

IN DEFENSE OF EMPIRE: A CASE STUDY OF THE STATE  
DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE "WE CHARGE GENOCIDE" PETITION TO  
THE UNITED NATIONS (1951)<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

On December 17, 1951, William Lorenzo Patterson of the Civil Rights Congress presented the “We Charge Genocide” petition to the newly formed United Nations. In this petition, he asserted the U.N. must address racial violence against African Americans in the United States because it constituted genocide. More specifically, he argued U.S. Empire caused racial genocide in the U.S. and abroad and therefore, constituted a threat to international security that fell under the legal jurisdiction of the U.N. In this article, I examine how the U.S. State Department defended itself against these claims. More specifically, I examine how the U.S. State Department employed intersecting analytic bifurcations to occlude the role U.S. imperialism plays in producing genocide.

*Keywords:* Intersecting analytic bifurcations, U.S. Empire, Genocide

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 1951, a Civil Rights activist and prosecutor named William Patterson presented the “We Charge Genocide” petition drafted by the Civil Rights Congress to the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the “We Charge Genocide” petition he asserted the United States government was complicit in committing genocide against African Americans. Fearing this petition would threaten the national sovereignty of the United States, the U.S. State Department launched a global “Campaign for Truth” against the petition and other similar “soviet propaganda” (Dudziak, 2000). This campaign included multimedia propaganda, which depicted capitalism as an antidote to racial inequality. This propaganda was intentionally distributed to recently decolonized countries that were seen by the U.S. State Department as vulnerable to Soviet propaganda. It also included an initiative between Secretary of State, Dean Acheson and U.S. representatives to the U.N., Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter White, and Tobias Channing to reframe how the newly formed U.N. conceptualized the causes of genocide.

In the “We Charge Genocide” petition, William Lorenzo Patterson used the U.N. genocide convention to charge the U.S. government of genocide against African Americans. The genocide convention stated racial violence constituted genocide if it was systematic. Patterson asserted racial violence against African Americans was systematic because it was caused by economic and political mechanisms integral to U.S. Empire. He warned the U.S. government’s use of violence against African Americans was caused by the same mechanisms that caused war abroad. More specifically, he asserted the U.S. government used racial violence to maintain a colonial division of labor both at home and abroad. He concluded because genocide against African Americans was a threat to global

security, the U.N. had the right to overturn the domestic jurisdiction clause and sanction the U.S. government for racial violence against African Americans.

As a case study of the State Department's response, I conduct discourse analysis on correspondence between Eleanor Roosevelt and the State Department, statements made by State Department appointees to the U.N., materials added to the "Campaign for Truth", and correspondence between William Lorenzo Patterson and Eleanor Roosevelt. I find the U.S. State Department used two sets of analytic bifurcations to defend itself against the claims made in the petition. More specifically, they employed a spatial bifurcation between the national and global scales, and a mechanical bifurcation between the causes of racial inequality and class inequality to occlude the role U.S. Empire played in producing genocide. I ask how did the U.S. State Department intersectionally use these bifurcations to reconcile U.S. Empire with the genocide convention?

#### LITERATURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL BIFURCATIONS IN THE AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Historians note that during the Cold War, in the American social sciences "race" went from something understood as rooted in U.S. Imperialism, to a "national", or "provincial" form of inequality caused by national laws (Von Eschen, 1997). The State Department repressed "radical" "communist" scholarship that employed an analysis of how U.S. Empire produces racial inequality in the U.S. More specifically, they withdrew passports from scholars, like William Lorenzo Patterson and W.E.B. Du Bois who presented arguments about how U.S. imperialism produces racial inequality to the United Nations. Conversely, the State Department promoted scholars that separated their analysis of racial inequality in the U.S. from understanding of Empire. They also made Civil Rights activists that wanted to represent the U.S. at the U.N. take an oath of loyalty

to the U.S. government against communism (Anderson, 2003; Dudziak, 2000; Horne, 2013; Singh, 2004).

Likewise, during the Cold War, the U.S. State Department propagated understandings of U.S. domestic policy that bracketed analysis of it from analysis of U.S. foreign policy. More specifically, they engaged in an aggressive “Campaign of Truth” passed through Congress in 1948 and waged until 1952 that divorced understandings of U.S. racial inequality from understandings of U.S. international relations. This Campaign involved an aggressive global propaganda effort in recently decolonized countries to disconnect analysis of the U.S.’s promotion of capitalism abroad from the promotion of racial inequality along the global color line. Following the presentation of the “We Charge Genocide” petition, the State Department added “Kit 5” to the campaign, which propagated the theory that capitalism promoted racial equality globally (Von Eschen, 1997).

