INTRODUCTION

Black Global Politics in a Post–Cold War World

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I don’t believe we can have world peace until America has an “integrated” foreign policy.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

In a *Playboy* essay, Martin Luther King Jr. contended that our disastrous experiments in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic had been a result of racist decision making. “Men of the white West,” said King, “have grown up in a racist culture, and their thinking is colored by that fact. . . . They don’t respect anyone who is not white.”

King’s 1967 break with American foreign policy on Vietnam marks a watershed in African American views on such policy just as Vietnam itself represents the beginning of the end of the bipartisan Cold War consensus on anticommunism. Our mistakes in dealing with Vietnam and by extension China seemed, indeed, to be those of a nation who saw most of Asia as a threatening, “yellow” monolith controlled by Mao Zedong’s little red book. If we had had diplomatic relations with “Red China” or had known a little about the historical antagonism between China and Vietnam, we would have seen that both countries were more concerned about domestic development than an international Communist alliance. As Malcolm X was fond of pointing out, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 was a decisive defeat for colonialism, demonstrating that a relatively small group of disciplined guerrillas could win against a larger, stronger, conventionally equipped army of a major power (with United States support). Instead of withdrawing, our segregated foreign policy making process led us in the opposite direction.
King was not the first African American leader to oppose the war in Vietnam. Malcolm X, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Muhammad Ali, and even Coretta Scott King and James Bevel of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), had preceded him in public opposition to the war. No national leader, however, of King's status had taken the position that King set forth in his sermon at Riverside Church in New York on April 4, 1967 (exactly one year before his assassination). In his remarks, King presented seven reasons for opposing U.S. policy:

1. Spending on the war was draining funds for domestic programs;
2. Young Black men were being killed at an extraordinarily high rate in integrated army units yet still faced segregated schools at home;
3. It was morally inconsistent for him to urge nonviolence at home while America applied violence abroad;
4. Winning the Nobel Prize gave him the responsibility to work for peace everywhere;
5. He opposed all forms of imperialism;
6. America needed a radical revolution in values that would lead it to place human rights above American profits;
7. He opposed the war because he loved America and wanted to see it become a "divine Messianic force" not a world policeman.

The King reflected in the Riverside sermon is not the King widely celebrated in January. It is this King, however, that much of the Third World identifies with. The Riverside sermon was a beautiful blending of domestic and international policy. The struggle for civil rights and the "War on Poverty" had indeed been gutted by the priority given to Vietnam. Blacks were paying a high price both in terms of program funding and lives lost. Yet King's remarks were almost universally condemned by African American leaders. Figures King had worked closely with such as Whitney Young of the Urban League, Roy Wilkens of the NAACP, and UN Undersecretary Ralph Bunche were quick to condemn him for linking the domestic Black agenda to foreign policy. Yet King's action inspired a host of younger leaders such as Ron Dellums to see domestic policy in a broader context. Lyndon Johnson bluntly said that King had no authority to speak on issues of foreign policy and closed off his access to the White House.

By the time of the Tet offensive in 1968, a much larger number of establishment figures had joined King in opposition. The "containment strategy" of George Kennan, which had governed U.S. foreign policy
since its enunciation in 1948, was now fractured beyond repair. Such influential elite figures as Reinhold Niebuhr,6 Arthur Schlesinger, Hans Morgenthau, and John Kenneth Galbraith were now arguing that the communist world was polycentric and Vietnam was not vital to our national security. Thus, Vietnam represented the beginning of a process that would end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that is, the removal of anticomunism as the guiding principle of U.S. post–World War II foreign policy.

As of today, no strategy or ideology has replaced “containment theory” and “anticommunism” as the decisive influence in U.S. foreign policy. Anticomunism was a perfect policy in that it combined elements of idealpolitik and realpolitik. Idealists supported it because of its opposition to the violation of individual political and civil rights that was widespread in the Soviet bloc. Realists approved of its emphasis on geopolitics protecting our economic and cultural interests in Western Europe and our strategic interests in the Pacific. Without anticomunism, U.S. foreign policy was a ship without a rudder.

