

# Foundational Knowledge Race and U.S. Foreign Relations

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## SECTION ONE

### African Americans [and U.S. Foreign Affairs]

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[\*Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy\*](#). Ed. Richard Dean Burns, Alexander DeConde, and Fredrik Logevall. Vol. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002. p1-11. Copyright: COPYRIGHT 2002 Charles Scribner's Sons, COPYRIGHT 2006 Gale, COPYRIGHT 2007 Gale, Cengage Learning

Race and foreign affairs have intersected at numerous points in U.S. history. Officials in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not always explicitly aware of the impact of race on foreign relations or on their own decision making, but its impact on historical events is demonstrable. Beginning with the American Revolution and continuing through the twentieth century, race influenced what the [United States](#) did and how it pursued its interests abroad.

#### THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Black volunteers, detesting [slavery](#) and wanting liberty, fought on both sides of the revolutionary war. The activities of African-American revolutionaries were matched by those of black loyalists, some of whom were deliberately recruited into military service by British [commanders](#) eager to destabilize the plantation economy, especially in tidewater Virginia. This British policy was bitterly resented by slaveholders. Many of these [soldiers](#) retreated to Canada with the British after 1783. Freedom proved elusive for black protagonists on both sides. The U.S. flirtation with freedom for blacks proved ephemeral. Slavery persisted as a national institution and free people of color increasingly faced racial [discrimination](#) during the course of the antebellum period. Some loyalists who evacuated with the British were sold into slavery in the West Indies. Others found barriers to civil [equality](#) in their new Canadian homes.

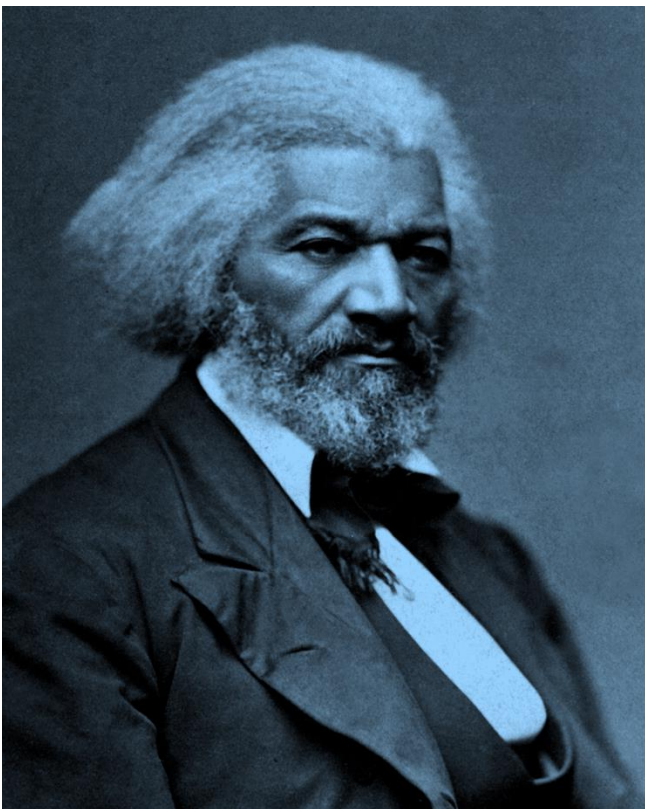
#### RACE, IMPRESSMENTS, AND MARITIME ISSUES

Race was a factor in the maritime trades and in navies during the age of sail. Black men from North America, the Caribbean, and Africa, slave and free, were among the thousands employed in a range of industries and at war. They served on slavers, whalers, packet boats, warships, and were represented as sailors in almost all sectors of maritime activity. Rules governing the movements of

both enslaved sailors and free men of color affected relations among states. In the antebellum South during periods of slave unrest, authorities enforced regulations that restricted the portside activities of West Indian seamen. Violators were threatened with enslavement. Abuse of foreign black sailors in U.S. ports sometimes brought protests from consuls or influential persons to whom they turned for support. The seamen's papers given black American sailors in 1796 did not afford them substantial protection from infringements on their rights, and until 1823, when civil equality was extended to black sailors in the British navy, black seamen of all nationalities were readily exploited, and those who were free faced the risk of illegal enslavement.

Impressment was a danger for all U.S. seamen, regardless of race, before and during the War of 1812. Those recruited into the British navy could expect harsher treatment than that experienced aboard U.S. ships. The fate of black loyalists enslaved in the West Indies during the American Revolution contributed to anti-British feeling among some [African Americans](#) in the early nineteenth century and helped preserve their loyalty to the United States during those years. The United States, however, was reluctant to recruit blacks into any armed forces except the navy. As a result, there were few black combatants except for those enlisted as volunteers in state units. The United States and Britain ultimately employed the same tactic that had been used in the revolutionary war in promising manumission to those who fought or served as military laborers. Those who allied themselves with Britain were taken to Canada at the end of the war and settled on plots of land. While many of the manumission promises made by U.S. authorities were honored, African Americans had no guarantee of civil equality.

## SLAVERY AND ABOLITION



In Western countries, efforts to limit slavery began with the prohibition of the African slave trade and attempts to enforce an international ban on this traffic. Britain outlawed the slave trade in its possessions in 1807, and the United States soon followed suit, effective as of 1 January 1808. While the U.S. law curtailed the international supply of slaves, American traders continued to retail slaves through a domestic market. The abolitionist movement then focused on eradicating slavery itself. Antislavery activists created cooperative networks where they proselytized against slavery and abetted the escape of fugitives. Some antislavery activities had an international character. One campaign, noted in the cities of the northeastern United States and in Great Britain, focused on encouraging consumers to buy products grown without slave labor. The effort met with indifferent success but provided small ephemeral markets for imports from Haiti—a country that had gained its independence through slave

rebellion—and after 1833, the British West Indies. The promotion of free labor produce coincided with a growing conviction in the northern United States and Britain that wage labor was the most rational, just, and efficient method of work, and with the social and political evolution of industrial society in those areas.

The British Parliament in 1833 enacted a gradual abolition program that ended slavery in British dominions by 1838. Between 1830 and 1860 a small African-American community had gathered in Britain. As most American universities barred black students, some were attending universities of far higher caliber than those in the United States. Others were fugitives who had made their way to



a country where slavery was prohibited. Such prominent U.S. abolitionists as Frederick Douglass and Charles Lenox Remond and his sister Sarah Remond visited Britain to enlist both the working classes and the bourgeoisie in

the American antislavery cause. Black abolitionists gave public lectures and sold copies of slave narratives written by themselves and others. They succeeded in thwarting many of the fund-raising efforts of the American Colonization Society, established in 1816–1817 to resettle blacks on the west coast of Africa. In Ireland, the Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell, an outspoken foe of slavery, embraced Frederick Douglass. Douglass spent nineteen months lecturing in the British Isles between 1845 and 1847. British Quakers raised the money to buy Douglass's freedom from his Maryland owner.

Antislavery activists hoped that pressure applied by Britain, then the world's most powerful nation, would persuade the United States to deal forthrightly with the slavery question. Abolitionists did not succeed in capturing all Britons. They faced the opposition of those manufacturers and workers most dependent on imports of U.S. cotton, but benefited from a widespread revulsion among all classes against slavery. The groundwork that Douglass, the Remonds, and others laid helped neutralize British sympathies for southern slaveholders. This was a critical issue during the 1850s, when sectional animosity reached a crisis point in the United States. If Britain, despite its own antislavery stand within its realms, allied with the Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War, the United States would likely be defeated. While American abolitionists often avoided direct discussions of class conflict because of their frequent reliance on elite patronage in Britain and their desire to

keep the focus on slavery, the zenith of their activity coincided with the Chartist movement, which sought to improve conditions for the industrial working class, and debates over the status of labor.

