americans had resisted America's wars since the First World War, that resistance only manifested itself as a bona fide movement during the Vietnam War, some five decades later.⁵⁶³ While the NAACP, the Urban League and other moderate Civil Rights organizations and leaders had long campaigned to separate protests against the War from the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam highlighted that the struggles were linked and that there was, in fact, a connection between the suppression of freedom struggles in the US and anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam, along with other centres around the globe. The state's attempt to rein in and discipline Black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Robeson, William

⁵⁶¹ Benjamin T. Harrison, "Impact of the Vietnam War on the Civil Rights Movement in the Midsixties." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 3 (1996): 261-278.

⁵⁶² Robert Cook, *Sweet Land of Liberty? The African American Struggle for Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1998), 176.

⁵⁶³ One could make the argument that the First and Second World Wars were existential conflicts. At the time, the Allied Forces could persuade an African American facing harsh Jim Crow conditions in Alabama that as dire his situation might be, a world ruled by Hitler and Nazi Germany would be even worse.

Alphaeus Hunton, Claudia Jones and W.E.B. Du Bois was a sign of the always provisional nature of African American citizenship. By the end of the Vietnam War even Black leaders, like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young from the moderate liberal wing of the Civil Rights Movement, no longer felt obliged to mute their opposition to the conflict in Southeast Asia. Members of their own organizations were openly expressing their dissent and disdain for the folly of US foreign policy. This was a sign that they no longer felt beholden to the authority of the state and would no longer engage in or conform to a certain brand of “respectability politics.” The War helped to destroy the liberal consensus that had emerged out of the Second World War and revealed to the race reform leadership the inherent limitations of American liberalism. What followed was a loss of faith in the federal government as a force that could protect the lives of movement activists and African Americans in general. The Vietnam War brought Black antiwar dissent, which for decades had been on the margins of civil rights discourse, to the centre of the Black freedom and racial justice movement.⁵⁶⁴

The NAACP’s most notable victories, especially *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, were gained by using the instruments of the state to oppose unjust laws. The organization and its leaders believed in the American creed of human equality and retained a faith that the U.S. political and judicial process would eventually enable African Americans to prevail in their struggle for civil rights. The NAACP was committed to reforming the American political system and therefore worked within it to change it. In contrast, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) largely operated in marginalized communities in the US South and sought to organize disfranchised people to exercise their rights as full citizens. The members of SNCC and the MFDP felt they were consistently being betrayed by the state, which in their minds failed to provide the requisite

support and resources in their struggle for racial justice in the South. The real experiences of SNCC members working “in the field of struggle” taught them that the federal government was rarely there when it was most needed to defend Black People against the brutality and violence of White Supremacy. It is impossible not to conclude that the various positions civil rights organizations and individuals adopted on Vietnam were not born of cravenness or naivete or even political opportunism, but rather out of the materiality of their struggles with the state.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: List of Principle Civil Rights Organizations

ANC - African National Congress (1912- Present)

A multi-racial organization founded in January 1912 dedicated to ending racial discrimination in South Africa and defending the rights and freedoms of Africans.

BSCP - Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (1925- 1978)

Founded by A. Philip Randolph who became its first president, the BSCP was an African American Labour organization that represented the interests of railway porters. It was the first labour union was led by African Americans to receive a charter from the American Federation of Labour.

CAA- Council on African Affairs (1937- 1955)

The CAA was founded in 1937 and quickly established itself as the preeminent African American-led anti-colonial and Pan-African organization in the United States. The group counted some of the most prominent leftist luminaries of the generation as members including Paul Robeson, who served as the group's chairman, W.E.B. Du Bois, who the vice- chair and head of the Africa Aid Committee, and English professor Alphaeus Hunton, its executive director.

CPNND - Committee on Participation of Negroes in the National Defense

The organization was formed in 1938 by Robert Vann, the publisher and editor of the Pittsburgh Courier, with the purpose of pressuring the federal government to end racial discrimination in the armed forces.

CORE- Congress of Racial Equality (1942-Present)

CORE was founded in 1942 in Chicago by, among others, James Farmer, and Pauli Murray. Influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and emerging from the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, it became one of the leading civil rights organizations of the 1960s, advocating for non-violent action in the struggle against segregation.

FOR - Fellowship of Reconciliation (1915- Present)

The group was founded in 1915 by pacifists including Jane Addams, A.J. Muste and Bishop Paul Jones who opposed the entry of the U.S. into World War I. FOR claimed to be the "largest, oldest interfaith peace and justice organization in the United State." It focused on both domestic and international issues

MFDP- Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (1964-1968)

An American political party dedicated to racial inclusion and challenging the established power of the Mississippi Democratic Party.

MOWM - March on Washington Movement (1941-1946)

The MOWM was formed by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in 1941 to pressure the U.S. government to desegregate the armed forces and provide fair working opportunities for Black workers.

