Diplomacy as Black Cultural Traffic: debates over race in the Asian travels of Adam Clayton Powell and Carl Rowan

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In a letter to the 1956 Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists in Paris, W.E.B. Du Bois sardonically remarked that African American diplomatic travelers spoke in ways synonymous with U.S. empire. 'Any Negro-American who travels abroad must either not discuss race conditions in the United States, or say the sort of thing which our State Department wishes the world to believe'.[91] If Du Bois's allegation was frank, then Julian Mayfield's 1963 essay, 'Uncle Tom Comes to Africa', was downright blunt. Mayfield's polemic argued that African Americans retained by the U.S. government and other institutions to work abroad were 'Ambassador Toms', the diplomatic equivalent to the obedient and submissive character made famous in Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist classic, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

> Uncle Tom is more difficult to recognize in Africa than he is at home. This type of Tom is often a technician of some sort, in Africa on a two or three year contract, on the payroll of the U.S. Government or a private firm. Frequently he is a scholar or a writer who is merely passing through on a lecture or a study tour, sponsored by the State Department or one of the many wealthy foundations…Tom's philosophy is Don't Rock the Boat.[92]

Du Bois and Mayfield's articulations positioned state-sanctioned black diplomatic representatives as racial apologist agents of American foreign policy. Both men's arguments were based in claims about how a true representative of black American culture and politics should act and represent the black public when traveling abroad. In so doing, Mayfield and Du Bois, in some measure, fell into the trap of racial authenticity. Claims of black authenticity frame racial being, and blackness in particular, as divided between the authentic and the inauthentic, the 'real' and the 'fake'. Such dichotomous thinking relies on essentialist claims about what in fact blackness *is* and *isn't* and, moreover, over

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[91] W.E.B. Du Bois, 'To the Congress of Ecrivains et Artistes Noires,' *Presence Africaine* (June-November 1956): 383.

[92] Julian Mayfield, 'Uncle Tom Comes to Africa,' *Revolution* 1, Nos. 4-5 (August-September, 1963): 35-37.

who *is* black and who *isn't* black enough. From this perspective, Du Bois and Mayfield's critiques partially grounded blackness in authentic terms. By framing black Americanness as corresponding with a progressive black political outlook, they judged state-sanctioned black American diplomatic travelers as inauthentically black. Their arguments, however, were not unique. Throughout the mid- to late 1950s, the international environment of the Cold War was rife with claims, both inside and outside the U.S., about the role and utility, or lack thereof, of black American diplomacy in facilitating African American connections to the Third World. Encapsulated within these assertions, moreover, were particular ideas and assumptions about race, specifically notions of how a progressive and authentic black American politics should be performed outside U.S. borders.

Reconsidering early Cold War black American diplomatic travel provides an instructive template to think about the entanglement of ideas and discourses regarding blackness and racial performance within African American international and intercultural encounters. This article interrogates these themes by examining the experiences of Congressmen Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., at the Bandung Asian-African Conference of 1955, and Carl Rowan's, *Minneapolis Tribune* correspondent, encounters traveling and speaking in India in 1954 as part of a U.S. State Department sponsored initiative.[93] In these different contexts, both men attempted to frame blackness in ways that linked black Americans to Asian and African populations, however each was met with extreme resistance. Dissatisfied with the two men's articulations, a number of African American and Asian journalists and newspaper readers harshly denounced and vilified them, to the point of dismissing and denying their racial identities and claims to blackness. Powell and Rowan's struggles to effectively navigate these two different international domains, therefore, offer intriguing portals to analyze the entanglement of mid-twentieth century arguments about African American diplomacy and the convergences and divergences of national and international conceptions of U.S. blackness within transnational and cross-cultural meeting spaces.

The article begins by briefly contextualizing the key themes and debates surrounding black diplomacy within American Cold War culture and laying out the main theoretical framework that informs my interrogation of Powell and Rowan's travel encounters. It then moves to its main argument and points of analysis.

The Cold War and Black Cultural Traffic

In the aftermath of World War II, the onset of the Cold War – what is generally understood as a complex shift in global relations and mobilization of a distinct international system by primarily, but not solely, the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, roughly during the period of 1945-1991 – produced a number of significant shifts in U.S. government policy, particularly regarding issues of race. The Harry S. Truman administration's (1945-1953) Committee on Civil Rights advised the President that the racial oppression and injustice experienced by black Americans and other U.S. racial minorities hurt America's image and credibility abroad.[94] To stem Soviet support for racial equality and decolonization of Asia and Africa and, moreover, the ease through which communist governments could argue that U.S. race relations pointed to the incongruity of the U.S.'s globalist

[93] Rowan would go on to become the Assistant Secretary of State in President John F. Kennedy's administration, the U.S. Ambassador to Finland, and director of the United States Information Agency during President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration.

