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Author(s): Kevin Gaines

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The Civil Rights Movement in World Perspective

Kevin Gaines

The Mighty Sparrow, a calypso performer from Trinidad, sang in 1963, at a perilous juncture during the civil rights movement, "I was born in the USA but because of my color I'm suffering today." "The white man preaching democracy but in truth and in fact it's hypocrisy," Sparrow continued, warning that he was "getting vexed." His proposed solution was the song's up-tempo refrain: "So—we want Martin Luther King for President!" Sparrow put his irreverent humor to deadly serious purpose, his song indicting both temporizing U.S. officials during the Birmingham crisis and a nation far from ready to elect a black president. Recorded for Caribbean audiences, including immigrants to the U.S., Sparrow's topical song reminds us, along with a number of recent studies, that the activities of King and the civil rights movement were keenly observed by audiences from all over the world.

Until quite recently, U.S. historians were accustomed to thinking of the civil rights movement within a domestic U.S.-based framework. But in its time, the movement had global dimensions that were abundantly clear to many contemporaries, including Sparrow, King, and many others, as this essay will show. Recent scholarship has engaged the ways in which the consciousness of civil rights leaders and black activists was in fact a *worldview*, a framework linking local and global events and perspectives. At the same time, that scholarship has yet to make a discernible impact in college and secondary school U.S. history textbooks. If the civil rights movement is covered in undergraduate surveys or high school classes (and sadly, we should not assume that even the most basic history of the movement is routinely taught), its story often remains a nation-based account of the response of presidential administrations to southern racial upheavals, with King as the movement's main protagonist.

That our understanding of the movement should emphasize a domestic U.S. narrative is not surprising. The violence that confronted civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham, Selma, Mississippi and other battlegrounds jolted the conscience of many throughout the nation. The sacrifices of those who died, and the traumas borne by their survivors, should never be forgotten. That said, viewing the civil rights movement within an international frame need not displace the memory of those who fought to end racial segregation on U.S. soil. Historians who examined the conditions that led many unsung local people in the South to risk their lives and livelihoods in opposing Jim Crow have learned that global events often informed the outlook and aspirations of activists (1) Black World War II veterans, energized by the global struggle against fascism, were at the vanguard of postwar demands for voting rights in the South. They and others were also inspired by national independence struggles in Africa and Asia. One of those veterans, Medgar Evers, the director of the NAACP branch in Jackson, Mississippi, admired the Kenyan nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta (2). The Freedom Singers, a vocal ensemble made up of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists working to organize black Mississippians to demand voting rights despite the constant threat of vigilante terror, paid tribute to the armed resistance employed by Kenyan nationalists (3). Such examples remind us that the local and the global are not antithetical. Rather, they complement each other.

By viewing the black freedom movement within a global frame, scholars and teachers may gain an enhanced appreciation of the motivations of those who challenged the racial status quo. Such a recontextualization also enables us to comprehend the limits, as well as the achievements, of civil rights strategies and reforms. In his discussion of the movement's mixed legacy, Thomas Holt has noted that South African and Brazilian freedom movements during the 1960s consciously aligned themselves with organized labor, while the U.S. civil rights movement severed its partnership with labor, a strategy that crucially limited the forms of freedom and citizenship that were imaginable in the U.S. context (4). In addition to prompting a reconsideration of the movement's tactics, an engagement with the global context of decolonization, the emergence of new African and Asian nations from European colonial rule during the 1950s and 1960s, reveals a wider spectrum of political consciousness and debate among black activists. Within that wider world of black movement activism, even as student sit-ins and nonviolent direct action campaigns spread throughout the South during the early 1960s, northern urban black activists were fighting discrimination in employment and housing, and had been doing so since World War II (5). Here again, the local and the global were inseparable. Activists based in New York, Chicago and other cites followed the decolonization of Africa just as avidly as they demanded equality on the local and national level. Their outlook was reflected in the views of such prominent figures as James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Malcolm X, all of whom faulted the federal government for its failure to enforce and implement civil rights law.

Viewing the black freedom movement within the context of decolonization and African national liberation movements goes beyond acknowledging the origins of the movement's tactic of nonviolent direct action in the Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha employed by Indian nationalists' struggle against British colonialism. Such a global refram-

