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TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

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# COLD WAR CIVIL RIGHTS

RACE AND THE IMAGE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

**Mary L. Dudziak**

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*To Alicia*

remarked that the Netherlands is very unreceptive to anti-American propaganda, whether it emanates from Communist sources or from right-wing colonial die-hards. However, he added that the opponents of American policies possess one propaganda theme which is extremely effective throughout Europe and even more effective in Asia—criticism of American racial attitudes.<sup>67</sup>

According to the memorandum, the Dutch official was “well-informed about American politics and the American culture generally,” but, nevertheless, “he himself had never been able to understand the American point of view toward negroes and other minority groups, and that the point of view was extremely difficult for friends of America to explain, let alone defend.” The Dutch official’s “knowledge of America” had

convinced him that America has made real progress in eliminating the worst aspects of racism, and he agreed that the nature and extent of American racial feeling has been grossly exaggerated by the Communists. However, he said that, in his opinion, the actual situation is sufficiently bad to provide a very solid foundation for the fabulous structure of lies which the Communists have built up.

There was a solution to this problem, however. The Dutch official suggested that the “United States information program should devote a major portion of its facilities and energies to a campaign aimed at counteracting the impression which so many people have of American racial suppression.”<sup>68</sup>

If the nation could not eradicate the conditions that gave rise to foreign criticism, it could at least place them “in context.” It could weave them into a story that led ultimately to the conclusion that, in spite of it all, America was a great nation. Rehabilitating the moral character of American democracy would become an important focus of Cold War diplomacy.

## CHAPTER 2

### Telling Stories about Race and Democracy

These neighbors in a housing project, like millions of Americans, are forgetting whatever color prejudice they may have had; their children will have none to forget.

U.S. INFORMATION AGENCY,

*THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN LIFE* (ABOUT 1950)<sup>1</sup>

In 1947, Public Affairs Officer Frederick C. Jochem wrote an article for a Rangoon, Burma, newspaper, with the approval of the U.S. consul general in Rangoon. The article, entitled “Negro Problem,” politely suggested that the Burmese did not have all the facts on the issue of race in the United States. It began:

A Burmese friend was astonished the other day when I told him that a Negro had just been appointed to a professorship in my university back home. We were discussing the “Negro problem” in America, and it turned out that a number of facts and viewpoints that I take for granted are surprising news in Burma.<sup>2</sup>

Among the facts unknown to the Burmese was the statistic that "more than fifty Negroes now hold major teaching posts in prominent American universities." The students and nearly all faculty at the institutions were "black as the proverbial ace of spades." That many of these schools were the product of enforced racial segregation was a detail Jochem failed to mention to his friend. Black colleges, instead, provided evidence of the availability of higher education to African Americans. Jochem thought that "there is still a 'Negro problem' in the United States," particularly in the South. However, he saw race prejudice as an understandable phenomenon in light of the nation's history of slavery. "Of course there is prejudice against Negroes, because for the first few generations of their life in America nothing was done to educate or train them, and the heritage of ignorance, and all that goes with it, persists." In spite of this legacy, Jochem was hopeful.

[S]ome of the best people in the North and South are working constantly to improve the position of the Negro everywhere in the United States. . . . The goal is now to realize, to the letter, and in every one of the 48 states, the provisions of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments which abolish all legal distinctions between individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Jochem's article was one of countless efforts by the U.S. government to tell its side of the story of race in America. International criticism of U.S. race discrimination could not be left unanswered. American embassies did their part to address racial difficulties by cooperating with the State Department in an effort to present what they considered to be a more balanced perspective on the issue. Organized U.S. government efforts to disseminate favorable information about the United States to other countries represented one method of doing so. During World War II, the Roosevelt administration increasingly recognized the value of print and broadcast media in U.S. government efforts to influence international opinion. By 1948, the Cold War increased the perceived importance of such efforts. In some government circles fears were expressed that America was losing an unequal war of propaganda in which the Soviet Union and its

satellites routinely misrepresented and distorted American ideals and actions. The federal government needed to respond by disseminating the "truth" to counteract such communist propaganda.<sup>4</sup>

The United States Information Agency prepared materials that placed American race relations in the best possible light for dissemination overseas. Such propaganda on race during the Cold War can be seen as part of an effort to hide the nation's blemishes as the government tried to portray American democracy as a model for the world. Yet of equal interest are stories the government would *tell* about the American past, including sins that were purposefully exposed. The best-developed presentation of the government position on race appeared in *The Negro in American Life*, a USIA pamphlet written in 1950 or 1951. This pamphlet revealed, rather than concealed, the nation's past failings, and it did so for the purpose of presenting American history as a story of redemption. In this story, democracy as a system of government was the vehicle for national reconciliation. The telling of a shameful story became an avenue for Cold War argument. Democracy, not totalitarian forms of government, it argued, provided a context that made reconciliation and redemption possible.<sup>5</sup>

The pamphlet's simple cover opened to reveal the photograph of an elementary school classroom. Sixteen white students and one African American student were visible in the picture, along with an African American teacher. The caption read, "In New York, a Negro teacher teaches pupils of both races." These are not the only school-children in the opening pages, however. In a much smaller picture in the upper right-hand corner of the page was a photograph of what was called "A new school for farm children." In front of the building was a large group of children, all of whom appeared to be African American. "Education and progress for the Negro people move together," the caption explained. "Thousands of new rural schools, like the one above, provide free education in the South."<sup>6</sup>

While the photos of happy children may have reassured some readers, the widespread knowledge of American race discrimination meant that racism and segregation could not go without comment. Unable to avoid the most glaring troubles of the past, which were

well known to foreign critics, *The Negro in American Life* instead turned that history into an advantage. Given how bad things were in the past, the pamphlet argued, isn't it amazing how far we've come?