Under Henry Kissinger’s leadership, both the Nixon and Ford administrations advanced a foreign policy primarily along realist lines. The balance of power emphasis of these two administrations was briefly replaced by the human rights idealism of the Carter administration. Recognizing the utility of anticomunism over détente, Ronald Reagan rode to victory on the revival of superpower confrontation. Unlike the Johnson administration, which split Black leadership, Ronald Reagan made it clear that African American interests could not be the “national interest.”

Pioneer Black scholar and diplomat Elliott Skinner has delineated several factors that tend to exclude African Americans from the foreign policy making process. First, most societies have made decision making in foreign policy an elite process reserved for monarchs, presidents, and at most a few high-ranking advisors and legislators. Second, those persons who had access to the foreign policy elite were themselves drawn from the same socioeconomic status, race, and gender groups as Ronald Palmer discusses in his contribution. In short, foreign policy makers trusted those who looked like themselves. Third, in democratic societies external pressure on decision-making elites has been influential because public opinion is especially ill-informed in the area of foreign relations. Immigrant or ethnic groups with close ties to their land of origin have an opportunity to fill the information vacuum and lobby on behalf of their native land. African Americans, in general, lack specific and affective ties to particular African nations. Finally, United States foreign policy has traditionally given low priority to relationships with Caribbean and African nations.6 Percy Hintzen’s contribution to this volume is an exhaustive treatment of U.S. foreign policy in the English-speaking
Caribbean that views Caribbean independence as subservient to U.S. Cold War interests. Central to his discussion is the role of U.S. government in undermining any radical assertions of independence in the post–World War II era. This led to American support for anticommunist Afro-Ceole nationalism as an alternative to socialism or communism. Ron Walters’ contribution emphasizes the marginalization of Africa in foreign aid and trade prior to 1993. Even with the switch from public sector development assistance to private sector–driven trade and investment, Africa suffers in comparison to other regions both in terms of amounts and limitations on the recipients of the investment.

The following table of key events in U.S. foreign policy from an African American perspective demonstrates the very limited effectiveness of Black influence.

**KEY EVENTS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FROM A BLACK PERSPECTIVE**

1794–1800—The Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint L’Ouverture.
1815—Paul Cuffee returns 38 African Americans back to Africa.
1820—The establishment of Liberia for freed African American slaves.
1884–85—The Berlin West African Conference divides Africa among the colonial powers.
1919—The first of five Pan African Congresses led by W. E. B. DuBois
1935—The Italian-Ethiopian War
1946—National Negro Congress Petition on Human Rights presented to UN
1947—U.S. Armed Forces desegregated
1950—Ralph Bunche wins the Nobel Peace Prize
1955—The Non-Aligned Nations meet in Bandung, Indonesia
1957—Ghana becomes the first postcolonial African nation
1967—Martin Luther King Jr. publicly opposes Vietnam War
1977—Andrew Young becomes U.S. Representative to the UN, TransAfrica is formed, the Sullivan Principles are established.
1984—Jesse Jackson raises South Africa as a presidential campaign issue.
1986—Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act is passed over Reagan’s veto.
1987—Colin Powell becomes National Security Advisor.
1998—President Clinton visits five African nations.