[94] See Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 79-83.

claims of a democratic, multicultural landscape governed by freedom in the public sector and the market place, Truman promoted a liberal agenda of racial reform. In the face of the pro-Jim Crow outlook of his Southern allies in the Democratic Party, his administration began endorsing the gradual assimilation and integration of blacks and other racial minorities into national life. It was believed that this depiction would aid the United States in situating American national culture as embodying the multicultural, democratic archetype that industrial and financial capital and U.S. superintendence could help replicate elsewhere.

These policies took grandest shape first with the July 1948 issuance of Executive Order 9981, an act that formalized equal treatment and opportunity in the Armed Services and the protection of its employees from discrimination. The desegregation of the U.S. military produced a rapid growth in the numbers of black enlistment and black military personnel abroad.[95] This increase, furthermore, built on earlier shifts produced by World War II where, during the war, opportunities in government and non-governmental initiatives abroad led to increased African American employment overseas as aid workers, technicians, medical service personnel, educators, and engineers.[96] This expansion of what Truman, and later the Eisenhower administration (1953-1961), perceived as cultural workers abroad who could help repair America's image, was also aided by the government's selection of several African Americans to serve as national voices within the international arena. Alongside Ralph Bunche who had been working in various leading government positions since 1943, Edward R. Dudley was plucked as the first black American ambassador (to Liberia), and attorney Edith Sampson, activist and civic leader Channing Tobias, and later minister Rev. Archibald Carey were chosen as alternate United Nations delegates.[97] Black musicians, entertainers, and artists were also sent on government-sponsored international tours to perform and attest to America's racial advancement (several of these travelers, however, periodically strayed from the government's pasteurized message of racial reform).[98] In addition, the image of America's racial progress was circulated internationally through State Department-packaged junkets featuring images and narratives of black American achievement and enjoyment of middle-class life that were strategically placed within U.S. embassies, particularly in Asian and African territories.

Several scholars have noted how these alterations in the U.S. government's self-presentation of American race relations had a significant impact on African American political activism within international affairs. Historian Brenda Gayle Plummer explains,

> the new black approach to foreign affairs also echoed a theme already familiar on the domestic political front: patronage […] Once part of any administration's foreign policy team, of course, black representatives lost any power to execute, and in some cases even to articulate, a specifically Afro-American foreign affairs agenda […] Brokerage and patronage traditions infiltrated independent thought and action, substituting partisanship in their place.[99]

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[95] See Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relation in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 60, 74-78.
[96] See Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 121
[97] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 211, 244-45; Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 78-79.
[98] See Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[99] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 212-213.

The filtered renderings of black American life and racial injustice articulated by some government-selected racial spokespersons, however, were periodically met with disbelief and rejection within domestic and international circles. Various black Americans and non-Americans, particularly Asian and African intellectuals, radical leftists, and militant nationalists perceived such depictions as masking the realities of American racial and economic oppression and the U.S. government's imperial ambitions. Some of these critics of American foreign policy even went to the extent of identifying black state representatives as race traitors and talking heads for the government whose words, ideas, and racial subjectivities did not correspond with that of their racial siblings back in the U.S. In sum, it was argued that these envoys' articulations and performances of race while abroad were unacceptable and inauthentic.

Considering the criticisms made of such diplomatic representatives, Cold War historiography in general has under-theorized the discursive and performatory features of black internationalism when in transit. Historians Charles R. Lilley and Michael H. Hunt have brought attention to this shortcoming, explaining that many works 'ignore and downplay the patterns of social interaction produced between different peoples' and, therefore, treat 'culture and power as though they were largely divorced from, rather than wedded to, one another in important ways.'[100] The field's inattentiveness to the cultural politics of black internationalism contrasts with the attention paid to the subject by critical theorists on race, gender, and performance. Numerous scholars have situated African American travel as a source of power and knowledge where travelers often perform and are privileged and challenged with situations to rethink her or his historical circumstance and the frameworks, categories, and terms used to define the scope of their condition.[101]

An important concept that theorizes the politics of international and intercultural encounters within black political culture is that of 'black cultural traffic,' what historian Kennell Jackson defines as a system of 'exchange and/or commerce' and 'trade in ideas, styles, impressions, body language and gestures.' He points out, though, that an important feature of such traffic is the 'fragments of cultural complexes that break loose and assume a life of their own,' particularly contradictory ideas and arguments about race and blackness. Employing performance as an analytic, Jackson notes that it is in this space of cultural crossroads where the similarities and differences between the traveler's (i.e. the performer) and those with whom she encounters' (i.e. the audience) conceptions and projections of race become entangled:

> Few public spaces occupied by a black performance or black performer are entirely free. Few tabula rasa spaces exist […] the density of ideas about blacks pulls people in, even though they often bring along a jumble of troublesome notions of blackness […] Performance is a key element in such traffic […] The performance moment is key because it is the instance in which some representation of blacks, black cultural material, or blackness is offered […] These performances seem to work best at

[100] Charles R. Lilley and Michael H. Hunt, 'On Social History, the State, and Foreign Relations: Commentary on the Cosmopolitan Connection,' *Diplomatic History* 11 (Summer 1987): 247, 246.
[101] See for instance Farah J. Griffin, and Cheryl J. Fish, ed. *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*: *Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael Cohn and Michael K. Platzer, *Black Men of the Sea* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1978).

