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Chapter 18

The Unbearable Whiteness of Grand Strategy

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The problem for grand strategy, to misquote W. E. B. Du Bois, is the problem of the color line. The field melds inquiry and application—often treating the study of how the powerful have pursued national interest as a prescription for how they *should* do so. For policy makers grand strategy is, as political scientists have noted, "a nation-state's theory for how to produce security for itself."[1] For scholars of the United States keen "to get the ear of power," grand strategy is a metanarrative of foreign relations in which individual decision makers have primacy of place and anthropomorphized states develop patterns of behavior.[2] Like most big narratives, grand strategy offers some useful fictions. Useful, because it reassures policy makers and the scholars who work with them that nation-states are what they seem, that they have enough coherence in composition and purpose to serve as historical actors. Fictive, because the world conjured up by scholars of grand strategy can get so abstracted that it bears only passing resemblance to the one in which most people live and make meaning; history's rough edges—process and complexity—get smoothed for propulsive action. Indeed, for most students and practitioners of grand strategy, the nation remains a self-evident truth; negotiations over national

[1] Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U. S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

[2] The phrase "to get the ear of power" comes from advice given by historian John Lewis Gaddis to a group of Yale graduate students to "try to get the ear of power" in the fall of 1998. For a helpful discussion of how scholars of grand strategy define the term, see Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy'," *Security Studies*, 27 (January-March 2018), 27-57.

interest remain spirited but relatively bloodless; and tracing causation involves psychologizing the actions of political elites rather than examining the culture and structures that set their horizons of possibility. Race and other forms of social difference go unremarked and their constitutive relationship to power go uninterrogated. White supremacy as political program and governing ideology is rarely, if ever, named.

Despite the field's willful self-positioning above the messy terrain of race, few things have remained more consistent across centuries of American history than state hostility to people of color.[3] More than an indictment of racism, this fact structures how power gets enacted, represented, and seen as legitimate. Inasmuch as this observation presumes that "ideational milieu[x]" do indeed structure behavior, choice, and what people conceive as possible, it makes an assertion about culture and ideology.[4] Yet, I am less concerned with extracting and asserting a strategic culture of states or state actors than I am with culture as varied (and contested) "meanings and values" expressed in "institutions and ordinary behavior."[5] Race is a "metalanguage," to use historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's formulation, "that has a powerful and all-encompassing effect on the constitution and representation of power relations." Often functioning as analogy, it "impregnates the simplest meanings we take for granted" and

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[3] On race as constitutive of American state and nation, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For an extended review of the vital and extensive scholarly literature on race, power, and transnational United States histories see Paul F. Kramer, "Shades of Sovereignty: Racialized Power, the United States and the World," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, eds. *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations, 3rd Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 245-270.

[4] Alistair Iain Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security*, 19 (Spring 1995), 46.

[5] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 61-62.

thus masks its ideological—and by extension political—work.[6] Thinking through the relationship between race, ideology, and the practice of power is an epistemological problem and one of the aims of this chapter.

The chapter explores grand strategy as an intellectual and cultural project by considering its willful unseeing of so fundamental a social cleavage as race as a political project. To ignore race is to misapprehend how power works in the United States and how domestic formulations of subjectivity, difference, and racialized power imbue American foreign relations. From the carceral state to the security state, establishing certain populations as the racialized rightless—subjected to laws but "refused the legal means" and denied "the political legitimacy and moral credibility" to contest them —can determine not just who gets "rendered…ineligible for personhood," in the words of scholar Lisa Marie Cacho, but who becomes "disentitled to life."[7] Deciding how far rights extend, and with that what forms of violence are allowable and on whom they are allowed, sets the frame for an array of other, vital decisions. Even, perhaps especially, in the realm of high policy, questions of means and ends—of what can be done and what it will mean—are inextricable from contests over who democracy encompasses and how power may be exercised. African Americans in the Civil Rights era voiced this insight in the vernacular of the black freedom struggle, consistently identifying white supremacy as constitutive not just of southern segregation but of state, economy, and society in the United States and beyond.[8]

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[6] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," Signs, 17 (Winter 1992), 252; 255.

[7] Lisa Maria Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 6, 98.