The oppression of theorists, like William Patterson and W.E.B. Du Bois who theorized about the relationship between global imperialism and the production of U.S. racial inequality, produces a problematic bifurcation between the national and global scales in American social thought (Jung, 2015; Go, 2017). As Julian Go discusses in *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, American social thought has long concerned itself with capitalism; but it has been less engaged with matters of Empire. This has affected sociology’s analytic categories: “...analytic categories like the ‘division of labor’ pervade our sociological texts, but not the colonial division of labor...” (Go, 2017, p.17). Racial inequality in the United States, particularly the on-going subjugation of African Americans, is not seen as a part of the colonial division of labor, nor is it seen as

produced in and through U.S. Empire. Rather, social scientists tend to focus on national discourse, such as national policies, laws or attitudes, as the cause of U.S. racial inequality. While this discourse is important, it is not separate from U.S. imperialism (Go & Lawson, 2017, p. 4). The U.S.'s domestic laws and policies towards immigrants, and racial minorities have always been produced in and through U.S. imperial discourse (King, 2019; Molina, 2014; Pascoe, 2009).

There is also a prominent bifurcation in the typology of theories of race in the American sociology of race, which separates “class based” theories of race from other theories of race. “Class-based” theories are depicted as taking capitalism as the root structure of racial inequality. These theories are contrasted to theories that take “race” more seriously and strive to develop a structural theory of race beyond just discussing it as a baseless ideology, secondary to class (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994). While this is a valid criticism, it is based on a narrow subset of theorists defined in Eurocentric terms. It does not include scholars in the first wave of postcolonial thought, like CLR James, W.E.B. Du Bois and Amilcar Calbral, or Civil Rights activists, like William Patterson and Paul Robeson that also looked at the relationship between capitalism and the production of racial inequality (Kelley, 2002; Magubane, 2017; Morris, 2012). However, these theorists *did not* reduce race to class, but rather structurally wed the production of “race” to imperialism, which they saw as an integral and ongoing part of capitalism.

This occlusion of Empire leads to issues with the reification of race in American social thought (Fields, 2014; McKee, 1993; Reed and Chowkwanyun, 2012; Steinberg, 2007). In presenting “class” and “race” based theories of racial inequality as alternative

modes of understanding racial inequality, the global capitalist structure is presented as purely a class structure, separate from racial imperialism. The idea of “Race” is left standing outside the socio-historical mechanisms within imperialism, which produce it. In this occlusion race becomes a substance in and of itself that can be used to explain why racial inequality exists. It follows that policies *based on* “race” are passed, which produce racial inequality. However, as Barbara Fields, notes “race” no more explains why African Americans were set a part for separate treatment in the United States than the “Civil War” explains why Americans fought each other between 1861 and 1863 (Fields, 1990, p.162). It is the name given to a set of imperial historical processes and mechanisms that need to be examined, but it isn’t a substance in and of itself that scholars can take as a given.

This treatment of “race” as a substance short-circuits what should be a broader analysis of what global-historical processes produce and reproduce the idea of “race” to begin with. In reviews of “class based” theories, scholars critique “class based” theories for giving a structural basis to their analysis of class inequality, but not to racial inequality. However, these reviews don’t contain insights by first wave post-colonial theorists or Black Marxists who conceived of “race” as a category formed within a structure: capitalist-imperialism (Kelley, 2002; Robinson,1983). Many Black Marxists conceived of “race” as developing within imperial structures even before the advent of capitalism. In Black Marxism, Cedric Robinson argues the development of world capitalism was influenced in a very particular way by racial ideologies. This could only be true if racism “anticipated” capitalism. He then shows how Empires within feudalism employed conceptions of “race” in their defense of Empire. Here imperialism, although

later integral to capitalism, is given primacy over capitalism in the production of “race” (Robinson, 1983, p. 9). Race, in fact, is not treated as secondary to class.

I suggest the bifurcation of the national and global scales and of the causes of racial and class inequality are analytically integral to one another. Scholars note the bifurcation of the national and global scales obscures Empire; likewise, they note bifurcating analysis of the production of racial inequality from class inequality obscures Empire. I explore how *both these* bifurcations work intersectionally to obscure Empire. More specifically, I explore how they were both employed to counter the claim made in the “We Charge Genocide” petition that U.S. imperialism causes genocide.

#### “THE WE CHARGE GENOCIDE” PETITION (1951)

On December 9, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. Twenty nation-states, including the United States ratified the Convention on January 14, 1951. By the end of the same year, the Civil Rights Congress, a New York based Civil Rights organization, charged the U.S. government of genocide against African Americans. The bulk of the Civil Rights Congress’s 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 between 1945 and 1951. The document not only charged the U.S. government of creating political conditions, which allowed law enforcement and the KKK to murder African Americans. It also highlighted how the U.S. created economic conditions that were genocidal for African Americans because they lowered the life expectancy of African Americans, and increased maternal and infant mortality rates in the African American community (Dudziak, 2000)



In the introduction of the petition, Patterson states, “We shall prove that the object of this genocide as of all genocide, is the perpetuation of economic and political power by the few through the destruction of political protest by the many” (5). Patterson proceeds to outline the ways Empires use genocidal practices to maintain their power at a global level. He gives the example of Germany,

This domestic genocide...was the foundation of predatory war and the prelude to the larger genocide that followed against the nationals of other countries, a genocide seeking the political and economic control of Europe, if not the world... (p. 31)

Germany’s genocide against Jewish people started domestically, but spread as Germany sought to extend its Empire throughout Europe.

