

Postwar Civil Rights Politics in the United States: Understanding the Dynamics of Democratization from a Global Perspective

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Introduction:

Even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, legal, social, political, economical, and cultural restrictions were used to forcefully subjugate African Americans. Despite the long history of severe hardship of racial discrimination, however, many African Americans were not fatalistic about their “caste status” in American society. After World War II, the civil rights movement gained greater momentum; it attracted an increasing amount of national attention, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of strong pressure for racial justice nationwide, the United States Congress successively enacted the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination. Despite the undemocratic deprivation of civil rights, African Americans strategically implemented political activities with the limited resources available to them, bringing about drastic social change and democratization in U.S. society.

There are some previous studies on social change that mainly focus on local and domestic politics and power struggles; however, the progress of democratization cannot be explained merely by domestic factors in the global age.¹ The global trend of anti-racism and the anti-colonial movement in Africa and Asia after World War II encouraged the civil rights movement and pressured the U.S. government to legislate against racial discrimination. Moreover, vis-à-vis anti-American propaganda by the U.S.S.R. during the age of the Cold War, the federal government had to demonstrate both to American citizens and to the international community that the communist critiques were wrong and that American democracy was the best in the world (Plummer 1996; Dudziak 2000; Layton 2000; Honda 2005).

With the help of several previous studies on American democracy and official publications such as Congressional hearings for the Civil Rights Acts after World War II, this study will try to sociologically explain the dynamics of democratization in the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s by focusing on both the domestic and global contexts in which American racism was challenged. This

study will examine the civil rights movement and federal civil rights policies on the one hand, and the U.S. victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, the birth of the United Nations, the expansion of anti-racism and the anti-colonial movement in Third World nations, and communist anti-American propaganda against the “hypocrisy” of American democracy on the other.

I. The Structure of the Racial Hierarchy until the 1960s

Just a glimpse of political and social realities from the end of the Reconstruction era to the 1960s reminds us of the many structural obstacles that confronted and suppressed the democratic processes in the U.S. Under strong pressure to respond to the parochial interests of the white electorates, for instance, governors and politicians in the Southern states institutionalized “literacy tests” for voting registration as the “legal” means to disenfranchise African Americans, leading to the deprivation of other inalienable rights. At the federal level, too, discriminatory policies were established—one example of which is the racial segregation of public facilities and services, a move that was interpreted as “constitutional” in the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision in 1896. Further, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Congress frequently suffered functional paralysis caused by the Dixiecrats who represented white electorates and vehemently opposed the passage of the effective Civil Rights Bills by filibustering (Honda 2005: 189–193).

However, institutional racism or political systems supporting racist policies did not function self-sufficiently. They successfully excluded African Americans only in reciprocal relations with racist discourse and practices in people’s everyday lives (Carmichael and Hamilton 1992: 5; Hacker 1995: 33). Thus, it is impossible to understand the dynamic structure of racial exclusion if institutional racism and racial discourse and practices are regarded as separate. A better understanding of the dynamic processes of (re)construction of the racist structure demands the theoretical frame of political sociology that pays close attention to mutual relations between racist policies and social exclusion.²

In addition, another factor to support and strengthen the structure of racial hierarchy was, ironically, African Americans’ apathetic attitudes. In the racist milieu described above, some African Americans chose to put on the persona of “Uncle Tom” and tried to “adapt” themselves to racist norms of the white dominant society, instead of demanding justice from the society. Stable domination in the longer term requires the dominant group to promote (or, at least, keep intact) some motivations for obedience on the side of the dominated groups; in other words, it depends upon their “Legitimitätsglaube” (belief in legitimacy) and “Gehorchen *wollen*” (voluntary compliance), as Max Weber understood (Weber 1976: 28, 122; also Dahl 1971: 90; Giddens 1985: 11). Though it is difficult to assume that African Americans could find any positive meanings in the racist establishment, they internalized white-centered norms by

observing their father or mother abiding by “interracial etiquette” in the natural process of socialization. Even when African Americans were indignant at racial discrimination, they tried to avoid “deviant behavior” for fear of sanctions from white racists (Litwack 1999: 13, 31; Kennedy 1990: 205–206; Hacker 1995: 202). African Americans also obeyed racist policies because it was usually difficult for them to refute their “legitimacy,” since the policies’ racist motivation was tacit and elaborately cloaked in the guise of being “legal” and “constitutional.” In the more advantageous position were anti-civil rights white conservatives, who can easily “legitimize” institutional racism just by referring to legal or constitutional terms such as “separate but equal,” “states’ sovereignty,” and so on, as pro-segregationists testified at the Congressional hearings.