NAACP- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909 - Present)

Established in 1909 by W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, William English Walling, Oswald Garrison Villard, and others, as an interracial, reformist organization dedicated "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination", the NAACP was the most prominent of the modern civil rights groups. It was the one most dedicated to the idea that the liberal principles of the United States Constitution needed to be extended to protect Black Americans, and it fought principally through the courts to ensure the end of all forms of juridical racial discrimination. Its legal department's long campaign against *Plessy v. Ferguson* culminated in the *Brown V. Board of Education* decision in 1954.

NCNW- National Council of Negro Women (1935- Present)

Founded in 1935 by educator and activist Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, the Council's mission was to advance opportunities for and the quality of life of African American women, their families, and communities. The organization, which was relatively conservative in its orientation, sought to encourage Black women's political and economic success.

NNC-National Negro Congress (1935-1946)

Founded in 1936 at Howard University, the organization was a Depression-era coalition of African American groups dedicated to Black Liberation and fighting against racial discrimination. As the successor organization to the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, it was affiliated with the Communist Party. Its first president was A. Philip Randolph

NNLC- National Negro Labour Council (1950-1955)

The council was founded in 1950 as a leftist advocacy organization dedicated to serving the needs and advancing the civil rights of African American workers. In 1951 it was declared a communist front organization by the U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell.

NUL- National Urban League (1910-Present)

Established in 1910 by sociology scholar George Edmund Haynes and social worker Ruth Standish Brown, the reformist organization was dedicated to eliminating barriers to employment for African American workers. It became one of the most significant modern civil rights organizations of the 20th century and a staunch advocate for the Liberal Creed.

STJ- Sojourners for Truth and Justice (1951-1952)

Created by a group of 14 African American women, including prominent activists Shirley Graham Du Bois, Louise Thompson Patterson, and Charlotta Bass, the STJ was a radical Black feminist civil rights organization with a global outlook that used an intersectional approach in its struggle for equality and justice. It was the only Communist group in the U.S. led by African American women.

SCLC- Southern Christian was Leadership Conference (1957-Present)

Formed in January 1957, the SCLC was one of the most significant African American civil rights organizations of the 1950s and 1960s. It emerged following the Montgomery Bus Boycott and was led for its first decade by Martin Luther King. The organization was dedicated to non-violent direct action.

SNCC -Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (1960)

Founded in April 1960 by Ella Baker, Diane Nash, Charles Sherrod, Julian Bond, Charles Lafayette, among others, SNCC was a student-led civil rights organization that emerged in the midst of the sit-in movement. Its membership was much younger than the traditional civil rights groups and committed to direct action attacks on segregation in the South. The group dedicated itself to grass roots organizing in some of the most marginalized communities in the United States.

SDS- Students for A Democratic Society (1960- 1974)

Founded in 1960, SDS was one of the most influential New Left national student activist organization of the 1960s in the United States. It eschewed permanent leaders and emphasized participatory democracy. Its manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, drafted by Tom Hayden in 1962, was a scathing critique of the social and political system in the United States and lambasted the U.S. approach to the Cold War and its addiction to militarism.

TTP - Turn Toward Peace (1961-1967)

Turn Toward Peace was founded in 1961 by prominent Quaker and peace activist Robert Pickus. The group was comprised of 60 peace and liberal internationalist organizations working for a “disarmed” world.

WRL- War Resisters League – (1923- Present)

A secular pacifist organization founded in 1923 by opponents of the First World War. Many of its founders had been jailed during World War I. THE WRL was the first organization to call for an end to the Vietnam War. It also organized the first demonstration against the war in 1963.

WSP- Women Strike for Peace (1960 - Present)

Founded in 1961 by Bella Abzug and Dagmar Wilson WSP was a women's peace activist group. In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, WSP was responsible for getting 50,000 women to march in 60 cities around the US to protest the testing of nuclear weapons.

APPENDIX B: Research Ethics Documents

B1.1 Carleton University Research Based on Secondary Use of Data

1. Title and Date

1A Project Title

The End of Respectability Politics: The United States Civil Rights Movement, Liberalism and the Vietnam War

1B Submission Date Date of completion of this form. Update each time the form is revised. ([Detailed instructions](#), [Example](#))

Click or tap to enter a date.

2. Project Team

2A Lead Researcher Last name/First name, Institutional Email, Department/Faculty and Institution (if not Carleton)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic or Library Staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	Post-doctoral Fellow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Doctoral Student
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Masters Student
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate Student
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

Harewood, Adrian
adrianharewood@cunet.carleton.ca
School of Journalism and Communication

If other, please describe

Conducting research as MA student in History. I am an Associate Professor in Journalism & Communication.