[8] See, for example, Tim Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); or Sean Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017.

To examine what work grand strategy does domestically and abroad, this chapter focuses on African Americans in the era of Cold War civil rights. But race-making, rights-making, and allocating power were never solely struggles between black and white, neither in the United States nor elsewhere. For Carl Rowan and Sam Greenlee, however, the two African-American veterans who provide concrete cases for thinking about the United States and the world, their blackness and ambitions for their people would color how they interpreted America's role in political and military struggles in the Third World and beyond. As with other people of color, their encounters with white supremacy shaped their understandings of liberation, violence, and the United States security project. Their perspectives challenge scholars' conceptions of the Cold War as a period of "defined clear national interests" and "public consensus." Centering the stories of Rowan and Greenlee highlights not simply ongoing contestation over the myth and history of the Cold War, but, more fundamentally, the unthinking whiteness of grand strategy itself.[9]

Carl Rowan's American Dilemma

"Race is the key to history," black journalist and diplomat Carl Rowan asserted in *Ebony* magazine in late summer 1965.[10] Writing in the magazine's special issue on "The White Problem in America," Rowan was echoing an assertion that Great Britain's prime minister Benjamin Disraeli had made in his autobiographical novel *Endymion* some 85 years earlier. For Disraeli, an aggressive proponent of British empire in the previous century, race mattered. No statesman

[9] Jeremy Suri, "America's Grand Strategy from Cold War's End to 9/11," *Orbis* vol. 53, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 613.
[10] Carl T. Rowan, "No 'Whitewash' for U. S. Abroad," *Ebony*, 20 (August 1965), 56.

should remain "insensible" to it, he wrote in his novel, "whether you encounter its influence in communities or in individuals."[11]

Disraeli spoke of European races such as "the Teutons, the Sclaves, and the Celts" and more alien "Semites," "Arabs," and "Tatars" at a moment when imperial encounters were changing what European and American thinkers understood race to be.[12] In Victorian Britain, closer embrace of their settler colonies—"white men's countries," as two historians would later label them—coupled with the contests borne of new administrative and territorial claims in Asia and Africa would serve to dampen Britons' emphasis on racial difference between Europeans.[13] In the Gilded Age United States, similar struggles over how to classify, incorporate, or control foreign peoples at home and abroad would link up with bitter, often deadly, contests over African Americans' place and prospects. As old-stock white Americans sorted out what to do with the Slavs, Semites, Arabs, and others in their midst, whiteness would emerge as the definitive racial category.[14] By 1906, when W. E. B. Du Bois observed that "the color line belts the world," the projects of race- and empire-making would be intricately bound.[15]

By the time Carl Rowan appropriated Disraeli's words eight decades on, the landscape had changed. The "rising tide of color" about whom white supremacist scholars had been sounding the alarm since the First World War had become a mighty force by the Second. Although racial identity largely hardened during these civil rights years—nothing tempers

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[11] The Right Honorable Earl of Beaconsfield, K.G., *Endymion*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 252.

[12] Disraeli, *Endymion*, 253.

[13] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[14] See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, and Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010).

[15] W. E. B. DuBois, "The Color Line Belts the World," *Collier's Weekly*, October 20, 1906, reproduced in David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois, A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 42.

whiteness better, after all, than the forge of massive resistance—racial hierarchy stood on trembling earth. Writing in this age of anti-colonial struggle abroad and at home, Rowan argued that the United States could "scarcely afford for a moment to 'treat with indifference the principle of race'." A former United States ambassador to Finland—posted "at the red border" with the Soviet Union, *Ebony* would breathlessly report—and current director of the United States Information Agency (USIA), Rowan knew full well that questions of race shaped both America's Cold War legitimacy and the emerging postcolonial order.[16] As he put it, race was the "key to the country's future in a world where a couple billion black, brown and yellow people have risen up in explosive revolution." Long after even the Cold War had faded, he argued, race would remain "the key to the fateful issue of war and peace."[17]

For Rowan, the problem of race was more precisely a problem of racism. "Race" served as a shorthand for the grossly unequal distribution of power, rights, and respect that people in power had long justified through theories of heritable difference, rooted in bloodline and mostly made visible by color. Thus he did not concern himself with racism as affect or emotion—although he did label "racial bitterness" and "racial arrogance" the "ugly and ominous time bomb that spells danger to mankind"—but as the creation of social difference and political hierarchy, and their perpetuation through violence.[18] Too politic a representative of the Johnson Administration to call white supremacy out by name in the pages of *Ebony*, he nonetheless identified both the ideology and political program of what southern Democrats in the pre World War II years would have proudly called white supremacy.