African American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois rightly called American racism a “legal fascist caste system” (Du Bois 1945=1975, 71; Layton 2000, 56), for institutional racism, racist discourse and practices, and the apathetic attitude of some African Americans were not functioning separately, but reinforcing mutually, and thereby constructing the racial hierarchy.

II. The Development of African Americans’ Resistance

However, African Americans were not always passive and subordinate in white-centered communities; as the leaders of the Black Nationalist movement, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, rightly said: “Where there is oppression, there is resistance” (1992: 194). Lion F. Litwack mentioned one example of the silent resistance of African Americans: “How many times I spit in the biscuits and peed in the coffee just to get back at them meanwhile” (1999: 171). This shows that African Americans were active and strategic agents in their everyday lives; they were not always behaving like puppets of the structure of racial hierarchy.

In addition to individual sabotage and resistance, black slaves and their leaders organized rebellions against slavery several times during the 19th century, even at the risk of their own lives. Then, the Underground Railroad was established to help many black slaves successfully escape from the oppressive living conditions in the South, which further shows that they did not believe in the “legitimacy” of slavery and were not happy with their inhumane living conditions in white-centered communities, regardless of what their white masters believed.

After the Emancipation of 1863, many African Americans joined the whites in political organizations such as the Friends of Universal Suffrage, National Equal Rights League, and United Free State party, though the majority of blacks were illiterate and not qualified as voters (Swain 1993: 24). This means that African Americans were not politically apathetic by nature, as white supremacists insisted.

In 1909, the NAACP was established as the first civil rights organization to promote racial equality through civil rights suits. Du Bois, one of its founders,

edited its publication, *The Crisis*, to promote African Americans' awareness of racial injustice. In 1941, Philip Randolph, one of its leaders, planned to organize the March on Washington, though it was discouraged by Franklin D. Roosevelt, who appealed for national solidarity to fight World War II and defeat fascism instead of dividing Americans. However, despite African Americans' struggle for racial justice up until the end of World War II, they failed effectively to change the racial status quo.

Then, World War II was over, and the Truman administration began to more actively intervene in American segregationist policies and practices, mainly by executive orders, such as the establishment of the Commission on Civil Rights in 1946, the desegregation of the U.S. military in 1948, and so on), though the President failed to have Congress pass the civil rights act vis-à-vis the strong opposition by Dixiecrats. In addition, the postwar black protest against racial discrimination gained momentum by mobilizing more black masses, unlike the prewar movement.

The *Brown* decision in 1954, for example, was a turning point for the development of the postwar civil rights movement. The Supreme Court decision emboldened African Americans and civil rights leaders to demand more racial equality in their everyday lives and made it possible for the Montgomery Improvement Association, with the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. as its leader, to successfully organize a bus boycott in 1955 and 1956 despite the threat of brutal violence. The victory of the bus boycott would be regarded by historians as "the Cradle of the New Negro" (Sitkoff 1981: 40) and helped launch the modern civil rights movement by inspiring African Americans in other Southern cities (Rasmussen 1997: 152). National civil rights organizations, such as NAACP, SCLC, CORE, SNCC, and others, became more active and strategic in their demonstrations.

The civil rights movement, by strategically organizing Gandhian nonviolence direct actions against racial injustice (including sit-ins, freedom rides, voter registration campaigns, and so on) successfully induced police brutality and white mob violence against black participants, which attracted media attention and made American citizens aware of the severe reality of the racist South, though the U.S. media often depicted the protest in unfavorable ways. Appalled by the scenes of racial violence seen via the mass media, both black and white Americans nationwide supported the civil rights movement. In the 1963 desegregation movement of Birmingham, Alabama, for example, "[t]he SCLC could count on [Police Commissioner in Birmingham] Connor to respond viciously to any effort to alter the city's racial order, they believed this could create the crisis that would force the President [Kennedy] to act. 'We presumed that Bull [Connor] would do something to help us,' recalled Wyatt Walker" (Sitkoff 1981: 121). With only African Americans, accounting for only 10 percent of the total U.S. population, mobilized in the civil rights movement, it would not have been so successful. Its political influence depended on the

nationwide sympathy for African Americans suppressed in the South, and it depended upon the interracial struggle for their shared democratic ideals. The leaders of the civil rights movement understood that African Americans' "salvation depends on their abilities to pursue policies, goals, and coalitions that transcend race" (Swain 1993: 243).