American slavery was also drawn into the international arena as a result of the activities of fugitive slaves. In the course of the nineteenth century some thirty thousand black persons from the United States entered Canada. Periods of domestic crisis, such as the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision, accelerated this immigration. The Fugitive Slave Act made it easy for slaveholders and bounty hunters to threaten the liberty of free people of color. In an explicitly racist finding, the Supreme Court, in the 1857 case *Scott v. Sandford*, ruled that blacks could not be citizens and had no [civil rights](#). The decision effectively ended the prospects of free people of color in the United States until after the Civil War. Many who were able left the country. In addition to the relatively familiar escapes to Canada by slaves and free people alike, blacks from Texas crossed the border into Mexico, where slavery was illegal. During the early years of the Republic, when Spain loosely administered Florida, fugitives in combination with the Seminole nation engaged the United States in [wars](#) in 1817–1818 and 1835–1842. In the aftermath of the first Seminole war, Spain, unable and unwilling to guarantee the security of U.S. real and chattel property along its Florida borders, and wishing to avoid armed conflict with Americans, ceded the rebellious territory to the United States.

Fugitives also included those whose antislavery activities put them in jeopardy of the law. Frederick Douglass in 1859 was a suspect in John Brown's conspiracy to seize the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Douglass fled to England to avoid arrest. Once there, he contacted the U.S. minister to the Court of St. James's hoping to secure a passport to visit France. The passport was denied on grounds that Douglass, according to Supreme Court dicta, was not a U.S. citizen. Douglass was an early victim of passport denial, a practice that would be used in the twentieth century to restrict the movements of blacks who were known critics of racial discrimination.

## COLONIZATION AND EMIGRATION

Opinion leaders on both sides of the slavery question during the antebellum period expressed fears about the consequences of emancipation. Some abolitionists believed that slavery was morally wrong but did not think that freed slaves could be assimilated into American society for racial reasons. Certain proslavery advocates used these doubts about assimilation to argue that slavery could not be eradicated. A third alternative to slavery or abolition was the removal of freed slaves from the United States. The option appealed to blacks who wished a homeland of their own, and to proslavery and antislavery advocates alike who thought blacks could not be assimilated into American life. Paul Cuffe, a black New England shipowner, was committed to civil rights for African Americans and an outspoken opponent of slavery. He nevertheless employed his own resources in a back-to-Africa project in the early 1810s. After correspondence with prominent British abolitionists, including the parliamentarian William Wilberforce, Cuffe sought to repatriate selected emigrants to the British African colony of Sierra Leone. His plans were interrupted by the War of 1812 and by his own death not long thereafter, but he did succeed in settling some thirty-eight persons in Africa.



In 1821 the American Colonization Society resumed Cuffe's work. Members of the organization included such figures as Henry Clay, Francis Scott Key, and other prominent white Americans for whom the United States had to remain a white man's country. The society purchased African land from local rulers, and in 1847 the settlement, called Liberia, became an independent republic. Many antislavery activists opposed the American Colonization Society, believing that it was simply a stratagem to solidify slavery by removing from the United States the only blacks in a position to contest it. Others endorsed colonization and emigration in principle, reserving their objections for the society per se. There were, accordingly, other colonization ventures. In the 1820s and 1850s, two emigration movements to Haiti were organized with the cooperation of the Haitian government. A project in the 1830s involved the removal of American blacks to the island of Trinidad. President Abraham Lincoln, who endorsed colonization as a strategy to prevent a civil war over the slavery question, researched the possibility of a black homeland on the isthmus of Central America. These schemes involved negotiations with heads of state for land grants and concessions. Foreign leaders had their own reasons for endorsing these programs. Haiti had traditionally offered itself as an asylum for blacks in the Western Hemisphere and in the 1820s wanted to create a buffer on its frontier with Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) by settling African Americans there. Great Britain in the 1830s sought labor to work on the Trinidad plantations abandoned by the beneficiaries of its own emancipation laws, a need for which it later recruited workers from India.

## CIVIL WAR AND RECOGNITION OF BLACK COUNTRIES

During the nineteenth century, slavery and its accompanying racist ideology prevented the United States from conducting full diplomatic relations with Haiti and Liberia, states modeled on modern republics that were populated and governed by blacks. Many U.S. [diplomats](#) did not believe it possible to consort with black counterparts on an equal basis and receive them into the polite society of the period. Proslavery southerners saw Haiti as anathema on social and political grounds and as a security problem. Some southern states passed laws that forbade the entry of sailors and other free people of color from Haiti. Before the Civil War, the U.S. government did not recognize Haiti and was represented there only by consuls. Southern secession removed the obstacles to recognition, which occurred on 12 July 1862 when the State Department appointed a chief of mission, Benjamin Whidden. In 1869, U.S. representation was raised to the ministerial level with the appointment of the first African American in such a post, Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett. The defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery meant improvement in Haitian-American relations, ending the threat of slavery expansionism and filibustering raids on Haitian coasts. Beginning with Bassett's appointment, diplomatic and consular posts to Haiti and Liberia became patronage posts for loyal black Republicans, a pattern that persisted until well into the mid-twentieth century.

In the late nineteenth century, American activists sought to bring international attention to the lynching problem in the "Jim Crow" South. Hampered by lack of access to sources of state power, activists such as the anti-lynching advocate Ida B. Wells-Barnett searched for unconventional and less restrictive venues for international contact. Just as American activists had sought British support for abolition during the slavery era, Wells-Barnett toured the United Kingdom in 1893 and 1894 to publicize the lynching problem and bring the weight of British public opinion to bear on the

issue. She devised another way to focus international attention on U.S. domestic affairs when, in 1893, Chicago hosted the Columbian Exposition, which brought visitors from all over the world. Through the mediation of Frederick Douglass, the government of Haiti selected Wells-Barnett to manage its exhibit and provided her with a table in the Haitian pavilion. There she sold copies of a book she had written to document lynching and the context in which it occurred. Wells-Barnett was thereby able to reach a wide audience in one of the first efforts to employ an international cultural festival to air concerns about U.S. [race relations](#).

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS

World War I shattered the balance of power in Europe and destroyed the Russian, German, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires. These state systems lost control of the diverse ethnic groups previously under their control. Subject nations and national minorities began demanding language rights, sovereignty, and democratic governments. When the Allies met in the Paris suburb of Versailles in 1919 to rebuild the world order, their agenda included the construction of nations in eastern Europe and the revitalization of the empires that remained. European debates on political [autonomy](#) and territoriality were the model for Asians and Africans seeking to bring their own interests to world attention.

The Pan-African Congress was an important vehicle for formulating and disseminating such demands. The association emerged from a 1900 London conference. Organized by a Trinidadian attorney resident in London and an African-American bishop, the congress brought together blacks from Britain and its colonies, the United States, and South Africa. The purpose was to discuss colonialism and [racism](#) and suggest strategies for reform. The association made little headway in its first twenty years, the zenith of European colonial domination of Africa. World War I provided an opportunity to renew its goals, however, and it planned a Paris conference that would convene simultaneously with the Versailles peace conference.

African-American leaders sought representation as observers at the peace conference and began discussing it before the war ended. Those most interested included the intellectual activist W. E. B. Du Bois, entrepreneur C. J. Walker, National Equal Rights League founder William Monroe Trotter, and activist Wells-Barnett. The Universal Negro Improvement Association, an international organization founded by Marcus Garvey, named delegates to the congress, including the labor leader A. Philip Randolph. Other interested organizations included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Race Congress. The thinking was that if representatives of black organizations were denied admission to the proceedings or audiences with principals, they could use the Pan-African Congress and their proximity to the peace talks to bring their issues to public attention.