The Haitian Revolution marked the first successful colonial revolt led by slaves in the New World. Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolu-
tion, Toussaint L’Ouverture and his generals defeated Napoleon’s finest troops, leading Napoleon to not only give up on Haiti but to also sell the Louisiana territory to Jefferson. While great efforts were made to suppress news of the Haitian Revolution in the United States, including laws banning the importation of slaves from the Caribbean, Toussaint quickly became a hero in America’s Black communities. However, as Lorenzo Morris points out in his contribution, United States endorsement of Haitian leaders today carries baggage that hinders rather than helps their popular appeal. Prior to 1815, wealthy Black Massachusetts shipowner Paul Cuffee petitioned Congress to provide him with funds to take a group of educated African Americans back to Africa to “Christianize” and “civilize” their brethren. When Congress—by a narrow vote—refused, Cuffee used his own funds and ship to return thirty-eight free Blacks to Sierra Leone. Cuffee’s efforts inspired the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 whose members included many of the nation’s most prominent political leaders and whose goal was the removal of free Blacks from the nation. Most free Blacks vigorously opposed the ACS program. In 1820, the nation of Liberia was established by eighty-six African Americans with U.S. government support. While the United States supported the removal of free Blacks to the African continent, it refused to recognize Liberia as an independent nation until 1847. The historic ties of the United States to Liberia are presented as the context for current democratization efforts promoted by the United States in the contribution of Keith Jennings and Celena Slade. As in Haiti, U.S. support of Liberian leaders is now seen negatively by rank-and-file Liberians. By contrast, the United States quickly recognized the colonial division of Africa that occurred at the 1884–85 Berlin Conference.

The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 not only gave hope to a new generation of liberal internationalists in the United States but also inspired W. E. B. DuBois to seize the opportunity to hold the first of a series of Pan African Congresses. The purpose of the Congress, held over the objection of U.S. officials, was to lobby for a timetable for self-rule in the colonies and to place those colonies ruled by the defeated Axis powers under the mandate of the League of Nations. While the Pan African Congresses represented a Black elite, Marcus Garvey moved rapidly during the same period to popularize the uplift of Africa among Black masses worldwide. Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 symbolized the failure of the League of Nations to deter aggression against a member African nation and opened the door for the fascist aggression of World War II. Italy’s action, which may be seen as partial revenge for Italy’s defeat at Adowa in 1896, led to the mobilization of Ethiopian support groups in the United States and clashes between African Americans and Italian Americans in cities like New York.
Immediately after the formation of the United Nations and its new Commission on Human Rights, African Americans began to use this new international forum to expose racial discrimination in the United States as the Charles Henry and Tunua Thrash contribution discusses in detail. The 1946 petition of the National Negro Congress was quickly followed by a longer 1947 petition sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a 1951 genocide petition submitted by the Civil Rights Congress led by William Patterson and Paul Robeson. The period after World War II also witnessed the desegregation of the United States Armed Forces in 1947 and the first Black Nobel laureate, Ralph Bunche, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his mediation of the conflict in Palestine. However, by 1947, the postwar optimism that had seen Black liberals and leftists united with Africans and West Indians in opposing colonialism abroad and Jim Crow at home had begun to erode under the pressure of McCarthyism. Many Black liberals joined White liberals such as those in the new Americans for Democratic Action in promoting a united front against communism while charging that the greatest internal threat to American leadership of the “free world” was racial discrimination.4

During the height of the Cold War, “Third World” nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia to form the “nonaligned movement.” Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. attended the conference and Richard Wright reported on the proceedings. The struggle for the allegiance of these nonaligned nations would help force the removal of Jim Crow laws in the United States, most notably in the 1954 Supreme Court decision Brown v. Topeka Board of Education, and present an alternative to communism and capitalism.

Ghana’s independence in 1957 marked the beginning of the end of colonialism in Africa and had reverberation in the United States. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s leader, had been educated in the United States, but in the 1950s and 1960s a younger generation of African Americans began to turn to African leaders and intellectuals like Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Amilcar Cabral, Jomo Kenyatta, and Julius Nyerere for guidance. A number even took up residence in countries such as Ghana. While African countries became popular assignments for Peace Corps volunteers, Allen Caldwell describes a kind of counter-Peace Corps in his contribution on Kenya. With the help of transnational philanthropy, Black youth in Baltimore are being sent to Kenya to receive a quality of education they cannot find in inner-city American schools.