In this way, the civil rights movement became so large-scale and influential and the "legitimacy crisis" of American democracy expanded so seriously that the U.S. government, seeing that it could no longer ignore the voices of African Americans, tried to intervene in racial violence in the South. Though the civil rights movement was criticized by some pro-segregationists as "anarchic," "subversive," "un-American," "communist," and so forth,³ the purpose of their protests was not bringing about the chaos of racial hostility but mobilizing as many sympathetic supporters as possible and putting the government under pressure to solve the problem of racial discrimination. The leaders of the civil rights movement understood that the government was anxious over losing the people's "belief in legitimacy" that is indispensable to the social and political order.

III. The Implication of World War II for African Americans

Then, one can ask why and how the postwar civil rights movement became strong and wide in its influence for racial equality, while the prewar protest failed to be effective. To reply to this question, it is necessary to understand the global context surrounding African Americans, the civil rights organizations and their leaders, and the U.S. government during and after World War II. Kent Rasmussen explained the context in which the postwar civil rights politics developed as follows:

The contradiction between American democratic principle and actual practice became even more evident in the 20th century, when the United States assumed a leadership role in the world struggle against non-democratic governments. It was no coincidence that the federal government finally began breaking down the barriers of racial discrimination and segregation in the midst of America's mid-20th-century cold war against world communism. It simply was not possible to champion freedom and democracy while denying it to a large group of citizens at home. (Rasmussen 1997: 19-20).

Here, three factors will be taken into consideration to explain the dynamics of postwar democratization; the U.S. defeat of the racist regime of Nazi Germany in World War II, the establishment of the United Nations, and communist anti-American propaganda. Let us begin with the implications of World War II for postwar U.S. politics.

It is said that African Americans felt strongly frustrated with the illogical and self-contradictory way in which the U.S. government sought to justify the fighting of World War II. As President Roosevelt appealed to Americans for national

solidarity to fight World War II in his “Four Freedoms” address—referring to the freedom of thought, the freedom of religion, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear—the war was principally fought for the realization of the Free World. However, African Americans justifiably wondered why they had to fight for others’ freedom in foreign countries instead of for their own in the U.S. Randolph testified about African Americans’ frustration before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1948: “I reported to President Truman that Negroes are in no mood to shoulder a gun for democracy abroad as long as they are denied democracy here” (Senate 1948: 687), and “I personally will advise Negroes to refuse to fight as slaves for a democracy they cannot possess and cannot enjoy” (*Ibid.*: 689).

In World War II, the U.S. regarded the racist and totalitarian regime of Hitler as its enemy. However, “Adolph Hitler’s doctrine of the ‘master race’ had as its chief victim the Jew, but the association of that doctrine with the creed of white supremacy was inevitably made in the American mind” (Woodward 1974: 131). Ironically, the U.S. army, which was sent to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany, was segregated. “At the meeting, Walter White of the NAACP warned Roosevelt of the anachronism of an army presumably trained to fight against Hitler’s theories of race while it practiced a similar philosophy in its own ranks” (Layton 2000: 42).

During the war for the Free World, the U.S. was not only exposed to domestic pressure for democracy at home, but it also was vulnerable to anti-American propaganda by its enemy countries. “Each lynching race riot was publicized by the Axis as proof of the hypocrisy of President Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms” (Sitkoff 1981: 16). The Axis exploited American racism and tried to invalidate the “legitimacy” of American democracy.

Ultimately, the U.S. and its Allies defeated Nazi Germany and liberated Europeans. The U.S. victory against Nazi Germany in World War II “symbolized equality and democracy and the defeat of racism” (Layton 2000: 32). Nevertheless, black soldiers, who were segregated and discriminated against in the U.S. military, fought to defeat the racist regime of Nazi Germany even at the risk of their own lives. When they got back to the soil of their own country after World War II, they found themselves surrounded by severe racial discrimination again. Ironically, one black soldier was shot to death by a white racist in his own country after surviving the fierce fight against Nazism in Europe. African Americans might have thought that the U.S., which proudly declared itself as the leader of Free World, was as oppressive as Nazi Germany.