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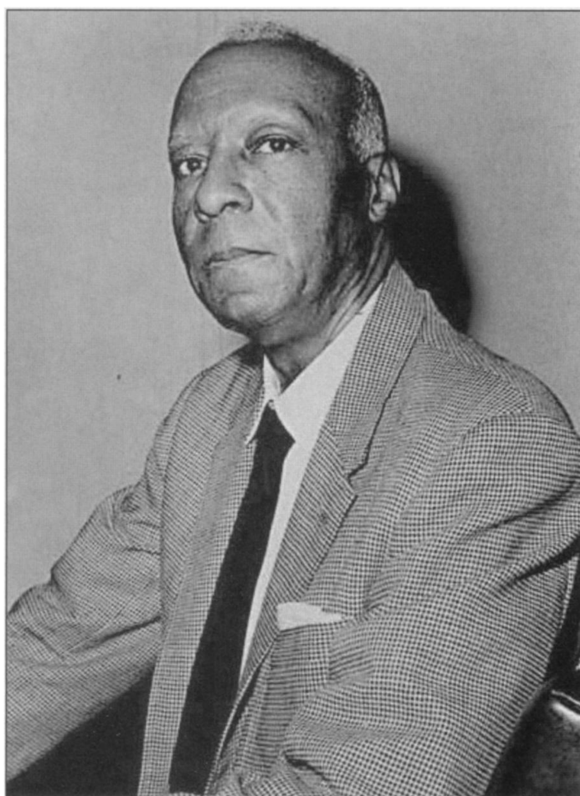
ing highlights the tension between U.S. conceptions of civil rights reforms, understood in terms of color blindness, or formal civil and political equality, and an evolving postwar international discourse of human rights, whose definitions of rights potentially embraced broader social needs such as income, housing, and health care. Arguably, this broader conception of social rights contained within human rights discourse partially informed Malcolm X's attempt, after he was forced out of the Nation of Islam, to substitute an internationalist rhetoric of human rights for that of civil rights.

To reconsider the U.S. black freedom movement within an international arena of political change is to discover that the status of African Americans in U.S. society has long been, and remains relevant for U.S. foreign affairs (6). It could not be otherwise, given America's superpower status since World War II. From the global war against fascism to the Cold War, to the present U.S. occupation of Iraq, the situation of African Americans has often symbolized, for Americans and overseas audiences, depending on one's perspective, either a color-blind American dream of racial progress, or a nightmare of exclusion mocking the nation's democratic ideals. More recently, a global perspective of a different sort found expression after the U.S. government's abandonment of African Americans stranded in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. That debacle led many Americans and overseas observers to compare the federal government's feckless performance to that of a third world country, the chronic conditions of poverty, ill-health, and official neglect exposed by the storm suggest the limits of triumphalist accounts of the civil rights movement in the U.S., and likewise, claims of victory in the Cold War. Arguably, the destruction of much of New Orleans can be attributed in part to the diversion of manpower and resources needed—for maintaining the levee system before the storm and emergency management after—to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, wars that have their roots in the Cold War policy of arming proxies to fight such enemies as the Soviet Union (7). The conjuncture of the Cold War and America's aspirations for global hegemony, the U.S. civil rights movement, and the decolonization of Africa was a momentous one. For Thomas Borstelmann, it led to a paradoxical divergence between domestic and foreign policy; while the Johnson administration could credit itself for passing landmark civil rights and voting rights legislation, its indulgent policy toward repressive white minority governments in southern Africa paved the way for substantial U.S. financial investments in those latter-day colonial societies (8). The debacle of the Vietnam War justifiably looms large in our assessment of LBJ's foreign policy, but the civil rights era also saw the subversion of African nationalist aspirations by the U.S. and other Western powers. Following such civil rights activists as Robert Moses, who linked the cause of black freedom in the U.S. with opposition to the Vietnam War, our account of the era must accommodate not only the sacrifices of the many who braved jail, beatings, and death in civil rights struggles at home, but also, the catastrophic toll of African and Asian victims of carpet bombing, "low intensity" proxy wars, and covert operations of U.S. foreign policy. A global approach to the civil rights movement fundamentally challenges us to ponder what is at stake in the teaching and writing of this history. Studying the black freedom movement within a global perspective can better prepare students to understand contemporary global affairs, helping them draw connections between postwar U.S. history and the histories of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.



A. Phillip Randolph. In 1941, Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and A. J. Muste proposed a march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the armed forces. The march was cancelled after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee. (Image Courtesy Library of Congress, *New York World-Telegram and the Sun* Newspaper Photograph Collection, 1963, LC-USZ62-119495.)

The joint enterprise of teachers and students to "connect the dots" between ostensibly disparate histories—of labor and civil rights, and domestic and foreign policy—becomes more palpable when we adopt, as the wartime examples above suggest, the perspective of what Jacquelyn Hall has called "the long civil rights movement," marking the genesis of the movement well before the landmark events of the 1954 *Brown* decision and the Montgomery bus boycott a year later, and emphasizing the movement's evolution from reformist goals to an agenda of radical social change under King's leadership (9). As Patricia Sullivan has shown, during the 1930s, federal New Deal reform and relief programs shifted the balance of power away from southern "states' rights" ideology, creating an opening in that region for labor organizing, civil rights activism and demands for voting rights (10). During World War II, civil rights and labor organizations joined hands as struggles for equality in the South and nationwide attacked segregation in housing, the workplace, and at the polls (11). African Americans supported the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), a federal agency mandated to safeguard African American rights in the workplace, the FEPC was established in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, as a concession to the pressure brought by A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement. In addition, blacks in civilian life and the armed forces championed the Double V campaign publicized by African American newspapers and civil rights organizations, which insisted that victory at home against Jim Crow segregation was essential for victory in the global war against fascism.