King’s Riverside speech in 1967 condemning the war in Vietnam stood in sharp contrast to the inclusion of King’s lieutenant, Andrew Young, in the Carter administration a decade later. Young was named U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and quickly gained the respect
of Third World delegates. During the same period, Reverend Leon Sullivan of Philadelphia, a member of the board of directors of General Motors, set forth a voluntary code of principles for companies doing business in South Africa. Young and Sullivan—along with the formation of a new lobbying group of African issues, TransAfrica—represent the emergence of an "insider" strategy for the first time in regard to Black influence on U.S. foreign policy.

This strategy quickly disappeared as the Reagan administration began a policy of "constructive engagement" with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Reagan's policies, both domestic and foreign, help generate support for the presidential campaign of Jesse Jackson in 1984. While Jackson had minimal impact on domestic policy, he was successful in introducing into the presidential debate the issue of U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa. To the dismay of the foreign policy establishment, he also had success as a citizen diplomat in the case of U.S. airman Ronald Goodman, who had been captured by the Syrians. In 1986, Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act over the veto of President Reagan. As Winston Nagan points out, this act was the first time U.S. foreign policy officially condemned institutional racism.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new challenges emerged in foreign policy that this volume explores. With the end of the Cold War Black liberals and leftists were again free to join ranks in a worldwide assault on racial domination. However, there are currently no figures on the Black left comparable to Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois and a Black right has emerged to compete for the "national interest." Already this period has produced the first African American to achieve elite decision-making status, Colin Powell, who was named national security advisor in 1987 and the late Ron Brown played a decisive role in developing Black and other business ties with Africa as Clinton's secretary of commerce. By 1994, the United States had ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and James Jennings explores its implications in his contribution. As recently as 1998, President Clinton gave new prominence to Africa as he undertook a five-country tour.

Many of these key events demonstrate that racism at worst and ethnocentrism at best have been at the center of U.S. foreign policy. As Lauren demonstrates, the spread of democracy in the nineteenth century was integrally linked to a rise in racism. Moreover, this racism grew with the development of science, not in spite of it. Thus, such concepts as manifest destiny, the White man's burden, eugenics, and racial hierarchy are central to the development of the "national interest" of the elites that controlled U.S. foreign policy.

While recent scholarship has devoted more attention to the influence of culture, it is absolutely essential to acknowledge what Martin Luther
King pointed out in 1967—that we have been blinded by our bias. The frantic search for a new worldview or guiding principle for U.S. foreign policy must include a multicultural perspective if the blunders of “anti-communism” are to be avoided in the future.

Perhaps the closet equivalent to “containment strategy” in today’s foreign policy debates is Samuel P. Huntington’s suggestion that world politics has entered a new phase in which the fundamental source of conflict will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic but cultural. The Harvard professor’s 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article received a great deal of attention because it seemed to accurately reflect the alarming rise in ethnic, racial, and religious conflict that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. While Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis was widely debated in academic circles and even given a domestic spin by some, his views were not reflected in U.S. foreign policy and generated little if any interest among U.S. minorities. Yet if, indeed, a “kin-country” syndrome is at work in such U.S. foreign policy decisions as the Gulf War and if cultural differences exacerbate economic conflict with such countries as Japan, then the cultural conflict thesis deserves more attention for several reasons.

It is widely acknowledged that the East-West conflict of past years has been replaced by North-South conflict. However, the use of geography obscures the real role that race and economics play in the international arena. As Abdul Aziz Said suggests, security is no longer a function of geopolitics but of technology. The old terminology of balance of power and national interest do not adequately explain the politics of global capital and global issues. Moreover, the conflict involves not only the governments of the developed versus less developed nations but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well. In the human rights field, for example, NGOs in Third World nations routinely criticize U.S. and European human rights organizations for focusing on political and civil rights while ignoring the right to development. As geo-economics replace geopolitics, entire continents such as Africa and nations as large as India are left out of the discussions over “economic zones.” No more than twenty or thirty national and international actors have any significant impact in this arena according to Edward Said and they are overwhelmingly White.

