Color and Credibility:
Eisenhower, the U.S. Information Agency, and Race, 1955-57

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Kevin E. Grimm
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by

KEVIN E. GRIMM

has been approved for

the Department of History

and the College of Arts and Sciences by

________________________

Chester J. Pach, Jr.

Associate Professor of History

________________________

Benjamin M. Ogles

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

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Domestic violence against African Americans in the 1950s complicated U.S. efforts to attract Third World allies in the global Cold War. The United States Information Agency studied the international reactions to the murder of Emmett Till, the plight of Autherine Lucy at the University of Alabama, and the Montgomery bus boycott and determined their narrative of gradual progress in U.S. race relations had not become the dominant interpretation among foreign populations. After realizing the loss of U.S. prestige from these incidents, the USIA and the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower undertook new efforts, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and Vice President Richard Nixon’s tour of African nations, to repair the American image. While U.S. officials often understood the myriad factors influencing responses to these racial events, they did not always realize the larger context of U.S. relations with individual nations and at times exaggerated the extent of the threat to American prestige or national security.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Chester J. Pach, Jr.

Associate Professor of History
To My Parents
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INTRODUCTION

By the mid-1950s most of the nations outside either the U.S. or Soviet alliance systems contained nonwhite majorities. These racial differences had the potential to influence interactions between the United States and these initially nonaligned nations. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision in 1896 legitimized both the “separate but equal” principle and Jim Crow laws limiting opportunities for African Americans in the southern states. Continuing domestic discrimination against African Americans lent credence to communist propaganda criticizing American claims that equality was a hallmark of U.S. society. A system of segregation affecting an entire region of the country, visibly punctuated by acts of violence, highlighted American hypocrisy as its leaders acquiesced in practices in the domestic sphere that they rhetorically opposed in the international arena.

The tacit support of U.S. officials for European efforts to maintain their overseas possessions, despite official American opposition to colonialism, also complicated U.S. relations with Third World nations. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s paternalistic belief that rapid independence for nonwhite peoples would open the door to communist influence led to a conclusion that white Europeans should groom local elites for self-government over time. News of American racial violence or discrimination also easily reached these Third World populations and painted an alternate picture of the United States than the one the Eisenhower administration wished to present. The denial of equal rights to African-Americans and repeated violence against them, along with acquiescence
In the colonial efforts of white Europeans, undermined the official American rhetoric of democracy and freedom in the international Cold War conflict.

In 1955 and 1956 the murder of Emmett Till, Autherine Lucy’s experience at the University of Alabama, and the Montgomery bus boycott damaged U.S. prestige around the world. Domestic incidents of racial violence affected how foreign populations evaluated American claims of freedom and equality, consequently threatening to undermine the goal of the Eisenhower administration to convince Third World nations to identify with the United States. Yet Eisenhower’s propagandists did not just spread information and then passively expect the world to adopt their viewpoint. They actively examined overseas reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents, as well as Vice President Richard Nixon’s trip to Africa, in order to determine the extent to which foreign populations adhered to their interpretation of racial violence. In addition to indicating a significant loss of U.S. prestige, therefore, foreign responses to these incidents also revealed that previous efforts by the United States Information Agency (USIA) to export a narrative of progress in American race relations had been largely unsuccessful. While the agency may have overestimated the negative impact in Europe, it accurately understood the potentially devastating effects such a result held for American policies in Third World regions such as Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Yet even in these areas, U.S. officials often exaggerated the threat to national security and did not include issues such as tacit U.S. support for colonialism and opposition to neutralism in their assessments. American responses to these reactions, including the Civil Rights Act
of 1957 and Nixon’s trip to Africa, revealed how the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents influenced attitudes and events far beyond their local context.

The following narrative will build on existing historiography about Eisenhower and race in the Cold War to examine in more detail than any previous study the international reactions to these racial events of 1955-56 and the administration’s efforts to deal with them. The dimensions of the study will be smaller than some of the major secondary works focusing on the interplay of race and American foreign relations because it will concentrate more exclusively on the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott. Thomas Borstelmann, in his work *The Cold War and the Color Line*, reveals how U.S. policymakers viewed the world through lenses partly based on race while at the same time trying to build the largest multiracial anti-communist coalition possible. He examines how racial incidents challenged American ideology, but it is not his main theme. While his analysis begins with the racial perceptions of U.S. leaders directed outward, this study focuses on how foreign populations focused attention on domestic American racial events. Robert Burk, in his landmark study, *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, pays only passing attention to the global implications of domestic racial incidents.1

Mary Dudziak’s book, *Cold War Civil Rights* tends to picture U.S. officials’ understanding of the American image in black and white terms. There was either success or failure with the agency’s efforts. The following study will reveal that the USIA held a more nuanced view of how incidents of racial violence played out during the Cold War.

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Although done inconsistently, the identification of diverse influences on reactions to American racial violence demonstrated that agency officials often understood that some foreign populations did not view the international system through a Cold War paradigm in the 1950s. Further, the agency’s examination revealed that in some nations its narrative had been successful, even in the mid-1950s. Unfortunately, none of this translated into any sort of policy shift during the Eisenhower years, but the knowledge did exist.²

Therefore, contrary to historian Kenneth Osgood’s claim that Eisenhower “failed to grasp the implications of race relations for U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World,” the following study will argue that, regarding the maintenance of the U.S. image, the Eisenhower administration was in fact acutely aware of the way racial problems affected American prestige. While the president himself was unable to escape a Cold War mindset, he understood the potential implications for U.S. foreign relations which could be caused by a loss of prestige based on racial violence. Yet his personal conceptions of the limitations of federal power did not allow him to make the changes to his domestic policy that his foreign policy towards Third World nations so clearly indicated would be useful. Despite this contradiction, extensive study of foreign reactions to racial violence by USIA officials revealed that the Eisenhower administration was more aware of the international impact of race than historians have previously given it credit for. These events also occurred before the school desegregation crisis at Little Rock in 1957 and

therefore indicate that U.S. officials understood the interplay between race and foreign policy throughout the tenure of the Eisenhower administration.³