Even though white Europeans were liberated by the U.S. and its Allies from the terror of fascism, African Americans were still discriminated against in the U.S., and then blacks naturally lost their belief in the “legitimacy” of American democracy described above. African Americans naturally felt betrayed and frustrated because the War for Freedom did not bring freedom and democracy to them at home, as promised by the U.S. and its Allies (Lusane 1996: 43).

Following World War II, civil rights activists started not just to agitate frustrated and disappointed African Americans but also to make the international community more aware of the hypocritical nature of American democracy. Additionally, not only African Americans but also colored peoples throughout the world doubted the “legitimacy” of the War for the Free World from the beginning because, their self-determination had been denied and racism and colonial domination persisted despite the establishment of the League of Nations after World War I. Then, many countries in Asia and Africa were still under colonial domination by white European countries just after World War II. Though anti-racist and anti-colonial activists, including Du Bois and other American civil rights activists, had organized several Pan-African Congresses for global solidarity of colored peoples throughout the world since the beginning of the 20th century, white colonial powers had ignored their voices for racial equality by saying that colored peoples are unfit for independence and self-determination and that white countries should dominate colored peoples as their “guardians” (Du Bois 1945: 25).⁴ With the end of World War II, the sentiment against racism and colonialism, however, expanded among colored peoples worldwide, because they felt betrayed by the white countries again, just as after World War I.

IV. The United Nations and Colored Peoples’ Rising Voices for Racial Justice

Just before the end of World War II, the United Nations was established, with world peace and democracy as its ideals. However, the UK and France had not given up their colonial territories in Africa and Asia just after World War II, and the U.S., the leader of the new world order, had not solved the racial problem at home, despite the democratic principles of “equality rights and self-determination of peoples” shown in “the spirit and purpose” of the United Nations Charter of 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly in 1948.

That is how self-contradictions and even hypocrisy were inherent in the United Nations from its establishment, much like the League of Nations.⁵ Despite its double standard, though, the United Nations created the Commission on Human Rights in 1946 and the Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities the next year on the initiative of the Soviet Union.

Civil rights organizations recognized the United Nations would be a “convenient forum for African American leaders to present their grievances before an international audience” (Dudziak 2000: 43), and then civil rights activists started sending petitions for racial equality to the Commission on Human Rights.

At its 10th anniversary in June 1946, the National Negro Congress adopted a “Petition to the United Nations on Behalf of Thirteen Million Oppressed Negro Citizens of the United States of America,” a document that was edited by Du

Bois. The petition was sent to the U.N. Secretary Trygve Lie and then went to the U.N. Economic and Social Council under which the Commission of Human Rights functioned, but “opposition from the U.S. delegates prevented its serious discussion” (Aptheker 1971: 301). However, the petition attracted special attention from the international community, especially from African leaders who sympathized with suppressed African Americans; its signatories included Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, who later became political leaders in Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, respectively. According to Dudziak, “Although the United Nations did not act upon the petition, it reinforced international scrutiny of American race discrimination” (Dudziak 2000: 44).

Following the petition by the National Negro Congress, the NAACP sent a petition, “An Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United States for Redress,” to the Commission on Human Rights in October 1947, Du Bois being one of the authors. Despite the Soviet Union’s proposal to investigate the NAACP’s charges concerning the human rights violations against African Americans, the “Commission on Human Rights rejected that proposal and the United Nations took no action on the petition” (Dudziak 2000: 45).

Then in December 1951, the Civil Rights Congress sent a petition, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States against the Negro People*, to the United Nations. The petition authored by Paul Robson (Du Bois’s friend and a prestigious black performer) and civil rights lawyer William Patterson made peoples in foreign countries indignant at the human rights violations in the U.S. When an African American man named Jay Saunders Redding took a State Department-sponsored speaking tour of India in 1952, he was asked many questions from the audience, such as “Aren’t Negroes prohibited public education in America?,” “Why has no colored person ever held high office in America?,” “Are ... Negroes in America lynched for looking at white women?” and, in response to Redding’s explanation about race relations in the U.S. in a positive way, one of the questioners “held up a copy of the petition, *We Charge Genocide* and said, “What you say does not convince us in the face of this” (Dudziak 2000: 59). Though the petition failed to prompt the United Nations to intervene in the human rights abuses against African Americans in the U.S., it influenced the way in which the international community looked at American democracy (Honda 2005: 339).

