Race, International Relations, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the African Liberation Struggle

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The racial issue is becoming a central problem of international relations. Despite the prevailing disregard in international studies, the racial factor can no longer be ignored. Its impact may well revolutionize the field as we come to appreciate how racial stratification dominates the world pattern of state relationships. Unfortunately, disciplined analysis seems to lag behind events. A few prophetic analysts such as W.E.B. DuBois, Richard Wright, and Gunnar Myrdal have identified the significance of color in transnational relationships, but they have been ahead of their times. There has been, however, very little systematic attempt to relate the racial factor to the theory of international relations or to apply a consistent analysis to the problems of international racial conflict and integration (Shepherd, 1970).

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Race is treated in this study as both contributory to and a product of stratification. In that regard, race refers to a group that is socially defined on the basis of physical criteria. In cases where the phenotypical features are not similar, race is determined either by association or by choice. Racial stratification exists, then, when the range of individual choices in society are determined among other factors, primarily by one's membership in a particular racial group. In effect, racial stratification is a function of discrimination against a subordinate racial group by a dominant one. Subordinate racial groups are denied or restricted in choices available to them to maximize their group values and interests or those of their individual members. Thus, in a racially stratified system, class stratification is a function of racial stratification and the boundaries of the two are highly coterminous.

Racially stratified societies and polities may be found in various parts of the world, and the patterns of stratification may vary significantly. The presence of such factors as ideological racism, the power capability of the dominant racial group and the numerical presence of subordinate racial groups in the polity all tend to make a difference both in the nature of racial stratification and in the degree to which stratification exists.

A racist system inherently tends toward dysfunction. In such a system, race is the basis for establishing and regulating dominant and subordinate relationships between races. It acts as the signaling device which evokes and justifies racially exclusive behavior on the part of the racially dominant and the inevitable racial response of the racially subordinate. That

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is, in racist societies, race is not only the rationale for and a continuing cause of racism and racial discrimination, but it can often be the catalyst for eventual violence. In the first instance, it acts as a systemwide centripetal force drawing together all racial components under the assumed superiority of the dominant (and solely racially legitimate) racial group. In the second instance, it acts as a centrifugal force fragmenting the system along its already racially stratified lines. Race functions as a visible guide to regulatory discrimination, ultimately leading to interracial conflict.¹

The simple mention of the terms racism or racial discrimination today evokes images of conflict and violence. The reason is that, with the exception of the classic example of white supremacist South Africa, modern racism is increasingly more a cause of violent conflict than a force for maintaining a society in relative stability. But, racial discrimination functions as a force for "racial harmony," as well as for conflict. In order to understand this seeming paradox, one must first understand different kinds of interracial relations that have developed in different types of racially stratified, white-dominant systems. Second, one must be aware of the patterns of change that have emerged from these relations.

In this essay, our concern will be with patterns of race relations on the international plane. Emphasis will be given to white-dominated racist systems, inasmuch as the pattern of white domination is an internationally observable fact about many multiracial and most racist societies. The paper ends with its focus on the United States, highlighting certain interrelated ties between white racism practiced internally and through prejudices embedded in the present U.S. foreign policy toward "nonwhite" states. Both levels of practices, national and international, merit serious reconsideration at this point, given the growing political power and sophistication of black peoples as citizens of this and other sovereign countries in the world and the fact that they are tied together
by certain common bases of identification and experience—one of which is racial inequality on both these levels.

**TRANSDOMINANT AND TRANSNATIONAL SUBORDINATE GROUPINGS**

The function of race across national boundaries has been perhaps the most obvious manifestation of an intraracial emanative relationship in international relations. Since Europeans unite in a common bond of whiteness to dominate the black, brown, and yellow peoples of the world, men have joined in the bond of color across national lines to pursue racially justified (if not always racist) causes. The Pan-African Movement, formed after black African resistance had failed in curbing white intrusion into Africa, is probably the best-documented of transnational racial groupings organized to counter white dominance. Black men of different nationalities and cultures and speaking different languages joined in a common bond of color to win first humane treatment, then equality, and finally independence for their black brothers under white domination in Africa. Out of this movement grew the race-conscious philosophies of Negritude and the African Personality—philosophies of color which black men have never before felt a need to formulate.