Close consultation existed between the president and the USIA. In October of 1955 Theodore Streibert, head of the agency during much of Eisenhower’s period in office, told the National Security Council (NSC), regarding a reference report, “that he had checked with the President at Denver and had secured his approval of the proposed guidance,” concerning the administration’s propaganda “offensive against international communism.” A year later Abbot Washburn, who at that time was the acting director of the agency, indicated that USIA activities concerning propaganda in Eastern Europe were “in compliance with NSC directives.” Numerous examples abound that show Eisenhower’s consistent involvement with the course of the agency. Indeed, the head of the USIA became a familiar sight at NSC meetings by the late 1950s. Even the concern with presenting racial violence in the context of an overarching advance of progress in a way reflected Eisenhower’s emphasis on gradual change. The president’s attention to USIA policies and his involvement in the major endeavors described in the final chapter therefore infuse Eisenhower revisionism, which presents the president as an active participant in his administration rather than the more aloof figure described by the first historians of his presidency, with discussion of race and U.S. foreign policy.⁴

Chapter one will cover the growing importance of the Third World in the minds of American policymakers during the Cold War, how U.S. officials articulated an ideology of freedom and democracy in order to win the hearts of these populations, and the specifics of the Till murder, the Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott. Eisenhower and those he tapped to spread good news about America encountered significant problems when trying to explain American race relations to the rest of the world and the loss of U.S. prestige often undermined national security in the minds of the president and many of his policymakers.

As foreign news media focused on these incidents, the American image dipped. Chapter two describes the efforts by the USIA to understand and explain the diverse influences on European reactions to these events. Except for France, agency officials often seemed unaware of how the responses fit into the context of the larger U.S. relationship with these nations. Identification of factors influencing responses, such as political orientation or foreign policy issues, existed, but awareness of underlying animosities and internal European debates were absent. The agency also tried to gauge the success of its narrative of racial progress and found it had not become the dominant interpretation of American race relations.

Assessments of the situations in the nonwhite nations of the Third World were more accurate, although at times still lacked an idea of the larger context. The third chapter describes how the USIA sought to understand the success of its efforts outside Europe, where the search for allies had shifted by the mid-1950s. U.S. prestige in Africa and India suffered while in the Middle East and East Asia reactions were more muted.
The agency most misunderstood the situation in Latin America, where resentment of U.S. hegemony and an American tendency to intervene in the internal affairs of its neighbors created an atmosphere conducive to criticizing the United States. Overall, however, the agency further developed an understanding of how the domestic and foreign policy objectives of other nations, whether an anti-American Arab nationalism or a desire to maintain an economic and political relationship with the United States, influenced the intensity of many foreign reactions to American racial violence. Only in Africa and India did pure moral outrage seem dominant.

The final chapter describes the efforts of the Eisenhower administration to bolster the American image during 1956 and the first half of 1957. USIA officials continued to explain and advance their narrative. As the president and his attorney general Herbert Brownell developed a new civil rights bill, they thought partly in terms of how the measure would appear to the world. Vice President Nixon’s visit to Ghana’s independence ceremonies and his subsequent tour of several other African nations demonstrated to nonwhite populations a new U.S. interest in the Third World. The USIA’s examination of global views of the trip accurately concluded that it had redeemed America in the eyes of many foreigners. The goodwill garnered by these actions, however, did not last. The Little Rock crisis, in which Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus used the national guard to block the entrance of nine African-Americans to a city high school, broke only a few weeks after Nixon’s return and mere days after Civil Rights Act of 1957 passed Congress. A cyclical loss of prestige followed by renewal of the American image would repeat until much stronger government action occurred in the
mid-1960s. Yet, this two-year period in the mid-1950s demonstrated the very real connection between domestic American actions and their repercussions in a world of Cold War.

The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as superpowers facing each other over a prostrate Europe. Deep ideological differences led to perceptions on both sides that an inevitable struggle loomed in the future, with the emergence of an actual victor considered doubtful by many. By the late 1940s American policymakers developed the idea of containment, articulated mainly by diplomat George F. Kennan’s advice to oppose further communist advances as a means of wearing down the Soviet system until it softened due to internal pressures. During the presidency of Harry S. Truman Congress created the National Security Council in an effort to coordinate U.S. diplomatic, defense, and economic policies. The Korean War legitimized NSC 68, a government document explaining the practical steps to be taken to provide the United States with a large defense establishment and increased military expenditures in order to secure the country. As Michael Hogan argues, “NSC 68 can claim to be the bible of American national security policy.” If twentieth century conflicts had not introduced the concept of total war, they had brought the idea fully into practice and the United States prepared itself for a contest of the same magnitude against the communist world.5

The death of longtime Soviet premier Josef Stalin in 1953 led to a reorientation in Soviet foreign policy in order to attract newly emerging nationalist and socialist

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movements outside Europe, where the Cold War had largely stabilized as the two sides had settled into a long staring contest. This Third World, so-called because its nations were not originally aligned with either the democratic, capitalist First World or the communist Second World, consisted of the Middle East, Africa, and large parts of South and Southeast Asia. Many of these areas had been previously colonized by Western European nations and while some, as in Latin America and Egypt, Iraq, and Iran in the Middle East, had become independent by the mid-twentieth century, in the immediate postwar years many still remained under colonial rule. The enormous costs of World War II incurred by European nations undermined their ability to maintain overseas possessions and their former dominance seemed to be fading. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1941 advocated the self-determination of all peoples in the Atlantic Charter and the authors of the United Nations charter adopted egalitarian language in 1945, a new international order in which previously colonized populations could achieve self-government appeared to be on the horizon.