President Woodrow Wilson led the U.S. delegation at Versailles. Wilson believed in international organization and saw the peace conference as an opportunity to put the United States permanently at the center of power in the global community. Like other Allied leaders, Wilson wished to maintain control over national minorities. He was, additionally, a committed segregationist who as president of Princeton University had excluded African-American students

from dormitories, and as [president of the United States](#) had separated federal civil servants by race, placing black employees behind partitions.

The Wilson administration did not want minority observers or protesters in Europe. The State Department accordingly refused passports to most of the black Americans wishing to go to France. Those who managed to cross the Atlantic attended a Pan-African Congress composed of fifty-seven delegates who discussed, under the careful scrutiny of the French government, such issues as the status of defeated Germany's colonies and colonial reform. The more militant civil rights activists and nationalists were less interested in the Pan African Congress than in addressing the peace conference, the forum where decisions affecting the world's national minorities and subject peoples would be made. President Wilson was determined to prevent such initiatives. He refused to see either Trotter or a young Vietnamese leader, Nguyen That Thanh, later known as [Ho Chi Minh](#). Wilson and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George prohibited the presence of delegates of colonized peoples and racial minorities at Versailles, but Du Bois succeeded in representing the NAACP at the first conference of the League of Nations in 1921.

## THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN WAR

In October 1935, Benito Mussolini's fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia. The war there occurred at the height of isolationist sentiment in the U.S. Congress and the nation at large. While public sympathy for Ethiopia was considerable, so was the disinclination to intervene. The minority that pressed for a more forthright stand included African Americans and Irish Catholics who broke with the Catholic majority on the issue. The administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt showed concern about Italian aggression, but domestic opposition to even rhetorical intervention discouraged firm action. When Secretary of State Cordell Hull and President Roosevelt sent Mussolini a note suggesting that the United States would not necessarily remain indifferent to what his government did in Africa, the message was so subdued that Mussolini readily dismissed it. A neutrality act banned the sale of finished war products to belligerents, but it did not deny them access to strategic materials, which could be purchased proportionately to the rate of prewar consumption. Italy, a growing industrial power, bought large quantities of American oil. Ethiopia, still feudal, bought none. The neutrality act thus helped ensure that Italy would be well equipped to defeat its decrepit adversary.

Administration officials shrank from the prospect of ventilating an issue that would bring down isolationist wrath. For actors at the policy center, domestic considerations and the ultimate collapse of Ethiopian resistance tabled the question for the duration of World War II. At the periphery, however, the Ethiopian issue enabled the development of linkages that remained timely. Ethiopia was a ready-made issue for black nationalists and permitted liberals and leftists to focus their general opposition to fascism. The Ethiopian government-in-exile played a leading role itself in keeping public interest alive through publicity campaigns and appeals for funds. It also made explicit appeals to African Americans as a usable pressure group. Ethiopia's experience with fascist conquest facilitated a sharper critique of racism and [imperialism](#) and focused postwar attention on the disposition of colonies in northeast Africa and colonialism in general.

## GERMAN RECONSTRUCTION AND RACIAL SEGREGATION

In 1945 the Allies claimed victory over a German state that had taken racism to its logical extreme in the pursuit of eugenic purity and the destruction of millions of lives. African-American troops were part of the force that occupied Germany from 1945 to 1955, when efforts were made on all fronts to reform its institutions and reconstruct it physically. From the beginning of the occupation, U.S. racial practices in the military contradicted the essence of its mission in Germany and led to confusion and resentment among the conquered.

In the American zone of occupation, commanding officers could approve soldiers' marriages as they saw fit. Many of those holding conventional American ideas about race often prohibited mixed marriages even when children were involved. When individual soldiers appealed these prohibitions, military judges relied on the laws of the various U.S. states to determine whether a proposed union could be approved and compiled the relevant statutes for their own use. If a soldier resided in a state where interracial marriages were illegal, his application to marry outside his race would be turned down. Racial record keeping on marriages began in 1947. German courts followed this example. The Allies, having struck down the racist Nuremberg laws, oddly found themselves reapplying them in the American zone of occupation, where the German courts followed suit.

Military opposition to mixed marriages gradually declined, but in the interim approximately three thousand biracial children were born in Germany between 1945 and 1951, almost all the offspring of African-American servicemen. As a result of the continuing ambivalence among all parties about the children's prospects for adoption in the United States, the West German state, autonomous in 1955, was charged with the responsibility for absorbing them into German society. Germans witnessed the contradictions between U.S. opposition to Nazi racism and policies governing intermarriage. The first cohort of biracial children reached their teens as violence associated with [segregation](#) in the United States made international headlines. While some Germans continued to believe that homes in the United States should be sought for those who were not already adopted, the prevailing opinion was that the orphans should not be sent into a society characterized by racial violence. If the United States' goal had been to transform Germany into a democracy characterized by tolerance, the biracial orphans provided them a paradoxical opportunity to show the world they had shed Hitlerism.