Although political independence has been won in most of black Africa, the ties of white emanation still linger in some African states and all, to varying degrees, are tied through economic subjection to the white-dominant world. The inherent contradiction in black political independence versus continued black economic subjection to white interests, coupled with total black subordination in the name of white supremacy in South Africa, led to the creation of the Organization for African Unity, which dedicated itself to the eventual defeat of white domination of black and brown people in Africa.
Expressions of transnational black racial ties are increasingly echoed across the Atlantic. What was once a domestic Black Power-Black Nationalist Movement in the United States has become ideologically a Neo-Pan-Africanist movement dedicated to the liberation of all black people from any kind of white domination. In this regard, it is instructive that annual Black Power Conferences become international after only two were held in the United States and have now developed a world organizational base in the recently formed Congress of African Peoples which held its first annual meeting in September 1970 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The bond of color in opposition to actual or perceived white domination has crossed not only black national boundaries but also those of yellow and brown peoples. The Bandung Conference of 1955 of African and Asian peoples was the first explicitly called to unite "peoples of color" against white domination and oppression. Specifically using the argument of race, China was successful in keeping Russia out of the Bandung meeting, making it an international conference of nonwhite peoples. The policies of racial discrimination in South Africa, the West Indies, and the United Kingdom are increasingly moving East Indians and other Asians to recognize they share common bases of oppression as "nonwhites" with blacks. Similar alliances exist in the United States among American Indians, Latins, Asian-Americans and blacks, under the banner of various "third world movements." By way of their rhetoric, these groups tend to identify themselves also as members of the world revolution of the people of color.

History has provided and still provides much evidence of transnational white ties in support of white domination over nonwhite peoples. The evidence of transnational racial ties in opposition to white domination is still sketchy but increasing. But its impact has already reached South Africa and Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), where continued white domination is sustained by the principal white nations of the world. If the
pattern continues on both sides of the racial lines, the international system cannot but experience increased racial dysfunction and incoherence. States cannot secede from international intercourse, nor can whole races any longer be isolated or controlled, as under white colonialism. International racial equality will obtain or the world will be engulfed in racial war.

As far as transnational racial ties are concerned, it is instructive to note the pattern of linkage between domestic race relations and foreign policy. The suppressive and paternalistic systems are not conducive to transnational linkages between subordinate racial groups. In the former, attempts at transnational racial ties are quickly detected and suppressed (South Africa); in the latter, subordinate emanative attitudes (pre-Black Power United States) preclude the development of subordinate transnational racial identity. As a consequence, the foreign policies of these types of racist systems reflect to a higher degree the racist assumptions and interests of their dominant white groups. On the contrary, it is the open conflict-dysfunctional, incoherent stage of domestic race relations that especially invites intervention as subordinate groups seek aid for their rebellion or secession. The incipient pattern of racial pluralism encourages transnational movements that strengthen the identity and cultural accomplishments of various groups within their own societies. Illustrative of this is the American blacks' quest for their African heritage, strengthened by the reverse flow in the Pan-African Movement of ideas, historical knowledge, and revolutionary accomplishments.

RACIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Race also operates as a stratification device for the entire world system. Because the white-dominant nations of the world are the most powerful, they dominate the international
system, whose present stratification patterns are themselves a consequence of earlier white dominance. It is in terms of this analysis that Eastern Europe is joined with the white Atlantic subsystem to create a world racial pattern of white dominance.

The attitude of the white states of the world is in part a reflection of their own internal racial stratification problems. There appears to be almost a direct relationship between the severity of these internal racial problems and the defensiveness or openness of a white nation's policy toward the nonwhite world, as reflected in support for human rights conventions and international collective action to abolish discriminatory practices within and between nations (Shepherd and LeMelle, 1970).