As evidenced by the Double V campaign, the movement itself responded to, and was shaped by, world events. During the war, African American civil rights leaders and organizations rhetorically anchored their cause to the global momentum of decolonization, as newly independent nation-states emerged from European colonial rule in Asia

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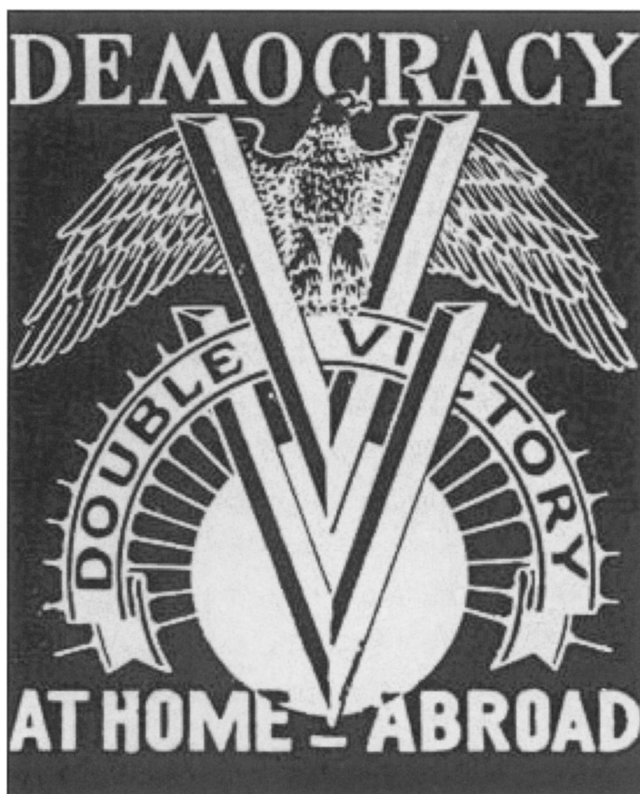
and Africa. But the postwar world, and the fortunes of emergent Asian and African nations, as well as those of the civil rights movement, came increasingly under the sway of the Cold War struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War did not simply influence the rhetoric of the movement. By stifling domestic criticism and dissent, the Cold War also limited the range of possibilities for social reform, restricting the goals of the movement to formal civic and political equality. Although the March on Washington demanded jobs along with freedom, the movement's goals maintained an exclusive focus on obtaining federal legislation to ban racial discrimination in civic and political life.

The Cold War held a double-edged significance for the civil rights movement. In declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional, the Court's unanimous decision in *Brown* enshrined the Cold War understanding that racial equality at home was a vital component of U.S. foreign policy and national security. But segregationists could and did marshal Cold War anticommunism to discredit the movement and its leadership. In their reliance on the federal government as an ally to secure civil rights legislative reforms, King and other leaders of the mainstream civil rights organizations maintained a discreet silence on U.S. foreign policy and the deepening U.S. war in Vietnam. By 1967, having achieved the hard won legislative victories of the civil rights and voting rights acts, King set about restoring the link between civil rights and economic justice. King could no longer refrain from criticizing the Vietnam War, which squandered resources needed to combat poverty and the effects of discrimination in the workplace and housing in the urban North and nationwide. The Vietnam War and opposition to it on a global scale had contributed to King's transformation from reformer to revolutionary.



The insignia of the Double V campaign of 1942, designed by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and supported by other African American newspapers aoumd the country. The Double V campaign demanded that African Americans, who were risking their lives abroad, should receive full citizenship rights at home. (Image courtesy the Library of Congress).

The very fact that the world was watching the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s ensured the responsiveness of otherwise reluctant U.S. policymakers to the demands of the black freedom movement. Throughout the modern civil rights movement, spanning the administrations of Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, U.S. State Department officials endorsed civil rights, seeking to convince foreign audiences of the nation's commitment to eradicating systemic barriers to the full participation of African Americans in public life. Yet news media accounts of all too frequent incidents of racism broadcast to foreign audiences throughout the 1950s and early 1960s were a chronic headache for U.S. foreign policy makers. Whether from acts of discrimination against African diplomats traveling Route 40, the corridor between New York and Washington, or from the full-scale unrest ignited by the violence unleashed by authorities upon nonviolent civil rights demonstrators throughout the Jim Crow South, as was the case in Birmingham, such racial upheavals, U.S. officials feared, undermined their assertions that the U.S. was the leader of the "Free World." The persistence of racism was America's Achilles' heel in its competition with the Soviet Union for the allegiance of new nations having recently emerged from European colonial empires.