With the lack of an identifiable enemy after the Cold War, the Great Powers of the international system have begun to work together to protect their own—generally economic—interests. Neorealism and neoliberalism have converged around technology and trade. In this new international system some 80 percent of the world’s population finds itself on the global periphery. No better example of this marginalization can be found than the disparate treatment of the genocide committed in
Rwanda as compared to the “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnia and Kosovo. As President Clinton so tellingly stated, the stability and peace of Europe are strategic priorities for U.S. interests.

As great as the horror of Rwanda and central Africa is, the more pernicious threat is the burden of debt and economic marginalization crushing Africa and to a lesser extent the Caribbean as revealed in the contributions of Walters, Morris, Hintzen, and Jennings and Slade. Structural adjustment programs imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs) on African and Caribbean countries can cause real incomes to fall as much as 50 percent. Given that 40 percent or more of the people in these countries already live below absolute poverty levels, the result is denial of education and health services, malnutrition, and premature death.¹³

While the World Bank recognizes that “programs of action can be sustained only if they arise out of consensus built on dialogue within each country,”¹⁴ it has yet to engage in such dialogue when imposing structural adjustment programs. In fact, the imposition of such programs requires draconian measures on the part of the state that work against an open democratic system. And although African states are pictured as authoritarian regimes controlling all aspects of life, they are in fact weak with few central services and partial territorial control. No African state approaches the level of government services or control over police and military that resides in the government of the United States or any other industrialized country.

What is needed is stronger not weaker government. But this stronger government must be accountable to voters. Moreover, this government must be the product of an active civil society. Government reflects civil society rather than opposing it. Mere privatization of public power that shifts into private hands the many coercive functions that once belonged to the state is likely to increase the class disparities in African society rather than decrease them. Further, if we expect social change in African states and the Caribbean, it is likely to come from social movements—as it has in the United States—rather than political parties.

The complex dynamics involved in constructing an open and vigorous civil society in Africa are seen in the politics of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. As Walters points out, the bill contains no debt relief, no funds for development, imposes conditionalities without discussion, has weak labor and human rights standards, and shrinks the public sector. Thus this bill, which comes from an administration dedicated to promoting democracy in Africa, simultaneously weakens the state and African leadership while undercutting support for elements of civil society including labor groups, human rights groups, and those groups that would benefit from development funds. Fareed Zakaria’s
controversial article "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" actually calls for a moratorium on U.S. democracy projects while we work to consolidate democracy in those countries where it already exists by developing constitutional liberalism. Zakaria's suggestion that we endorse "liberal autocracies" in less developed nations brought an immediate response from Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck and USAID Administrator J. Brian Atwood. They challenged Zakaria's contention that U.S. democracy assistance only focused on elections and that such elections can increase social tensions and destabilize societies.

As Keith Jennings and Clena Slade illustrate in the case of Liberia and Lorenzo Morris in Haiti, the North American–West European model of development is largely inapplicable in the Third World, where cultural practices and economic conditions are quite different from our own. Morris asks, for example, is it possible to decommission a military and turn them into a civilian police force in a country with no history of civilian control over the military? Clarence Lusane interrogates the role of democratization in limiting the drug trade, arguing that it may have negative as well as positive consequences. Is it any wonder then that lacking strong governments that can control drug smuggling or vibrant civil societies that give civilians status and power, many African and Caribbean states fear domestic disorder and welcome international order. That is, for many less developed countries the realist focus on the sharp boundary between domestic order and international anarchy seems reversed.