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[16] "Youngest U. S. Ambassador," *Ebony*, 19 (January 1964), 52.

[17] Rowan, "No Whitewash," 57.

[18] Rowan, "No Whitewash," 57.

Rowan knew firsthand the pain and peril of such white supremacy. Raised in desperate, Depression-era poverty in a small town near the foot of Tennessee's Cumberland mountains, he had experienced Jim Crow as "grotesque bigotry" that left him in physical and economic peril: jobs scarce and debased, racial etiquette intricate and fraught.[19] If one had no "usefulness" in McMinnville, Tennessee, an increasingly restless Rowan realized as he began to chafe at Jim Crow, then one could quickly find himself in a "foolish and rather dangerous predicament.[20] He had escaped his predicament through military service and challenged the system through journalism and diplomatic service.

Even as Rowan lived Jim Crow, he also experienced the benefits of a state grown marginally less hostile to African American lives. Indeed, Rowan believed in and had benefitted from the promise of the liberal order: his father's World War I bonus had saved his family from starvation during the Great Depression; his enlistment in the Navy in the 1940s—"the great turning point in the life of a green country kid"—had shown him a world beyond Tennessee; and the GI Bill had financed the education that set him on the path that led to ambassadorship and the USIA.[21] He was not naïve, he would explain late in his life, and had "never believed that any American boy can grow up to be president." He did believe, however, that with the system stacked against certain peoples and populations, "some of us" could still "beat the system to a satisfying degree."[22]

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[19] Carl T. Rowan, *Breaking Barriers: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 15.

[20] Carl T. Rowan, *South of Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 3.

[21] Biographical info comes from Rowan, *Breaking Barriers*. Quote comes from Carl T. Rowan, "What Jimmy Carter's Election Will Mean," in *Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues: The First Twenty Years, 1966-1986* (Manhattan Kansas: Kansas State University Press, 1976), 389.

[22] Rowan, *Breaking Barriers*, 15.

The occasional African American could beat the system because white supremacy was on the defensive in the postwar world. It had been damaged, as publisher John Johnson wrote in introducing *Ebony's* special issue, by international upheavals: "World War II, the Communist conspiracy," and "the black nations' fight for freedom from colonialism."[23] So entangled were the fates of foreign peoples and African Americans that the NAACP in the late 1940s briefly considered changing its name from the National to the International Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Although the NAACP board tabled the proposal, they also reiterated "the pressing need for us to lift our sights and see the world problem of race and color in its overall significance." To approach it as anything other than a world problem would be "short-sighted and futile."[24] Even with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* opening up nation-state-based tactics for attacking Jim Crow, many African Americans believed that securing black civil rights required tamping down white supremacy worldwide.

Yet if African Americans' grand strategy was to contain Jim Crow, folks like Rowan saw doing so as an integral part of fighting the Cold War. Decolonization, nonalignment, and challenges to white supremacy launched from an emerging Third World could threaten Jim Crow, but if the United States did not distance itself from segregation, they could also threaten American power. Sorting through his own impressions not long after reporting on the 1955 Asia-African Conference in Bandung, Rowan balanced "loyalty to country—to color—to religion"

[23] John H. Johnson, "Publishers Statement," *Ebony*, 20 (August 1965), 27. On African American internationalism and the black freedom struggle in the postwar era, see Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Nikhil Pal, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[24] Walter White, "A Suggestion for Change in the Name of the NAACP," *Chicago Defender*, September 3, 1949, 7. See also, Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 331.