On the other hand, civil rights opponents strongly condemned the possibility of the United Nations’ investigation and intervention into American race relations as the “violation of sovereignty,” ignoring the “spirit and purpose” of the United Nations Charter that “imposed the important obligation that nations could no longer claim exclusive rights to treat their citizens as individual nations might have wished” (Layton 2000: 77–78). Horace Wimberly, an Assistant Attorney

General from Texas, testified concerning the United Nations Charter at a Congressional hearing; "...it looks to me like it is just opening the door to maybe turning over our sovereignty to world power someway. It doesn't look healthy, at all, to me" (The Senate 1959: 299).

Other conservatives testified for protecting the national interests of the U.S. from international pressure. Attorney Ernest W. Goodrich, from Virginia, said, "Unless you are ready to accept the 'One World' concept and turn our domestic affairs over to the United Nations, I beg you to consider this legislation [civil rights act] only in the light of its effect on the people of this country. Do not try to legislate to please the world" (House of Representatives 1959: 664).

If civil rights opponents had been sincerely confident that there had not existed any human rights violations in the U.S., as they often emphasized "racial harmony" in the South,⁶ they would not have had to be obsessive about the possibility of the United Nations' intervention. However, they must have felt the accelerating expansion of the international pressure for racial justice and decolonization after World War II, especially around 1960 when "seventeen African nations achieved independence" from colonial powers. In "the year of Africa," "a total of twenty-five former colonies on the continent had now been liberated" and "eight more would follow while Kennedy was in office" (Dudziak 2000: 153). During the 1950s and 1960s, "Third World nations would now use the United Nations to promote their solidarity as a voting bloc rather than align themselves with one of the two superpowers" (Layton 2000: 201).

Sensing the globally expanding trend of anti-racism and anti-colonial movement after World War II, the civil rights organizations shown above sent the petitions to the United Nations to exploit the increasing frustration of Third World countries over the War for Freedom and to promote the global solidarity for such common interests as the realization of racial equality, self-determination, and human rights. The U.S. government, the leader of the Free World, could not avoid the international critical attention and had to become more responsive to the voices of colored peoples throughout the world. Otherwise, the U.S. could not expect to win the "heart and mind" of the Third World, which both the U.S. government and civil rights activists recognized was one of the important conditions for the U.S. victory in the Cold War.

V. Communist Anti-American Propaganda during the Cold War

After the end of World War II, the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. increasingly intensified their competition for global hegemony. The two superpowers tried to show the world the superiority of their military strengths and then went to the Korean War in 1950. The Cold War, however, was fought not just for global military dominance, but also for moral and ideological superiority in the international community. The U.S. government tried to show that it was far more serious about democracy, freedom, and human rights than communist Russia.

The U.S. government feared that the international community would regard the Korean War as a U.S. imperialist invasion for the capitalist exploitation of Koreans.

While many serious human rights violations were reportedly committed in the U.S.S.R. and communist countries, however, the racial problem in the U.S. might have attracted much stronger condemnations from the international community, especially from Third World nations. Communist Russia was not defensive, but offensive on the issue of human rights, by exposing American racism to the critical scrutiny of the international community. “Communist propaganda had long used stories of racial discrimination and injustice to discredit American capitalism and democracy in the eyes of the world” (Woodward 1974: 181) and “the Soviet Union’s use of American racism to compete for influence in non-white nations was an effective weapon against the United States” (Layton 2000: 7). Anti-American propaganda significantly worked in favor of the Soviet Union despite its own alleged human rights violations. The U.S.S.R. understood well how to effectively damage the international image of American democracy and minimize or at least weaken U.S. justifiable attacks against the totalitarian regime of Russia. “Perceiving ethn racial prejudice as the most vulnerable aspect of America’s international status, they [Soviets] regularly attacked all aspects of it, especially to counter the criticism of their own oppressive policies in Eastern Europe and at home” (DeConde 1992: 131).