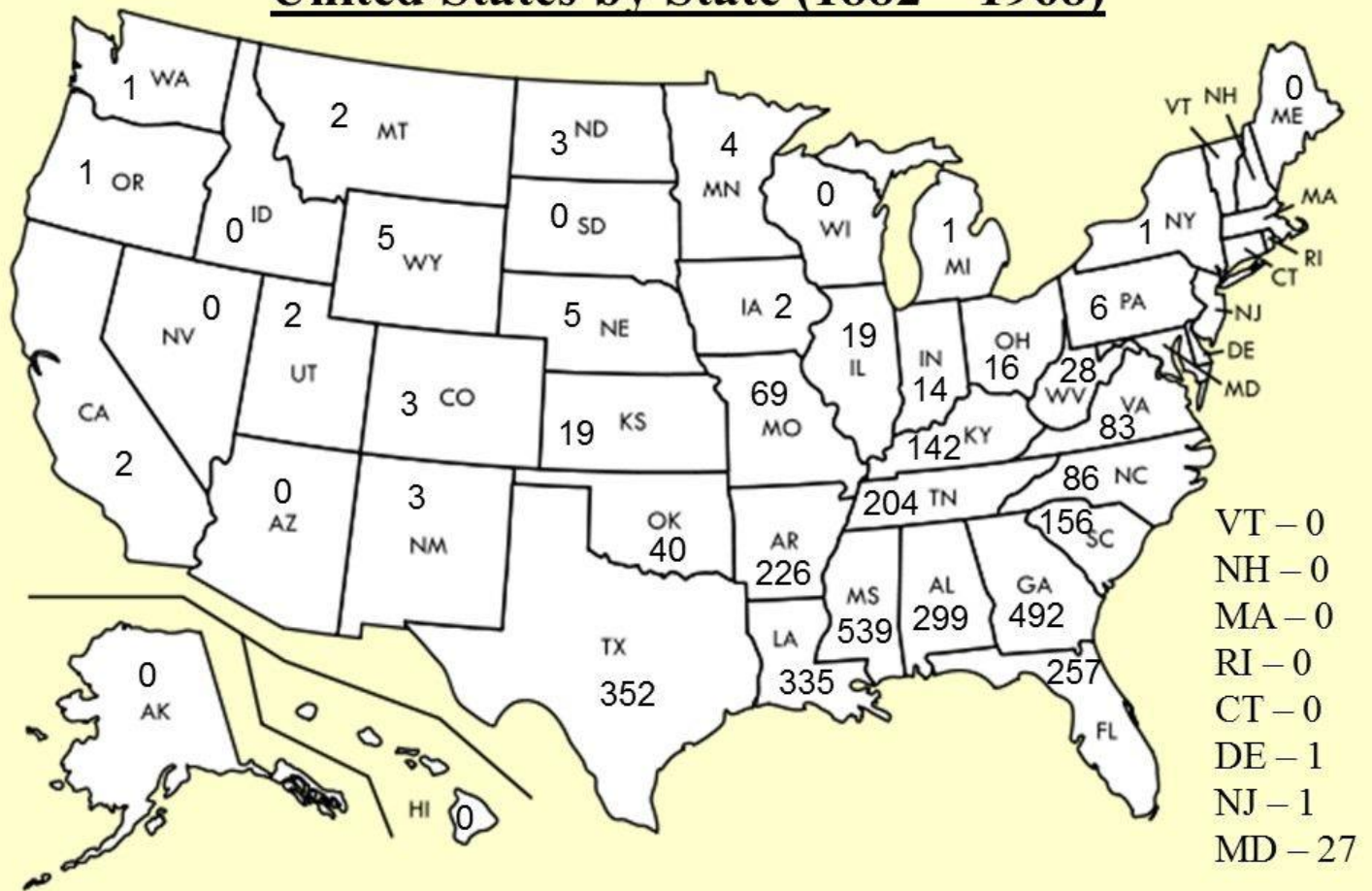
## THE UNITED NATIONS PETITION

At the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in the autumn of 1944, delegates planned the foundations of a postwar international organization that would reprise the work of the League of Nations. Conferees rejected a racial and national equality clause that the Chinese government had put forward but failed to energetically defend. In the early years of the [United Nations](#), efforts were made to insert ethnic and linguistic rights into the UN Charter and other central documents. Cold War tensions entered the deliberations of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in the late 1940s, as many sovereign states proved reluctant to permit international oversight of their treatment of national minorities.



For African Americans in particular the era reflected a rising interest in social science and world affairs and the secularization of black protest that moved it away from philanthropic church control. Black opinion widely supported a pluralist United Nations that would counter the "Anglo-American" conception of a postwar peace elaborated by Winston Churchill in his Fulton, Missouri, "Iron Curtain" speech. While no blacks attended the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, Walter White, secretary of the NAACP; W. E. B. Du Bois, the NAACP's director of special research; and Mary McLeod Bethune, of the National Council of Negro Women, were present as observers. Their attendance resulted from extensive organizing activities by black nongovernmental organizations to formulate an agenda for international [activism](#). The black

## **African-American Lynchings in the United States by State (1882 – 1968)**



Attempts in 1945 to influence the United Nations to protect minority rights were among the first of several efforts. Backed by labor, professional, fraternal, and [veterans'](#) associations, the National Negro Congress drafted a petition to the United Nations in mid-1946. It was formulated at the same time that similar petitions were being presented by Indonesians and the Jewish diaspora, and shortly before the General Assembly voted to censure South Africa for its treatment of its East Indian resident population. Encouraged by parallel international events, the NAACP followed suit with its own petition in 1947. The NAACP asked the UN Commission on [Human Rights](#) to investigate racial discrimination in the United States. Supported by hundreds of black organizations across the political spectrum, and by African and Caribbean nationalists and labor federations overseas, the appeal was also viewed favorably by India, Pakistan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Belgium, Haiti, Norway, China (Formosa), and the USSR, which introduced the petition in October 1947. Despite its popularity with the black public in the United States and international endorsement, the petition died in the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Pressure applied on the United Nations by the United States, the influence of Eleanor Roosevelt, then a UNESCO commissioner, and misgivings among certain NAACP officials about Soviet support of the appeal, led to its demise.

## RACIAL REFORM AND COLD WAR IDEOLOGY

The U.S. rivalry with the [Soviet Union](#) and its Cold War partners involved political as well as military competition. President Harry S. Truman articulated the need to improve U.S. race relations not only because the Soviets were exploiting the race issue but also because U.S. credibility was at stake. Truman and his successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, articulated a need for reform and coupled this with the same repression of black [communists](#) and other radical black critics of America that generally characterized the early Cold War period in U.S. society. Such activists as Du Bois and Paul Robeson were refused passports. U.S. representatives abroad interfered with American-born dancer Josephine Baker, a French citizen and an outspoken critic of U.S. racial mores. The



# Timeline of the COLD WAR



1945- 1947

WWII ends and the U.S./U.S.S.R alliance dissolves. President Truman expresses the need to contain Communism and the Red Scare begins. Numerous figures in Hollywood and the federal government are investigated, tried, and persecuted, while others are "black-listed" due to accusations of supporting communism.

1953- 1956  
**Upheaval**

U.S. backs a coup and overthrows the Iranian government. President Eisenhower sends aid to South Vietnam and the Soviets end an anti-communism revolution in Hungary.

1962- 1964

**The Cuban Missile Crisis**

American Navy blockades Cuba after the Soviet Union places missiles in Cuba. Kennedy pulls away from Cuba in exchange for the Soviet's removal of Cuban missiles. Meanwhile, China successfully tests its first A- bomb while America begins air raid attacks on North Vietnam.

1973- 1979

**Guerilla Warfare**

America's combat in Vietnam ends but it secretly backs a coup that overthrows the Chilean president. The Soviet Red Army invades Afghanistan. Guerilla warfare with guns supplied by U.S. are used against the Soviet army, but it takes 10 years for them to leave without victory.



1989- 1991

Protesters gather in Tiananmen Square who wish for the Chinese Communist Party to reform. The Party kills many young students. In Poland, the Solidarity Union forms a non-communist government and Hungary replaces its communist leadership. In Germany, the Berlin Wall is torn down. Additionally, Communists attempt a coup against Gorbachev, which fails, and the Soviet Union collapses. The Cold War ends and Boris Yeltsin is elected President of Russia.



1949- 1950  
**Bombs Away**

The Soviet Union tests their own atomic bomb and the Arms Race begins. Truman responds by announcing intentions to build a superbomb and joins in the Korean War in efforts to stop communism spreading. Korean War ends in a stalemate cease-fire in 1953.



1957- 1961

Russia launches Sputnik into the earth's orbit. America fears the Soviet Union's technological capabilities. Communist Fidel Castro overthrows American-backed dictator in Cuba. After 2 years of unsuccessful attempts to thwart Castro, the CIA initiates the Bay of Pigs invasion which fails. In Europe, East Berlin builds the Berlin Wall.

1965- 1972

President Johnson sends troops to Vietnam and to the Dominican Republic to prevent "another Cuba." Soviet Red Army invades Czechoslovakia, to stop the "Prague Spring", a move toward liberation & away from communism. In '72, President Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev sign the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty which makes it illegal to manufacture nuclear weapons.



1980- 1981

The Solidarity Union forms when Polish workers lead labor strikes. In '81, President Reagan resumes the mission to contain communism with the Reagan Doctrine, with focus on Central America.

1983- 1985

**Invasion of Grenada**

The U.S. invades Grenada, overthrowing the government and replacing it with a U.S.-friendly one. Mikhail Gorbachev becomes premier of the Soviet Union and his policies are the catalyst for the Soviet Union's collapse.



emphasis on promoting the economic and cultural superiority of American life, had come to associate winning the Cold War with improving the civil rights climate for black Americans. While Eisenhower was not enthusiastic about desegregation, he was committed enough to the principle of civil equality to support a modest civil rights bill in 1957.