against "loyalty to those bonds 'that tie together the oppressed.'" In the wake of Bandung, he felt "keenly and acutely aware" that "the awakening" of Asia "may yet be our salvation," but, even more, he felt consternation over how much South Asians' and others' conviction that "the United States is incurably addicted to racism" damaged America's international standing and bolstered communist propaganda.[25] By inclination and occupation, Rowan's primary concern was to secure the nation's international position. The first step in doing so was facing "the grim fact that the United States' most critical domestic problem is also our most worrisome international problem."[26]

For Rowan, the answer to these pressing problems lay in the state fulfilling its promise. President Lyndon Johnson raised the cause of black legal rights "to the level of a national imperative," Rowan would write decades later (in one of the few unqualified compliments he would pay the president), by going before Congress and requesting passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.[27] In the decade following Bandung, a powerful combination of direct action, community organizing, and urban uprising in the United States had spurred Lyndon Johnson to make firmer commitments to expanding civil rights. Rowan encouraged protest in certain moments, advised moderation in others, and occasionally excoriated voices he saw as too

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[25] Carl T. Rowan, *The Pitiful and the Proud* (New York: Random House, 1956), vii, 147. On Rowan's and other African Americans' tours of the emerging Third World, see Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 75-77.

[26] Rowan, "No Whitewash," 57. On extending civil rights as Cold War strategy, see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; and Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 41, no.1 (November 1998), 61-120. On nonalignment and the Third World as a political project, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007). For rich discussions of African Americans' engagements with decolonization and postwar nationalism, see Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*; Robeson Taj Frazier, *The East is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

[27] Rowan, *Breaking Barriers*, 249.

radical; but he always saw the protests as crucial, as he told a group of college students in North Carolina, to extending "the sphere of democracy in the U. S. in the eyes of the world."[28] As he put it in *Ebony*, "In an era where Western wealth and military power are of themselves not enough to guarantee Western leadership the future hangs in our ability to breathe enough life into the ideal of equal justice under the law to fire the imagination of the world's angry masses."[29]

In other words, appearances mattered. Maintaining American power meant convincing folks in Africa and Asia that Jim Crow no longer reigned in the United States. In this, he argued, the United States' treatment of African Americans served as bellwether of how the country would conduct itself in the world. This was not about solidarity for Rowan; it was about American influence. Whereas activists like John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) felt "a sense of communion, a sense of fellowship" with "the young men and women" of Africa, Rowan approached "the world's angry masses" with both political and emotional distance.[30] As members of SNCC and other organizations increasingly articulated their critique of American empire and solidarity with Third World movements through the language of black power, Rowan derided the notion as "a plain old-fashioned hoax."[31] Black power and its

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[28] "Rowan Declares Sit-Ins Benefit Negroes, Whites," *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 18, 1962, 5. On the importance of the black freedom struggle to the Cold War, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: The Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 2004); and Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[29] Rowan, "No Whitewash," 57.

[30] John Lewis quoted in Fanon Che Wilkins, "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa Before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-1965," *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Fall 207), 468. On SNCC's internationalism, see also Julia Erin Wood, "Freedom Is Indivisible: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Cold War Politics, and International Liberation Movements," Ph.D. diss, Yale University, 2011.

[31] "Rowan Calls 'Black Power a Phony Cry; Says It Only Divides Race," *Chicago Defender,* November 7, 1966, 27.

reimagining of racial identity as political kinship had "less force in our real, cruel world than a fantasy born of a good slug of LSD."[32] Indulging that fantasy not only weakened the civil rights cause, he felt, but also ran the danger of giving succor to the enemy.[33]

At the end of the day, Rowan was an *American Dilemma* sort of fellow, one who believed as did its author Gunnar Myrdal that "what America is constantly reaching for is democracy at home and abroad."[34] Even after he had resigned from diplomatic service, Rowan found himself making the same arguments that he had made to international skeptics two decades before—that "the society that had given me a break was in the process of taking great strides for racial justice."[35] His rejoinder to proponents of black power relied on a vision of America as "continuously struggling for its soul," to borrow another phrase from Gunnar Myrdal, but ultimately united around a universalist political creed that promised more than any other nation on earth.[36] Reaping the fruits of that promise required buying in. "To gain freedom, the Negro… needs the help of the courts," he wrote. "He needs the power of the Justice Department and the prestige of the White House and the pocket of the federal treasury. He will need the pressure that can be exerted by a large portion of white America."[37] Race remained the key to war and peace,

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[32] Ibid; Carl T. Rowan, "Crisis in Civil Rights Leadership: Isolation is a trap; 'Black Power' is a phony cry, a plain old-fashioned hoax," *Ebony*, 22 (November 1966), 37.