International racial stratification can be seen in terms of international mobility and opportunity. Here poverty figures, development trends, population growth, and international migration all point to a very rigid global system of distribution. The fact that state barriers of citizenship are the determining factors of life chances should not be allowed to obscure the growing disproportion that results from this compartmentalization of humanity. Race is only one consideration, but it is important, as shown by the Australian and British white immigration policy. Race needs to be carefully examined as one of the major factors perpetuating the present inequitable distribution of opportunity in the world as a whole.

The formation of the United Nations and other world organizations has enabled the nonwhite peoples to gain greater participation and visibility within the international system. Yet even an Afro-Asian majority within the United Nations does not change the realities of international stratification in the reward system. The basic decisions regarding the world economy are still made by the white-dominant nations, as the GATT conferences and the present international monetary crisis have shown only too clearly.
The primary decisions regarding war and peace are still in the hands of these great powers, as symbolized by the Security Council and the veto power of the Euro-American powers. The only non-white vote on this council was, until recently, a farce of representation. China's hostility to the current Western domination of the United Nations, as well as of the world system, is not simply ideological. Their brand of communism contributes to this alienation, but the racial stratification pattern which places power and control in the hands of the white-dominant nations of the world is a source of suspicion, hostility, and conflict. Continuous rivalry and periodic conflict between China and the two great white powers, the Soviet Union and United States, present a major problem in how racial differences intensify this hostility.

The possibility that the world system will be transformed to a racially plural one appears remote at present. The chances are that international strife will develop along racial stratification lines. Points of primary irreconcilable conflict, such as South Africa, can become the incendiary event. Or, alternatively, racial conflict may simply add to the several points of rivalry for prestige, military advantage, and economic opportunity that bring confrontations between great powers today. No major war is to be simply a racial war. But the international stratification pattern between the races is apt to be a major contributing source of hostility in the future. Lesser racial wars are already under way in South Africa between secessionist liberationist forces and dominant white sections tied to the larger white Atlantic system.

One might speculate on the implications for probable future conflict. What will happen when the interaction between population and technological growth in the white industrialized world creates greater demands for increasingly scarce resources needed to sustain an "advanced" life style? Will these demands lead to the modes of lateral pressures that developed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe? Given their projected development and growth, the non-white
areas of the world from which many of these resources will have to come, will have begun to develop their own countervailing lateral pressures. Unless the nonwhite peoples of the world forego their own chances for a better life in order to sustain white civilization, the white industrialized world will be forced to reduce its standard of living, change its life style, or pay an increasingly higher price to sustain itself. The other alternative will be racial war. Neither is it likely that rapidly developing, low-capability countries will be satisfied with or even seek the status of “honorary white” in a white-dominant international system, as has been the case with Japan as the sole nonwhite, high-capability country. The thrust of an increasing sense of color identity around the world in opposition to white dominance suggests that nonwhite states will demand and attempt to force at least fair international competition on their own racial terms.

Thus, the present numbers game being played by some population control demographers has more serious international implications for the “developed” world if it hopes to sustain its present life style. For the nonwhite world (except perhaps India), the question of population increase relates more to quality than to quantity if it is to withstand the projected lateral pressures from the industrialized white world.

The white and honorary white “haves” and the nonwhite “have nots,” however, need not conflict racially. Any prospect, however, for altering growing racial conflict is linked to radical changes within the white dominance systems themselves. This is not easily done, as most societies have experienced. The questions of time and pace are acute. And dominant groups lack both the vision and the determination so essential to turn the disastrous possibilities into more hopeful prospects.
RACE AND THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE WHITE-DOMINANT INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

It is in the above context that one must view the role of race in U.S. foreign policy as it relates to African states as well as to other "nonwhite" states in the world. Racial stratification patterns in the international system have been so established and institutionalized by international white power that, with few exceptions, the function of the non-European peoples of the world is that of subsidizing the life styles of Europeans and supporting continued white domination of the international system at the expense of the "nonwhite." The role of the United States is to provide leadership for that portion of the white world subscribing to what is called democratic capitalism or democratic socialism in its competition with what is called communistic socialism.