In response to anti-American propaganda by the U.S.S.R. and the communist blocs, pro-segregationists insisted that there had existed “racial harmony” in the U.S. and rejected communist attacks on American race relations as “conspiracy against the people of the United States,” according to Leander Perez, a district attorney from New Orleans (Senate 1957: 622). He went on to say that “the purpose of these [civil rights] bills would serve the Communist cause to bring about turmoil and strife and national disunity in this country and to weaken the national defense” (*Ibid.*: 622). Also Strom Thurmond, a U.S. Senator from South Carolina, testified before Congressional hearing as follows;

Propagandists have tried to sell the American people on the idea that the defeat of these bills would provide Russia with new arguments against us. That is not a valid reason in fear of the bills. If we permit Russia to control our domestic policy by deferring to what she might say about us, then we shall have bowed to the dictates of communism. Instead of considering what Russia might say, we should be concerned with the mandate given to the Congress by the people of the United States in ordaining the Constitution as the basic law of the land. (Senate 1957: 677)

On the other hand, both the U.S. government and civil rights activists were aware that Soviet anti-American propaganda was effectively threatening the “legitimacy” of American democracy and damaging the international status of the U.S. In 1948, Randolph warned of communist propaganda by saying “... the policy of segregation in the armed forces and in other avenues of our life is the

greatest single propaganda and political weapon in the hands of Russia and international communism today” (Senate 1948: 690). After World War II was over, as shown above, civil rights organizations started to take advantage of the dilemma of the U.S., to expose American racism to the international community and to agitate colored peoples for global solidarity throughout the world. In this point, the non-violence civil disobedience of the bus boycott in Montgomery worked very effectively to show how the U.S. treated African Americans. After Dr. King was arrested for his leadership role in the bus boycott on February 21, 1956, “the photograph of him with a numbered plaque hanging from his neck captured national and international attention. Statements in support of the boycott, as well as cash contribution, poured in from all over the world” (Sitkoff 1981: 49).

In the global trend of anti-racism and anti-colonialism, American people also felt strong pressure and noticed the “legitimacy crisis” of American democracy. “A Harris Poll [in 1963] reported that seventy-eight percent of white Americans surveyed thought that race discrimination in the United States harmed the nation abroad. Twenty-three percent of respondents volunteered that the primary reason discrimination harmed the United States abroad was that it gave the communists a valuable propaganda weapon” (Dudziak 2000: 187).

U.S. political leaders were also keenly aware of the global pressure for the abolishment of racial discrimination in the U.S. For example, Truman said that depriving people of basic rights was “an invitation to communism,” an invitation that could be withdrawn simply ending the deprivation (Polenberg 1980: 109). Reactionary Dean Acheson, then the Undersecretary of State in 1946, also seemed to be anxious about communist anti-American propaganda; “The existence of discrimination against minority groups in this country has an adverse effect on our relations with other countries” (*Ibid*: 108). Herbert Brownell, President Eisenhower’s pro-civil rights Attorney General, stated that “segregation in the nation’s capital had been a major subject of anti-American propaganda in the Kremlin” (Layton 2000: 17). President Eisenhower and President Kennedy were also keenly conscious of anti-American propaganda when their administrations intervened in racial violence in the South, such as the Little Rock crisis of 1957 and Connor’s brutal suppression of the desegregation movement in Birmingham in 1963 (Honda 2005: 169–171, 173–177).

In the global trend toward anti-racism and anti-colonialism described above, American people, politicians, and presidents felt threatened by communist anti-American propaganda. The testimony at a Congressional hearing by W. Dawson, a pro-civil rights representative from Illinois, is helpful to understand the global and domestic contexts of the 1950s surrounding the U.S.:

Every incident of racial violence, school closing, segregation, and other types of discrimination against colored people, is headlined in the newspapers throughout the world. How can these countries, especially those with substantial colored

populations, give credence to our ideals of democracy and freedom when they read those headline? If we are to maintain our international prestige and hold our allies fast to us, we must hasten our efforts to clean out the racial discriminations that besmirch our country. (U.S. House of Representatives 1959, 176)

Civil rights activists understood the global context in which the U.S. found itself and tried to exploit the international and domestic pressure on the U.S. government that resulted from the combination of several global factors described above. They then succeeded in mobilizing both white and black support by advocating for the realization of democratic ideals, not appealing to racial parochial interests that would have alienated white sympathizers for the civil rights movement. After World War II, domestic and international pressures for racial equality and federal interventionist civil rights policies worked together to promote democracy for all, and then American race relations started to change drastically around the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion: The U.S. was Dependent on the International Community