[33] See for example, Rowan's chastisement of Martin Luther King for his statement criticizing the Vietnam War, "Martin Luther King's Tragic Decision," *Reader's Digest*, September 1967. Reprinted in C. Eric Lincoln, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 212-218.

[34] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (1944; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 3. Quoted in Singh, *Black is a Country*, 39.

[35] Rowan, *Breaking Barriers*, 124. Also quoted in Singh, *Black is a Country*, 178.

[36] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 4.

[37] Rowan, "Crisis in Civil Rights Leadership," 36.

to be sure, but for Rowan, solving the white problem in America required the indulgence and resources of white America. Faith placed elsewhere looked to him like "hopelessness."[38]

Sam Greenlee's Revolutionary Blues

Sam Greenlee dreamed of revolution. Even as Carl Rowan took to the press to decry black power as thought and practice, Greenlee produced poetry and prose as part of black power's cultural front. "We were baaaad, writing about revolution," he would say of himself, editor Hoyt Fuller, and other members of Chicago's Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) Writer's Workshop, "and if words were incendiary, we would have started another Great Chicago Fire!" Greenlee described himself and his compatriots as "warriors, revolutionaries devoted to providing a solution to the pollution of Western Imperialism, racism, oppression and exploitation." Reflecting back on his Cold War era politics in his memoirs, he conceded that he and his colleagues were "naïve, maybe" but more important they were "totally committed!"[39] He carried that commitment into old age, explaining, "I do not consider myself a victim because a victim submits. Nor am I appalled by Euro-American 'history' because I consider it a racist fiction."[40] For Greenlee, whose most famous novel featured an African American ex-CIA agent who trained gang members for armed revolution on the south side of Chicago, Rowan and his defense of the American creed likely would have sounded delusional.

Rowan and Greenlee shared similar profiles but hewed to different narratives. Both descendants of black soldiers who had become soldiers themselves—a lieutenant in the Korean

[38] Ibid., 37.

[39] Sam Greenlee, "Weary Warrior Blues," 2-3; and "Prologue," both in "Sam's Blue's: The Adventures of a Traveling Man," in Box 1a, Folder 1, Samuel Greenlee Papers 1965-2005, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, University of Rochester River Campus Libraries

[40] Ibid.; Greenlee uses nearly the exact same language on back cover of his 1971 book of poetry, *Blues for An African Princess*. See Sam Greenlee, *Blues for an African Princess* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1971).

War era army, in Greenlee's case—both had used the benefits from the GI Bill to finance graduate study. Like Rowan, Greenlee broke barriers in the foreign service: in 1957 after earning an MA in International Relations from the University of Chicago, he secured a position as one of the first three African Americans hired into the USIA. Rowan was moving from journalism into diplomacy in those years, rising to succeed Edward R. Murrow as Greenlee's boss in the USIA.

Yet unlike Rowan, who presented his military service as the dramatic fulcrum of his Horatio Alger story, Greenlee found his assignment to the aptly-named Thirty-First Infantry "Dixie Division" to be a different kind of crucible. He had known "closet bigotry" as a college student at the University of Wisconsin but "the open contempt that southerners offered 'colored people'" caught him unawares. Although "raised and conditioned in patriotism" and subjected as a child to "the Pavlovian conditioning that all nations lay on its citizens," Greenlee grew certain after repeated encounters with racists in the Army that he owed no "allegiance to a country that treated black people as scum."[41] Rather than identify as an American soldier, he began to think of himself as "a guerrilla fighter against the pervasive racism" that surrounded him.[42] Where Rowan offered himself up as proof positive of the potential of American liberalism, Greenlee told stories based on his experiences that were at once pulpy, satirical, and deadly serious. From the 1960s on, both his novels and memoirs offer an account of Greenlee becoming, to borrow a phrase from poet and veteran Amiri Baraka, "post American."[43]

Sam Greenlee was decidedly *not* an *American Dilemma* kind of guy. Like Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, and other black veterans who would go on to participate in the Black Arts

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[41] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," 233, Box 1a, Folder 4.