During the early Cold War, Third World elites were determined to realize their goals of independence. Economic and social conditions at home also created pressure on European leaders to focus limited resources on their respective domestic fronts. The United States made good on its previous promise to the Philippines and granted independence in 1946 while the Dutch were forced to retreat from Indonesia in 1949. Great Britain left the Indian subcontinent, North Africa, and most of the Middle East by the end of the 1940s with plans to liquidate its holdings in the rest of Africa. Even when
some Europeans, primarily the French and Belgians, sought to reestablish control in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they found native movements better organized, more militant, and harder to defeat. The anti-colonial rhetoric of the United States seemed to encourage the decolonization process, but American policymakers held practical interests in Third World nations besides simply wishing goodwill to the newly independent nations.

Of primary importance was the development of democratic, capitalist nations on the American, or at the very least Western, model. If resistance movements from the political left were victorious in Third World independence struggles, according to most U.S. officials, communism would have an open door. In addition to containing any Soviet advances, the United States sought to keep these regions politically stable and economically open for American exports and extraction of natural resources. As Robert McMahon comments, “Long-standing U.S. interests in the raw materials and markets of the developing world deepened appreciably as a result of World War II.” Geographic position became a factor as “the enhanced strategic value of the Third World for the United States also derived in significant measure from the lessons of World War II.” During the war the United States had utilized far-flung territories to move and supply its forces. U.S. officials seeking to project American military might abroad in order to safeguard allies and ensure an ability to effectively strike any future enemy, would need overseas bases to station men and machines. Finally, McMahon states that as a matter of U.S. credibility, “Washington policy makers reflexively viewed any Soviet intervention, threatened intervention, aid offer, or diplomatic initiative anywhere in the Third World as a test from which other states, large and small, would derive important lessons about the
power and resolve of the respective superpowers.” Accusations directed towards President Roosevelt for giving the Soviets a free hand in Eastern Europe at the end of World War II and at Truman for losing China to Mao Zedong’s communists made U.S. officials wary of giving way anywhere else. In the minds of American policymakers, opposing communist advances globally would assure U.S. allies of their own security and validate their decision to side with the free world as well as presenting the United States to nations not yet aligned as a potential guarantor of their security. U.S. officials also feared that communist control of the resources of the large Eurasian landmass would necessitate increased defense spending and restrictions on freedoms at home in an effort to defend the nation against a vastly strengthened and organized enemy. The very character of American democracy therefore seemed at risk should the Third World move en masse into the communist fold. American credibility and concern over ramifications at home combined with the geopolitical and economic benefits to make Third World nations important to the United States over the course of the Cold War.6

During the 1950s, therefore, American policymakers tried to attract Third World nations as allies in the global confrontation with the Soviet Union. When Eisenhower entered the presidency in 1953, he shared the antipathy towards communism held by the previous administration. Eisenhower and his aides also recognized the increasing importance of the Third World in the Cold War. In October 1953 the NSC warned of the dangers of these newly independent areas falling into communist hands because such a scenario could “perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power” against the Free

World. Simply denying the Soviets access to Third World populations and resources was not the only goal of the administration, for the “orderly development into more stable and responsible nations, able and willing to participate in defense of the free world, can increasingly add to its strength.” Covert U.S. interventions in Iran to overthrow Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 and the following year in Guatemala to get rid of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman reflected Eisenhower’s wish to maintain friendly, anticommunist governments in the Third World in order to achieve overarching U.S. goals of maintaining credibility, open markets, and natural and human resources.⁷

Early in Eisenhower’s presidency the NSC also identified the importance of information programs to convince foreign populations to identify and ally with the United States. NSC officials advised, “Constructive political and other measures will be required to create a sense of mutuality of interest with the free world and to counter the communist appeals.” As Kenneth Osgood argues, Eisenhower “concluded…that the battle for hearts and minds was one of the most critical dimensions of the Cold War struggle.” The president sought to frame the Cold War as a choice between democracy and communism and to present the latter as antithetical to freedom and equality. Such “other measures” included establishing the United States Information Agency in 1953 in order to tell America’s story to the world and demonstrate the benefits of American democracy. Yet

aspects of life in the United States such as racial discrimination and violence would not bolster the image of the nation.8

Eisenhower’s personal attitudes further complicated his administration’s efforts to address the international reactions to racial violence. He was uneasy about racial matters and uncomfortable with situations in which popular passions were aroused. He often viewed those advocating rapid advances in civil rights as impatient troublemakers and wanted both segregationists and activists to adopt gradual and moderate stances. His familiarity with white southerners and his belief in the limited reach of the federal government produced inaction when violent incidents threatened the international American image. The story of race in America was one of the most difficult issues Eisenhower’s propagandists had to negotiate. The USIA couched domestic incidents of racial violence in language explaining them as aberrations in the march of progress for African-American rights. Racial conflict therefore fit into the larger American story of freedom and equality.