The belief that America's ability to champion democracy depended on its success at practicing it at home continued during the Kennedy years. The Cold War rationale for racial reform was strengthened by evidence that hostile countries utilized negative news about race relations to discredit the United States. In an increasingly decolonized world, where Africans and Asians now headed sovereign states, racial discrimination could no longer be endorsed or accepted. Technological change meant that journalists could record instances of racial violence and broadcast them to the world. The Soviet Union and its allies were not the only critics. Disapproval emanated from nonaligned countries, especially India, and from such conventional Western states as Denmark. In contrast to the world [press](#), pro-apartheid South African journalists played up racial incidents in the United States, especially the exploits of white supremacists. This also constituted



Map showing the way Europe was divided into rival alliances during the Cold War

part of the embarrassment that necessitated a significant [propaganda](#) effort to neutralize damaging racial news stories about segregation.

Members of the intelligentsia and business communities also employed arguments that linked foreign and domestic affairs. In September 1950, for example, the NAACP convened the Breakneck

Hill Conference, where [senators](#), UN officials, journalists and broadcast executives, State Department representatives, educators, and activists considered the impact of racial discrimination on the nation's [foreign policy](#) objectives. Civil rights proponents, including participants in sit-ins and other demonstrations in the [1960s](#), also used Cold War arguments to rationalize their challenge to discriminatory statutes. Segregation tainted the U.S. reputation abroad, they claimed, and the limited opportunities for minorities that resulted from it meant fewer human resources available to defend the nation and extend its interests.

U.S. government efforts to counter the bad publicity involved activities sponsored by the State Department and the United States Information Agency (USIA). These included providing news to international readers, stocking U.S. libraries abroad with what was perceived as balanced information about black life in the United States, and enlisting African-American lecturers and entertainers to travel abroad and entertain or provide information to interested foreigners. Some individuals who toured foreign countries for this purpose sometimes exaggerated the amount of progress made in race relations. The State Department and USIA, for their part, did not deny the existence of racism but rather emphasized what they portrayed as a national commitment to effect change through nonviolent means. The appointment in 1964 of the African-American journalist Carl Rowan as USIA director was intended to emphasize the latter. Rowan had previously served as deputy assistant secretary of state for public affairs and as ambassador to Finland.

## AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

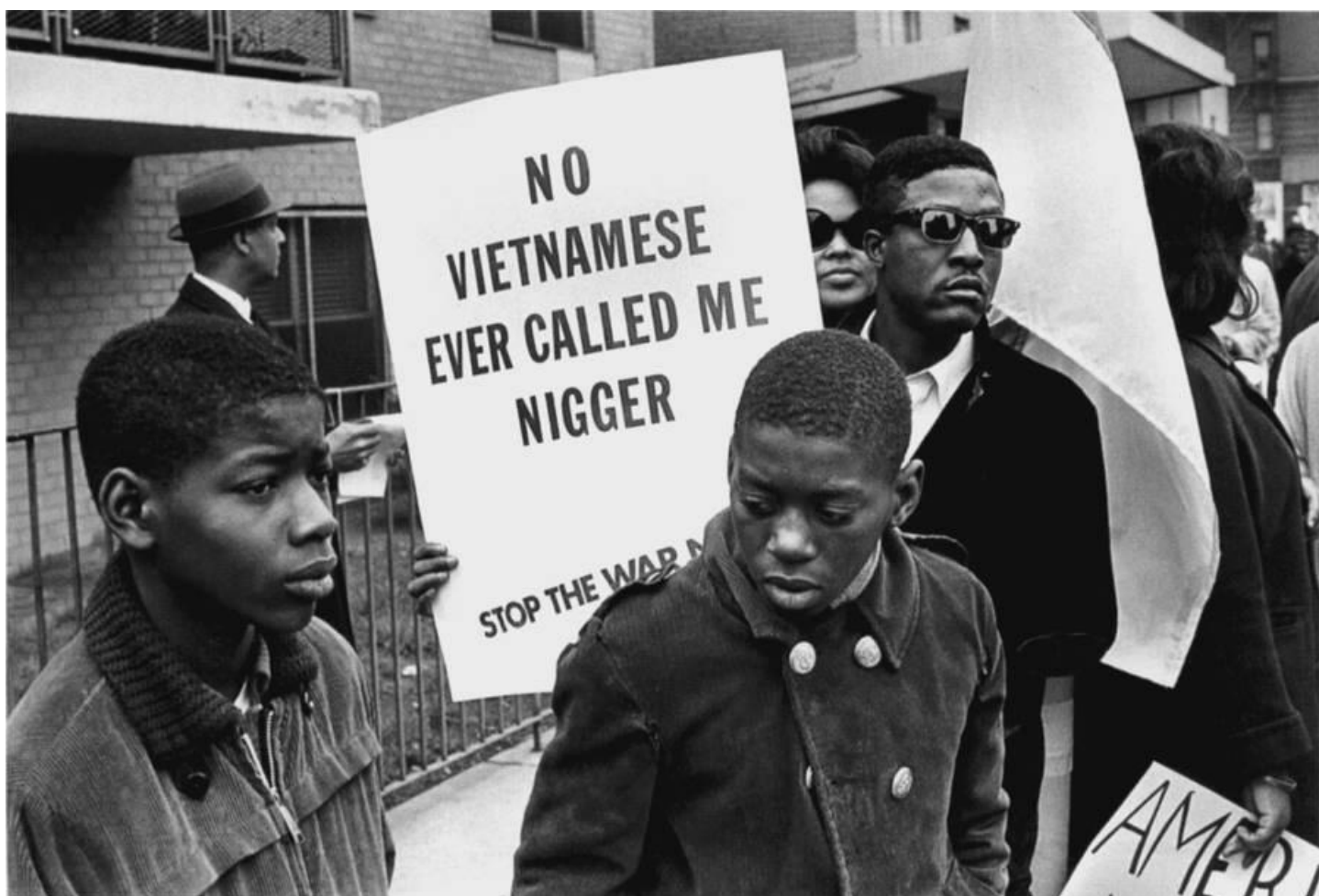
The civil rights movement presented the State Department and other government branches not only with the problem of trying to counter America's racist image abroad but also that of dealing with discrimination within their own ranks. Since Reconstruction, most African-American consuls, ministers, and [ambassadors](#) had been political appointees posted to black countries. The number of career black foreign service officers and consular officials remained minuscule until the second half of the twentieth century. The State Department, an executive department in a staunchly segregated capital, steadfastly resisted integration. In addition to racial segregation, its institutional culture traditionally relied on eastern elites. The democratization of the State Department through geographic and demographic diversification evolved only gradually. Its racial desegregation occurred chiefly at the initiative of presidential administrations and informal pressure from black leadership.

Civil rights organizations had expressed dissatisfaction with the unrepresentative character of the State Department since the 1940s, but changes were desultory until the early 1960s. The Kennedy White House, seeking to consolidate its gains with the African-American electorate while maintaining a moderate posture on civil rights, looked to Africa for the solution. Well-publicized visits from African heads of state and the appointment of African Americans to diplomatic posts provided the symbolic politics the situation required. The United States would also realize the additional benefit of encouraging ostensibly nonaligned African states to view the West more favorably and limit their contacts with Warsaw Pact states. The State Department remained slow to change, however, and only after criticism of the pace and scope of reform accelerated were significant numbers of African-American diplomatic representatives named to countries outside Africa and the Caribbean.



In line with the perceived need to court newly independent African states and encourage them to maintain close ties with the West, U.S. officials tried to insulate U.S. foreign relations from the repercussions of domestic racism by assisting diplomats from Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions who encountered discrimination while living and traveling in the United States. In the 1950s and early 1960s, negative experiences of foreign envoys chiefly involved the refusal of service to Africans (as well as South Asians and others) in states where segregation was official, the relegation of nonwhites to Jim Crow sections of public facilities, and housing discrimination in states ranging from New York to Virginia.