According to *The Negro in American Life*, the "cardinal cause" of American racial prejudice was the nation's history of slavery. That history was presented as an unfortunate part of the American past. The reader was told that during the colonial period "enlightened men vigorously opposed the slave trade," but "farmers and plantation owners accepted slavery as the answer to their ever growing need for cheap labor." At this time, "use of cheap or slave labor was the way of the world." Some had "moral qualms" about slavery, but they "could be persuaded to accept the notion that Negroes—strange men from Africa—were something less than human. And so there began in the United States a theory of racial inferiority which became a key tenet in support of slavery and, later, of economic and social discrimination." From this theory of inequality, "a divided society was built upon the assumption of white superiority. In some places it became a serious crime to educate a Negro. To treat a Negro as an equal was heresy. The Negro who challenged his slave status did so at risk of life." In the late eighteenth century, when the nation was formed, some American leaders were cognizant of the contradiction between slavery and American democratic ideals, but nevertheless accommodated slavery's continued existence in order to foster national unity.<sup>7</sup>

The reader of *The Negro in American Life* might have been shocked not only by the hypocrisy of slavery in a nation that claimed to embrace freedom and individual liberty but also by the fact that it was portrayed so starkly in a U.S. government publication. In educating the reader about slavery, the pamphlet also impressed the reader that openness and a free exchange of information and ideas were features of American government. In learning from the U.S. government about slavery, the reader may have felt that she had experienced democracy in action.

The discussion of slavery had another, and more central, rhetorical function, however. By setting forth the history of the evil slave past, and contrasting past with present, the pamphlet asked the

reader to marvel at the progress that had been made. The reader was asked not to view American race relations in isolation. Rather, "it is against this background that the progress which the Negro has made and the steps still needed for the full solution of his problems must be measured." With the shameful past as a benchmark, race relations in the early 1950s could certainly be seen as an improvement.<sup>8</sup>

Over the previous fifty years, since the beginning of the twentieth century, progress for "the Negro" had occurred in all areas "at a tremendous pace." Such change was the result of efforts by African American and white citizens and was supported by government efforts. However, the government did not make "fundamental changes in human attitudes by commands from a central source" or attempt to "alter psychology by fiat." Such efforts would be counterproductive, for "pressures driven underground by legal means are not really eliminated but smolder, only to manifest themselves later." The problem of racial prejudice ultimately could not be eradicated through law, for it was "essentially a question of evolving human relations."<sup>9</sup>

Using a combination of fact and, at best, aspiration, the pamphlet presented a rather rosy picture of the contemporary conditions of life for the Negro in American life. "Some Negroes are large landholders; some are wealthy businessmen," it stated. "Negroes work in banks, public utilities, insurance companies, and retail stores. They are physicists, chemists, psychologists, doctors, metallurgists. Nearly 200,000 own farms averaging seventy-eight acres in size." The pamphlet acknowledged that "much remains to be done," because the average income of white Americans was still "substantially better than that of Negroes." However, "the gap is closing."<sup>10</sup>

"The most significant index of over-all Negro progress," was education. Education lifted up "the Negro," giving him the status to overcome other forms of discrimination.

As long as he is ignorant and illiterate, the Negro is unqualified for the better jobs; without the improved income which comes from better jobs, he is handicapped in finding better housing; poor housing breeds disease and crime and discouragement. Given education, he is enabled to speak up for his



rights; he increases the prestige of his community and his own self-respect and is able thereby to develop friendly face-to-face relations with the white population.

Most important, the pamphlet continued, "he achieves real cultural status and the sense of social responsibility which exerts continual and inexorable pressure against the web of discrimination which confines him." Education, therefore, made "the Negro" more worthy of equal treatment, and made him more likely to insist on his rights.<sup>11</sup>

There had been significant improvement in education for "the Negro." Drawing from census data, the pamphlet reported that 51 percent of African Americans of school age were attending school in 1900. In 1950, the proportion had jumped to 90 percent. It was in college education, however, where the greatest progress had been made, with 128,000 African Americans attending college at the time the essay was written. Further, "in 1948 there were more Negro students enrolled in and graduated from colleges than were enrolled in and graduated from high schools in 1920." In addition, "more than seventy northern colleges number Negro professors among their faculties; in addition there are some sixty-eight Negro colleges and universities, most of which are situated in the South."<sup>12</sup>

As to the effect of these enrollment increases, the figures meant that

in the first instance, an important gain in economic status. Not long ago, nearly all Negro boys and girls had to earn a living at an early age. They mean that ever increasing numbers of Negroes are being trained as professors, writers, engineers, lawyers, and doctors. They mean that an army of community leaders and spokesmen for the Negro cause is being developed. They mean that the Negro is well on the way to equal opportunity in the field of education.

The essay went on to suggest that increased education would be effective in combating prejudice. "The Negro," it appeared, had to be well educated to overcome stereotyping. Another benefit of the growth of a black professional class would be the enlightenment of

whites. "The large number of educated Negroes, and their journalists and novelists, have made the white community keenly aware of the cruel injustice of prejudice." At the turn of the century, "the majority of whites, northern as well as southern, were unabashed in their estimate of the Negro as an inferior. . . . Today, there is scarcely a community where that concept has not been drastically modified."<sup>13</sup>

*The Negro in American Life* celebrated the great strides that had been made in the area of legal rights, due largely to the efforts of the NAACP. In 1949, "among the year's most outstanding legal efforts were the *McLaurin* and *Sweatt* cases, which established the rights of Negroes to higher education on a nonsegregated basis." Further, "since the war, in cases prosecuted by the NAACP, the Supreme Court has declared unenforceable by law leases which exclude Negroes from renting homes; *it has ruled against segregation in public transportation and in public education.*" The Court's public education cases were the *McLaurin* and *Sweatt* cases, yet the pamphlet reads as if the Court had done something more. *McLaurin* and *Sweatt* only held that segregation at the University of Texas Law School and the University of Oklahoma School of Education did not provide equal treatment to African American students. The cases did not address the separate-but-equal formula that still governed most other educational settings, especially elementary and secondary education. Yet approximately four years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, *The Negro in American Life* seemed to declare that school segregation across the spectrum was unlawful. In doing so, the pamphlet went beyond merely placing a positive gloss on the facts. It left readers with the impression that the Supreme Court had already outlawed all public school segregation.<sup>14</sup>

From *The Negro in American Life*, we see the image of gradual and progressive social change which was described as the fulfillment of democracy. Through education and enlightened participation by all in electoral politics, equality was "nurtured." This was contrasted with the "authoritarian measures" used when the North sought to *impose* equality on the South after the Civil War. The equality achieved now under the "new reconstruction" would be more lasting.



An integrated classroom and an integrated housing project (facing page) embody the image of "The Negro in American Life," circa 1950, as projected in U.S. propaganda. (Chester Bowles Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library)

To reinforce this point, the final picture in the pamphlet had the following caption: "These neighbors in a housing project, like millions of Americans, are forgetting whatever color prejudice they may have had; their children will have none to forget."<sup>15</sup> The optimism in this document might have seemed uplifting, inspiring, something to reach for. In embracing the optimistic vision in *The Negro in American Life*, the reader would hold onto, as well, a carefully crafted image of American democracy: a nation so open it could acknowledge its faults, a nation that had sinned but was on the road to redemption, a nation where politics reflected the will of the people, and where the people were sufficiently good that, at least in time, they willed for the right things.