Efforts by the American government, influenced by the international context of the Cold War, to address events and issues which arguably constituted the beginning of the modern Civil Rights movement highlight the intersection of the domestic and global arenas. This examination will fit into the larger historiography of American foreign relations and the Cold War by stressing the importance of ideology. Racial incidents complicated the efforts of the Eisenhower administration to convince Third World populations of the appeal of American values and social and political systems. A focus on

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race and ideology is not meant to diminish other factors, but to reveal an intricate and important way in which a domestic factor influenced foreign relations. As the Cold War deepened, the U.S. push for influence in the Third World caused individual acts of racial violence to have important consequences far beyond their local origins and the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery cases clearly illustrate the intersection of the American domestic sphere with the global Cold War in the mid-1950s.
CHAPTER 1

NATIONAL SECURITY, PROPAGANDA, AND RACE

During the immediate post-World War II period American policymakers believed an international image as a land of freedom and democracy would benefit the United States in the struggle with the Soviet Union by convincing foreign populations to ally with the “free world.” Both American policymakers’ racial views and the violence inherent in domestic race relations complicated U.S. efforts to export such an image of the nation. In his study of race relations in the global arena, Thomas Borstelmann argues that “policymakers in Washington, viewed the world in explicitly race-conscious terms,” which often prevented them from identifying with nonwhite nations and gaining their support.9

Violence against the African-American minority often devastated the American image and held the potential to negatively affect American foreign policy. Kenneth Osgood, who has closely studied Eisenhower’s propaganda, claims, “Throughout the postwar period, international media coverage of the ‘American Negro Problem’ was widespread and overwhelmingly critical.” U.S. propagandists tried to solve this problem by presenting violent racial incidents in the context of overall progress in American race relations which was only possible in a democratic environment. Claims of freedom still seemed hollow as one of the largest minorities in the United States remained without an equal footing in society. Individual racial events therefore held the potential to threaten American national security in the Cold War by undermining the beneficent image of

9 Borstelmann, Cold War and the Color Line, 9.
American democracy U.S. officials believed so crucial to garnering allies in the overarching struggle with the Soviet Union.10

President Dwight D. Eisenhower firmly believed in the global nature of the fight against communism. He was further convinced that the support of other nations was crucial to the national security of the United States and advanced an extensive program of propaganda to persuade foreign populations that their interests were the same as those of America. Using newly created government agencies such as the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) and the United States Information Agency (USIA), Eisenhower sought to centralize efforts to present the United States as the land of democracy and freedom. Anything challenging that picture would complicate efforts to enlist other nations in the fight against communism and would therefore undermine American national security in the Cold War.

Violence in domestic race relations complicated the image of American democracy the Eisenhower administration deemed so important in the global struggle with the Soviet Union. Individual incidents, such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, could undermine national security by placing racial violence in the forefront of foreign minds. The USIA believed its efforts to have failed if foreign reporting on domestic racial events did not appear in a calm, factual manner placing them in the context of overall progress in race relations. Reports not fitting this framework were labeled “emotional” or “slanted” and the agency’s desire for “factual” reporting actually meant putting racial incidents in the desired context of progress. Agency officials also sought to understand all the factors

influencing international reactions to domestic racial violence and sought to identify steps to be taken in the future to repair and maintain U.S. prestige.

As European nations retreated from empire in the late 1940s and early 1950s, many populations emerged from colonialism and had decisions to make about their futures. These areas included Indonesia, India, and other territories previously held by the Netherlands or Great Britain in East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Latin American nations, although often tied to the United States militarily or economically, also contained nonwhite populations that reacted to American racial events. Ethiopia and Liberia were the sole self-governing nations in sub-Saharan Africa. In the rest of the continent and the parts of Southeast Asia remaining under European control, fervor for independence reached new heights. As Belgian and French administrators and troops returned to Africa and Southeast Asia after World War II in bids to reestablish control, they often met more tenacious and better organized resistance movements. Whatever the path, many nations outside Europe and North America were either independent, or determined to head that way, in the late 1940s and 1950s. The stabilization of the Cold War in Europe by the early 1950s, with neither side able to make any more significant gains without risking a devastating conflict, made these newly independent states even more important in the total, global conflict because they were still available to be shaped in the image of one of the contestants. Leaders of both superpowers viewed this Third World as an important facet of the Cold War and it became the ground for many struggles over the next several decades.
As soon as he entered office, President Eisenhower recognized the potential the Third World held for the United States. In 1947 Congress had passed the national Security Act which created the National Security Council to advise the chief executive on matters of national defense in the Cold War. Eisenhower continued to use the institution throughout his two terms. A top secret NSC document from October 30, 1953 discussed Third World nations and claimed, “Their orderly development into stable and responsible nations, able and willing to participate in defense of the free world, can increasingly add to its strength.” While many Third World nations could contribute only a few natural resources and negligible military capabilities, they could provide forward bases for U.S. forces. Also, the more other countries gravitated toward the United States, the more likely American lives and treasure would not have to be expended to oppose communism within their borders.11

American policymakers believed the Soviet Union would receive some tangible benefits if it gained allies in the Third World. The NSC document warned, “Although largely undeveloped, their vast manpower, their essential raw materials and their potential for growth are such that their absorption within the Soviet system would greatly, perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power to our detriment.” Large populations and untapped natural resources were physical assets inherent in the new nations as well as their ability to develop into industrialized, and therefore relatively more powerful, societies on the side of whichever superpower garnered their allegiance. Again, while many small Third World nations would pose no direct threat to the United States, their willingness to provide Soviets with bases or access to specific raw materials needed by

11 NSC 162/2, FRUS, 587.
Soviet industry or weapons manufacturers could undermine American national security. Despite the power of American allies in Europe, a Third World of communist nations could tip the scales against the free world and ultimately lead to defeat in the global Cold War struggle.\(^\text{12}\)

U.S. officials placed importance on Third World countries other than just trying to deny them to the Soviet Union. According to Zachary Karabell some historians and political scientists, among whom he includes Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, and Hans Morgenthau, “have celebrated the beneficial influence that the United States exercised in the Third World,” in expanding democracy and providing aid for development. In 1959 William Appleman Williams introduced an alternate view of U.S.-Third World relations, arguing mainly that the United States wanted to keep continually expanding markets available to American capitalist interests in an “Open Door Policy.” Eisenhower’s paternalistic views of nonwhites as easily susceptible to communism limited his enthusiasm for rapid expansions of self-government in the Third World. Yet his efforts to privilege European allies over Third World nations, as well as his desire to maintain a vigorous American economy, necessitated keeping foreign markets open for Western products.\(^\text{13}\)