[42] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," 229, Box 1a, Folder 4.

[43] Baraka quoted in Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom Beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 19.

Movement, military service fed in Greenlee what literary scholar James Smethurst has called a "wide-ranging and inchoate political and artistic radicalism."[44] Travel in the decolonizing and post-colonial world would intensify that radicalism as he came to believe that "Black Americans are no more citizens of the U.S. than were the Algerians citizens of metropolitan France."[45] The comparison worked for Greenlee because experience taught him to view the multiethnic liberal nation-state, like American history itself, as a fiction.

Indeed, linking an ever-expanding national body to a liberal state struck him as a fiction as well. Where Rowan saw promise, Greenlee saw a white supremacist state system centered in a government committed to preserving power and its spoils for a select few. Those select "White Folks and their pet Negro flunkies" preserved that system through violence even as they obscured its workings by linking the idea of an abstract, universalizing national body to an *idea* of a liberal state—a powerful narrative, both messianic and teleological, in which the United States, especially, tended towards expanding rights and freedoms for its peoples.[46] Such obfuscation, Greenlee felt certain, was an imperial project; having labored in service to that project, he saw in action what scholars like Abrams strove to emphasize, that reifying the state as such made it harder to see the "real relations of domination within the state-system and between it and other interest and institutions and groups."[47]

A self-described "professional propagandist in the foreign service of the United States Information Service," Greenlee knew a hustle when he saw one. And could run one when he

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[44] James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 34.

[45] Sam Greenlee, *Ammunition: Poetry and Other Raps* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1975), back inside cover; Sam Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," Prologue.

[46] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," Prologue.

[47] Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," fn 47, p. 88. See also Singh, *Black is a Country*, 202-206.

wished to. He did the job well, so well that he won a meritorious service award for his work, but, he was quick to say in his reminiscences, always as a skeptic.[48] Working for the USIA offered him an alternative to the low-paying debasing jobs he found in Chicago, a way to travel the world, and a chance to use his graduate training, but his memoirs insistently frame the job as a means to an end. Like any effective hustle, it required him to lie with ease. When asked in his job interview how he would explain American race relations to an American audience, he gave a response that would have done Carl Rowan proud. "I might draw a comparison" to "the caste system in India," he answered. "I would maintain that no right-thinking Indian could support the indignities and discrimination of the caste system, nor Americans of comparable discrimination. I would conclude by saying that I believed great social strides were being made in both India and America." Greenlee considered his answer to be "stone bullshit, of course," but it was also exactly what his interviewers wished to hear.[49]

Greenlee got by in the USIA by handling white people expertly enough to not pierce their fictions. He both "sold the United States like toothpaste" to Iraqis, Bengalis, and Indonesians and sold his white colleagues on their own high-mindedness.[50] Posted to Baghdad in 1957, he found himself socially ostracized by his white colleagues even as, at work, they trotted him around at parties "like an organ grinder and his pet monkey" to assure Iraqi guests that the United States did not discriminate. Alienated but tactical, Greenlee "learned to take a low profile" at work, to "keep [his] political opinions to [himself], attempt a good little nigger stance," and to parry his social invisibility among white Americans into more meaningful encounters with local people

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[48] Greenlee, *Ammunition*, back inside cover.

[49] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," 283-284. Box 1a, Folder 1.

[50] Cheryl Aldave, "The Revolution," Interview with Sam Greenlee, *Wax Poetics*, 2011, http://www.waxpoetics.com/features/articles/the-revolution, accessed July 20, 2016.

among whom his blackness was, by and large, viewed as an asset. Although these encounters convinced him that revolution in Iraq was "imminent," he understood that saying so would sink his career. "A strong and stable Iraq," he had discerned from his boss's reluctance to complicate any narratives coming out of Washington, was the only "illusion permitted by State Department dogma."[51] Whatever tweaks came to American foreign policy would be delivered top-down; there was no refining strategy from the bottom up.