Sparrow's identification with King and African Americans' struggle for equality was also part of a tradition of black internationalism dating back to the interwar years, as peoples of African descent forged solidarities across geographical and historical divides. The example of New Negro radicalism in the United States during the 1920s, especially the mass movement led by the Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, had inspired the anticolonial movements in Africa and the Caribbean that had shaped Sparrow's worldview. That internationalist consciousness was energized throughout the black world by Italy's invasion of the sovereign African nation of Ethiopia in 1935 (12). As World War II accelerated the collapse of European empires in Asia and Africa, African American civil rights and civic organizations lent support to African anticolonial movements, espousing what Penny Von Eschen has called a vibrant "politics of the African diaspora" that linked demands for equality in the U.S. with African national liberation movements (13). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such prominent African Americans as the singer and actor Paul Robeson, the scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, the boxing champion Joe Louis, and later, of course, Martin Luther King, Jr., were household names among people of African descent worldwide. Likewise, many black Americans avidly followed in the black press the political exploits of Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the nationalist movement in the British Gold Coast Colony, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya.

As the Cold War transformed the Soviet Union from wartime ally to postwar nemesis, a wartime black popular front alliance of African American civil rights organizations, the labor movement, and African nationalist parties came under official suspicion. African Americans' advocacy of African anticolonial movements and their democratic aspirations clashed with U.S. foreign policy makers bent on extending their influence over Africa's labor and raw materials. The allied victory over global fascism was not accompanied by the demise of Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. South, as most African American civic leaders, journalists, and soldiers had hoped. The political backlash of the Cold War led some, like the novelist and ex-communist Richard Wright, to

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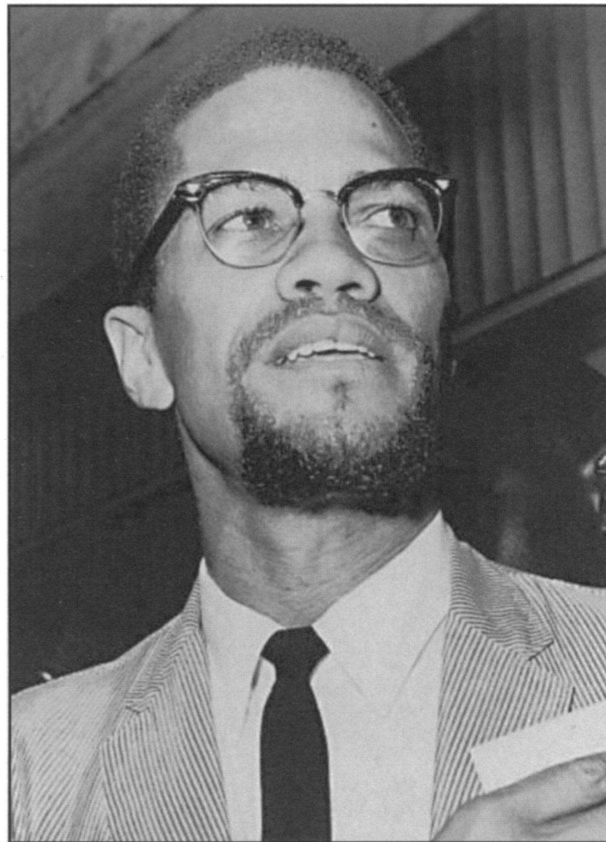
relocate to France in 1946, where he could speak, write, and work with West Indian and African nationalists beyond the reach of House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations.

The Cold War and its loyalty investigations had served as a warning to actual or potential critics. But if U.S. officials sought to keep internal dissent from overseas audiences, news coverage of violent outbursts by white southerners could not so easily be embargoed. U.S. officials sought a propaganda counteroffensive that would help audiences abroad view outbreaks of racial unrest as aberrations within a narrative of steady progress in race relations. *Brown*, the product of a protracted legal struggle waged by civil rights attorneys against Jim Crow "separate but equal" doctrine, was crucial for this narrative. But while it allowed U.S. foreign policy makers to proclaim to critics abroad that desegregation was the law of the land, *Brown* offered no plan for implementation.



Malcolm X at Queens Court, 1964. *(New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-119478.)*

Without an official federal strategy for integration, mass activism would be needed to desegregate public life in the Jim Crow South. The mobilization of African Americans in the Montgomery Movement had desegregated that city's public transportation system, and catapulted its leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., to national prominence. But King and other civil rights leaders seemed to falter in the face of white southern resistance, and an Eisenhower administration unwilling to enforce *Brown*. When Ghana (formerly the British-controlled Gold Coast Colony) achieved its independence in March of 1957, its Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah, invited King and other civil rights leaders and African American dignitaries as a show of support for the struggle for equality in the U.S. In doing so, Nkrumah also acknowledged African American leaders' support for nationalism in the Gold Coast and throughout Africa. Many attended, including A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell, and Ralph Bunche. In Ghana, ironically enough, King achieved the high level contact with the Eisenhower administration that he and other civil rights leaders had vainly sought back home when he encountered Vice President Richard Nixon, head of the U.S. delegation. With his wife Coretta, King lunched with Nkrumah, and upon their return, King linked Ghana's independence to their own struggles: "Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice . . . An old order of colonialism, of segregation, discrimination is passing away now. And a new order of justice, freedom and good will is being born" (14). King informed his audience that Nkrumah encouraged African Americans to move to Ghana and contribute to building the new nation. Over the 1950s and 1960s, some 300 African Americans did so, establishing an expatriate community whose destiny was closely tied to the political fortunes of Ghana under Nkrumah's leadership.