Another revisionist, Gabriel Kolko, further argues, “Although this economic factor was by no means always the sole or principal cause of American involvement in these [Third World] countries, the role of these nations as exporters of raw materials

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., 587.

generally defined their structural relationship to the United States.” More recent treatment of this relationship has focused on Third World actors themselves. Karabell laments how “those who excoriate U.S. foreign policy have often treated the third world as a passive object that the United States used and abused.” By claiming “that both American and third-world actors designed an ‘architecture’ for U.S. policy in their respective countries,” Karabell gives agency to Third World leaders and populations beyond viewing them as mere recipients of American policies for good or ill. 14

U.S. officials therefore viewed the Third World in many ways, including as a source of raw materials, markets for products to benefit the domestic economy, and populations to bring into the free world fold. Peter Hahn further expands the definition of American interest in Third World nations by including the issue of U.S. credibility. American commitment to allies and an official opposition, via the strategy of containment, to communist advances anywhere, translated into concern over global prestige. Hahn points out, “The United States, consequently, vested enormous significance in each and every Third World challenge or hot spot….regardless of the intrinsic strategic or economic value of the territory in question.” Even if the natural and population resources of Third World nations remained negligible compared to those of the United States and its European allies, the strident anti-communism of American policymakers precluded dismissing any Third World problem as unimportant. 15

Melvyn Leffler lays out several imperatives for U.S. interest in regions beyond Europe during the immediate post-World War II period. He argues, “For U.S. officials,

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the most decisive and lasting legacy of the wartime experience was that potential
adversaries must never again be allowed to gain control of the resources of Eurasia
through autarkical economic practices, political subversion, and/or military aggression.”
Such power would create a threat to the United States that American policymakers were
not completely confident they could overcome. Leffler connects this perceived scenario
to the effects U.S. officials feared it would have on the domestic front. If a nation gained
control over such resources, “the United States would have to protect itself by increasing
military spending or regimenting its domestic economy. And if such contingencies
materialized, domestic freedoms would be imperiled because there was no way to
separate the economic from the political realms of governmental activity.” Soviet
advances in Third World nations therefore had a direct bearing on the further
development of American democracy in the minds of many Cold warriors. To make sure
such a future did not occur, the United States had to be ready to oppose communists
everywhere and this required access to sites for military facilities around the globe. As
Leffler argues, U.S. “officials regarded overseas bases as one of the keys to retaining
U.S. strategic air superiority and its world leadership role,” two essential components in
the struggle against global communism. The continuation of the American way of life
was therefore closely linked in the minds of U.S. policymakers to other aspects of U.S.
interest in the Third World such as economics, security, and credibility.16

U.S. officials, however, recognized inherent obstacles in gaining the support of
nonaligned nations. In 1953, the NSC noted, “Forces of unrest and of resentment against

16 Melvyn P. Leffler, A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the
the West are strong. Among those sources are racial feelings, anti-colonialism, rising nationalism, [and] popular demand for rapid social and economic progress.” Officials in Eisenhower’s administration explicitly recognized that racial differences could undermine national security by driving away potential allies because foreign nonwhite populations could identify with the victims of domestic American racial violence and not with American democracy.17

The Eisenhower administration also understood the dynamic of nationalism and in 1955 the president claimed that, although “the widespread growth of nationalism…had become obvious in the world since the end of the war [World War II]…the United States…had failed to utilize this new spirit of nationalism in its own interest.” Osgood provides an explanation of this failure when he argues that the president’s “psy-warriors wanted to identify the United States with anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, but such an identification clashed markedly with U.S. allies who were seeking to maintain imperial influence in the developing world.” The desire to maintain good relations with industrialized European nations and keep them in the free world orbit basically precluded any deep association with Third World nationalist movements which were largely anti-colonial, and hence anti-European, in nature.18

The development of a conscious nonaligned movement among Third World countries also posed an obstacle to U.S. efforts to gain allies in the Cold War. Historian Jason Parker claims, “Neutralism complemented nationalism…[and] offered the

17 NSC 162/2, _FRUS_, 587.
possibility that those leaders [of Third World nations] might rally around some other solidarity – regional, racial, or the neutralist cause itself – rather than mere strategic or ideological obeisance to the West or East.” The clearest expression of this neutralist sentiment was the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in April 1955 which leaders of twenty-nine African and Asian nations attended. Parker describes how the Eisenhower administration viewed “the Bandung Conference as a potent symbol of the intensifying dynamics of neutralism, anti-colonialism, Third World nationalism, and race in Cold War affairs,” all of which had the potential to undermine U.S. national security by preventing Third World nations from identifying with and joining the free world against the communist menace.19

By the mid-1950s Soviet officials also recognized the importance of the Third World and sought to expand their influence outside Europe. Josef Stalin died in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev’s ascension to the head of the Soviet state led to a reorientation in foreign policy towards the Third World. According to historian Roger Kanet, communist officials realized the potential Third World nations held as sources of raw materials and bases and also sought to deny these benefits to the West. As with the United States, the ability to quickly support client states and maintain credibility also influenced the Soviet drive in the Third World. Historian Margot Light adds an ideological element when she includes the anti-imperialist aspect of Marxist-Leninist theory as a factor in Soviet interest in the Third World. By identifying with indigenous anti-colonial movements, Soviet officials could expand their influence within the context of the Cold War conflict.

with the capitalist world. As with U.S. policymakers, Soviet officials never escaped the conceptual framework of two competing ideological systems, yet still tried to utilize anti-Western sentiment among Third World populations to undermine U.S. power. As Francis Fukuyama relates, “By admitting [in February 1956] at the Twentieth Congress that the transition to socialism could be made in a variety of ways, Khrushchev legitimizing a range of noncommunist progressive forces in the Third World whose tremendous anti-imperialist potential the Soviet Union had previously not tapped.” Denying Third World identification with the West became a prime Soviet goal in the 1950s as a way both to limit the resources available to the capitalists and begin relationships that would one day lead to communist control.20