Patterson concluded there was no way genocidal practices could be addressed domestically. He claimed the United States’ genocide against African Americans was the precursor to the spread of genocidal practices along the global color line. Like Germany, U.S. Empire was predicated on racial genocide, and as it expanded it would spread genocidal practices to other parts of the world,

Jellied gasoline in Korea and the lynchers’ faggot at home are connected in more ways than that both result in death by fire. The lyncher and the atom bomber are related. The first cannot murder unpunished and unrebuked without so encouraging the latter that the peace of the world and the lives of millions are endangered. Nor is this metaphysics. The tie binding both is economic profit and political control (p. 7).

The petition asserted the United States’ was practicing genocidal practices in the Korean War to expand its Empire relative to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, The U.S. was already practicing in these genocidal practices because it used these practices to build its own nation-state.

Patterson argued the U.S. government had engaged in genocidal practices with African Americans for centuries, to maintain its Empire globally. More specifically, it had relied on a colonial division of labor at home to build itself as a global power, and then extended this colonial division of labor in the development of its overseas Empire. It also exploited the colonial division of labor set up by other Empires, and set to maintain that colonial division of labor in the post World War II context to maintain profits:

This huge sum of four billions of dollars in super-profits is, then, the substantial motive for conspiracy to commit genocide against the Negro people. Added to the seven and a half billion dollars of booty from abroad, this sum brings the total of American imperialist super profits from the labor of oppressed peoples to eleven and half billions of dollars per year. The first step in breaking the grip of American imperialism abroad, is forcing it to release from bondage the American Negro people at home (p. 137).

He theorized racial genocide against African Americans in the United States, was integral to the genocidal practices it practiced abroad. Therefore, any effective strategy to address genocide in the U.N. also had to address racial genocide within the United States.

The petition claimed the United States was complicit in ongoing genocidal practices against African Americans because it wanted to maintain the division of labor it needed to produce rapid profits for American corporations.

As American monopoly grows in strength, reaching out for control of the world, the exploitation of the Negro people in the United States grows in scope and severity. Thus, in 1947 the median wage or salary income of white wage earners was \$1, 980 of non-white wage earners \$863, or 43.6 per cent as much, according to the United States Department of Commerce. In 1949, according to the United States Bureau reports, while 16,800,000 Americans in 4,700,000 families had an income of less than \$1,000 a year, the income of white families was two times greater than that of Negroes (p. 136)

This surplus value predicated upon genocidal practices against African Americans gave American corporations the power to expand globally. Furthermore, as these American

corporations extended their power globally the genocidal practices they practiced against African Americans would be inflicted on populations abroad.

He argued the racial division of labor the U.S. employed to grow American corporations profits, was in fact a colonial division of labor. It not only included worker exploitation, in paying poor wages, it included dispossession from the land based on racial ideologies. He stated,

Most sharecroppers work from dawn- to dark for a living, which verges on starvation. Often these black Americans are not even able to quit or move not only because of lack of money but because of ancient debtors' laws which make it a crime to move while owing money...Much of the law of those states in the Black Belt, moreover, is directed towards guaranteeing an American peasantry without political or human rights... (p. 23)

The division of labor used in the U.S. sharecropping system, which helped produce the power of today's American corporations was a colonial division of labor. It wasn't just exploitive in the sense of paying poor wages, it actually included continued dispossession of African Americans from the land.

The profits this dispossession produced helped U.S. corporations gain the power they needed to expand abroad, which necessitated imperial expansion by the U.S. state.

This expansion incited more War with Mexico:

The genocide that was American slavery, the killing of part of the group so that the remainder could be more readily exploited for profit, resulted in two wars. The first was the aggression against Mexico in 1846 seeking more territory for the expansion of slavery (p. 24).

Therefore, the U.N. should be concerned about racial genocide against African Americans because it was integral to U.S. imperial expansion and U.S. imperial expansion led to genocidal practices in other countries.

In summary, the petition asserted racial genocide in the United States was perpetuated by the U.S. government as a method to maintain a colonial division of labor within the U.S. He argued this colonial division of labor within the U.S. was integral to the colonial division of labor globally, which was integral to the maintenance of capitalism. Finally, he claimed the U.S.'s imperial promotion of capitalism, would cause more genocide because capitalism is predicated on genocidal practices along the global color line.

From this line of reasoning, William Lorenzo Patterson concluded the United Nations had the right to overturn the U.S.'s claim to national sovereignty in addressing matters of racial inequality towards African Americans. He asserted genocide against African Americans was systematic and a threat to global security. In particular, he concluded, genocide against African Americans was a threat to the mission of the United Nations to prevent future imperial wars.