Initially, the State Department dealt with the problem by attempting to isolate foreign blacks from African Americans, a task facilitated by the nature of diplomatic relations. Nonwhite envoys could, for example, simply be exempted from segregation laws by virtue of their status. Federal officials could intervene in particular cases, but they were not always present when visitors experienced embarrassments. When the Ghanaian finance minister was denied service at a Delaware restaurant in 1957, Eisenhower invited him to breakfast at the White House, and Vice President Richard Nixon sent him a formal apology. The State Department discussed the matter with the restaurant's franchisee. The most serious incident was the beating of a Guinean foreign service officer by New York City police officers following a traffic accident. The presence of nonwhite envoys also forced adjustments in the elite social life of Washington. State Department chief of protocol Angier Biddle Duke resigned in 1961 from the prestigious Metropolitan Club because of its refusal to continue



extending what had previously been automatic membership to foreign diplomats and its absence of black members.

To be sure, another consideration that drove reform within the diplomatic corps was the awareness that segregation as a whole made a bad impression on foreigners regardless of race. As early as June 1951, the solicitor general of the United States, Philip Perlman, filed an amicus curiae brief in a U.S. Court of Appeals case that involved a Washington, D.C., restaurant's refusal of service to a U.S. citizen on racial grounds. Perlman argued that foreigners judge the United States by their experiences in its capital and that segregation marred the image of American democracy. The solicitor general thus linked the reform of racial policies in the United States to the nation's best interests abroad.

In August 1961 the Kennedy administration created a task force composed of representatives from the White House, State Department, and local state governments to address the problem of racial discrimination. Because of local entrepreneurs' inability to distinguish between Africans and African Americans and favor the former, public facilities along the Washington-Maryland corridor ultimately had to be desegregated for everyone.

## THE VIETNAM WAR

African-American opposition to the war in [Vietnam](#), the overriding U.S. foreign policy concern of the 1960s and early [1970s](#), reflected perceptions of self-interest. During the 1950s the major civil rights organizations had stopped taking action on foreign policy questions. As the war escalated, civil rights leaders feared both the loss of organizational revenues if prowar advocates withdrew their





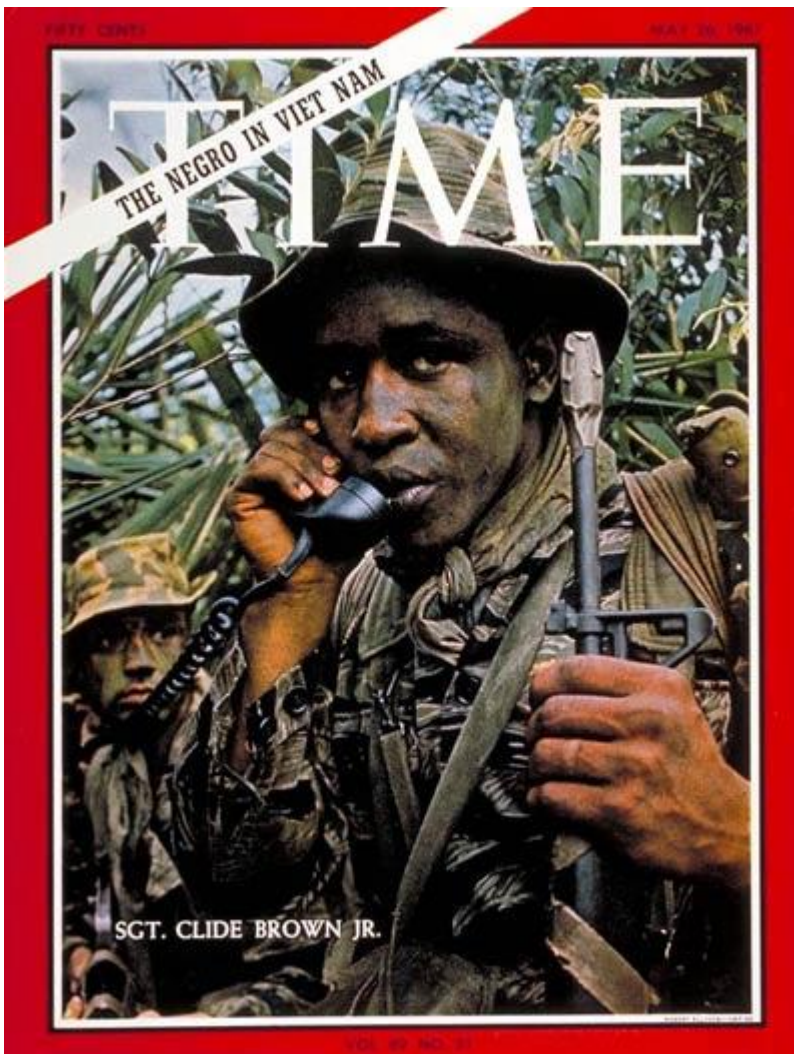


support and the prospect of internal friction among organizations over the peace issue. Anxiety about possible accusations of subversion, and concern lest the civil rights focus be dissipated, were other causes of apprehension. The immediacy of civil rights insurgency in the South provided a powerful pretext for channeling organizational energies to domestic questions only.

Moreover, by the mid-1960s the reluctance of black leaders to engage in issues apart from domestic civil rights was reinforced by an increasingly beleaguered presidential administration fighting to maintain a "one voice" approach for U.S. foreign policy around the globe. President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#), for whom Africa was a low priority, particularly opposed the consolidation of an African-American foreign policy constituency. Johnson did not want to multiply the number of players in international affairs and perceived such a constituency as contradicting the goal of fully integrating blacks into American life. Johnson believed that racially and ethnically based interest groups generally fragmented what should be a unitary national position on foreign affairs as government experts defined them.

In 1965, however, the Mississippi Freedom [Democratic Party](#), at the center of some of the most sweeping changes in American society, publicly advocated [draft](#) resistance. The [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) became the first national body to oppose the war. While antiwar sentiment did not overtake the black majority until 1969, activist organizations mounted pressure on Martin Luther King, Jr., to take a stand. Vietnamese Buddhists who sent him an "open letter" joined with domestic war critics in urging action. In 1967, King formally reiterated his inability