In order to fulfill its role, the United States has set up an elaborate white alliance system which commits millions of people around the world to defend Euro-American interests. Beginning with NATO, which, in its full ramifications, is not a simple alliance of North Atlantic states, since peripherally it includes South Africa and has considered Brazil and Argentina, in the South Atlantic (moreover, at least sixteen African states are geographically North Atlantic states)—NATO is a white alliance system par excellence and is the hub of a white-dominated alliance system. Beginning with NATO and including SEATO (U.S., U.K., France, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan), CENTO (U.K., Greece, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan), ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, U.S.), the Rio Treaty (OAS) and the bilateral treaties of the U.S. with Japan, Korea, Taiwan—all of these are Euro-American-dominated. In Southeast Asia, we find Asians fighting Asians to protect perceived Euro-American interests. What is most interesting is that Euro-Americans have not found it necessary to form multilateral military alliances with black African states—only economic alliances such as the Common Market and Associated African States.
Could it be that such an alliance would be called upon to hold white supremacist South Africa in check militarily? Or could it be that economic domination of African-controlled states is sufficient to protect white interests on the continent? It is both, since the African commitment to nonalignment has not deterred some African states from striking bilateral military agreements with France, the United States, and African states. The fact is that Euro-Americans have become militarily involved in Africa only to protect perceived white interests.

The case of direct and indirect U.S. military involvement in support of Portuguese attempts to maintain white domination in Africa is illustrative of U.S. racial priorities in Africa. First of all, to listen to the rhetoric of U.S. State Department officials, one would conclude that the United States is not involved at all in the racial war in Africa. State Department representatives basically argue that neither through NATO nor through the bilateral military agreement with Portugal does the United States support Portuguese counterinsurgency measures against the African liberation forces. They argue that under both treaties they support Portugal in terms of Western European defense and security. And Europe is not Africa.

Their argument, of course, is based on the assumption that Portugal's military role in Europe is entirely separate from its military role in Africa. Needless to say, that assumption is false and the U.S. government knows that it is false.

(1) Portuguese openly make no distinctions between metropolitan Portugal and what they call the "overseas provinces." To the Portuguese, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau are merely extensions of Portugal on the continent of Africa, and they view their military adventures in Africa as defense of Portugal.

(2) While each territory has its own armed forces budget, supported by taxes collected locally and in Portugal itself, the expenditures from the central budget in Portugal are divided between ordinary and extraordinary defense and apply to the entire "national" territory, which includes the African continent.
(3) Of approximately 180,000 troops, only 18,000 are assigned to NATO. The rest are in Africa, and rotation of units of troops between Africa and NATO occurs regularly. A given unit usually serves a minimum of two years in Africa. Trained under the auspices of NATO, they fight in Africa.

(4) While direct U.S. military aid to other NATO countries was phased out after 1959 (ten years after the formation of NATO), it has continued regularly to Portugal (for 23 years).

(5) To go into the nuances of how much of this material is used in Africa would take us into too much detail now. There is direct and circumstantial evidence that some of not only the pre-1961 (before liberation movement) material but later arms supplied by the United States are being used against African liberation forces. In 1967, the U.S. ambassador to the UN admitted that F-86 Sabre Jets used in Africa had been removed at the request of the United States.

(6) Not only through bilateral aid, NATO and the Azores base off the coast of Africa is the United States officially and publicly supportive of Portuguese military activities in Africa, but also through U.S. guarantees for U.S. corporate business investments in the Portuguese-dominated African territories and, as some may remember, through the CIA-supported attempt to smuggle twenty B-26 bombers to Portugal: the "Operation Sparrow" affair. The whole affair was revealed only when U.S. customs officials who were not in on the plot caught up with the smugglers, and they were brought to trial in Buffalo, N.Y. The United States did not demand the return of the bombers from Portugal.4