An astute and acerbic observer of the day-to-day enactment of United States foreign policy, Greenlee came to believe that one of its primary functions was to convince white Americans that their understanding of the world made sense. When events departed from narrative, as when revolution finally came to Iraq in July 1958, he "marveled at how easily the most arrogant people on the planet could fall apart." His colleagues' whiteness—an amalgam of class, national, and professional identity—took a hit. Co-workers seemed less "self-assured, confident, and ready to patronize anyone who's [sic] class ring did not match their own." Disoriented and "bewildered," they moved about with "their cord suits wilted, faces stubbled, pouches beneath their eyes, their crew cuts less jaunty." For Greenlee, these physical transformations arose not just from his colleagues' fear for their safety, but from the shock of glimpsing a reality in which foreign service work was not easy, in which Iraqis "were as good at the put-on as Black folks are," and in which a nationalist coup could take them by surprise.[52] To regroup, his colleagues began searching for communist influence. As one colleague explained to Greenlee, "We've built the Communists up to be masters of deception, duplicity and revolution. If it's a communist takeover, everything is forgiven" by the higher-ups in Washington. A

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[51] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," 293, 297, 307, Box 1a, Folder 5.

[52] Greenlee, Sam's Blues, 330-331, Box 1a, Folder 5. Greenlee's observation about "the put-on" comes from page 294.

nationalist coup, the colleague continued, the "kind of thing we're witnessing? Heads will roll!" Nationalism was untenable given their understanding of locals as child-like, but communist subversion fit a narrative into which Americans had already invested plenty of time and resources.[53]

Greenlee responded to his time in the foreign service by spinning fictions of his own. When he resigned from the agency to become a full-time writer, his eight years of sojourning for the American century provided ample fodder. His observations in Baghdad were reinforced by experiences in Dhaka, Jakarta, and Thessaloniki, where he watched local people attempt to turn US-backed rebellions to their own ends. Don Freeman, the main character in his first and best-known novel, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, reflected the wily watchfulness of Greenlee and the rebels who inspired him. Freeman succeeded as a spy because, as he notes in one passage, a black person made for "a natural agent in the United States," given that his or her life "might depend, from childhood, on becoming what whites demanded, yet somehow maintaining what he was as an individual human being."[54] Part of the inspiration for Freeman, a more liberated cognate for Greenlee, came straight out of Iraq. "The cat who planted the seed in my mind was a guy named Abdul Kharrim Kassim" who had risen to general before launching the coup that ended the Baghdad Pact. "That cat kept undercover and organized and planned and plotted for 21 years," Greenlee marveled.[55] If Kassim could pull that off, what would such a feat look like in the ghetto? Writing *Spook* allowed Greenlee a way to plot a rebellion from within the civil

[53] Greenlee, "Sam's Blues," 333, 307, Box 1a, Folder 5.

[54] Sam Greenlee, *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1969; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 109-110.

[55] Jim Cleaver, "'The Spook Who Sat by the Door' Exposes Black Tokenism in the CIA," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 29, 1970, B4A.

service, not just laying bare the relations of domination that underpin the state system and foreign policy but imagining a method of effectively meeting its violence with violence.

Spook was at once a satire, an indictment, and a revolutionary manual. Having seen racialized power at work, indeed having been part of the institutional structure that brought that power to ground, Greenlee produced a novel that traced the relationship between the United States security project and uprisings at home and abroad. The book directly linked the economic marginalization and state violence visited upon African Americans to the domination and exploitation that the United States visited upon the Third World. "They call them gooks and us niggers in Vietnam and Korea," a Chicago gang member in *Spook* observes about white American leaders, "And they don't see any reason why gooks and niggers shouldn't kill each other for whitey's benefit."[56] Upon realizing this, the gang members become willing recruits in Don Freeman's campaign to turn urban riots into guerrilla insurrections.

Greenlee could not have written the book, he would say four decades later, if he "hadn't been out there among revolutionaries" in the Third World, folks "who had gotten nose to nose with the White folks and kicked their ass." He also was out there watching "them desperately trying to rebuild nations that had been systematically destroyed by their colonial masters. And they're still struggling."[57] To readers still processing working class rebellions in cities from Los Angeles to Newark, neither the book's plot nor the sense of perpetual struggle seemed unfamiliar. In fact, the book seemed so "real" to one reviewer that he cautioned readers "to remember that this a work of fiction and not a statement of fact."[58] A theologian in the *Christian Century* worried that the movie adaptation, co-authored by Greenlee, would spur "future use by the state

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[56] Greenlee, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, 102.