Even with the help of materials such as this, by the early 1950s U.S. officials came to realize that their information programs were inadequate on the difficult question of "the Negro problem." Much attention was paid to educating embassy personnel, as well as visiting lecturers, about how to respond to queries about U.S. race relations,



and to locating speakers who could address the issue more effectively. While the United States hoped that, with the help of an improved information program, other countries would rally behind the flag of democracy and would perceive communism as the most important threat to world peace, many Asian and African countries



did not view the conflict between the superpowers as their primary concern. According to a 1952 report on the status of U.S. propaganda efforts, "In South and Southeast Asia, anti-colonialism and associated racial resentments have been far more important elements in the psychological situation than anti-communism." The United States attempted to shape its propaganda accordingly, finding that approaches that focused on matters of local concern were more effective in "underdeveloped" nations "where the memory or actuality of domination by the white man is a far greater psychological reality than the Soviet menace."<sup>16</sup>

State Department and American embassy officials recognized that African Americans themselves would be most effective in countering negative international opinion. Consequently, the State Department sponsored trips by African Americans to speak on the "Negro Problem" in the United States. Max Yergan, a founder and executive secretary of the Council on African Affairs, an organization that attempted to gain American support for anticolonial movements in Africa, traveled to Africa on such a trip in 1952. The American consul in Lagos, Nigeria, made sure he received ample exposure. An advance story on Yergan's visit was sent by the USIA to the Lagos press and radio, where it received "substantial play." Notice of a scheduled speaking engagement was carried in all local newspapers, as requested by an American information officer. Following Yergan's July 17, 1952, speech, the USIA sent out a special press release with the title "Yergan Says Trend in U.S. Race Relations is Toward Full Civil Rights for Negroes."<sup>17</sup>

Yergan's value as a State Department-sponsored speaker was not merely that he could speak from personal experience and claim that his family enjoyed "ever-expanding rights and privileges which his grandfather, a Negro slave, could only dream of." He also spoke against communism. As the US/A reported it, in Yergan's view,

a testimony to the progressive direction of American race relations . . . was that Negroes in the United States have as a group rejected communism as a "sinister force" interested in exploiting their position in America for the designs of a foreign power. "Every communist is a potential traitor to his

country, . . . and my people in America have chosen to cast their lot with democracy, because they believe it offers them the opportunity to achieve full equality."<sup>18</sup>

Two members of the audience challenged Yergan's characterization of communism, asking "1) if the Communists were not the leading fighters for full civil rights for Negroes? and 2) if the Communists had made promises to the American Negro and broken them, had not the American Constitution done the same thing?" In response, "Dr. Yergan called upon his own bitter experience with Communists to answer the questions negatively."<sup>19</sup>

According to the American vice-consul in Lagos, the reaction to Yergan's visit was generally favorable. Nevertheless, Yergan was criticized in editorials in two local papers. According to the *West African Pilot*,

Any honest inquirer after truth pondering over the monivations [sic] of Dr. Max Yergan urging the African to shun the vices of "Communism and its agents as one shuns poison" will only surmise: "We have heard this before." For, in the grim days of the battle against the forces of Nazism and Fascism, Africans were warned too to shun Nazism and Fascism as one shuns poison all because at the time we were—all lovers of freedom—engaged in a battle to guarantee freedom in order that free men may continue to learn freedom.

The paper concluded that, "for the African, no less [than for] the Negro in the United States of America, two world wars have brought no dramatic changes in status. . . . Daily we grapple with the forces of imperialism, projected by the democracies who condemn Communism ever so much."<sup>20</sup>

The American vice-consul believed that the author of the *Pilot* editorial had a "personal axe to grind" because of an argument he and Yergan had "over the merits of Africans taking sides in the cold war." In the vice consul's view, the paper attempted to smear Yergan by publishing a photograph of him with former officials of the Council on African Affairs. With Yergan in the photograph were "convicted Communist Dr. Hunton and the controversial Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois."<sup>21</sup>



When Jay Saunders Redding took a State Department-sponsored speaking tour of India in 1952, he felt that Indians spoke more freely to him than to white Americans. "Dozens of Indians told me that I was 'one of them;' that (obviously, because of my color) I looked like a 'Madrassi,' or a 'Bengali,' that they felt 'immediately at home' with me." He reported that "most of the Indians met me with their guards consciously lowered and free of the reticence with which (some of them told me) they meet other Westerners. I think that in general my Indian friends and acquaintances told me the truth."<sup>22</sup>

The truth about America, as Indians saw it, was that the nation was imperialistic, and its foreign aid was a tool of imperialism. Redding's contacts also believed that "American policy is opposed to the 'liberation and rise' of the colored peoples of the world, and that the treatment of Negroes in America is a home demonstration of this. The color question is linked with imperialism." He continued, "America, the belief is, is prejudiced against non-whites and that prejudice, long documented in the disabilities under which Negroes suffer in the U.S., is now being expressed in American world policy. My Indian acquaintances contrasted the American billions given or loaned to Europe with the few millions disbursed in the East."<sup>23</sup>

Redding felt that the Indians he met showed "an understandably great ignorance of the actual facts of race relations in America and there is a strong tendency, which among Communists amounts to determination, not to be set right on the facts." Among the questions he was asked were: "Isn't it true that the Haitian Ambassador to the U.S. must live in a ghetto in Washington?" "Aren't Negroes prohibited public education in America?" "Weren't American citizens of Japanese descent interred in slave labor camps in America during the war?" "Why has no colored person ever held high office in America?" Are . . . "Negroes in America lynched for looking at white women?" Redding's response to such questions was hampered by the fact that people in the audience often had copies of a United Nations genocide petition prepared by Civil Rights Congress documenting hundreds of incidents of racially motivated violence in the United States. After Redding had given an account of U.S. race relations, undoubtedly with a positive gloss, a questioner held up a

copy of the petition, *We Charge Genocide* and said, "what you say does not convince us in the face of this."<sup>24</sup>