The whole military involvement of the United States against African liberation forces can be summed up in the words of Lyman Lemnitzer, Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, when he visited Lisbon on May 8, 1963. "Portuguese soldiers, while fighting for the defense of principles, are defending land, raw materials, and bases, which are indispensable not only for the defense of Europe, but for the whole Western World." Can it be put more clearly?
Since Lemnitzer's statement, the status and leverage of Portugal have been reinforced by the transfer of NATO headquarters to Portugal and by a new signed agreement with the United States extending the former lapsed Azores agreement. The latter is significant in that the United States and Portugal had allowed it to lapse since 1961 because of a disagreement over Portuguese colonial policies in Africa. The Nixon administration, however, not only formally signed the agreement again in 1971, but included in it a substantial grant of $460 million for education and food production projects in Portugal itself. The grant helps take pressure off the domestic Portuguese economy, hard pressed by the demands of colonial wars, and releases more monies to finance the war against African liberation forces.

The case of U.S. support for Portuguese attempts to maintain a white-dominant, racially stratified system in Africa is just one example of U.S. involvement in the whole of Africa in support of white supremacist interests as against the aspirations of African peoples. It illustrates how U.S. ties with Africa reflect both the ideology of whiteness that has infected black-white relations at home and the racially discriminatory behavior that follows when racism combines with power in international relations. U.S. attitudes and behavior toward its own black citizens have been carried over into its dealings with Africa and reflect the same kind of racial biases. If the United States cannot address itself seriously to the aspirations and interests of its millions of Afro-American citizens because of institutionalized racism at home, how can one expect it to transcend that racism in its relations with the millions of black Africans for whom it has no immediate concern or responsibility?

As dictated by the ideology of whiteness, just as the well-being of Afro-Americans has received lowest priority in U.S. domestic policy, black Africa historically has been given lowest priority in U.S. international relations. Just as U.S. domestic policy has done nothing to change the stratified
position of black Americans imposed and existing since slavery, neither has U.S. foreign policy done anything to change the stratified position of black people around the world—a position of stratification imposed and maintained by international white power. On the contrary, the mystique of "kith and kin" of the ideology of whiteness has dictated just the opposite.

Historic African-U.S. relations leave little for African peoples to hope for in terms of advancing African interests. From the first contact made between Americans and Africans in the Atlantic slave trade, the relationship between black Africa and the United States has been infested by white racism. Politically independent though most African people are today, they still must function in an international system in which white racism has not only been a formative and regulative ideology but institutionalized and legitimized through international white power. Racism is a profitable business (psychologically and economically) at home and abroad. The United States, like other white-dominant, racially stratified systems, will not really stop supporting white domination in Africa (or in the United States) until that support is made less profitable and too dangerous. By that time, it may be too late.

NOTES

1. The world of Richard Schermerhorn (1970: 22-25) and his conflict analysis of dominate-subordinate group relations, along with his modification of an earlier conflict model of group relations, has influenced our thinking.

2. The concept of emanation is used in the same sense as that employed by Halpern (1969) and Deutsch (1970). In the latter is a discussion of seven characteristics of industrialization and modernization that tend to have a great impact on the breakdown of emanation and on the escalation of racial conflict.

3. An analysis of the structure of NATO reveals that the implied geographic composition of NATO is misleading. When NATO is viewed as an international subsystem, both its core and its peripheral members include states on the Mediterranean Sea, the South Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean. The last two areas
are instructive in that they include white supremacist southern Africa and exclude the many black African states that geographically form part of the North Atlantic together with the Portuguese-controlled Azores which are included in the NATO system. Thus, at least one criterion for inclusion (inversely, exclusion) in NATO is the racial criterion of "kith and kin" with the dominant white powers of Western and Central Europe—the former colonial masters of the world. NATO is thus simply an alliance system to protect the interests of the dominant white powers of Western and Central Europe whenever those interests are perceived as threatened. In Africa, the threat comes from black people striving for independence.

4. A detailed analysis of U.S. military and economic involvement in southern Africa may be found in articles included in *Africa Today* of 1967 (October), 1970 (July/August), and 1971 (October). See also the U.S. Congressional Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Africa for March, April, and May of 1966 and for February 26, 1970.

**REFERENCES**