[57] Aldave, "The Revolution."

[58] Cleaver, "Spook Exposes Black Tokenism."

of excessive force to put down every racial disorder but thought the risk worth it because "in a paradoxical way," the movie "dealt more *realistically* with the terrifying but logical extension of black response to oppression than did the actual events of the 60s."[59] As Americans struggled to articulate the relationship between black power, working-class protest, and inchoate internationalisms, *Spook* pointed to the revolutionary potential of folks who, like Greenlee, "traveled the road" from state-bound reformist to "Third World revolutionary."[60]

The White Problem in Grand Strategy

The point of discussing Carl Rowan and Sam Greenlee is not to argue that they belong in a pantheon of great grand strategists. Rather, it is to ponder what they thought race was, how they saw racialized power at work, and what they believed it meant for the United States in the world. For all their profound differences in temperament, trajectory, and solidarities, both men understood that, as scholar Nikhil Pal Singh has written, "black skin has historically demarcated and condensed what lies outside the protection of the nation-state and its cultures of citizenship and civility."[61] Greenlee and Rowan diverged sharply in how they approached the nation-state, but each knew that white supremacy mattered to American foreign policy, that other nations recognized and reacted to American investment in white supremacy, and that the work of dismantling it would be vital, brutal, and long incomplete.

The charge to take such insights seriously is not a matter of representation—mentioning a black Secretary of State here, or citing an African American diplomat there—but a matter of

[59] Cornish Rogers, "How the Riots Might Have Turned Out," *Christian Century*, October 3, 1973, 964. Emphasis in original? Added?

[60] Greenlee, Sam's Blues, Prologue.

[61] Singh, *Black is a Country*, 204.

thinking. Foregrounding how Greenlee and Rowan used race as a tool of analysis is a reminder to approach grand strategy's whiteness as an epistemological problem; it ought not remain a given, an unspoken norm that requires no acknowledgement or consideration. To do so is to ignore the relationship between subjectivity and structure in the United States, the ways that "race neutral" in foreign and domestic policy has largely meant "white," and the extent to which the investment in whiteness-as-norm has conditioned how American policy makers have defined partner and ally, client and vassal, enemy and threat. Normalizing whiteness does ideological work—masking racialized power while declaring the United States to be blessedly free of ideology. If we treat grand strategy as "the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy" or a "coherent set of ideas about what a nation wishes to accomplish in the world," then we must think about the ideas—understandings of self, of what makes a nation, of what constitutes an interest—that mix with the construction material.[62] We also must accept that ideology does not exist separate from statecraft; it is what legitimizes the practice of power.

Thinking through race—divining the relationship between statecraft and what scholars Barbara and Karen Fields have labeled "racecraft"—forces us to articulate how the entwined socio-political constructions of "race" and "state" motivate and inform American actions.[63] Doing so allows for sharper analyses of the history of United States in the world, and, for scholars of grand strategy, a richer language for talking about how the United States exercises power, on whom, and to what effect. As political scientist Robert Vitalis has written in his intellectual history of international relations, "In the first few decades of the twentieth century in the United States, international relations meant race relations." That this statement seems self-

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[62] Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 4.

[63] Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso Books, 2012).

evident to many scholars of African American studies and "strange and wrong" to many scholars of international relations or diplomatic history underscores how much of the ideal of colorblindness comes down to willful unseeing.[64] It highlights how much the fields' self-perception comes down to what Vitalis calls, inspired by Toni Morrison, the "norm against noticing."[65] For the sake of scholarship and policy, I propose that we disrupt the norm against noticing in order to re-think grand strategy, that we inspect its intellectual architecture, and allow—to tweak Carl Rowan's language, "No 'Whitewash'" for the U.S. in the world.

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[64] Robert Vitalis, *White World Order: Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1.

[65] Robert Vitalis, "The Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29 (2000), 333.