In this claim, the petition blurred the lines between national and global and race and class. It showed how racial violence in the U.S. was connected to the expansion of U.S. Empire. Conversely, it also showed how the Expansion of U.S. Empire also strengthened racial violence within the nation's borders. Likewise, the petition asserted the U.S.'s promotion of capitalism globally was an imperial project. Therefore, it would not just produce a general unraced form of class inequality; it would specifically increase class inequality and violence along the global color line.

#### U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT RESPONSE TO THE "WE CHARGE GENOCIDE" PETITION

In November 1951, the U.S. State Department took pre-emptive action against the "We Charge Genocide" petition. They requested the Executive Secretary

of the NAACP, Walter White, read and respond to the petition before it was submitted to the U.N. General Assembly. Likewise, U.S. representatives to the U.N., Eleanor Roosevelt, and Channing Tobias also responded to the petition. In all of their responses, the production of racial inequality within the U.S. was divorced from the global imperial context. More specifically, they argued the U.S. government promoted a form of capitalism that was separate from imperialism. Therefore, understandings of the production of racial inequality could be understood as a national issue related to domestic insurance of civil rights, rather than a global issue connected to capitalist-imperialism and class inequality along the color line.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951, NAACP administrator, Roy Wilkins wrote to members of the NAACP Committee on Administration. In this letter, he notified the administration that the State Department requested Walter White write a statement on the “We Charge Genocide” petition. The State Department wished to release this statement in Paris prior to the submission of the genocide petition to the General Assembly of the United Nations (LOC, ID No. MSS34140, Box II A636, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951).

In Walter White’s response, he presented two broad critiques of the “We Charge Genocide” petition (LOC, ID No. MSS34140, Box II A636, November 1951). First, he argued the petition did not show the domestic progress the U.S. had made in addressing racial inequality. He asserted there was a “brighter side of the phenomenal gains in civil rights during the past ten years” in the United States (1). The one example he gave of this progress was the U.S. Supreme Court “abolished disenfranchisement” by means of the grandfather-clauses (2). Likewise, he critiqued

the petition for not mentioning that U.S. racial inequality could be addressed through the promotion of national civil rights legislation. He noted racial inequality was already addressed through Civil Rights organizations, like the NAACP. These organizations were able to promote African Americans' rights because the U.S. guaranteed its citizens' civil rights. More specifically, because Americans had the Constitutional right to freedom of speech and association, the NAACP was able to form and openly protest racial inequality in the U.S. Therefore, racial inequality in the U.S. could be addressed through recourse to national institutions because African Americans were guaranteed civil rights through national institutions (ibid).

In putting the emphasis on the national context, Walter White obscured the ways in which racial violence against African Americans was integral to U.S. Empire. Rather, it became a matter of African Americans acquiring legal rights within the national political framework given by the U.S. Constitution. He framed it as a national issue that had to do with securing legal rights, not a global issue tied to the maintenance of a colonial division of labor.

The State Department also employed Channing Tobias of the Phelps Stokes Fund to represent the U.S. at the U.N. General Assembly. More specifically, the State Department brought in Channing Tobias to counter claims made in the "We Charge Genocide" petition that the U.S. sought to undermine recently decolonized countries right to self-determination through the expansion of its own Empire. Channing Tobias argued this claim was false because the United States government promoted the right to self-determination in its own colonies. He stated,

In the case of territories for which my Government is responsible, the records of the Special Committee will show that very great strides have been

taken in the direction of self-government. One of the most populous of these territories is Puerto Rico, whose people are not engaged in drawing up their own constitution under a Governor who was elected by the people... (YMCA, Box 5, Folder 42, November 21, 1951)

He highlighted how the U.S. government promoted Puerto Rico's right to self-determination by allowing them to create their own Constitution. Furthermore, the U.S. government allowed the people to elect their own Governor through a democratic process. Therefore, the U.S. promoted their self-determination through promoting their Civil rights.

Furthermore, he broadened the definition of the right to self-determination to make it more compatible with U.S. Empire. He argued that if some countries were still not independent, this was because they had decided they wanted to remain dependent. In doing so they were exercising their right to self-determination:

And when I say that these peoples should be free to choose, I mean that they should be able freely to decide they nature of the relationship, which they wish to maintain with any other country. History has shown that this relationship has sometimes taken the form of independence. In other cases it has taken the form of some kind of association with the mother country... (ibid)

Therefore, in supporting certain countries still remaining part of Empires, the U.S. was actually supporting self-determination, because self-determination meant freedom of choice, not independence. Within this line of reasoning, trying to force a country to be independent from an Empire was imperial because it challenged these countries right to freedom of choice.

In his defense of U.S. Empire against the claim that it was undermining countries' right to self-determination, Channing Tobias severed the national act of self-determination from the imperial context. He implied the act of self

determination occurred in vacuum outside of the country's relationship to an Empire, or the unequal power dynamics of that relationship. Countries could simply decide to be independent outside of the power dynamics of imperialism.