Further evidence of U.S. racism was the lack of African American personnel in U.S. embassies. Redding was asked, "Isn't it unusual for your Government to send you (a Negro) out here? It is the general feeling in India that Negroes in your Foreign Service are conspicuous by their absence." Redding reported that the question was "in line with the thinking that Negroes (and also Jews) in America, no matter what their abilities, are not only looked down upon but purposefully kept down." U.S. embassy personnel believed that Redding's report on Indian reactions to race in America was "overly pessimistic," but they were still concerned. One officer thought that the matter should be pursued, for if Redding were "even 50% right, it is of fundamental political significance for the future of this country."<sup>25</sup>

Redding's overall impressions regarding Indian concern with U.S. racial problems were mirrored in reports filed by Roving Cultural Affairs Officer Clifford Manshardt on a 1952 speaking tour. At the top of a list of typical questions he was asked was "Do negroes have equal opportunities for education in the U.S.?" The question was asked "over and over again." Indians also wanted to know "how many Negroes were lynched in the U.S. last year?" and "what race does America hate most?"<sup>26</sup>

U.S. Ambassador to India Chester Bowles followed up on the implication of Redding's report that it would be helpful to hire African American Foreign Service officers. In a January 1953 letter to the director general of the Foreign Service, he concluded an account of staffing needs with a discussion of a problem that he said had concerned him for some time. Bowles requested to have "top notch Negro Foreign Service Officers" assigned to India. He explained that "Indians, particularly those outside official circles in the capital, will open up much more freely to an American Negro than they will to others. It will also, of course, help us to combat to a certain extent the feeling in India about the Negro problem in the U.S."<sup>27</sup>

Many felt that efforts at cultural exchange paid off, and praise for such programs went beyond the U.S. diplomatic corps. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas thought that a speech by African American attorney Edith Sampson "created more good will and un-

derstanding in India than any other single act by any American." Speaking in New Delhi in 1949, Sampson told her audience that she would not tolerate criticism of the United States for its civil rights record because, in the previous eighty years, African Americans had advanced further "than any similar group in the entire world."<sup>28</sup>

The State Department also sponsored trips by Indians to the United States. When Indians returned home and defended American culture, however, they made themselves vulnerable to attack. After a trip to the United States, C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer said that "the spirituality of Americans should not be overlooked by those who emphasize American materialism." The paper *Cross Roads* ridiculed Iyer, noting that many Indians were visiting the United States and, upon returning, "dutifully pay back their hosts by lauding to the skies the American way of life." The *Cross Roads* depiction of American culture was represented in a cartoon published alongside the article. According to the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, the cartoon showed "a Negro hanging from a tree, on which sits 'Uncle Sam' as a vulture." A later issue of the paper quoted from a New York *National Guardian* report that two African Americans had been executed, indicating that that was "evidence of American spirituality."<sup>29</sup>

Efforts at cultural exchange could backfire when foreign persons of color experienced American-style race discrimination. Students from other nations often came to the United States in search of educational opportunities not available in their countries. In March 1950, the Carnegie Corporation released a report of a study it conducted of 410 African students studying in the United States. The students had been attracted to the United States by the wide range of courses offered at American colleges. According to the report, the students were "shocked and embittered" by the widespread racism they encountered. Rigid racial segregation in the South created "an undesirable atmosphere" for the students, but the South was not the only problem. Students reported that they were "very much embittered by the treatment they received . . . in New York," and that they "saw little to distinguish segregation in the South from discrimination in the North." Because the students would return as future leaders in their native countries, such experiences would not aid future relations with African nations.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the efforts to address racial issues, a 1952 report on U.S. information programs concluded that "efforts to counteract communist exploitation of the race relations problem in the United States have not been fully successful."<sup>31</sup> The impact of race discrimination on U.S. prestige abroad was so entrenched that ultimately more would be required to overcome it. And propaganda on race would be more effective once greater social change gave the United States Information Agency a better story to tell.

Propaganda was only one of the avenues for constructing a narrative about race in America for foreign audiences. People in other nations developed their understandings of American race relations from all the information they received. African Americans traveling abroad could bear witness to the character of American equality. Reporting on personal experiences, their statements had a significant impact.

Because of this, the U.S. government took a keen interest in the international travels of African Americans, particularly celebrities and political figures. Individuals who would say the right thing, from the perspective of the government, could find their travel and international contacts facilitated, directly or indirectly, by the State Department. Talking about progress, and embodying black middle-class status, helped reinforce the USIA's message. The only difficulty was that not all African Americans believed that the federal government was doing all it could to achieve racial equality. Not all had faith in the inevitability of American justice.

When critics of U.S. race discrimination traveled overseas, they posed a powerful challenge to the government's narrative of race in America. The story of progress could be protected if these challenges were contained.

Paul Robeson and W. E. B. DuBois, among others, found that their ability to travel overseas was curtailed in the early 1950s. Robeson through song and DuBois through political organizing generated international interest in American racial problems. As far as the U.S. government was concerned, however, the nation had enough of a foreign relations problem from international media coverage of events at home. It didn't help matters when people went out of their



way to generate foreign interest in race discrimination in the United States. Consequently, when Robeson and DuBois criticized U.S. racism abroad, the State Department confiscated their passports, effectively denying them access to an international audience.

Robeson was perhaps the most prominent target of Cold War travel restrictions. His troubles began not long after a speech he delivered at the Congress of World Partisans for Peace in Paris in 1949. He reportedly said that United States government policy was "similar to that of Hitler and Goebbels" and that it was "unthinkable" that African Americans would go to war against the Soviet Union. According to Martin Duberman, Robeson's statements were misquoted. Still, Robeson was widely denounced in the American press and by African American leaders. Rioting at a Robeson concert in Peekskill, New York, was widely covered in the international media. Though the rioters included Ku Klux Klan members, Robeson was blamed for this international embarrassment because his friendliness toward the Soviet Union was perceived to have caused the disturbance.<sup>32</sup>

Robeson continued to speak out. In 1950 he criticized President Truman's decision to send troops to Korea, arguing that "if we don't stop our armed adventure in Korea today—tomorrow it will be Africa." At this point, the State Department and the FBI took action. The State Department issued a "stop notice" at all ports to prevent Robeson from leaving the country. J. Edgar Hoover sent out an urgent call to FBI agents to find Robeson. Robeson was asked to surrender his passport, but he refused, leading the State Department to inform the Immigration and Naturalization Service that Robeson's passport was invalid and that he should not be allowed to leave the country. State Department officials indicated that the reason for their action was that "Robeson's travel abroad at this time would be contrary to the best interests of the United States." His "frequent criticism of the treatment of blacks in the United States should not be aired in foreign countries," they explained. "It was a family affair."<sup>33</sup>