King's understanding of the cause of civil rights as a global issue, if not his optimism, was reinforced by the turmoil in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, as menacing white mobs gathered outside that city's Central High School to prevent the enrollment of nine African American youths, thus desegregating the school. President Eisenhower hesitated to intervene, prompting an angry condemnation by jazz musician Louis Armstrong of the president and the state's segregationist governor Orval Faubus, for inflaming the situation. Amidst damaging worldwide press coverage of the crisis, Eisenhower finally sent in federal troops to restore order, and to allow the students to attend school. The international implications of the civil rights issue were on King's mind when he announced plans for the Pilgrimage for Prayer in Washington, where a crowd of 20,000 assembled at the Lincoln Memorial in May 1957 to demand federal enforcement of *Brown*. "[T]he hour is getting late," King warned, "[f]or if America doesn't wake up, she will one day arise and discover that the uncommitted peoples of the world will have given their allegiance to a false communistic ideology." King insisted that civil rights was not some "ephemeral, evanescent domestic" matter to be exploited by segregationists for immediate political gain, but an "eternal moral issue" that would determine the outcome of the Cold War. Vice President Nixon used similar logic, warning that continued discrimination against African Americans undermined U.S. influence in Africa, which he regarded a crucial terrain of the superpower struggle against international communism.

Not everyone subscribed to such stark visions of Cold War conflict, nor did others feel compelled, as King and his advisors did, to promote the image of Christian piety to deflect charges of communist influence on the movement. Several prominent African American intellectuals and artists viewed the U.S. black struggle for equality within the changing global order of decolonization, including sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, the expatriate novelists Richard Wright and James Baldwin, the playwright Lorraine Hansberry and others. How might African Americans redefine themselves and their relation to modern political change in America and Africa? Would they become unhyphenated Americans, or in gaining formal equality, would they enact their U.S. citizenship in solidarity with African peoples and promote a broader definition of socioeconomic justice at home and abroad, that might contribute to the democratization of American society (15)?

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Frazier, Hansberry, Baldwin, and increasingly, the Nation of Islam minister and national spokesman Malcolm X were voicing in their respective ways the frustration of African Americans in the urban North, where, since World War II, local civil rights activists had opposed discrimination in housing, labor unions, and the workplace, making little headway against white-controlled municipal governments, police departments, school systems, neighborhood associations and labor unions. The plight of northern urban African Americans mired in slum conditions while wealth, opportunity and the American dream lay beyond their reach, led many to look to Africa as the foundation for their identity, rather than an American nation still largely defined by the indignities and brutality of Jim Crow. As an alternative to what some regarded as the Scylla of integration and the Charybdis of separatism, black radical writers, artists and activists, including Hansberry, Maya Angelou, Julian Mayfield, Amiri Baraka (then Leroi Jones) and others advocated a new Afro-American nationalism, defined by an independent critique of Cold War liberalism, a sense that integration would not address the plight of northern urban blacks, and an anti-imperialist critique of U.S. foreign policy consonant with that of the Afro-Asian bloc in the United Nations. That emergent Afro-American nationalism had its most dramatic expression in the demonstration in February 1961 in the gallery of the United Nations Security Council by African Americans, including Angelou and Baraka, following the announcement of the death of Patrice Lumumba, the democratically elected prime minister of the Congo, whose independence from Belgium was marred by civil disorder fomented by Belgium. The demonstrators were outraged that Lumumba's ouster, disappearance, and murder occurred with the apparent complicity of the UN peacekeeping mission. The assassination of Lumumba, who had traveled to Washington and to the U.N. in a vain appeal for diplomatic support, would remain a decisive event for those northern urban black militants and radicals whose political consciousness had been shaped by the decolonization of Africa.

Malcolm X would become the most prominent spokesman for those northern blacks sympathetic to Afro-American nationalism. The demonstration at the U.N., the most prominent of many protests condemning Lumumba's death throughout the United States and worldwide, would become a defining moment for Malcolm and his generation. In the near term, U.S. officials regarded the demonstration as proof that those involved and others were susceptible to the influence of international communism. The secular Afro-American radicals involved in the demonstration could not have been further in temperament from the organization that most effectively tapped the disaffection of urban blacks, the Nation of Islam (NOI). Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammed, born Elijah Poole in rural Georgia, the NOI diverged from orthodox Islam, capitalizing on America's racial divide. The NOI's view that whites were devils made sense to those mired in the endemic poverty and exclusion of Jim Crow segregation in the urban North. Muhammed urged NOI members to eschew political activism, but Malcolm, his leading spokesman, intensified his criticism of the Kennedy administration during the Birmingham crisis of 1963. Malcolm's harsh rhetoric—he dismissed the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom as a public relations event stage-managed by the Kennedys—had garnered headlines and FBI surveillance.