This fear of domestic disorder explains the willingness of some African leaders to accept even the limited recognition that the African Growth and Opportunity Act represents internationally. However, it does not explain the split among African American leaders over the bill. As Walters explains, the "two line" struggle historically reflected by African American activists in regard to Africa disappeared with the fall of apartheid in South Africa. What has emerged is a more conservative political framework that to some extent mirrors domestic policy such as welfare reform. This conservative political framework has led to the replacement of aid with trade as discussed by Walters and the privatization of the sanctions regime as outlined by Nagan.

The rise in ethnic, racial, and religious conflict reflects a return to stable and traditional roots at a time when technological change and the loss of an ideological compass leave entire groups searching for roots. As Robert Kaplan has demonstrated, those societies best able to cope with change are those where strong traditional values have been institutionalized. Even in the United States, which has its own culture wars, ethnic, racial, and religious identity serve as a ground for the pragmatism of U.S. foreign policy. It seems clear, for example, that in an era
when U.S. foreign policy is driven primarily by economic interests, President Clinton’s 1998 trip to Africa served primarily as a symbolic reminder to African Americans that his administration would not ignore Africa.

The search for new foreign policy paradigms must be undertaken with a critical eye on race and culture. Americans have tended to insist on using U.S. beliefs as a model because of the success this nation has enjoyed. Rather than tolerating differences, we have tried to transform other countries into our image.19 Even as we acknowledge the unique interweaving of religious and civil traditions that characterized the civil society tradition in the United States—setting it off from those of other nation-states and giving the unity of natural law documents and religious themes their particular saliency in eighteenth-century America—we continue to insist that other nations follow our lead. At the same time, we must acknowledge that an emphasis on race or ethnic identity can have negative consequences. Foreign policy debates often obscure the fact that states are political entities while nations represent a cultural grouping. Most nation-states reflect the domination of and expansion of one cultural group over others. The dominant group’s interests become the national interest. This is as true of the United States as it is of developing societies. “In America, that paradigm of modern society,” says Adam Seligman, “the private is invested with a public nature in an attempt to constitute its value in the face of what is conceived to be a neutral public arena . . . it is precisely due to its ‘Protestant’ nature that in America the locus of morality and ethical value is in the individual and not in the public realm.”20

As we move into the next millennium, it is apparent that nonstate actors will play an increasingly significant role in international affairs. Not only are national minorities more likely to see their issues as international issues, as the contribution of James Jennings suggests, but transnational social movements will become important proponents of global issues or defenders of common interests that challenge transnational corporations. The nonprofits or third sector will continue to grow and new links between civil society actors in this country and abroad will be established, as Allen Caldwell demonstrates in the field of education. Yet, as Caldwell demonstrates, the success of almost all transnational campaigns depends on how the issue of nationalism is engaged. Advocacy networks in the North function in a cultural milieu of internationalism that is generally optimistic about the promise and possibilities of international networking. For network members in developing countries it is a much more difficult process to justify external intervention or pressure in domestic affairs of fragile or weak states. To be truly effective, these networks must become sites of cultural and political
negotiation rather than mere enactors of dominant Western norms.\(^{21}\) These networks represent the "two line" struggle of the future without which the success of democratization and development in the African and the Caribbean is doubtful.

NOTES


2. John Bracey reports that efforts to get the issue of Vietnam addressed at SCLC's unity rally at Soldier Field in Chicago in 1966 were in vain and young protesters were hustled out of the stadium. Public lecture, University of California at Berkeley, May 1, 1998.

3. There had been serious talks about King going to Nigeria to negotiate an end to the Biafran War before his death.


5. It is interesting to note that the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr had a profound impact on both Martin Luther King Jr. and on U.S. foreign policy-makers. It was Niebuhr's attack on the Social Gospel movement that introduced King to the notion that love must be linked to power to bring about social justice. Niebuhr's work also challenged the liberal internationalism of the post–World War I period with Niebuhr arguing that altruism was almost totally absent in relations between states and providing a moral base for "containment strategy." See Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1974), pp. 71–98, and Robert W. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 12–15.


9. Ibid., pp. 34–53.