The State Department also barred Robeson from entering Canada, where a passport was not required, leading Robeson to host a concert at the Peace Arch at the Canadian border. While well at-

tended by Canadians, this concert and others failed to draw the American crowds expected, and blacklisting seriously interfered with Robeson's ability to perform and to earn a living within the United States for many years. His international popularity meant that he was always a big draw abroad, but without a passport Robeson was exiled by his own country from his international audience.<sup>34</sup>

Travel abroad by lesser-known civil rights activists also caught the eye of the State Department. William Patterson's actions in 1951 were thought to be particularly incendiary. As chairman of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), Patterson helped draft a petition claiming that the United States had committed genocide against African Americans, and he personally delivered the petition to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland. While many felt that genocide was too strong a charge, Patterson and others found support for their efforts in the language of the U.N. Convention on Genocide. According to that document, "genocide" was defined as killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and other actions directed at a group "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnical, racial or religious group." Punishable acts included "complicity in genocide," as well as genocide itself. Ratifying states agreed to punish any of their citizens who committed genocide, "including public officials responsible for genocidal policies."<sup>35</sup>

The bulk of the Civil Rights Congress's lengthy petition consisted of documentation of 153 killings, 344 other crimes of violence against African Americans, and other human rights abuses committed in the United States from 1945 to 1951. Ninety-four individuals signed the petition. Among them was W. E. B. DuBois, the person behind the NAACP's 1947 U.N. petition, "An Appeal to the World." The CRC petition claimed:

Out of the inhuman black ghettos of American cities, out of the cotton plantations of the South, comes this record of mass slayings on the basis of race, of lives deliberately warped and distorted by the willful creation of conditions making for premature death, poverty and disease. It is a record that calls aloud for condemnation, for an end to these terrible

injustices that constitute a daily and ever-increasing violation of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

According to the Civil Rights Congress, African Americans "suffer from genocide as the result of the consistent, conscious, unified policies of every branch of government." The petition continued:

It is our hope, and we fervently believe that it was the hope and aspiration of every black American whose voice was silenced forever through premature death at the hands of racist-minded hooligans or Klan terrorists, that the truth recorded here will be made known to the world; that it will speak with a tongue of fire loosing an unquenchable moral crusade, the universal response to which will sound the death knell of all racist theories.

The petition was filed with an international body because "history has shown that the racist theory of government of the U.S.A. is not the private affair of Americans, but the concern of mankind everywhere."<sup>36</sup>

The Civil Rights Congress called upon the United Nations "to act and to call the Government of the United States to account." The consequences for the United States related not only to internal human rights matters but also to its posture in international politics.

We believe that the test of the basic goals of a foreign policy is inherent in the manner in which a government treats its own nationals and is not to be found in the lofty platitudes that pervade so many treaties or constitutions. The essence lies not in the form but rather, in the substance.<sup>37</sup>

According to the petition, American genocide had important consequences for world peace.

This genocide of which your petitioners complain serves now, as it has in previous forms in the past, specific political and economic aims. Once its goal was the subjugation of American Negroes for the profits of chattel slavery. Now its aim is the splitting and emasculation of mass movements for peace

and democracy, so that a reaction may perpetuate its control and continue receiving the highest profits in the entire history of man. That purpose menaces the peace of the world as well as the life and welfare of the Negro people.

Ending genocide against African Americans "will mean returning this country to its people. It will mean a new growth of popular democracy and the forces of peace."<sup>38</sup>

The Civil Rights Congress petition immediately found an international audience. In India, for example, *Blitz*, described as a pro-communist paper, enthusiastically covered the story. The paper celebrated the efforts of CRC leader William Patterson. It reported that Patterson characterized the petition as illustrating the "shocking and inhumane butchery and physical destruction of the colored American citizens under the patronage of the American government." A *Tass* bulletin distributed in India also covered the petition in an article entitled "Crimes of American Racists." According to the United States Information Service (USIS) in New Delhi, the article said that the petition exposed "'criminal' activity by the American authorities and terroristic organizations seeking to perpetuate the 'national oppression and slave-like condition' of the 15,000,000 Negroes in the U.S."<sup>39</sup>

William Patterson hoped that the petition would help "internationalize" civil rights efforts. For Patterson, the struggle for black liberation was global. American racism was manifested both in its toleration of racial brutality at home and in its support for colonial regimes abroad. The movement to overturn racial oppression was also global. Patterson drew support from labor and communist groups worldwide. This international support and the leverage of the United Nations would give momentum and create pressure for civil rights reform at home. Unfortunately for Patterson, his efforts to internationalize the civil rights movement ran directly counter to U.S. government efforts to create and sustain an image overseas of a progressive and just nation.

The State Department did not look favorably upon the Civil Rights Congress's efforts. After Patterson submitted the petition in Paris, the U.S. embassy in Paris asked him to surrender his passport.



Patterson refused, but his passport was seized when he returned to the United States. The *New York Times* reported that "the State Department said that further travel by Mr. Patterson would not be in the 'best interest of the United States.'" Patterson had broken the unwritten rule of Cold War civil rights activism. He had aired the nation's dirty laundry overseas. Patterson had also run afoul of other Cold War norms: he was active in a left-of-center organization, and worse, he openly associated with members of the Communist Party. The CRC itself was on the attorney general's list of subversive organizations. The organization was under constant pressure from anti-communists in the federal government, so that eventually, according to Gerald Horne, it "seemed . . . to be in business in order to defend itself." As with the NAACP petition, the United Nations would take no action on the Civil Rights Congress petition.<sup>40</sup>

Louis Armstrong was one of many African Americans tapped by the State Department for travel abroad. Armstrong's cancellation of a State Department-sponsored trip to the Soviet Union led to angry public reaction and to government concern. During the crisis over the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the fall of 1957, Armstrong said that "the way they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell." Were he to go to the Soviet Union, and "The people over there ask me what's wrong with my country, what am I supposed to say?" Armstrong later added, "The Government could go to the devil with its plans for a propaganda tour of Soviet Russia." Many harshly criticized Armstrong's angry words. In Armstrong's FBI file for that year was an anonymous letter stating "Louis 'Satcho' [sic] Armstrong is a communist, why does State Dept. give him a passport?" While Armstrong's passport was not seized, the FBI recorded the episode and continued to collect information on his activities. In the eyes of the federal government, Armstrong had spoken out of turn under the etiquette of Cold War race politics. Domestic problems were to be shielded from outside ears. And the discourse on civil rights was bounded by the terms of Cold War liberalism. Some level of liberal activism would be tolerated, but only if articulated in a way that did not challenge the democratic order. Armstrong's offense was that he

seemed unwilling to defend the nation against communist critics. Patriots were supposed to close ranks.<sup>41</sup>