Likewise, he reframed discussions of self-determination to focus on civil, rather than economic or social rights. He noted the U.S. government promoted other countries right to democratic governance and therefore, helped them secure an institution that would secure their civil rights. Therefore, you could not argue the U.S. was an imperial power that threatened a country's national sovereignty because the U.S. promoted their civil rights through their national institutions. His discussion, of course, occluded that countries can not be fully sovereign if they are economically dependent on an imperial power and cannot secure their own citizens economic or social rights within that structural arrangement.

The same month Channing Tobias issued this statement to the U.N., Eleanor Roosevelt also made a speech to the U.N. General Assembly. She asserted, "It is not the objective of the United States to dominate any country in the world, or to make any country adopt her special type of democracy or economy." In this statement, Eleanor Roosevelt directly countered the argument made in the "We Charge Genocide" petition that the U.S. sought to extend its economic interests through imperial expansion that would increase exploitation of human beings along the global color line. She went on to state, "As far as the United States is concerned, the reason for building military strength at present lies in the hope that there will come a day when much of the strength will be transferred to the United Nations..." (NA, ERP Part II, Box 1420, December 12, 1951). In this statement, Eleanor Roosevelt



attempted to reconcile the development of the U.S.'s military capacity with the promotion of disarmament by the U.N. She did so by bifurcating an analysis of the U.S.'s actions from an understanding of U.S. imperialism. She argued the U.S.'s promotion of its own military capacity had nothing to do with the country's desire to expand its Empire. Rather, the U.S. was increasing its military capacity to promote human rights. It intended to turn over its military capacity to the U.N. In doing so it would give the U.N. the needed force, to promote civil rights through spreading democracy globally.

After the "We Charge Genocide" petition was presented to the U.N. General Assembly, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote to President Truman about her concerns about the petition. She asserted that it hurt the U.S. "in so many little ways" and that although the petition had very little effect in the United Nations, its presentation within the U.N. "will carry a great deal of weight with our American Negroes." She also argued the petition hurt the U.S.'s global reputation. It made other nations worried about the rise of the United States as a global power. She stated, "We need something to prove to our allies that we are not planning war when we have attained equal strength with the Russians." Furthermore, she noted that the petition made formerly colonized nations more suspicious of the U.S.'s global influence. She noted that these nations, particularly within "the Arab world" already viewed the U.S.'s vote on setting up U.S. military bases in Morocco with suspicion. It made them believe "...we were really just like any other colonial power, and that when we needed bases, the bases mattered and not the conditions of the people of the country." She noted the petition reinforced "under-developed countries" suspicion

of the U.S. acting unilaterally. She noted these countries wanted to work through the U.N. because “...in the United Nations they have equal vote with any of us...” She concluded the petition’s depiction of the U.S. as a rising Empire was a “very real problem” and required “a planned response” by the U.S. State Department. (NA, ERP Part II, Box 1915, December 22, 1951).

Eleanor Roosevelt then asked Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, to expand the State Department’s efforts to combat Soviet misrepresentation of the United States. More specifically, she asked the Secretary of State to add materials that would show the U.S.’s global promotion of capitalism would promote racial equality. The U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, wrote back to Eleanor Roosevelt about a new kit the U.S. State Department added to “The Campaign of Truth” (NA, ERP, Box 1519, February 12, 1952). This kit contained materials about the gains of black Americans within the capitalist system.

Kit 5 was explicitly distributed within formerly colonized countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America. The U.S. government worried these countries were susceptible to communist conversion in the post-colonial context. They launched the “Campaign of Truth” with the explicit purpose “to reach people in critical areas of the world” that were susceptible to “the Soviet-inspired hate America offensive” (Sixth Semiannual Report of the Secretary of State to Congress on the International and Educational Exchange Program, p. 1). Furthermore, in this report, the U.S. Secretary of State, noted in a section he entitled “Truth takes the Offensive” that the United States government had to actively shape knowledge of U.S. racial inequality to counter Soviet imperialism (ibid).

Dean Acheson assured her that a “sizeable package of background materials has been sent to eighty five of our overseas missions.” He noted a large number of films, which had been prepared by the State Department’s information program were included. These programs “stressed numerous situations in which the Negro may be portrayed in warm and informal relations as a customary part of American life” (NA, ERP, Box 1519, February 12, 1952).

The materials in this kit obscured the ways in which the U.S.’s promotion of global capitalism was predicated on racial violence along the global color line. The U.S. Secretary of State argued, “The chief merit of this ‘kit’, designed for adaptation to the special needs of the various areas of the world, lies in the fact that it is the answer of American Negroes themselves to allegations made by those either ignorant of or uninterested in the true situation” (ibid). The written materials, included articles, which argued capitalism benefitted black Americans. For instance, one article was entitled “Land Reform, U.S. Style Benefits Negro”, while another stated, “White Collar workers among Negroes Increase.” The pictures included captions, which stated, “Negroes Contribute Leadership in U.S. Labor Unions”, “Interracial Public Housing in United States a Success” and “Skills of Workers of all Races Utilized by U.S. Industry” (NA, ERP, Box 1519, February 12, 1952).). These materials depicted the U.S.’s promotion of capitalism as separate from the global color line. In fact, capitalism under U.S. global leadership promoted racial equality. They presented the condition of African Americans within the United States as quite different from the condition of people colonized by European Empires. U.S. Empire

promoted a form of capitalism that just had a general division of labor, not a colonial division of labor predicted on racial violence.