2B Academic Supervisor

Academic supervisor(s) Last name/First name, Institutional Email, Department/Faculty ([Detailed instructions](#), [Example](#)) (Note, the supervisor must be copied on all correspondence with CUREB.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Applicable
--------------------------	----------------

Johnston, Andrew
Andrew.johnston@carleton.ca
Department of History

2C Project Team Members

List the project team members: 1) Last name/First name 2) Email address 3) Role in project 4) Department and institution ([Detailed instructions](#), [Example](#))

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No other team members
-------------------------------------	-----------------------

3. Project Description

3A Is this Project Funded?

If Yes, identify the source of the funding and the title of the award?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No

3B Study Goal

Briefly explain the primary objective(s), rationale and potential benefits of the current study.

The study goal is to better understand how US civil rights organizations and leaders responded to the US war in Vietnam and how it ultimately affected their relationship with each other and the state.

4. Summary of the Original Data or Sample Collection

4A Source of Data

Who is providing the data or biological materials, or images? Provide the original protocol clearance letter, or the number and the date of clearance (approval), if available. Attach initial consent form if available. If this information is not available, please explain.

Journalism interviews conducted in early 2000's.

4B Type of Data

What kinds of data or biological samples or images (e.g. medical files, blood samples, school records, etc.) will be used?

Interviews

4C Participants

Describe the characteristics of the participants from whom the information was originally collected (e.g. accountants working in government, people with asthma).

The participants are former members of the US Civil rights movement and Black Freedom Movement

4D Other Permissions

Describe any permissions required for secondary use of this data or materials. If applicable, include copies of the relevant documents (e.g. contract/data sharing agreement, permission letter/email, other REBs or Institutional approvals). If not available, please explain

In the early 2000's I was not yet considering pursuing graduate work in History, so I could not have asked the subjects for permission to use the interview for research purposes.

4E Donors' Consent

What was the participants' understanding of the use of the data or materials? Is this understanding consistent with the proposed use? If not, please explain.

I interviewed the subjects in the early 2000's as part of my work as a freelance journalist. At the time, excerpts from the interviews were broadcast on a weekly campus/community radio program that I hosted on CKLN-Radio Ryerson.

5. Identifiability of Secondary Information

5A Privacy Protection

Describe the physical (e.g. locked filing cabinet) and/or technical safeguards (e.g. encryption) that will be used to securely store the secondary information (e.g. written records, electronic data, recordings, etc.).

Locked Filing Cabinet

5B Identifiability

Characterize the type of secondary information or samples that will be obtained for research use.

1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Data or samples that can identify specific individuals either directly (eg. name, email address), or through a combination of indirect identifiers (e.g. DOB, IP address, postal code, rare diagnosis).
----------	-------------------------------------	---

2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coded data, in which personal identifiers are removed and replaced with research identification numbers, but a separate code key is maintained linking personal identifiers to research identification numbers.
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anonymized data in which no individual can reasonably be identified and the original identifiers have been permanently destroyed.

If you checked 1 above: Answer questions in Section 6.

If you checked 2 or 3 above: Proceed to Section 7.

6. Use of Identifiable Information (Complete only if you answered 1 to Question 5B)

6A Risks to Donors Could the secondary use of these data lead to any potential harm (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal)? If yes, describe the nature of the potential harms and the measures you will take to minimize these harms.

No

6B Data Security Describe if and how the identity of the individuals will be safeguarded.

All participants consented to the interviews being broadcast on radio at the time. The interviews will be kept in a filing cabinet with a lock.

6C Published Data Will published data identify any study participants? (If yes, please explain)

Yes

No

As mentioned all participants consented to the interviews being aired on radio. At the time I was working as a freelance journalist and I identified myself to them as such.

6D Retention of Data How long will data be retained (or will it be retained indefinitely)?

Indefinitely

7. Attachments

7A Documents to be submitted to the Research Ethics Board:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TCPS 2 Tutorial Course on Research Ethics (CORE) tutorial certificate for each team member. if requesting exemption, please justify below
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample of original consent document
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor approval form (if applicable)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Permission letter from partner organizations (if applicable)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consent forms, text or scripts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please describe in the following box

Please explain:

7B

Provide a brief rationale if an attachment(s) is not available at time of submission.

8. Declarations

By submitting this form, the Lead Researcher and academic supervisor, if any, confirm that:

- The information in this Form is correct and accurately describes the research project.
- No analysis of the data or materials for this protocol will start before receiving ethics clearance.
- I (we) will carry out this project in accordance with the information in this Form and the other submitted documents. No changes will be made to the research project as described in this protocol without clearance from the Research Ethics Board.
- I will promptly notify the Research Ethics Board of any ethical or data breaches, adverse events, unanticipated problems, or protocol deviations that arise relating to this project.
- This study meets all of the conditions for eligibility listed above.

9. Comments

Do you have any comments or suggestions to improve this form?

No

CPS 2: CORE

Investigating the ethics of human research

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Adrian Harewood

*has completed the course: TCPS2: CORE
Principles of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*

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