Outside the borders of the United States, other African Americans found themselves under surveillance. After moving to France, Richard Wright formed an organization concerned with racism in Paris that would examine the hiring practices of American businesses abroad. Its meetings were infiltrated, and reports on Wright's activities were placed in his FBI file. FBI interest in James Baldwin, also living in Paris, was heightened when he considered writing a book about the FBI. Acceptable activists included such people as NAACP executive secretary Walter White. After White had traveled on behalf of the government to settle disputes involving African American soldiers during World War II, and after the NAACP had passed a resolution excluding communists from its membership, White had earned the credentials to criticize, within the walls of the White House, racial violence and segregation. When sent abroad, however, he would emphasize racial progress in the United States and argue that persons of color had nothing to gain from communism.<sup>42</sup>

Entertainer Josephine Baker presented a somewhat different problem. Relegated to stereotyped black vaudeville roles in the United States, Baker left for Paris in the 1920s and found stardom. After experiencing racial discrimination on a return trip to the United States, Baker used her international prominence to call attention to American racial practices when she traveled throughout the world. Since she was no longer a U.S. citizen by the early 1950s, the government could not withhold her passport and directly restrict her international travels. Instead, more creative means would be employed to silence her.<sup>43</sup>

The red-baiting of Baker had its origin, in part, in a run-in with New York gossip columnist Walter Winchell. After Baker protested discrimination at New York's exclusive Stork Club and Winchell's refusal to come to her aid, Baker became the subject of an FBI investigation. Winchell wrote to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover asking him to check up on allegations that Baker was a communist. The FBI began collecting derogatory information about Baker, paying

close attention to the question of whether she was sympathetic to communism. In fact, Baker preferred to distance herself from the left and was praised for this move by the staunchly anticommunist *Counterattack* magazine. Her brother, Richard Martin, found irony in the allegation that the glamorous Baker was a communist. "Imagine Josephine a communist," he said. "When you think of the way they dress in Moscow."<sup>44</sup>

More threatening than Baker's questioning of race discrimination within U.S. borders was her propensity to raise the issue overseas. On September 25, 1952, during a Latin American tour, Baker gave a lecture about U.S. race discrimination in Uruguay. According to the acting public affairs officer (PAO) at the U.S. embassy in Montevideo, "Before an audience of approximately 200 Uruguayans," Baker "stated that she felt impelled by God and her deep religious feelings to fight discrimination by stressing this problem in talks to people wherever she goes." Baker began by criticizing racial practices in South Africa and then turned to a lengthy discussion of race discrimination in the United States. The PAO described Baker as a "staunch crusader for the elimination of racial and religious discrimination throughout the world," and he thought that her objective was "a most worthy one." Nevertheless, he was concerned about her activities because "[h]er remarks concerning racial discrimination in the United States are wholly derogatory, thus presenting a distorted and malicious picture of actual conditions in the United States." The embassy officer's claim that Baker's account was distorted stemmed from the fact that she did not mention that progress was being made. "Not once was any mention made of what the American people have done and are doing to eliminate racial and religious discrimination." He was also concerned because Baker's message had an effect. "It was evident that the spectators were impressed by her analysis of the status of the negroes in the United States."<sup>45</sup>

Baker was "devoting as much time as her artistic schedule will permit" to her campaign against discrimination. According to the embassy officer, she would "undoubtedly . . . continue to misrepresent the United States with respect to the negro problem." Consequently, the officer thought that the State Department would be "interested in following her campaign" and that "the Department

might find it advisable to prepare special material to counteract her activities."<sup>46</sup>

Baker's impact in Montevideo was muted by limited local press coverage. The U.S. embassy seems to have had a hand in this. Baker later commented that "Upon my arrival in Montevideo, the press was very kind to me, but after my speeches, only one newspaper dared to publish my discourse, and they told me that they had received a friendly visit from the American Embassy requesting them not to publish it."<sup>47</sup>

Although the State Department was alarmed at Baker's harsh critique of American race relations, her notion of social change was not very radical. Baker's underlying philosophy was that education and respectful interaction among persons of different races and religions would overcome prejudice. Baker believed that "there is only one race and that is the human race." Differences between people were a result of the different circumstances in which they had lived. Baker believed that such differences must be understood and respected.<sup>48</sup>

The State Department became increasingly concerned about Baker's actions when she traveled to Argentina the following month. In most other contexts, the U.S. government was concerned with communist or left-wing criticism. In Argentina, race in the United States was instead an anti-American tool of the right-wing Peronistas. Baker's statements about race discrimination were given "dramatic play" by most Buenos Aires newspapers. Baker also escalated the rhetoric in her critique of the United States, reportedly comparing American racism to the Holocaust. According to the evening paper *Crítica*, Baker believed that "Negroes throughout the world entirely rightly are looking upon the United States in the same way the Jewish people pointed a short time ago to the land where they had been sentenced to extinction."<sup>49</sup>

News of Baker's appearances quickly found its way to Washington. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Ben Brown thought that it was very unfortunate that Baker was "permitting herself to become the tool of foreign interests which are notoriously unfriendly to the United States and which are only interested in the causes which she sponsors in so far as they can be made to embarrass the United States." The State Department was upset about the effect of Baker's speeches



in Argentina. According to an internal memo on Baker's activities, "her work was welcomed in Argentina by the Peronistas who had been making much of the discrimination issue in their propaganda against the U.S." One staff member suggested that the State Department should do something "to counteract the effects of her visit. One of the most effective ways to my mind would be to have one or two outstanding negro intellectuals make trips through the southern part of the hemisphere." The USIA staff began to consider such a strategy involving people like Ralph Bunche, Walter White, and Jackie Robinson. Meanwhile, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell publicly denounced Baker, arguing that she was "guilty of deliberate distortion and misrepresentation of the situation in the United States."<sup>50</sup>