Kit 5 specifically included a speech made by Edith Sampson who was the first black delegate appointed by the U.S. to the U.N. in 1951. This piece was entitled “The Negro in Maturing America” and she presented it on her Scandinavian tour in January 1952. The Kit also included a piece entitled “Communism versus the Negro” written by an African American social scientist that worked at the *Institute of Social Order* at the University of St. Louis. Edith Sampson was in contact with Eleanor Roosevelt and asked her to pass on her speech to the Secretary of State for broader distribution to the United States’ overseas missions. In this speech, she stated, that the communists were trying to create the impression “that Negroes in America are subject to wholesale terror; that they are beaten down and exploited by ruthless capitalists.” She refuted the theory that racial inequality in the U.S. was caused by U.S. imperialism. Rather, she asserted that racial brutality in the U.S. was “a result of the wild thrusts of a small group of pathological people.” Furthermore, she noted that it was through American means like legislative reform and education that African Americans would achieve equality: “The youth of American is finished with the old prejudices and discrimination...America is coming of age. In its maturity it will bring the strength of its people from every nation and every race to the common cause of universal peace...” (NA, ERP, Box 1940, January 1952).

Professor William Nolan echoed this sentiment in his piece entitled “Communism verses the Negro”, which was distributed by the U.S. State Department to eighty-five of its overseas missions. In this piece, he stated, “Negroes are

Americans and their hopes are rooted in the American way...they look to the solution of their problems on American soil and through American institutions" (NA, ERP, Box 1519). Professor Nolan argued American institutions were not imperial, therefore, they could be used to fight racial violence.

This sentiment was echoed by State Department appointed U.N. representative, Channing Tobias in a speech he made to the Urban League on September 2, 1951. Citing the "more than ordinary attention" the address received, Tobias Channing sent this speech to Eleanor Roosevelt. In this speech, he asserted that racial inequality in the United States was not fundamentally a racial problem, but in fact an American problem: "Bear in mind that this is not in essence a racial problem. It is an American problem in human relationships..." (NA, ERP, Box 1648, September 17, 1952). He then outlined the way this "American problem" should be addressed, stating "It is being attacked in three ways. First by legislation on the local, state and national levels. Second by court action. And third by intelligent, cooperative effort on the part of the parties concerned." (ibid). In the first instance, he severs the issue of racial inequality from its global context. He states the issue at hand is not a global one: it is an American one. Then once affirming that it belongs to the domestic domain, or jurisdiction, he goes onto outline the solutions. The solutions are ones that don't address the ways imperial economic mechanisms produce racial inequality in the United States. They all have to do with addressing civil rights based legislation that reaches its limits in the national courts. In the use of these bifurcations the role of U.S. Empire in producing racial inequality is completely obscured.

Ultimately, these bifurcations were also institutionalized in the human rights covenants. Writing Eleanor Roosevelt, the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson wrote, “While the Department recognizes fully the general significance of economic and social rights, it has attached great importance to a Covenant limited to Civil and Political Rights” (NA, ERP, Box 1519, July 11, 1949). The outcome was that by June 1952 a human rights covenant was pushed through the Human Rights Commission by Eleanor Roosevelt that severed civil from economic rights into two separate covenants. The civil rights covenant was framed in the language of realizable rights. This belonged to the domestic realm and was the way to address racial inequality. The economic rights belonged to the global realm and had to do with class inequality. These were framed in the language aims rather than rights. Eleanor Roosevelt, stated

The rights in the latter covenant are quite different rights from the civil and political rights, which will go into a separate Covenant. They are of a character that cannot be brought into being by mere enactment and enforcement of legislation, as is the case with civil and political rights. They are described, therefore, in terms of goals and aspirations, and governments would agree to work toward these goals ‘progressively,’ within their available resources and in their own ways. (NA, ER Papers, Box 1941, June 13, 1952.)

Economic and social rights included countries’ right to self-determination, to own their own resources, to universal healthcare, and to unionize. Civil Rights included the right to freedom of speech and press, and to the vote. Within this framework you could theoretically guarantee racial equality through civil rights domestically and globally by promoting national democratic institutions, while failing, but “rhetorically” aiming, to recognize another country’s right to self

determination, or equal access to resources through universal healthcare and union rights etc within your own country.

The separation of these two types of rights served to reconcile the promotion of U.S. Empire with the U.N.'s aim to curb racial genocide promoted by Empires, like Germany. Effectively, racial genocide could be curbed through changes in national laws that promoted civil rights. There was no need to address economic rights, or the ways a colonial division of labor, undermined civil rights at a national or global level.