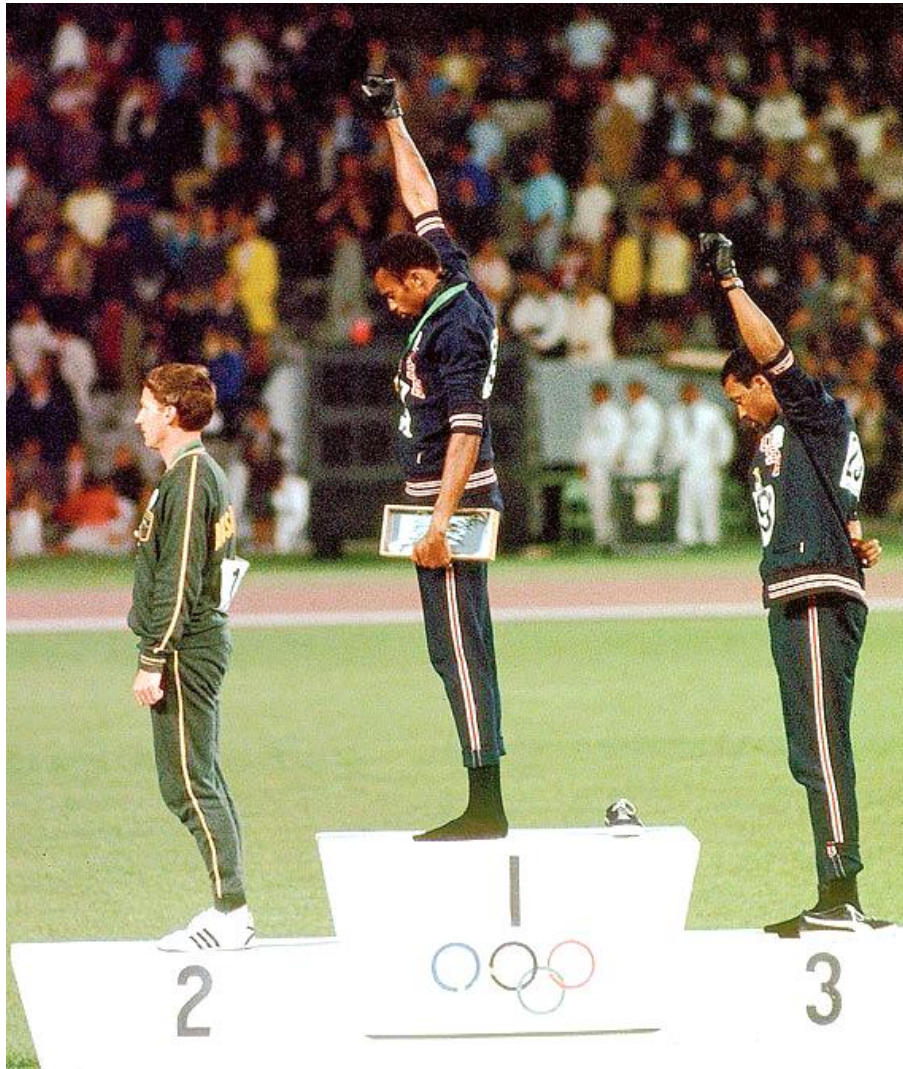


to square the war with his conscience, his belief that the war was sapping the economic and spiritual vigor of the country, and his conviction that the national mission needed redefinition. In an April speech at the Riverside Church in New York City, King delivered a radical critique of U.S. foreign policy.

Ultimately, Vietnam was a broad enough issue to absorb many of the questions that had long preoccupied African Americans. Critiques of the war called into question the integrity of the political process and opened the door to largescale insurgency. On this issue black foreign policy audiences entered the controversy late, had dwindling access to increasingly less responsive policymakers, and were considerably alienated from "normal politics." Their efforts to influence the conduct of the war were also hampered by strategies that were based on addressing legislatures and courts rather than executive officials.



The spirit of insurgency in the late 1960s combined with new global media to afford African-



American activists new forums for international exposure to U.S. domestic problems. One of the most prominent examples was the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, from which South Africa had been excluded owing to worldwide opposition to that country's apartheid policy. Certain African-American athletes had contemplated a boycott of the games because of their dissatisfaction with racial conditions in the United States, but they ultimately decided to participate. African-American medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos, feeling the need to make at least a symbolic gesture, raised their fists in protest as the "Star-Spangled Banner" was being played. Both athletes were widely criticized and their careers were destroyed. In an ironic twist in 1980, the U.S. government asked African-American boxing champion

Muhammad Ali to persuade various countries to boycott the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

## SOUTH AFRICA

By the mid-1950s, only in South Africa could U.S. diplomats be committed and outspoken racists. The State Department sent envoys to South Africa whose own outlook aligned closely with that of their hosts. In light of U.S. reliance on South African raw materials, mutual [anticommunism](#), and interest in free trade, policymakers acquiesced to South African segregation laws that paralleled those that were still current in the United States. As civil rights insurgency and changing views toward race worldwide eroded segregation at home, U.S. official acceptance of South African racial





practices could no longer be direct. Washington attempted to distance itself rhetorically from apartheid while continuing harmonious relations with South Africa.

As noted, the State Department and USIA often sponsored goodwill tours of African-American entertainers to foreign countries, and these included South Africa. U.S. authorities may have believed

that exposure to the diversity of U.S. society would give proponents of apartheid pause. Visits to South Africa by American performers were not limited to government-sponsored ventures. South African promoters signed U.S. artists to lucrative contracts, but they were often required to perform before segregated audiences.

The gap between U.S. democratic beliefs on one hand, and government and private sector ties to the South African regime on the other, led in the 1980s to an international protest movement against apartheid. Anti-apartheid activists set out to discourage artist exchanges in the belief that they had no effect on apartheid, degraded the artist involved, and lent credibility to the South African regime. Through adverse publicity and boycott, many U.S. entertainers were pressured into avoiding South Africa. Similar actions were mounted when the South African government sent African troupes to the United States if they apologized for conditions in their homeland.

Pressure from advocacy groups was a crucial factor in leading the United States to impose economic sanctions against South Africa in the 1980s. Thus, in February 1990, South African President F. W. de Klerk released the African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela from his twenty-seven-year imprisonment, and in March 1992 white South Africans passed a referendum that would end white minority rule.

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See also [CIVIL WAR DIPLOMACY](#) ; [PEACE MOVEMENTS](#) ; [RACE AND ETHNICITY](#) .

## JIM CROW AND THE COLD WAR

"A vast literature has explored the major American cold war initiatives of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The decision-making processes and ramifications of the [Truman Doctrine](#), the European Recovery Plan (Marshall Plan), the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) (NATO), and [National Security Council document 68](#) (NSC 68) have received painstaking analysis from a variety of political perspectives. But there has been only occasional attention paid either to the ways in which these policy initiatives emerged from a racially hierarchical domestic and international landscape or to their racial meanings and ramifications. Yet, people of color at the time were well aware of this other context. Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech of February 1946 represented a declaration

of cold war, but it also served as a call for Anglo-American racial and cultural unity. The Truman Doctrine of March 1947 opposed potential 'armed minorities' of the left but not those of the right who actually ruled much of the world: European colonialists. The Marshall Plan (1948) and NATO (1949) bolstered anticommunist governments west of the Elbe River but also indirectly funded their efforts at preserving white rule in Asia and Africa. NSC 68 laid out an offensive strategy of diminishing Soviet influence abroad, but it also revealed American anxieties about a broader 'absence of order among nations' that was 'becoming less and less tolerable' when the largest change in the international system was coming not from communist revolutions but from the decolonization of nonwhite peoples."

— *From Thomas Borstelmann, "Jim Crow's Coming Out: Race Relations and American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years," Presidential Studies Quarterly 29, no. 3 (1999): 549–569* —

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## SECTION TWO

### **Martin Luther King Jr. Spent the Last Year of His Life Detested by the Liberal Establishment**

By [Zaid Jilani](#)

SOURCE: <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/15/martin-luther-king-jr-mlk-day-2018/>

In 1999, the polling agency Gallup [set out](#) to determine the individuals Americans most admired in the 20th century.

Mother Teresa came in first, with 49 percent of Americans putting her at the top; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., ranked second, with 34 percent placing him on the same list. But, the polling agency would later write, "King was far from universally revered during his lifetime." They noted that in 1966,



Dr. Martin Luther King, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, delivers his speech that opened the National Conference for New Politico Convention in Chicago, Sept. 1, 1967. King, facing a battery of microphones, called for an end of the Vietnam fighting.

63 percent of Americans held a negative view of the civil rights leader, while just 32 percent held a positive one. This was a marked reversal from five years earlier, when 41 percent of Americans gave King a positive rating and 37 percent a negative one.

King's [slide in popularity coincided with his activism](#) taking a turn from what Americans largely know him for — his campaign for civil rights in the American South — to a much more radical one aimed at the war in Vietnam and poverty.

## Refusing to Choose Between Civil Rights for African-Americans and Peace for Vietnamese

For years, King had been troubled by the war in Vietnam and [raised it privately](#) in conversations with the Democratic President Lyndon Johnson. As the conflict dragged on, King felt he had no choice but to publicly denounce the war.

In an [April 1967 speech](#) at Riverside Church in New York City, the civil rights leader publicly denounced American involvement in Indochina.