To cultivate Third World leaders and populations in the mid-1950s, Soviet leaders undertook extensive efforts to demonstrate interest. Public support for the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 was followed by Khrushchev’s trips to India, Burma, and Afghanistan the same year. According to Odd Arne Westad, the communist leader also “stressed Soviet willingness to cooperate with the ‘national development’ of nonsocialist countries in the Third World both in economic and military terms.” High profile visits to important Third World locations and promises of material aid in the mid-

1950s presented the USSR as a nation willing to accommodate the wishes and aspirations of Third World peoples and made U.S. officials increasingly nervous.21

During the 1950s U.S. officials became concerned about this new Soviet interest in the Third World. At a meeting of the NSC in mid-1955 Eisenhower lamented, “It was very alarming to observe how the Communists had managed to identify themselves and their purposes with this emergent nationalism.” The administration believed the Soviets were using Third World nationalism much more effectively to achieve their goals and this posed a serious national security threat. Osgood discusses how, as a part of presenting themselves as a proponent of anti-colonialism in the Third World, “the Soviets utilized a combination of flexible diplomacy, liberal trade and aid offers, and cultural, educational, and technical exchanges to build closer ties to the developing world.” Osgood further identifies the fear held by U.S. officials that claims by the Soviet leadership of more peaceful intentions, following the death of dictator Josef Stalin in 1953, would attract Third World nations.22

Members of the Eisenhower administration realized how communism could fulfill the previously identified “popular demand for rapid social and economic progress.” In a circular to all United States Information Service missions, the overseas posts of the United States Information Agency, American policymakers worried about “the highly favorable impact made upon newly-developing countries by the material achievements of the Soviet Union.” The report went on to mention how communist leaders could fulfill any economic promises they made to any Third World countries. NSC officials

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22 Memo of 244th Meeting of NSC, FRUS, 41; Osgood, “Words and Deeds”, 10.
recognized that Third World populations understood these potential advantages of the Soviets because “all they see are the results of Russia’s industrialization and all they want is for the Russians to show them how they too can achieve it. We can ill afford to ignore the enormous impact on Asians and other underdeveloped areas which the Russians have made.” Although the consumer goods found in the United States were largely absent in communist nations, Soviet heavy industry, economic modernization, and weapons systems could potentially provide security for newly independent Third World countries. In the minds of American policymakers foreign populations concerned with development were likely to adopt the Soviet Union as a model political and social system.23

The USIA circular also suggested what the administration could do about the new Soviet drive, through official state visits and promises of material aid, for influence in the Third World. “The new Soviet tactics and their appeal to large numbers of people abroad pose new problems for the Free World, which can only be met by consistent pursuit of our own positive aims.” One method to do this, as the NSC argued in 1953, was to move beyond mere economic assistance to “constructive political and other measures [that] will be required to create a sense of mutuality of interest with the free world and to counter the communist appeals.” For President Eisenhower and his administration, propaganda would be a primary tool to achieve these goals.24

Eisenhower pursued the most consistent propaganda program of any Cold War American president in order to maintain a beneficial global image of American society and democracy. According to Osgood, the president “believed that psychological warfare was a potent weapon in the American Cold War arsenal…[and] ensured that psychological considerations exerted a profound influence on the overall direction of U.S. foreign policy.” Eisenhower considered the ability to win the “hearts and minds” of foreign populations, in both allied and nonaligned nations, to be not just one more aspect of American foreign relations, but a key ingredient.25

The NSC had noted how the loss of Third World nations to communism would be a serious detriment to the defense of the United States. Eisenhower felt the same as he directly linked American national security to the success of his worldwide information and propaganda efforts. A mere four days after his inauguration on January 20, 1953 the president ordered the National Security Council to set up a committee, chaired by the head of Eisenhower’s Psychological Strategy Board (later to become the Operations Coordinating Board) C.D. Jackson, to study America’s foreign information programs. The president desired “a survey and evaluation of the international information policies and activities of the Executive Branch of the Government and of policies and activities related thereto with particular reference to the international relations and the national security of this country.” Eisenhower connected propaganda not only to U.S. foreign policy, but also to the successful defense of the nation.26

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25 Osgood, Total Cold War, 6.
26 Ibid., 78; The President to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), January 24, 1953, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, vol. 2: International Information Activities, 1867, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.
The Jackson Committee’s extensive final report on U.S. foreign information programs identified how propaganda could ensure national security and recommended practical steps to be taken. The report noted, “Several important countries in the free world are as yet uncommitted; and as neither the Soviet Union or [sic] the United States can alone gain the power position required to make significant progress toward its objectives, the conflict will probably be most intense in the areas which lie between these two poles of power.” Indeed, in the interest of national security, “the primary purpose of the information program should be to persuade foreign peoples that it lies in their own interest to take actions which are also consistent with the national objectives of the United States.” If foreign populations identified with the United States they would presumably join the free world and bolster the defense of the anti-communist coalition.27

In a late 1955 meeting between the president and congressional leaders, Eisenhower repeated his insistence on propaganda when he “emphasized how important an aggressive information program is in the support of all our other foreign activities.” He further stated, “I am personally convinced that this is the cheapest money we can spend in the whole area of national security. This field is of vital importance in the world struggle.” This passage reveals not only Eisenhower’s continuing emphasis on propaganda during the mid-1950s, but also how the president deemed the success of these foreign information programs essential to the nation’s security.28