The U.S. State Department ultimately promoted different language for civil vs. economic rights. For economic rights they stated that nations only had to take "steps" to address racial economic inequality, but were only legally bound to guarantee civil rights. Therefore, the U.S. did not have to recognize or address its promotion of a colonial division of labor at home or abroad to promote racial equality, because racial inequality in the U.S. was separate from the colonial division of labor globally.

In January, after hearing nothing from the General Assembly, William Lorenzo Patterson wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt pleading with her to present the "We Charge Genocide" petition to the Human Rights Commission. He noted that although the U.N. General Assembly took the charge that genocide against African Americans was a threat to international peace seriously, they ignored the points made about the "fascization of the state apparatus in America" because they were supposedly of "internal character." He stated that he had not received reply from the U.N. Secretariat or any U.N. representative about presenting the petition to the human

rights commission. He heard that several members of the U.S. delegation had dismissed the petition on the grounds that the charges set forth did not constitute “genocide.” More specifically, he noted that Professor Raphael of Yale University, who formulated the Convention on Genocide adopted by the United Nations, dismissed the charges on these grounds, as well as Walter White of the NAACP (NA, ERP, Box 1925, January 14, 1952).

However, he noted that that argument never accompanied any denial of the crimes. Therefore, the crimes must be addressed in some way. He again insisted that the crimes be addressed globally. He stated, “I cannot accept the position that these matters are of concern only to the internal agencies of law and order in the United States...The record is 335 years long. These crimes are demonstrably beyond the power of forces inside the United States.” He concluded with a question to Eleanor Roosevelt that challenged the bifurcation of the study of U.S. racial inequality from the global context: “...who can argue that these irresponsible elements will confine their criminal activities to the territory of the U.S?” (ibid).

Eleanor Roosevelt never responded to this letter; however, a month later, she gave an interview to the *Associated Negro Press*. When questioned about the petition, Roosevelt stated Patterson’s was well done and “based on sound and good documentation.” However, the petition’s charge of genocide was unfounded because the United Nations defines “genocide as systematic destruction.” She argued by definition, what is occurring in the United States is not “genocide” because it is not structurally caused. On the contrary, there was nothing inherent to the economic or political structure of the United States that necessitated the promotion of racial



violence or inequality, because the U.S. government was already making progress through its own national institutions to fix racial inequality (LOC, No. MSS34140, Box II A636, February 2, 1952)

Furthermore, she noted the high death rate of African Americans in the U.S. was not caused by anything systematic, or imperial. The high mortality rate of African Americans was a result of their “ignorance” and high birth rate:

Mrs. Roosevelt said, that although Negroes have a high death rate from sickness and disease due to ignorance and underprivilege, they also have a high birth rate (ibid).

This was Eleanor Roosevelt’s response to the charge in the petition that the U.S. was creating economic and political conditions that increased the death rate of African Americans. Her response reframed the issue as a matter of ignorance. Therefore, the issue could be solved through education.

This emphasis on bifurcating the domestic from the global realm was explicitly encouraged by the State Department. In letters to Eleanor Roosevelt, Secretary of State, George Marshall, and State Department head of the U.N. commission, Durward Sandifer, asked her to employ these bifurcations. In 1948, Secretary of State, George Marshall, wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, about the U.S.’s official position on the human rights covenants. He asserted, “even though the Covenant has been advanced as the only way of getting ‘teeth’ into United Nations action, I think that its principal value may prove to be in relation to public opinion.” He went on, “Where our constitution and laws make it impossible for us to agree to an article in a Covenant, we should frankly acknowledge that. We are able to show that we are making an effort to deal with these problems through our domestic

procedures” (NA, ERP, Box 1944, May 19, 1948). George Marshall acknowledged the human rights covenants were the only thing that gave the U.N. any power to enforce human rights standards. Therefore, the covenants had to be limited to the symbolic realm. He went on to suggest there were many ways the U.S. was not living up to the proposed human rights standards. He noted this was because the U.S. can’t Constitutionally live up to those standards. He concluded with a recommendation to Eleanor Roosevelt that she should acknowledge we can’t meet those standards Constitutionally, but also suggest we can use our Constitution to meet those standards. In this statement, George Marshall encapsulates the inherent contradiction: an acknowledgement that the U.S. Constitution limits the ability of the U.S. government to recognize or enforce U.N. human rights, but also a proposal to frame the U.S. Constitution and more specifically the U.S.’s national democratic institutions as the solution to violations of human rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt was also explicitly asked by Durward Sandifer, the State Department’s head to the U.S. delegation to the U.N., to revise a speech she planned to give to the U.N. in September 1948. In a letter he wrote to her, (with the original copy of her speech and his edits attached), he asked her to revise her segment on U.S. racial inequality. In the original copy of this speech, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, “In the United States we are old enough not to claim perfection...Discrimination against minorities is caused by bigotry and frequently is the result of ignorance and illiteracy. Economic inequalities also make for discrimination...” (NA, ERP, Box 1922, September 9, 1948, p.12). In the original version, she acknowledges that economic

inequalities are connected to racial discrimination in the United States. Sandier then gave her this edit,

In the United States we are old enough not to claim perfection...Through normal democratic practices we are coming to understand our needs and how we can attain full equality for our people. Free discussion on the subject is encouraged (ibid)

In his edit, he took out the mention of economic inequality being related to the promotion of racial inequality in the United States. He then redirected the audience to the national scale and how racial inequality could be fixed through the promotion of civil rights without redress of capitalist-imperialism.