In planning a strategy to counter Josephine Baker, the State Department and USIA acted carefully. One staff member felt that they should not "immediately rush in with our big cannon (like Bunche) just because La Baker has a 'running off at the mouth.'" The staff member suggested instead that the USIA send embassy public affairs officers information on Baker "for confidential background use." Before anyone was selected for a lecture tour, the USIA would make sure he or she was likely to say the right thing. Though one staff member suggested Walter White, he wasn't sure "what kind of an impression or what kind of a line Walter White, Pres. of the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People, would take with a foreign audience, but this might be investigated." The Harlem Globetrotters had been to Buenos Aires, but this staff member didn't "recall that one single line was printed indicating that they believe the racial question is improving in the U.S." The Globetrotters were popular and would probably be returning to Argentina, so he wondered whether one of them could "speak out on the progress [the] U.S. is making on the racial question."<sup>51</sup>

Although they had different ideas about strategy, the USIA staff was unanimous on one point. As one individual put it, "[N]aturally we should avoid any appearance of having sent someone to 'offset' J. Baker." According to another, "[T]o put ourselves on the defensive in this case could serve to weaken our arguments. We should do nothing to directly refute Baker's charges." A third person noted that such a cautious approach was "in keeping with the Depart-



William Patterson, Paul Robeson, and Robeson's attorney, James Wright, leave the Washington, D.C., federal district court after Robeson's challenge to his passport denial was rejected on August 16, 1955. (UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN)

ment's policy to avoid doing things which draw attention to the fact that we have a problem in connection with the negro."<sup>52</sup>

While the State Department planned a propaganda response to Baker, embassy personnel also took steps to silence and discredit her. Baker found it increasingly difficult to perform in Latin American countries. She was unable to travel to Peru in December 1952 because that country denied her request for a visa. A representative of the theater in Lima, Peru, where Baker was scheduled to perform told the local press that Baker's contract had been canceled because she insisted on using her performances not just for artistic purposes but also to express her views about racial inequality. A scheduled trip to Colombia was called off for the same reasons. According to Baker, her Bogotá appearances were canceled when she refused to make a written commitment to refrain from making speeches against racial discrimination while in that city.<sup>53</sup>

In early February 1953, Baker was scheduled to appear in Havana, Cuba. The American embassy in Havana, concerned about



Josephine Baker holds a one-woman protest outside a Havana, Cuba, radio station, February 15, 1953. When she criticized American racism in Latin America the entertainer found her contracts canceled and conditions placed on visas requiring that she not engage in political activities. (UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN)

what it called "further anti-American activity," urgently cabled the State Department for background information on Baker. The staff wanted to know about her "anti-American statements," recent cancellations of appearances in Peru and Colombia, quotes from African American newspapers criticizing Baker, and personal data, including the fact that she had given up her U.S. citizenship. The information supplied included the fact that Baker had been married

three times (it was actually four), and that two of her husbands were white.<sup>54</sup>

Embassy officers then contacted Goar Mestre, who owned the theater where Baker was scheduled to perform, and local newspapers. As the U.S. embassy reported it, embassy personnel

informally outlined to Mr. Mestre and to certain newspaper people that Miss Baker had given statements to the Argentine press highly uncomplimentary to the United States. The idea was planted discreetly that Miss Baker might use the Cuban press, particularly its communistic elements, as a further sounding board for her accusations of the mistreatment of Negroes in the United States.<sup>55</sup>

Baker did not arrive in Cuba in time for her scheduled performances but sent a wire requesting a later date. Rather than being rescheduled, her performances were canceled. As Mestre explained, "[W]e know that Josephine Baker has terrific drawing power, but we can't keep adjusting our business to her." As an embassy officer put it, Baker's tardiness "may well have provided her Habana employers with just the legal loophole they needed to 'get out from under' a ticklish situation."<sup>56</sup>

Baker showed up in Havana anyway. She blamed American influence for her contract cancellations, claiming that Teatro América had canceled a scheduled performance because the theater was afraid of losing its U.S. film franchise. Though Baker's other engagements in Havana had been canceled, an advertising agency scheduled a February 11 appearance for her on a popular television show. The agency did not seek approval from Goar Mestre, who was also the president of the television station, however, and Mestre ordered his doorman to bar Baker from entering the television studio. When she arrived on February 11 for an afternoon rehearsal, she was not allowed to enter. As the U.S. embassy reported it, "[A]damant, Miss Baker, costume over her arm, stood outside the gate from 3:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in an apparent effort to elicit sympathy. 'Cabaret Regalias' went on the air without her."<sup>57</sup>

After much effort, Baker finally was able to arrange an appearance in Cuba. On February 16, she opened a one-week run at the Teatro



Campoamor, described in an embassy despatch as "a down-at-the heels theater which last year was a burlesque house." The embassy reported that "there was no indication she . . . used the Campoamor stage for political purposes." Baker was warned not to. At 4:30 the afternoon after her opening, Baker was taken into custody by the Cuban military police. They filed no charges against her, but they interrogated her for three hours about her political and social views. The military police reported that "the questioning was in response to a suggestion by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation that Miss Baker might be an active Communist." Baker was photographed and fingerprinted. The military police asked her to sign a stenographic report of her interrogation, but she refused. She later wrote in an autobiography that the statement would have had her admit to "being paid by Moscow and indulging in subversive activities." When she was fingerprinted, "the word 'Communist' was marked beneath my picture." As the embassy put it, Baker was warned to "stick to her art and refrain from any voicing of political views at the Campoamor." She was released in time for her evening appearance.<sup>58</sup>

Baker's visit to Cuba had far less of an artistic and political impact than she would have liked. After she left the country, the American embassy in Cuba concluded that "Miss Baker's visit to Cuba must be considered of little value to her cause." The embassy also felt that Baker had done little harm. "All in all, Miss Baker's influence on Cuban Negroes may well be appraised as negligible. The Negro press ignored her, and Negro societies made no fuss over her." The embassy reported that a Cuban newspaper editor "explained to an Embassy officer that the attitude of the Cuban Negro toward the United States has changed radically in the last few years and that the Cuban Negro is now aware that real progress is being made in the United States toward the elimination of racial discrimination."<sup>59</sup>

After her visit to Cuba, Baker planned to appear in Haiti. This created a more delicate problem for the State Department because Haiti was a black country. In anticipation of her visit, Maclair Zéphyrin, Haitian minister of the presidency and acting minister for foreign relations, telephoned the American chargé d'affaires. Zéphyrin expressed the fear that Baker might use her visit to create

trouble between the United States and Haiti, and he wanted to know the chargé's views on the subject. At this point the chargé told Zéphyrin that "he did not see how he could restrict Miss Baker's freedom of speech nor how he could properly comment on the advisability of the visit." He told Zéphyrin that Josephine Baker's visit was a problem the Haitian government would have to handle.<sup>60</sup>