> projecting their representations when they are broadly suggestive about blacks and black culture, when they allow the audiences to insert its own ideas into the performance.

Cultural traffic, therefore, speaks to multifarious and contradictory politics of such cross-cultural and international engagement where performances of blackness are always sights of intensive negotiation because perceptions and expectations of blackness 'crowd the performance space.' Jackson concludes, 'balancing a black presenter's sense of self with an audience's need for a particular black type was tricky […] Still within this problematic moment, a cultural exchange between blacks and others was going on.'[102]

Situating Cold War black diplomatic travel within the framework of cultural traffic relays how black envoys were tasked to perform as travelers and negotiate complex and contradictory perceptions of race. In the international arena, race and U.S. blackness were often framed by the U.S. state and by critics of American foreign policy in uneven and conflicting language and opposing ideologies. While the U.S. government depicted race and American blackness in ways useful towards advancing American foreign policy, African American radicals and foreign leftists and militant nationalists portrayed blackness as a subject-position mired by the injustice and inequality of U.S. racial discrimination. Their struggles were inherently linked with that of antiracist international movements struggling against western imperialism and global white supremacy.

Throughout the Cold War's first decades, numerous African American diplomatic travelers were confronted with these diametrical constructions of U.S. blackness. An important site for such projections was the Bandung Asian-African Conference of 1955. In mid-April of that year, delegates representing twenty-nine newly independent African and Asian nations and national liberation movements met in Bandung, Indonesia to carve out a global system of relations, exchanges, and definitions for humanity in opposition to the bipolar postwar world order decreed by the Soviet Union and the U.S. Together this group of Asian, African, and later Latin American populations came to embody what French anthropologist Alfred Sauvy described in 1952 as 'the Third World', and what Vijay Prashad has recently termed, 'The Third World Project', a decolonial movement that linked the destinies of over 2.1 billion people (over seventy percent of the world's population in 1960) during the 1950s-1970s.[103] The Asian-African conference was an outgrowth of a series of conferences organized by Asian delegations frustrated by the United Nations' failure to involve Africa and Asia in the decision-making process of the international body. At Bandung, the conference's participants promoted Asian-African goodwill and cooperation and reflected on the attending nations' mutual problems in terms of national sovereignty, military warfare, economic security, and social development – the palpable cultural trauma and socio-economic residue left by western imperialism.

One dark face serving under the Stars and Stripes

[102] Kennell Jackson, 'Introduction: Traveling While Black,' In *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture,* Edited by Harry Justin Elam Jr. & Kennell Jackson, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 9, 11, 4, and 2.
[103] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New Press, 2008).

Prior to the Bandung conference, one person who looked upon the impending international summit with avid intrigue was Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. of New York. He perceived it as an opportunity to push for greater U.S. relations with the nonaligned states of Asia and Africa and for greater African American involvement in U.S. state diplomacy. Powell was initially motivated to attend when he learned that the administration of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower was not going to send representatives on its behalf. 'I don't believe that we or any country is strong enough to be representing 3/5 of the earth's population', Powell explained, and expressed to fellow government officials, 'we need to let the peoples of Asia and Africa know that we do not consider them second-class nations […] We need to let the two billion coloured peoples on earth, without whom we cannot continue much longer as a first-class power, know that America is a democracy of the people'.[104] Powell, moreover, blamed the Eisenhower administration's debacle on the U.S. State Department, arguing that the department's adherence to an outdated racial hierarchy in assessing foreign affairs prevented them from producing 'an adequate foreign policy for Asia and Africa'. According to Powell, too many State Department officials were willing to 'only see white'. Powell maintained that the State Department's 'crass stupidity and ignorance' could be most clearly discerned in its deafness to the role that race would play at the Bandung Conference.[105]

He, moreover, insisted that if the U.S. wanted to prevent communism's growth in Asia and Africa and cultivate strong relations with the governments of these continents, then the best soldiers and cultural diplomats to mobilize these relations were African Americans. 'The U.S. State Department must immediately send dark-skinned Americans at the highest possible levels to all American embassies in Asian countries. These people (Asians) look at a white face, well remembering colonialism'.[106] Powell countered that black Americans like himself could effectively solidify racial commonality between black Americans and the Asian and African attendees of the Bandung Conference by proving that, as he put it, 'America is not a white man's country' and emphasizing the 'tremendous advantages' that had been made in U.S. racial relations.[107] 'America's biggest selling point in Asia and Africa is the (its) 25 million coloured peoples', he rationalized. 'One dark face serving under the stars and stripes will do more good than millions of dollars for military aid'.[108]