Malcolm's notoriety and his apparent disregard for the NOI's apolitical stance had opened a breach between him and Muhammed, along with those rival ministers who considered themselves Muhammed's rightful heirs. Instructed by Muhammed to refrain from public comment on the death of President Kennedy, Malcolm told a New York audience that Kennedy had fallen victim to the violence his administration had unleashed throughout the world. Calling the assassination a matter of "chickens coming home to roost," Malcolm's provocative claim led to his ouster from the NOI. Malcolm spent much of the eleven months remaining to him traveling throughout Africa and the Middle East. His travels and discussions with members of diplomatic corps and African heads of state informed his rejection of the idea of innate white racism. Malcolm addressed audiences throughout Europe, Africa and the U.S., his analyses focusing on institutionalized racism at home and abroad, and positing a universal moral standard of justice and human rights. Though unable to live down his media reputation as an extremist, Malcolm's critical posture would help shape African American leadership and civil rights organizations' attempts to influence U.S. foreign policy in Africa. At the Oxford Debate Union in December 1964, Malcolm condemned the recent military offensive by Belgium, backed with U.S. air support, against Congolese nationalists. That mission, described in the press as the humanitarian rescue of European hostages seized by Congolese rebels against the Belgian-controlled central government, resulted in the slaughter of some 3,000 Congolese civilians. The Belgium-U.S. intervention in the Congo was widely condemned by African officials at the United Nations. African American civil rights leaders, including King, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer, Whitney Young and Dorothy Height, pressed the Johnson administration to withdraw its support for the Congolese central government. For its part, the administration refused to meet with these prominent civil rights leaders who comprised the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa. A White House memorandum of January 1965 referred to LBJ's desire to "discourage emergence of any special Negro pressure group (a la the Zionists) which might limit [the administration's] freedom of maneuver" (16). For Johnson, the achievement of civil rights reforms in the U.S. seemed to require the acquiescence of black leadership on African and foreign affairs.

At Oxford, Malcolm condemned the "cold-blooded murder" of Congolese civilians and linked that use of organized violence to the unredressed violence wielded by white extremists in Mississippi, where charges against the accused killers of three civil rights workers (James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner) the previous summer had recently been dropped. Aided by fellow activists in Harlem, Malcolm founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity a secular organization whose agenda for liberation sought to address local conditions within an internationalist framework. Malcolm also sought a *rapprochement* with civil rights organizations, sharing platforms with SNCC activists in Harlem and Selma, Alabama. In East Africa, Malcolm held court with SNCC activists including John Lewis. Upon his return, Malcolm, the son of Garveyite parents, told a Harlem audience that although a physical "return" to Africa was impractical, Afro-Americans should migrate "spiritually, culturally, and philosophically" to Africa. By this he meant that for African Americans, a sense of black and "African" cultural identification was essential for the achievement of equal citizenship. Malcolm's death in 1965 at the hands of assassins incited by NOI death threats brought a swift end to that fledgling organization.

Though unable to build an organization that remotely matched the influence of the NOI, black movement activists increasingly followed Malcolm's example in envisioning an international terrain of black struggle and liberation. As if emulating Malcolm's pilgrimage, SNCC activists, including Robert Moses and Fannie Lou Hamer, toured Africa, nursing their disillusionment at the defeat, as they perceived it,

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of their attempt to unseat the all-white Mississippi delegation at the 1964 Democratic Convention. While the sight of black officials exercising power and leadership in black majority societies was inspiring, they, like Malcolm, were dismayed by the reach of U.S. propaganda, whose rosy portrayals of progress clashed with their experience of violent resistance to their demands for voting rights in Mississippi and elsewhere throughout the South (17).

As SNCC became bogged down in disputes over organizational structure and ideology, Moses gravitated toward the burgeoning anti-Vietnam war movement (18). Here, it is crucial to note that antiwar statements by Moses, and later, King, were matters of sharp disagreement and conflict within the civil rights movement. A world of political differences may have separated youthful SNCC militants from the gray eminences of the civil rights establishment, but members of both camps could voice strong objection to criticism from the likes of Moses and King against U.S. foreign policy. In their view, antiwar statements at such a crucial juncture were diversions from the steadfast pursuit of freedom at home. The realities of a movement under siege and the urgent cause of voting rights, justified to some black activists reticence on matters of U.S. foreign policy.