Minister Zéphyrin then wrote to Baker's agent in New York, informing him that Baker "was welcome to Haiti but should clearly understand that she was not to embarrass the Haitian Government by anti-American remarks which would disturb the excellent relations between the American and Haitian Governments." The letter notwithstanding, the U.S. embassy public affairs officer reported to the State Department that "in spite of the good intentions of the Haitian Government," the American embassy could "expect unpleasant and embarrassing publicity which will tend to counteract much positive effort which has been made in the past by American officials in Haiti to better relationships." Even though the embassy was likely "to see many of its 'friends' brought under the spell of Miss Baker and considerable encouragement to Anti-Americanism, it does not appear possible for the Embassy to take a firm stand against her proposed visit."<sup>61</sup>

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles would not tolerate the impending damage to U.S. prestige in Haiti. Upon receiving an account of the situation, he contacted the embassy in Port-au-Prince regarding background information on Baker the department was sending to the embassy. The material contained information about Baker's change of citizenship and the fact that, according to Dulles, "her activities have been widely denounced by prominent negroes and by the negro press in the United States." Dulles said that the embassy was authorized to make the information available to the Haitian acting foreign minister. Subsequent communications involving the embassy about Baker's trip remain classified for national security reasons. Whatever transpired, Josephine Baker's trip to Haiti never happened.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly frustrated in her efforts to appear in Latin America and the Caribbean, Baker could not turn to the United States as an alternative market for her performances. According to a December 10,

1954, FBI internal memorandum, the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service had taken a "personal interest in the case of Josephine Baker and has directed that INS obtain sufficient information with which to order her exclusion from the U.S." The INS requested that FBI files be reviewed to ensure that "all pertinent derogatory information" had been forwarded to the INS. On January 21, 1955, the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that Josephine Baker was detained by the INS at a New York airport where she had stopped en route from Paris to Mexico City. She was held for four hours before being allowed to depart. The INS gave no explanation for its actions. Baker's literal exclusion from the United States capped government efforts to exclude her from the discourse on race relations in America. Although the FBI ultimately concluded that Josephine Baker was not "pro-communist," but, in their words, "pro-Negro," they continued to pass derogatory information about her to the State Department and other agencies for several years.<sup>63</sup>

Josephine Baker's saga is, in some ways, simply a global counterpart to the red-baiting that was so pervasive within U.S. borders during the early Cold War years. More can be drawn, however, from this particular episode and other efforts to manage the impact of African Americans overseas. The degree of effort put into quieting this cultural figure underscores the importance to Cold War international politics of maintaining control over the narrative of race and American democracy. As other nations seized on stories of U.S. race discrimination, they questioned how the United States could argue that its form of government was a model for the world when American democracy accommodated racial oppression. The persistence of racial problems in the United States meant that race had to be addressed. The legacy of discrimination could not be denied, so through carefully prepared propaganda and through coaching well-chosen speakers, the USIA and embassy personnel tried to manage the narrative of race and democracy. By acknowledging past problems and emphasizing reforms, the story of race in America was told as a story of progress. Because American democracy was the site for this progress, it was argued democracy was a

model of government that enabled peaceful social change. The world was focused on race in America, and so the story of American race relations became an important Cold War narrative. The U.S. government did its best to turn a liability into an advantage. A history of oppression became a narrative of progress toward the inevitable goal of greater social justice.

The image of America projected in *The Negro in American Life*, the classic example of the narrative of race and democracy, would be hard to sustain in the face of criticism by Paul Robeson, William Patterson, Josephine Baker, and others perceived to be more authentic voices on the topic of American racial justice. For that reason, silencing Robeson, Patterson, Baker, and other critics can be seen as part of the broader effort to safeguard the image of America, and maintain control over the narrative of race and democracy.

In spite of U.S. efforts to tell a progressive story about race in America, the counternarrative of racial oppression continued to make headlines. The news took its toll. The impact of race on foreign relations greatly troubled Chester Bowles as he neared the end of his first tenure as U.S. ambassador to India. Bowles stressed the importance of race to foreign relations in a 1952 speech at Yale University.

A year, a month, or even a week in Asia is enough to convince any perceptive American that the colored peoples of Asia and Africa, who total two-thirds of the world's population, seldom think about the United States without considering the limitations under which our 13 million Negroes are living.

Bowles believed that most Asians and Africans were "convinced that, solely because of their color, many Americans are denied a full share in the life of the richest nation on earth, and in their ears this conviction gives our claim to world leadership a distinctly hollow ring." Bowles asked his audience, "[C]an any of us say they are wrong?"<sup>64</sup>

Chester Bowles believed that more was required than information programs. American society ultimately had to change. "A great ma-

jority of Americans now accept the idea that discrimination is wrong and must be ended," he argued. "The remaining differences are over the timing and the method." Yet Bowles questioned how much time remained. "Since the end of World War II our country, somewhat reluctantly, has advanced to the center of the world stage. . . . With such leadership the world comes to know more about us, both good and bad."<sup>65</sup>

"How much does all our talk of democracy mean, if we do not practice it at home?" Bowles asked. "How can the colored peoples of Asia be sure we are sincere in our interest in them if we do not respect the equality of our colored people at home?" It would be easier to answer these questions "if we have a better answer from home. I can think of no single thing that would be more helpful to us in Asia than the achievement of racial harmony in America." This issue was of such importance, Bowles would later write, that "of one thing I am certain. I have not exaggerated. It is impossible to exaggerate."<sup>66</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

# Fighting the Cold War with Civil Rights Reform

It is in the context of the present world struggle between freedom and tyranny that the problem of race discrimination must be viewed.

BRIEF FOR THE UNITED STATES AS AMICUS CURIAE,  
*BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION* (FILED 1952)<sup>1</sup>

American embassies scattered throughout the world tried to do their part to salvage the tarnished image of American democracy. They used the tools available to them: speakers and news stories that would cast American difficulties in the best light possible. Meanwhile, in Washington, the Truman administration could take more affirmative, less reactive steps. President Truman and his aides sought change in the domestic policies and practices that fueled international outrage.

In 1947, Truman's President's Committee on Civil Rights issued a report that highlighted the foreign affairs consequences of race discrimination. The committee's report, *To Secure These Rights*, argued that there were three reasons why civil rights abuses in the United States should be redressed: a moral reason—discrimination was morally wrong; an economic reason—discrimination harmed