Implicit within Powell's proposal were certain claims about race, skin-color, and skin-complexion. His emphasis on the role that 'dark faces' and 'dark-skinned' features could play in repelling communism in Asian-African disguise was reliant on notions of racial and phenotypic symmetry. Although Powell understood that African Americans' 'racial' tie to the Third World was based on more than just skin-color, but on their experiences with colonialism and white supremacy, he resorted to conventional biological conceptions of race. Powell's rhetorical representation of race framed blackness as homogenous and as 'a common, invariant racial identity capable of linking divergent black experiences across different spaces and times'.[109] By rigidly separating race and skin-colour into easily distinguishable binary camps, Powell turned a blind eye to the U.S.'s multiracial and multi-phenotypic realities and, additionally, collapsed the divergent viewpoints constitutive of

[104] 'Powell Tells Why He'll Defy Afro-Asia Meet Ban.' *Chicago Defender*, April 9, 1955, pg. 2 & Jay G. Hayden. 'U.S. Relaxing Concern Over Bandung Parley,' *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 18, 1955, pg. 2; Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., *Adam by Adam* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1971), 103.
[105] Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 104, 118.
[106] Louis Lautier, 'Powell May Effect Fliers' Release.' *The Washington Afro-American*, April 26, 1955, pg. 9.
[107] 'Powell Tells Why He'll Defy Afro-Asia Meet Ban,' and 'U.S. Relaxing Concern Over Bandung Parley.'
[108] Alice A. Dunnigan, 'Powell Reports to Ike on Bandung Meet.' *Chicago Defender*, May 21, 1955, pg. 21.
[109] Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts (*Serpent's Tail, 1994), 2.

African American politics. Differences based on class and political and/or ideological sensibility were also irrelevant within Powel's proposal. Additionally, the masculinist undertones of Powell's remarks were far from camouflaged. In refuting the notion of America as a 'white man's country' Powell, despite challenging uni-racial (white) constructions of U.S. nationality, succumbed to defining U.S. nationality within gender-specific terms. His claim implicitly suggested that African Americans employ diplomacy as a means to abrogate their feminization and powerlessness 'to male-like 'Whiteness'.[110]

Powell's proposal was a strategic articulation. As a sound bite his comments were far more provocative than an oratorical disquisition on race's legacy in the U.S. or on the diversity of black life. Through the 'dark' metaphor Powell, moreover, mapped African Americans' identities and bodies within a global terrain of colour. In his vague schematic, they stood racially alongside various other 'darker' oppressed groups, a temporary rendering that simulated equivalency between these groups yet that also did not effectively speak to their numerous differences. Even so, Powell reasoned, among Third World nations, African Americans possessed a global cultural currency that white Americans lacked. The signifier of dark-skin and African Americans' experiences with racial discrimination and oppression provided black Americans with cross-cultural capital that could assist in transforming the U.S.'s image abroad. 'Darkening' the U.S.'s likeness could, therefore, function as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and as means of symbolically connecting the U.S. to other foreign publics.

Attending the Bandung conference as an 'unofficial observer', Powell put this project into action. Aiming to distance the U.S. from its repressive racial past and present, he informed a group of Indonesian reporters, 'To be a Negro in the U.S. is a distinction'.[111] This revisionist recoding of America's racial legacy was further emphasized when Powell asserted that racism and black Americans' second-class status were being eradicated in the U.S. When pushed to provide examples of such material and structural transformations in Jim Crow racism, Powell sidestepped the probes by defensively referencing discrimination in other countries including India and Indonesia. And even when he admitted to one journalist that, 'there isn't much difference between the Union of South Africa and the union of South Carolina', Powell nonetheless absented from making any all-out remarks about the state of U.S. racial discrimination. 'Let's not judge the United States by what is happening in its worst states, but […] by what is happening in most of its states', he commented.[112]

Furthermore, by positioning himself as a staunch defender of anticommunism and the U.S. government's opposition to Communist China, Powell worked to embody the kind of pro-U.S. diplomatic agency that he had attributed to black Americans. So, for instance, he critiqued the Chinese delegation's efforts to change the language of a resolution condemning racial discrimination. While the Chinese delegation wanted the resolution to liken racial discrimination in Africa to that in the U.S., Powell argued that the U.S. should not be specifically mentioned in the resolution.[113] China's effort to discredit the U.S. by calling awareness to the treatment of African

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[110] Wahneema Lubiano, 'Mapping the Interstices Between Afro-American Cultural Discourse and Cultural Studies – A Prolegomenon.' *Callaloo* 19.1 (1996): 68-77, (74).
[111] 'Adam At Them,' *Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1955, pg. 2.
[112] Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 108-109.
[113] 'Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference,' in George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), 76-86.