To ensure this goal, Eisenhower took practical steps to enhance the power and reach of American propaganda. He followed the Jackson Committee’s recommendation to establish an Operations Coordinating Board to centralize the efforts of his administration concerning national security. He also created the United States Information Agency on August 1, 1953 with the publicly stated goals “to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace.” Such similar language to the Jackson Committee report revealed Eisenhower’s desire to use the newly created USIA to advance American propaganda and therefore ensure American national security.29

The director of the agency during most of Eisenhower’s administration, Theodore C. Streibert, was similarly convinced that foreign information programs held the key to victory in the Cold War. In 1955 he lamented, “The whole level of this activity has been too low, when you consider it holds within it the potential to destroy the opposition’s will to carry out his doctrine of world revolution [emphasis his].” He believed propaganda could sow seeds of doubt in the communist mind and could ultimately end the Cold War in America’s favor. The USIA became such an important part of Eisenhower’s administration that by 1957 the director of the agency consistently attended meetings of

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the NSC and the OCB, two government organizations primarily concerned with national security.\textsuperscript{30}

The USIA distributed books, pamphlets, articles, movies, and newsreels around the globe in order to spread information about the United States. Complementing agency endeavors in film and print were the radio programs of the Voice of America and personal encouragements by agency officials to foreign media personnel to include stories or adopt angles that benefited the United States. Certain methods permeated all of these efforts and the Jackson Committee first recommended that U.S. propaganda “be dependable, convincing, and truthful,” in order to ensure that foreign populations adopted the American worldview. The report went on to warn that the goal of winning “hearts and minds” abroad “can be achieved only on the basis of clear and consistent statements of American positions on major issues.” For propaganda to be effective in gaining allies for the anticommmunist cause and maintaining American national security, it had to be truthful and consistent.\textsuperscript{31}

USIA officials agreed and made factual reporting a standard by which to measure not only the agency’s own efforts, but also the way it perceived foreign press comments. In a report commissioned by the agency in June 1953 and delivered to Streibert in 1954, the USIA extensively examined methods and practices its officials were to use globally. In a clear statement on how to present news stories to foreign populations, the study claimed, “Presenting facts is good enough. A matter-of-fact tone is far more convincing


\textsuperscript{31} Jackson Committee Report, \textit{FRUS}, 1953, 1836, 1838.
than displays of emotion.” The report further justified this argument by explaining it in the context of the struggle with communism. “It is not possible instantaneously to convert anyone from communism to a neutral position. Such a long, difficult task calls for reason, not emotion. USIA’s most forceful propaganda merely uses the Soviets’ own words to expose the falsity of communism.” The self-evident problems in communism would become apparent to foreign populations based on the facts themselves. 32

The agency desired factual representation so deeply that the report advised, “Domestic news that may be received unfavorably abroad must be covered in a strictly factual manner, not ‘explained away.’” If the USIA could factually present events and issues that did not necessarily benefit the American image, the damage to U.S. prestige would still be limited because this truthfulness would build up credibility for the agency in other nations. On the other hand, if clearly propagandistic or slanted news stories appeared in foreign press services and convinced foreign populations to distrust the United States or draw closer to communism, the USIA’s goal of convincing foreign populations that their interests coincided with those of the United States would be threatened and, in the minds of administration officials, America’s national security put at risk. Yet the agency’s goals informed the way it used terms like “factual” and “emotional.”. Factual accounts were not merely to include the specifics of a story, but also the agency’s own interpretation of them. U.S. officials further labeled any account

critical of the United States as emotional and often lamented the “misunderstandings” of foreign populations.\textsuperscript{33} 

To achieve a beneficial global image, Eisenhower and his administration wished to present the United States as the home of democracy and freedom and as the opposite of a repressive communism. Osgood describes how Eisenhower’s newly created OCB developed an overarching plan of propaganda that “attacked the core tenets of communist ideology and promoted the concept of freedom as a positive ideological alternative to communism.” Contrasting freedom and communism was a key component of the administration’s information programs.\textsuperscript{34} 

The USIA also identified several themes to emphasize in order to promote American ideals. Agency officials and publications were to present the United States as a nation of nice, generous, altruistic, peaceable, and cultured people. The agency also sought to spread the more tangible idea of a successful economy, especially because of the belief evident in the administration that a major attraction of communism was its quick provision of material benefits to Third World populations. Agency officials also promoted the desire of Americans to see other peoples achieve freedom, the spiritual quality of American life, and the fact that America was democratic and free. All of these aspects of American society would contribute to the administration’s goals of convincing foreign populations that their interests were the same as those of the people of the United States.\textsuperscript{35} 

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 129. 
\textsuperscript{34} Osgood, “Words and Deeds”, 289. 
\textsuperscript{35} Bogart, Premises For Propaganda, 89-90.
Eisenhower’s propagandists encountered major obstacles in promoting some of these themes. One problem in particular appeared when the USIA tried to advance the notion, included in its description of the theme of democracy, that “in a democratic U.S., all races and creeds live happily together.” Discrimination and violence, predominantly against the African-American minority in the southern states, undermined the goal of the USIA to present the United States as a land of democracy and freedom, even according to the agency’s definition of the former in the survey of its operating assumptions. Osgood puts it concisely when he says, “American race relations were one of the most vexing propaganda problems facing the United States Information Agency.” In addition to the violence inherent in those relations, the fact that many Third World populations were nonwhite, and could potentially identify with the African-American minority based on race, undermined the prestige of the United States.\(^\text{36}\)

Racial strife in the United States affected the image of American democracy in the eyes of Third World populations, especially those in Africa and Asia. Historian Mary Dudziak reveals how U.S. officials perceived this challenge to America’s prestige when she claims that as they endeavored “particularly to ensure that democracy would be appealing to newly independent nations in Asia and Africa, the diplomatic impact of race in America was especially stark.” The fact that Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had called the neutralist Bandung Conference demonstrated the potential that racial issues, including both discrimination and white colonialism, could potentially separate the United States from strategically important countries in Asia. U.S. concern over the reconstruction of Western European nations, and paternalistic attitudes towards