This study shows that the U.S. had no alternative but to take action on the racial problem within its borders, particularly within the historical context of the 1950s and 1960s; this action was spurred by the U.S. defeat of Nazism in World War II, the establishment of the United Nations, the expansion of anti-racism and anti-colonial movement in Third World nations, and communist anti-American propaganda. The postwar global context demanded that the U.S. government solve the racial problem quickly. For the national interests and diplomatic strategies during the Cold War, the U.S. struggled hard to guard the newly independent countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America from the increasing influence of communist ideology by proving the legitimacy of American democracy to the international community (Layton 2000: 151; Dudziak 2000: 253).

In the particular historical context of the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans were strongly encouraged to advocate for freedom, equality, and participation for all U.S. citizens, even at the risk of their own lives. Attracting national and international attention, the civil rights movement gained impetus and exploited the domestic and global pressure on the federal government for its prompt and strong action. Despite furious resistance by the Southern states' governments, Dixiecrats, and white racists, the particular domestic and global contexts surrounding the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s left the federal government and Congress no alternative but to do their best for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Not necessarily for the moral cause of racial justice, but rather for its political strategic motivation to win international credit for American democracy and to reconstruct the democratic order in the U.S., the federal government tried to do its

best to prove its serious commitment to solve American racism. Otherwise, the U.S. would have been isolated from the international community and found it more difficult to induce cooperation from other countries that were indispensable to achieve its ambitious goals and to expand American hegemony worldwide. The federal government and political leaders were keenly aware that the national interests of the superpower paradoxically depended on cooperation of other countries, including small nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That might sound strange because the U.S. was (and has been) the most powerful country on earth, but the U.S. could not afford to ignore the international community when attempting to expand its influence worldwide in direct competition with Soviet communism.

Forty years have already passed since then, but the paradoxical relationship between the U.S. and the international community remains. Even though the U.S. has often taken unilateral policies for its national interests, it is always careful not to damage the international image of American democracy and is trying to be responsive to the voices of the international community. We should not be optimistic, but our watchful eyes are not meaningless in keeping the juggernaut America under some control.

Notes

1. David Held points out that “leading perspectives on social and political change have assumed that the origins of societal transformation are to be found largely in processes internal to society” (1996: 336) and Alexander DeConde claims in a similar way that some studies “draw a firm line between domestic and international politics” (1992: p. x). K. Honda also criticizes Robert Dahl’s theory of polyarchy because he takes into account only domestic factors such as political competition and strategy for influence among several political actors (Honda 2005).
2. Keith Faulks defines “political sociology” as follows: “Political sociology is the study of the interdependent power relationship between the state and civil society” (2000: 2). Also see Otto Stammer (1965: 19–20).
3. See Honda (2005: 260–268).
4. While white countries tried to expand their territories in Africa and Asia for economic and political motivations, they justified colonization and slavery by referring to their moral responsibilities or Christian missions as “heaven-sent rulers of yellow, brown, and black people” (Du Bois 1946: 17). Also they claimed that white countries should colonize colored peoples and contribute to the development of their economy and civilization. As Du Bois explained their justification, white countries claimed that “the leaders of world civilization must control and guide the backward peoples for the good of all” (Du Bois 1945: 25). Whether in religious terms or in economic explanation, colonization was thought of as “White Man’s Burden” and “manifest destiny” (Du Bois 1946: 17; Du Bois 1945: 25), and was justified as beneficial for the colored peoples.
5. “U.S. Senate expressed fears that a racial equality clause is the League of Nations Covenant might seriously threaten domestic jurisdiction within the United States” (Layton 2000:

173).

6. Attorney General Joe T. Patterson from Mississippi testified before a Congressional hearing; “Speaking for the State of Mississippi and its fine people, the record wholly fails to show where the people of Mississippi have ignored the civil rights of the Negro race, which up until only a few years ago constituted 50 percent of its population, and in some particular localities the Negro population exceeded the white population as high as 10 to 1. A spirit of understanding and good will has existed between the white and colored races in the State of Mississippi for more than 100 years, and each race has prospered and gone forward side by side in an atmosphere of sympathy, understanding and good will” (The Senate 1956: 229).

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