"This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love," he warned. "A nation that continues



year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Many in King's inner circle [warned](#) against making the speech and publicly campaigning against the war. Their argument was that Johnson had risked his neck for the African-American community on issues like civil rights, health care, and welfare, and publicly condemning his foreign policy would irreparably harm the relationship between black activists and the president.

**"We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls 'enemy,' for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers."**

King reserved a section of his remarks to address these critics. He labeled the war an "enemy of the poor," saying that its budget was draining anti-poverty programs; he also pointed out that it was hypocritical for him to preach nonviolence to activists at home, while watching his government reject that principle abroad. But ultimately his stance came from personal moral conviction and his devoted Christian beliefs.



"Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood. Because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned, especially for His suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them," he said. "This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us

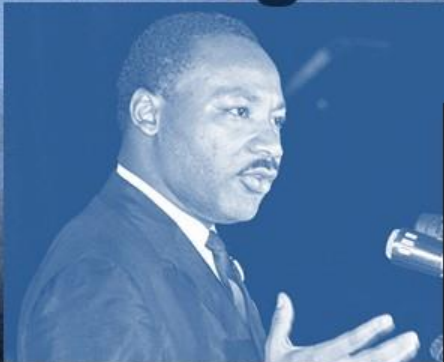
who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties, which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls 'enemy,' for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers."

## The Liberal Backlash

The backlash from a liberal establishment that had once praised King for his civil rights campaign came as hard and fast as his allies had feared.



**“When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered.”**



Martin Luther King, Jr., "Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam," Sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church on April 30, 1967

The [New York Times editorial](#) board lambasted King for linking the war in Vietnam to the struggles of civil rights and poverty alleviation in the United States, saying it was "too facile a connection" and that he was doing a "disservice" to both causes. It concluded that there "are no simple answers to the war in Vietnam or to racial injustice in this country." The Washington Post [editorial board said](#) King had "diminished his usefulness to his cause, his country and his people." A [political cartoon](#) in the Kansas City Star depicted the civil rights movement as a young black girl crying and begging for her drunk father King, who is consuming the contents of a bottle labeled "Anti-Vietnam."

In all, [168 newspapers denounced him](#) the next day. Johnson ended his formal relationship with King. "What is that goddamned nigger preacher doing to me?" Johnson [reportedly remarked](#) after the Riverside speech. "We gave him the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we gave him the Voting Rights Act of 1965, we gave him the war on poverty. What more does he want?"

The African-American establishment, fearful of Johnson's reaction, also distanced itself from King.

The NAACP under the leadership of Roy Wilkins refused to oppose the war and [explicitly condemned](#) the effort to link the peace and civil rights movements. Whitney Young, the leader of the National Urban League, [warned](#) that "Johnson needs a consensus. If we are not with him on Vietnam, then he is not going to be with us on civil rights." Jackie Robinson, the celebrated African-

American baseball player and civil rights advocate, [wrote](#) to Johnson two weeks after King's speech to distance himself from the civil rights leader: "While I am certain your faith has been shaken by demonstrations against the Viet Nam war, I hope the actions of any one individual does not make you feel as Vice President Humphrey does, that Dr. King's stand will hurt the civil rights movement. It would not be fair to the thousands of our Negro fighting men who are giving their lives because they believe, in most instances, that our Viet Nam stand is just." Many donors to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [wrote to King](#) announcing they were pulling their support.



Dr. Martin Luther King on platform talks to thousands of demonstrators on United Nations Plaza on April 15, 1967 in New York City.

## Tolerance for Civil Disobedience Ends at the Mason-Dixon Line

As he alienated the liberal establishment for his campaign against the Vietnam War, King also planned to mobilize mass demonstrations and civil disobedience aimed not at his old foes in the segregationist South, but politicians north of the Mason Dixon line who he believed were failing to act to stop endemic poverty. In August 1967, he told the SCLC that he was calling for activists to "dislocate" northern cities with nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns demanding action on federal aid. He said he would consider tactics, such as school boycotts, blocking plant gates with unemployed African-Americans, and mass sit-ins in federal buildings.



The New York Times, a steady ally of King's civil disobedience campaign in the South, was [furious](#). Two days after King's SCLC address, the editorial board called his idea a "formula for discord." The paper complained that there is an "inherent contradiction in Dr. King's summons to Negroes to act 'peacefully but forcefully to cripple the operations of an oppressive society.' He himself has acknowledged that nonviolence is losing its appeal; once the spark of massive law-defiance is applied in the present overheated atmosphere, the potential for disaster becomes overwhelming."

But King was never an advocate for violence. Although some on the left [in King's time](#) and [today](#) argue about the utility of violence, King spent much of the end of his life trying to prevent the rioting and violent unrest that the Times was so concerned about. In February 1968, he warned during a tour through Alabama that increased rioting could lead to a "[right-wing takeover](#)." He pointed to segregationist George Wallace's presidential bid, [saying](#), "Every time a riot develops, it helps George Wallace." Defending his threat to take poverty protests to the doorsteps of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, he [portrayed](#) nonviolence as a sort of middle path between acquiescence and violence. "We need an alternative to riots and to timid supplication," he said.



Arrest of MLK in Montgomery, Alabama in 1958.

Also that year, he [launched](#) the Poor People's Campaign, aimed at providing good jobs, housing, and a decent standard of living to all Americans. More than 40 years before American protesters took to the streets of New York City and other locales to "occupy" space to protest inequality, King proposed a massive tent encampment in Washington, D.C. to demand action on poverty. King was assassinated during a campaign to organize sanitation workers in Tennessee in April of that year, before he was able to set up the encampment. His widow Coretta Scott King, as well as fellow civil rights leader Ralph David Abernathy, [went ahead](#) with the plan to create what they called Resurrection City.

The camp [lasted six weeks](#) until police moved in to shut it down and evict all of its inhabitants, pointing to sporadic acts of hooliganism as justification. Andrew Young, the young civil rights leader who later went on to be Jimmy Carter's U.N. ambassador and a mayor of Atlanta, was horrified, saying the crushing of the camp was worse than the police violence he saw in the South. "It was worse than anything I saw in Mississippi or Alabama," [he said](#). "You don't shoot tear gas into an entire city because two or three hooligans are throwing rocks."

Following King's assassination, the mood shifted quickly. Johnson, who had once terminated all communication with King and privately cursed his name, issued a statement saying the "[heart of America is heavy, the spirit of America weeps](#)" following the activist's death. Georgia's segregationist Gov. Lester Maddox, a frequent critic of King, even [begrudgingly allowed](#) Georgia's flag to fly at half mast following his death. Bobby Kennedy, who once [authorized](#) the wiretaps of King's phones, [attended](#) the funeral.

**"He gave his life for the poor of the world — the garbage workers of Memphis and the peasants of Vietnam."**

Coretta Scott King's greatest concern was not for her husband's image, but how his legacy would be carried on after his death. Rioting rocked major American cities following King's assassination, and she feared that the nonviolence he had preached would be lost in the embers.

The [Sunday](#) following the assassination, she spoke at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and implored his movement to continue to act as he would for the causes he believed in:

*"Our concern now is that his work does not die. He gave his life for the poor of the world — the garbage workers of Memphis and the peasants of Vietnam. Nothing could hurt him more than that man could attempt no way to solve problems except through violence. He gave his life in search of a more excellent way, a more effective way, a creative way rather than a destructive way.*

*We intend to go on in search of that way, and I hope that you who loved and admired him would join us in fulfilling his dream.*

*The day that Negro people and others in bondage are truly free, on the day war is abolished, on the day wars are no more, on that day I know my husband will rest in a long-deserved peace."*

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