Americans and other non-white American groups, according to Powell, represented a sly attempt to 'exploit the color question'.[114] Powell concluded,

> Make no mistake about it, the Soviet Union, through Red China, had deliberately planned in advance to take over the Bandung Conference and to make it the greatest propaganda victory to be won by any nation in modern times.[115]

The U.S. government and dominant news media championed Powell's actions at Bandung.[116] Members of the black press also extolled Powell's exploits. One reporter lauded how Powell 'defended the progress made in America toward better race relations'.[117] A journalist from the *Chicago Defender* on the other hand argued Powell had 'gained tremendous international stature' by serving notice to the U.S. government that 'America must clean up her own race problem', and take 'a forthright stand on such issues as colonialism and race repressions in South Africa'.[118] Another *Chicago Defender* reporter asserted that Powell's refusal 'to furnish grist for the Communist mill by sounding off against his native land' represented a larger anticommunist sensibility among African Americans. The journalist reveled in 'the fact that a Negro […] could so defend America confounded designers of a subtle plan to destroy the democracies of the world'.[119]

All African Americans, however, did not applaud Powell's deeds. Reporter Louis Lautier felt that the congressman 'made some extravagant statements' and, moreover, disagreed 'with his remarks on it's a great privilege to be a Negro in America at this time '.[120] Journalist James Hicks caused a media uproar when he tagged Powell as a 'giant killer' and accused the politician of 'directing a lynch mob' in various Asian leaders' directions. Hicks queried,

> As I see it, Mr. Powell, as a coloured man, is standing lonely and deep in the forest like all other coloured people of the world today […] Why should a coloured man of the stature of Mr. Powell take it upon himself to try to politically slay another coloured man who stands upright […] in forums of the world?[121]

Quite a few newspaper readers concurred with Hicks's commentary, such as Maria Price of Washington, DC, who wrote about Powell, 'How can he look people of his own race in the face after telling such ridiculous lies as he did at the Asian – African conference'? Another reader, S.J. Moore of New Rochelle, NY, agreed with Hicks's evaluation of Powell: 'He said what millions of other coloured people all over the world are thinking […] You can't serve two masters and Mr Powell at Bandung was a white man's man'.[122]

To identify Powell's actions at Bandung as the embodiment of serving "a master" branded Powell as the figurative slave of the U.S. government, the "Ambassador Tom" of U.S. globalism.

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[114] James Hicks, 'Nehru 'Done' – Powell.' *The Washington Afro-American*, May 3, 1955, pg. 1 & 2.
[115] Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 104, 118, 117.
[116] 'Democratic Whip Backs Powell on Asia,' *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1955, pg. 12 & 'Laud Powell's Role In Asia,' *Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1955, pg. 1.
[117] 'Our Opinions, Diplomat Powell.' *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1955, pg. 9.
[118] 'Laud Powell's Role In Asia.'
[119] 'Our Opinions, Diplomat Powell.'
[120] 'Powell didn't Stab Anyone, says Lautier.' *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 28, 1955, pg. 16.
[121] James Hicks, 'Voter's Vineyard,' *The Afro-American*, May 14, 1955, pg. 4.
[122] 'What Afro Readers Say,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 17, 1955, pg. 4.

Furthermore, painting Powell's critiques of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as comparable to 'directing a lynch mob' explicitly associated Powell with a heinous act of terror that had a long and traumatic legacy in American life and history.[123] As an instrument of terror and regulation utilized by both the state and civil society to coerce African Americans and other groups into subservience and trepidation and police African Americans' will, lynching was a key tool in the arsenal of Jim Crow racial segregation and anti-black racism. Ultimately the depiction of Powell as a slave directing a lynch mob toward Zhou and Nehru exploited black newspaper readers' disdain for racial terror, slavery, and white paternalism. By thus maintaining that Powell had 'sold out' African Americans and the Third World, and as one black newspaper reader put it, 'sold colored people down the river', these journalists and newspaper readers dissociated Powell from common conceptions of blackness and simultaneously situated Zhou and Nehru within these same conceptions.[124] Thus, while the latter two men were discursively authenticated as symbolically 'black,' Powell was depicted as 'no longer black' and a race-traitor.

That African Americans partook in such stereotyping and racial discourse, even within arguments about diplomacy, is not surprising. Assertions about racial authenticity and discourses of 'selling out' – arguments about what being black is and what it is not and about the texture, or "look", of black political activity – have been historically employed to make particular claims about the function of African Americans in politics and diplomacy. In many ways, such propositions often silence the plurality of African American perspectives. Claims about racial authenticity thus can at times serve as a helpful tool in maintaining a specific hegemony of African American viewpoints and stances on what African Americans act and think like. Arguments about diplomacy are not left out of such constructions. The idea of 'selling out,' when critically unpacked, has certain rhetorical weight and merit when utilized in relation to U.S. foreign policy. Recognizing that the U.S. state has a monopoly of power and instruments of violence, coercion and incorporation, discourses of 'selling out' and arguments about authenticity are valuable currency and figuratively combustible and dangerous weaponry in the arsenal of the downtrodden and oppressed. Thus, within African American popular discourse, arguments about 'selling out' sometimes provided a useful binary to distinguish 'black diplomacy' as a political project whose aims and functions were in rigid alignment with the foreign policy objectives of the U.S. government.