Given the unwillingness of the Johnson administration to countenance an independent African American critique of U.S. foreign policy, it seems fitting to recall an assessment of global affairs by Richard Wright in his novel *The Outsider* (1953) that uncannily speaks to our present condition. Casting a pox on both houses of American capitalism and Soviet communism as totalitarian systems of exploitation, Wright, in the guise of his protagonist, claimed that those systems contained the seeds of the destruction of Western progress and modernity. The few hundred years of "freedom, empire-building, voting, liberty, democracy" would yield to a "more terrifyingly human" future. "There will be . . . no trial by jury, no writs of habeas corpus, no freedom of speech, of religion—all this is being buried, and not by Communists or Fascists alone, but by their opponents as well. All hands are shoveling clay onto the body of freedom before it even dies, while it lies breathing its last" (19). Those secular Cold War belief systems would be undermined by greed, corruption and cynicism, and would be rejected by much of the world's population, replaced by the rise of new forms of religious fundamentalism.

In this, and other writings, Wright seems to have sensed that civil rights—integration and formal equality envisioned solely within the U.S. terrain, would not be enough. Wright helps us to understand how devastating the eclipse of the movement's abandoned vision of socioeconomic justice that King had tried to restore was. Yet this was more than a matter of the lack of an alliance between labor unions and the black freedom movement. The liberating impact of the civil rights movement was limited, as well, by the Cold War's containment by the U.S. and Western powers of the democratic aspirations of the formerly colonized world, and the eclipse of an expansive international democratic vision of freedom emanating from the civil rights movement from such powerful exponents as King and Malcolm. The death of those figures, and the ideological defeat of their global vision of liberation, with its religious underpinnings, resulted in the moral and political vacuum left by the end of the Cold War, a vacuum ominously filled by religious fundamentalisms at home and abroad. And so it is at the end of 2006 that as the Roberts Court is poised to interpret the *Brown* decision in a manner that undermines the pursuit of integration, the global and the local merge once again in the return of the bodies of U.S. servicemen and women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan to their hometowns. ❑

Endnotes

1. Stuart Burns, ed., *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997) frames that event in the context of the national independence struggle in the Gold Coast, West Africa.
2. John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (University of Illinois Press, 1995).
3. "Oginga Odinga," a selection from The Freedom Singers album, *Freedom Now*, describes SNCC activists' meeting with the Kenyan nationalist leader and politician who had been brought to the U.S. by the State Department.
4. Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University*, 2000), xx.
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12. Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999); James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
13. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 1997.
14. Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 83-84.
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17. Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
18. Eric R. Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil*

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19. Richard Wright, *The Outsider* (New York: Perennial Library Edition, 1965), 366.

Bibliography

Teaching the international dimensions of the civil rights movement through music offers a powerful means of exposing students to the immediacy and contingency of consciousness as it is lived. The album containing the Mighty Sparrow's "Martin Luther King for President" contains other topical songs, including a tribute to President Kennedy after his assassination, and commentary on Khruschev and the Cold War. These songs are found on a compilation album, "The Mighty Sparrow Sings True Life Stories of Passion, People, Politics," Scepter International SI-9001. The song "Oginga Odinga" can be found on the album "The Freedom Singers Sing of Freedom Now!" Mercury Records, MG 20924. In part due to her association with SNCC activists, during the 1960s Nina Simone's music reflected the militancy of many younger blacks, while also foregrounding issues of Afro-American nationalism and gender equality as well. Her music is widely available on compact disc reissues and the relevant selections are discussed in Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1349-79.

Teachers of the civil rights movement in world perspective would do well to begin with the work of Brenda Gayle Plummer. Her book, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) extensively details African Americans' involvement with international affairs from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to the emergence of newly independent African nations at the dawn of the civil rights movement. Penny Von Eschen's *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) foregrounds the broad-based support among African Americans for anticolonial movements in Africa during World War II, with an emphasis on the black press as a forum for wide-ranging commentary on global affairs. Von Eschen argues that in response to Cold War strictures, civil rights leaders downplayed linkages with African nationalist movements. Instead, they increasingly argued that desegregation was essential for winning the Cold War.

Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004) builds upon the work of Plummer and Von Eschen with his intellectual history of African American intellectuals' sustained engagement with issues of race and democracy in a global arena since the 1930s. Singh's introduction asks students to rethink the legacy and popular memory of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. Singh places the often forgotten radicalism and "world perspective" of Martin Luther King during the later phase of his career within the context of earlier efforts by W.E.B. Du Bois (and others) to bring a global perspective to bear on their critiques of American democracy, as Du Bois did in the coda to his 1935 study *Black Reconstruction*, positing the post-Reconstruction repression of African American citizenship rights and colonial systems of exploitation founded on white supremacy as a unitary historical phenomenon. The active role Du Bois sought in advancing a vision of equality in the U.S. and world order defined by self-determination for colonized peoples at the conference devoted to crafting the United Nations charter is detailed by David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois—the Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000) in chapter 14 of the second volume.