#### RECONCILING US EMPIRE WITH THE UN GENOCIDE CONVENTION

To discursively reconcile U.S. Empire with the newly formed United Nations genocide convention, the U.S. State Department made two analytical moves. First they employed a spatial bifurcation between the national and global scales. They argued racial inequality in the U.S. was a national phenomenon that *could not* be linked to the promotion of racial inequality or class inequality on a global scale. This spatial bifurcation paved the way for the U.S. State Department to employ a mechanical bifurcation. In this mechanical bifurcation, they severed the causes of racial inequality from the causes of class inequality. They argued racial inequality on a national scale was caused by a denial of civil rights, whereas class and racial inequality on a global scale had to do with an imperial history that was unrelated to the U.S. and its political and economic institutions.

These bifurcations worked intersectionally to obscure the ways U.S. Empire produces genocide. Once the State Department spatially segregated racial violence in the United States from violence on a global scale, it could conceptually sever the

structural causes. The cause of racial violence on a national scale was the denial of civil rights. More specifically, the United States had broken with the democratic principles outlined in its own Constitution, and needed to refocus on reasserting these principles to address racial inequality. Inequality on a global scale was caused by imperialism, but the U.S. was not a part of this structure. The U.S. promoted a form of capitalism that was non-imperial. The growth of capitalism under U.S. global leadership also promoted democracy, which was presented as inherently anti-imperial. Furthermore, under U.S. global leadership, racial equality would be promoted through the imposition of democracy, which would racial minorities' civil rights.

In *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. Du Bois argued there has always been a profound moral contradiction at the heart of American democracy. On the one hand, American democracy ostensibly drew its power from the consent of the governed. On the other, it was built on the practice of slavery, and incorporated racial violence and exclusion into its political tenants (Du Bois, 2017). The "We Charge Genocide" brought U.N. attention to this moral contradiction. It argued U.S. democracy could not provide the political framework for addressing racial violence, or genocide, because racial violence was integral to U.S. democracy. A colonial division of labor was integral to the U.S. state and racial violence was used to maintain this colonial division of labor. Therefore, democracy or "civil rights" guaranteed through democracy, could not resolve the causes of racial violence because "civil rights" have always been promoted alongside extreme violence and denial of other forms of human rights on a global scale. In fact, the guise of promoting civil rights and

enforcing democracy, has always been used as an imperial project by the U.S., and thus has gone hand in hand with genocide and war.

There are serious epistemological and political implications of recognizing that the U.S. Empire causes racial inequality and violence. Within this framework, racial inequality in the U.S. is linked to the U.S. Empire's maintenance of the colonial division of labor along the global color line. The global class line is intertwined with the global color line, and they are mechanically linked by U.S. imperialism. Therefore, racial inequality can't be bifurcated spatially from the global scale, and confined to the national realm. Furthermore, it can't be bifurcated from an analysis of the mechanisms that produce global class inequality.

Postcolonial scholars argue sociologists' repression and exclusion of the perspectives and theories of the colonized from analysis of social modernity have led social scientists to misunderstand the production of modernity (Bhabra, 2010, 2014; Connell, 2006, 2007; Go, 2017). Likewise, I argue the exclusion of analysis of how racial inequality in the U.S. is produced through U.S. Empire, limits understandings of how to structurally address racial inequality within the United States and abroad. This exclusion propagates the idea that racial inequality can be fully addressed within the nation-state framework. This understanding of racial inequality was intentionally propagated by the U.S. State Department during the early formation of the U.N. In this case study, it is shown that the State Department used these bifurcations to incapacitate the U.N.'s ability to challenge the sovereignty of U.S. Empire. However, even more insidiously these bifurcations discursively worked to promote the structural cause of racial genocide, U.S. imperialism, as the

solution to racial inequality. These bifurcations worked collectively to obscure the ways the U.S.'s national institutions are imperial, and then suggested increasing the power of those imperial institutions and expanding them globally was the solution to the production of racial violence along the global color line. To overcome the inherent contradiction of promoting the cause of racial genocide as the solution, scholars must actively interrogate these bifurcations. The inclusion of theorists of theorists that show the ways in which the production of class and racial inequality are structurally integrated through U.S. imperialism suggests the only way to challenge racism in the United States is to challenge U.S. imperialism. This would require the development of transnational movements, as well as transnational institutions that have the power to challenge the sovereignty of empire-states.

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