Nonetheless, the representation of Powell as a 'white man's man' and thus an inauthentic black man, was not only constructed by African Americans, but also by Asian journalists and Bandung attendees. An unnamed *Chicago Defender* reporter commented that various wings of the Indonesian press were dissatisfied with Powell's charges about U.S. race-relations. Apparently Powell's positive portrayal left many of the reporters puzzled. The reporter asserted, 'They came to us for explanations […] It was a tough job explaining to them and we don't know if they were really convinced yet either on this or that things in the States are as rosy as Adam painted them'.[125] Furthermore, at times Powell's attempts to establish a sentiment of racial commonality between him and other attendees was ignored, or better stated, misread. Several attendees and journalists, most especially people from various Asian nations, were greatly confused over how to racially define Powell. Because of his fair-skin complexion, several attendees, reporters, and onlookers misidentified him as Caucasian. One journalist remarked that the 'biggest riddle to the local boys

[123] Hicks, 'Voter's Vineyard.'
[124] 'What Afro Readers Say: Letter from Jeanette Green of New York,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 17, 1955, pg. 4.
[125] 'Adam At Them,' *Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1955, pg. 2.

was Adam's explanation of his non-convincing appearance as a Negro […] Indonesian journalists ask, "Is he really a Negro"'?[126] When clarifying his race as 'coloured' or 'Negro,' Powell still discovered doubt among his receivers. A Chinese journalist responded, 'You are not a Negro. Your skin is white'.[127] Once Powell's race was confirmed, he was treated far differently. In explaining the actions and perspectives of various Asian attendees at Bandung, journalist Louis Lautier stated,

> Not only are they coloured, but they appear consciously biased in their friendship for other coloured people […] Ignored was Rep. Adam C. Powell because he looked like a white man. But when they found out that he, too, was coloured, they immediately began to bestow upon him the same type of attention they had given us[128]

Even Powell commented on this treatment:

> Frankly, at Bandung I wished my skin had been black, for it was a *mark of distinction*. The distinguished writer Vincent Sheehan told me […] he was going to hang a sign around his neck saying, 'Me coloured too,' so that people would speak to him.[129]

The skepticism over Powell's racial identity and disagreements with his portrayal of U.S. race relations both demonstrates and calls into question Powell's proposals for the darkening of the U.S. foreign services and diplomacy. That some Third World journalists and attendees at Bandung 'ignored Powell' does ambivalently verify Powell's claims about how 'white faces', 'dark skin', and 'dark faces' would be judged and engaged differently in Asian and African contexts. Powell ultimately was not 'dark enough'. His skin-complexion prevented him from accruing the immediate cultural currency and capital possessed by darker-skinned African Americans in Bandung and, therefore, testified to his point about the possible diplomatic potential of African Americans in the Third World. Powell's Bandung description of black skin as a 'mark of distinction' fits neatly with his pre-conference assertions about the power of the 'dark-skinned American' abroad.

Nonetheless, the denial and dismissal of Powell's racial identity also illuminates the complexity of blackness, that is the difficulty and shortcomings of defining race within the terms of physical features and skin-colour, and the problem of uncritically endowing blackness with a subversive and transgressive potential. Powell's doubters clearly had preconceived notions about how African Americans looked, acted, and perceived U.S. race relations. Their disregard for Powell's assurances that he was a black man displayed the group's ignorance about the history of miscegenation in African American and, moreover, American life. It also conveyed that they, similar to Powell's proposal about 'dark faces,' were incorrectly attributing race merely to skin-colour. Ultimately, their rejection of Powell's claims of racial progress, though warranted, confirm that Powell's representation of black life did not mesh with a their own conceptions of U.S. blackness and black political thought. Their expectations and disappointment in Powell's depiction of U.S. race

[126] Ibid.
[127] Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 110.
[128] Louis Lautier, 'Travelers to East learn our world is non-white,' *Washington Afro-American*, April 26, 1955, pg. 9.
[129] Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 110; emphasis added.

relations suggests that they construed U.S. black political struggles and African American political sensibilities as homogenously resistant and subversive.

In seeking to establish meaningful cross-cultural exchange, Powell and his critics' renderings of blackness thus hinged on gambles. Each constructed blackness in ways that they thought might help to create connections between African Americans and foreign populations of colour. The latter's articulations about blackness, for instance, were driven by their desire to assist in Asia, Africa, and Latin America's efforts to establish an autonomous and non-aligned Third Force against western dominance. Still, these articulations reveal how unstable and slippery the terrain of race and blackness can be in international and intercultural contexts and exchanges. In both Powell's depiction of African American diplomacy and his detractors' critiques, blackness at varying points was associated with corporeality and performance and ultimately framed consequently in limited, mainly symbolic terms.

Performing Blackness and the Geopolitics of Race

Another interesting and similar case to that of Powell is *Minneapolis Tribune* correspondent Carl Rowan's experiences traveling in India in 1954[130]. Throughout Rowan's three-month stay, he too encountered similar non-American articulations about how an African American diplomat should discuss race experiences. Rowan was a real-life example of Powell's claims about the possibilities of African American diplomacy in Asia. Invited by the State Department to travel to India under the auspices of the U.S. Leader Exchange Program, Rowan visited New Delhi, Assam, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, and numerous villages; in these locations he lectured on the role of the free press in creating free societies.