Studies of local movements have probed the significance of international events on the perspective of movement activists. Besides Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Missouri* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), there is Timothy B. Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie; Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), a pathbreaking study of the North Carolina NAACP official who gained notoriety for advocating armed self-defense among blacks. Tyson is attentive to Williams's adept use of Cold War internationalism during the late 1950s in what became known as the "kissing case" (in which two African American boys were jailed on charges of rape for "playing house" with white female playmates) to pressure federal intervention by attracting international condemnation on that travesty and to publicize other such crises facing African Americans. In *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), Martha Biondi reminds us of the centrality of struggles against racial discrimination in labor and the workplace, and also notes that internationalism was part and parcel of the political vision of the black popular front. Her account notes the paradox of the intensification of racial segregation in the urban North at the very moment that legal racial barriers were being dismantled in the South. Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) provides an account of Moses's evolving internationalism and his incorporation of an antiwar position in his work for SNCC. *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), John D'Emilio's biography of the pacifist who served as an advisor to King during and after the Montgomery movement, notes the importance of his encounter with national independence movements in India and Africa. Rustin's involvement in nuclear disarmament protests in Africa was integral to his—and the movement's—vision of nonviolent direct action.

Also building on earlier work on African Americans and U.S. foreign relations, Mary Dudziak's study *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* established the importance of viewing the *Brown* decision as a legal event embedded in national and international diplomacy and geopolitics, and the civil rights movement as profoundly exposed to the political winds of the Cold War. *Brown* was a landmark, but its reliance on extrajudicial arguments such as the need to maintain the image of the U.S. as the leader of the "Free World" overseas illustrates that constitutional law cannot be separated from sociopolitical conditions. The subtitle of Dudziak's book is instructive for she extensively portrays U.S. policymakers as more concerned with defending the image of American democracy than enforcing federal desegregation laws.

Viewing the civil rights movement in world perspective necessitates a reperiodization of sorts. Just as our understanding of *Brown* as the genesis of the modern civil rights movement is called into question by the framework of "the long civil rights movement," and complicated further by the impact of the Cold War, so must we consider the extent to which African American consciousness and U.S. domestic and foreign policymakers were responding not only to the black freedom movement in the U.S., but also to the decolonization of Africa, including such events as what became known as the Congo Crisis. For Malcolm X, Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka and a generation of Afro-American nationalists, the death of Lumumba was as formative as any of the hallmark civil rights campaigns and crises that occurred in the South. James Meriwether's *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and*

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Africa, 1935-1961 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) captures the mood of those who looked to the new Africa of modern nation-states as an important basis for American civic identity. The impact of the Congo Crisis is detailed in Plummer, Meriwether, and in my recent study, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Newsreel footage of the demonstration of African Americans in the gallery of the United Nations Security Council, can be seen in the documentary *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey* (William Greaves Productions). One of the participants in that demonstration, Maya Angelou, provided an account of the demonstration in her evocative, if not always historically accurate memoir, *The Heart of a Woman* (New York: Random House, 1981), which describes the transformative potential of the new Africa on African American identity. In *The Cold War and the Color Line*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), Thomas Borstelmann provides an account of the Congo Crisis from the standpoint of U.S. officialdom. Borstelmann argues that Eisenhower officials' racial attitudes toward the besieged Congolese prime minister Patrice Lumumba were decisive in their refusal to extend political or military support. While silent on the administration's racial perceptions of Lumumba, Stephen E. Ambrose notes Eisenhower's approval of a CIA plot to assassinate Lumumba in *Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

My study *American Africans in Ghana* resituates such familiar figures as King and Malcolm X within the framework of decolonization in Africa. As one of several African American honored guests, King visited the nation of Ghana in 1957 for that former British colony's independence ceremonies. A valuable contemporary account of King's visit to Ghana is in Lawrence D. Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper, 1959). See also the relevant documents on King's visit to Ghana collected by Clayborne Carson, senior editor, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. volume 4, Symbol of the Movement January 1957-December 1958* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), particularly King's sermon on the Birth of Ghana. While in Ghana, King met with Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and other Ghanaian nationalist leaders, as did Malcolm X, during his own visit in 1964. By 1964, the optimism of the moment of independence was a distant memory, shattered by violent repression of nationalists in the Congo and in South Africa. Ghana was under siege from internal and external opposition, and Nkrumah had eroded civil liberties with a repressive domestic security apparatus after two assassination attempts. And in the U.S. setting, African American liberals and radicals who sought to influence U.S. foreign policy toward Africa clashed with the U.S. liberal establishment over the very terms and content of African American political consciousness and citizenship. For teaching purposes, I recommend chapter 6 of my book, *American Africans in Ghana*, on Malcolm X's visit to Ghana, which details his ouster from the Nation of Islam, his engagement with African affairs, and the impact the latter had on his ideas for mobilizing U.S. blacks. ❑

Kevin Gaines is director of the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies and professor of history at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His new book is American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era *(UNC Press). He is also the author of* Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture During the Twentieth Century *(UNC Press, 1996).*

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