Although Rowan depicted himself as a 'free agent and not as a spokesmen' or 'State Department lackey', many listeners of a radical bend could not turn a deaf ear to his quixotic portrayal of U.S. society and life. Rowan explained to them that the U.S. 'was in the process of taking great strides toward racial justice', and that he was 'optimistic about the willingness of the South to accept the end of Jim Crow'. Citing the vast changes made in U.S. racial segregation, he asserted that 'more progress towards ending it [racial discrimination] had been made in the United States than anywhere else' and referred to himself as 'a walking example of the opportunities' made available in the U.S.[131] Not persuaded by Rowan's explanations, attendees insisted he come clean about African Americans' experiences and everyday lives in the U.S. 'Inherently you are one of us […] Now, you tell us the real story about the treatment of your race in America', Rowan was repeatedly told.[132] Nonetheless, segments of the people he addressed were in deep disagreement with Rowan's contentions about U.S. race relations and the U.S.'s history of racial strife and, as a result, journalists frequently scolded him for his pro-America stance. They labeled him a 'black apologist' and 'an excellent propagandist for the U.S.' Editor R.K. Karanjia inquired, 'We are all interested in how a man with a black skin, who has been unable to know freedom because of it, can talk to us so learnedly about a free society.'[133]

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130 Brenda Gayle Plummer also briefly describes Rowan's travel to India. See Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 221-22.
131 Carl Rowan, *Breaking Barriers: A Memoir.* Perennial, 1992, 123-124; 'Newspaper Man One of America's Best 'Private' Ambassadors to India,' *Toledo Blade*, November 19, 1954, pg. 8.
132 Carl Rowan, 'This is India: Core of Cold War – Race Hatred in Reverse Jolts Writer.' *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 16, 1955, pg. 25.
133 Rowan, *Breaking Barriers*, pg. 124-25.

One particular dialogue dynamically displays the distance between Rowan's views and that of his Indian critics. In Assam, *Press Trust of India* newsman P. E. Shanker explained to Rowan,

> We trust you, and we speak to you frankly, because there is a common bond of colour. We hate the white man because he is the cause of all the trouble in Asia today. We respect you, but we hate white America […] We think she wants to dominate Asia, to make it her market.

Rowan retorted, 'Tell me where in America's history do you find evidence that she ever dominated any people for economic or ulterior motives'? Rowan continued, 'I simply cannot buy all this 'bound by color' nonsense […] I cannot accept your theory for a moment. I think it is ridiculous to argue that you can trust all coloured men, but no white men.' Dismayed by Rowan's refusal to acknowledge the severity of the U.S.'s problems with racial inequality, the editor of the *Assam Tribune* exclaimed, 'Why do you defend these white devils? Why do you go around saying there has been progress'?[134] Ruled by the American press as 'one of America's best private "ambassadors" to India' due to his defense of U.S. race-relations and awarded the coveted Sigma Delta Chi award for his foreign correspondence from India, Rowan's diplomatic efforts were met with extraordinary fervor and dissatisfaction among various segments of India's population. Although Rowan left the nation a hero in the eyes of many Americans, to pockets of India he was, as one Indian journalist curtly put it, a 'trained Negro parrot of the State Department'.[135] Even reporter Shanker conceded, 'I fear the insidious capitalistic influence has robbed us of a coloured brother'.[136]

Upon returning to the U.S., Rowan framed his experiences in India and the benefits of African American inclusion within U.S. diplomacy in a similar fashion to the image Congressman Powell would depict one year later. Rowan described his time abroad as a quotidian process of shielding the U.S. from communist attacks. Communists' exploit of the U.S.'s racial woes, he maintained, was taking a major toll on U.S. foreign policy - the former were publishing stories about U.S. racial discrimination and segregation in Indian newspapers and 'peddling the idea that Americans were against colored peoples'. To combat this bombardment of negative press, Rowan advised the news media and U.S. government to publicize African American achievements. Success stories like his own rise from rural backwoods childhood to Navy commissioned officer to world-traveling journalist and diplomatic officer, Rowan argued, were prime examples of the triumph of U.S. democracy that could beat back communism's sway in Asia. He disclosed,

> When I left India, I was of the opinion that the Communists were winning the battle in Asia, especially in India […] We're losing these places because they can only buy what you sell them. The idea is prevalent in India that you and I are frightened people. We aren't going to sell democracy in India unless we have confidence in it.[137]

Rowan's admonition and recommendations ultimately did not go unnoticed. One year later, CIA director Allen Dulles and the consul general of Hong Kong pushed for Rowan's presence at the

[134] Rowan, 'This is India: Core of Cold War – Race Hatred in Reverse Jolts Writer.'
[135] Rowan, 'Newspaper Man One of America's Best 'Private' Ambassadors to India.'
[136] Rowan, 'This is India.'
[137] Carl Rowan, 'India Being Lost to the Reds,' *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 6, 1955, pg. 2

Bandung Conference. Rowan, they asserted, was a U.S. asset whose race would assist him in conducting 'backstage public relations work for the United States among the delegates and observers'.[138]

The denunciations of Powell and Rowan's portrayals of U.S. race relations were more than just ideological and political disagreements. They were critiques of both men's performances of U.S. blackness. In Powell's and Rowan's encounters, cross-cultural and transnational ideas about U.S. blackness converged with the two men's physical bodies and their ideological viewpoints, that is with both men's corporeal and ideological articulations of blackness. In the eyes of their critics, the men's professional and class positioning and their allegiance to liberal American conceptions of internationalism and racial reform circumscribed their representations of black American life. In addition, Powell's complexion led several Asians to doubt his racial identity, the latter perceiving his skin-colour and moderate depiction of U.S. race relations as evidence of the failure of his claims to African American subjectivity.

However, by situating Powell and Rowan's actions as the work of 'Ambassador Toms', their critics narrowly reduced the complex and differing political landscapes each man was compelled to navigate and evaded broadening their criticisms of U.S. racial discrimination to also consider the ways race and class oppression structured life abroad. Powell's critiques of the State Department and his recommendation that the department reshape its foreign policy toward the Third World for instance counter W.E.B. Du Bois's claim that African Americans travelling and speaking abroad were working in cahoots with the State Department. It is also important to note that one of the biggest ironies to Rowan was that of the numerous Indians radicals who pestered him about his conservative depiction of American race relations. Few commented on and acknowledged the ways ideologies of skin-color, beauty, and caste impacted Indian social life. From his observations, while Indian newspapers featured advertisements lauding fair-skinned Indians, a disproportionate number of poor Indians of lower caste were dark-skinned.[139]

Despite these inconsistencies, though, what is nonetheless evident is that in Powell and Rowan's presentations abroad, each man's portrayal gave credence to the other half of Du Bois's claim - that African American state representatives could not openly discuss U.S. race conditions when traveling abroad. To some extent, representing the race in such transnational spaces was an oxymoronic task for these two privileged travelers, most especially considering the fact that both men's class and professional status made them highly unrepresentative of the majority of African Americans to whom they claimed to represent. Furthermore, their depiction of African Americans as cultural diplomats in Asia, Africa, and Latin America framed African Americans' contribution to U.S. state diplomacy generally in symbolic terms - the use of black faces and black bodies to internationally market inclusion and diversity, while at the same time extend U.S global hegemony. Their alignment of the Third World project of national liberation and self-determination with U.S. triumphalism and visionary globalism displayed the sad ironies and contradictory paradoxes of black uplift ideology.[140]

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[138] Dispatch, Drumright to the Department of State, January 20, 1955, 670.901/1-2055 & Cary Fraser, 'An American Dilemma: Race and Realpolitik in the American Response to the Bandung Conference, 1955,' 124, in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, edited by Brenda Gayle Plummer, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[139] See Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 222; Carl Rowan, *The Pitiful and the Proud* (New York: Random House, 1956), 154-156.

[140] For more on uplift ideology see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Ultimately, Rowan and Powell's experiences abroad embodied highly contentious and dynamic sites of cultural traffic between their representation of American race relations and their critics' ideas about this subject. They demonstrate the *geopolitics of race*, that is to say the reality of globalization's intersections with the ever-changing meanings and structural inequalities inhabiting racial difference in different national and geographical contexts. This firstly refers to the processes through which socio-political constructions of racial difference and racial exclusion become embedded in modern nation-states and international relations, and structure domestic and global configurations of power. But it also intimates considering how particular racial formations, racial projects, and racial epistemologies take shape in spaces that exceed the nation, particularly transnational locations and crossroads where differing conceptions intersect, become embattled, and are forced to engage one another. Media scholar Radhika Parameswaran argues that scholarship and theorizations on racial formations must shift from examining race only through a national lens and instead 'problematize blackness in the context of global spaces as inciting new alliances and indexing social registers outside of race'.[141] Citing the work of Deborah Thomas and Kamari Maxine Clarke, Parameswaran asserts that only through this type of critical investigations can scholarship interrogate the 'new forms of subjectivity, cultural practice, and political action' that are molded within cross-cultural exchanges and traffic.[142] As Parameswaran notes, more attention must be paid to the multifaceted attributes and expectations of blackness and black Americanness in international contexts and to what happens as blackness and ideas about race travel. Such scholarship can complicate analysis of the entanglement of foreign affairs, diplomacy, and race. The reality that bodies are never *just* bodies but fluid points of intersection, interconnection, and confrontation where meanings are made, challenged, and shared, entails a rigorous diplomatic and cross-cultural outlook and orientation.

[141] Radhika Parameswaran, 'Facing Barack Hussein Obama: Race, Globalization, and Transnational America,' *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2009): 195-205 (202)
[142] K.M. Clarke & D. Thomas, 'Introduction: Globalization and the transformation of race,' Kamari Maxine Clarke & Deborah Thomas (Eds.), *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-36 (2-3).

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