\(^\text{36}\) Ibid., 89; Osgood, “Words and Deeds”, 12.
nonwhites held by American officials, often led to acquiescence in the continuation of white colonialism. Rapid independence would open the door to communism so nonwhites had to be trained for democratic self-government by their colonial overseers. Despite anti-colonialist rhetoric, the Eisenhower administration offered only lukewarm support to groups striving for freedom. Aid more often went to white Europeans, as when the United States heavily funded France’s war in Indochina.37

The U.S. record on colonialism therefore undermined the American image in the eyes of Third World populations. This was crucial because upon achieving independence many Third World nations opted for neutralism. James Meriwether describes the significance of an independent Ghana by claiming it “seemingly held the potential to lead an entire slate of African nations into nonaligned status.” The dynamic nationalist leader Kwame Nkrumah’s immense prestige in the Third World as head of the first sub-Saharan African nation to achieve independence after World War II created the potential for other countries to follow his neutralist example. The USIA undertook constant efforts during Eisenhower’s administration to explain events and issues involving race to foreign populations in order to maintain, and at times repair, America’s international image and therefore enhance the ability of the United States to gain allies.38

The USIA hoped to explain discrimination in the context of overall progress for the African-American population. Violent events were not indicative of American race relations, the agency claimed, but merely aberrations in the progress the United States was making toward a more free and equal society. Osgood describes how Eisenhower’s

propagandists tried to advance a balanced picture because “while admitting that racial discrimination was indeed a problem in American life, the agency stressed that the United States was progressing on the road to equal opportunity.” Mary Dudziak, who has studied the connection between international opinion in the Cold War and civil rights reform, extensively examines a prominent USIA pamphlet titled “The Negro in American Life” which “revealed, rather than concealed, the nation’s past failings, and it did so for the purpose of presenting American history as a story of redemption. In this story, democracy as a system of government was the vehicle for national reconciliation.” She claims that from this USIA publication “we see the image of gradual and progressive social change which was described as the fulfillment of democracy.” Despite America’s former racial oppression and even current racial violence, only democracy, not communism, could provide an environment in which the nation could overcome the wrongs of the past.\(^{39}\)

The early USIA self-examination also revealed an approach to explaining American racial problems that was consistent with the agency’s goals of factual reporting, convincing others to identify with the United States, and promoting the image of progress in race relations. Agency officials advised, “If people abroad want to know about an anti-Negro incident in the South, the wire services have to tell them about it, even if it is harmful to American foreign policy.” This factual reporting would build credibility that agency officials seemed to believe was worth more in the long run for U.S. foreign relations than periodic dips in prestige due to isolated incidents. In an effort to get foreign populations to identify with the United States the agency commented, “Negro Americans can answer charges of racial discrimination more effectively than

white Americans can. Any favorable description of Americans or America should be written by a foreign national since his account will be readily believed.” Incidents of racial violence were treated with a dual process emphasizing factual reporting and the theme of progress. “A lynching should be reported without comment, but the following week, when memories of it have faded, there should be a general report on progress in U.S. race relations.” Avoiding sensational stories on American racial incidents would uphold American prestige and the USIA narrative.40

A major discrepancy appeared between the president’s concern with upholding the American image and the way he handled racial issues which threatened to undermine that image. Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson provide a concise explanation of the factors influencing the president’s avoidance of racial matters. They show that Eisenhower was more familiar with white southerners than blacks, he was uncomfortable when popular passions were aroused, and he disliked choosing sides on divisive issues. His belief in the division of power between the federal government and the individual states also generally precluded action on behalf of African-Americans outside the purview of the national government. Robert Burk, in his work on Eisenhower and civil rights, argues, “He preferred to limit his involvement in racial questions to the occasional assertion of general democratic principles.” Due to these beliefs, as Osgood claims, “Eisenhower resisted taking the assertive stand on civil rights that American propagandists so badly needed to convince the world that the United States was indeed

40 Bogart, *Premises For Propaganda*, 139, 117, 133.
progressing toward racial equality.” The president refused to intervene in specific racial incidents unless there was a clear threat to federal authority.\textsuperscript{41}

Eisenhower’s own words in the following passage from his diaries revealed both how his conception of limited federal power and his desire for gradual change, to avoid the arousal of popular passions, worked together to limit his involvement in many racial issues. He thought, “Improvement in race relations is one of those things that will be healthy and sound only if it starts locally. I do not believe that prejudices, even palpably unjustified prejudices, will succumb to compulsion. Consequently, I believe that federal law imposed upon our states in such a way as to bring about a conflict of the police powers of the states and of the nation, would set back the cause of progress in race relations for a long, long time.” Eisenhower’s refusal to allow the FBI or the justice department to prosecute the murderers of Emmett Till, to extend the aid of the executive branch to Autherine Lucy in her struggles at the University of Alabama, or to help the African-American population in Montgomery during the bus boycott demonstrated his avoidance of racial issues.\textsuperscript{42}

The story of American progress in racial matters thus became hard to sell for the USIA without clear evidence of government support of civil rights. Indeed, as Osgood argues, Eisenhower’s “self-proclaimed belief that he could not change people’s views on racial matters with mere words stands in stark contrast to his avid endorsement of propaganda to mold popular attitudes on other matters.” That propaganda would fail as from mid-1955 through 1956, three racially charged events in the South would

\textsuperscript{41} Pach and Richardson, \textit{Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower}, 148-9; Burk, \textit{The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights}, 23; Osgood, “Words and Deeds”, 15.
undermine the image the agency wished to present to the world. The murder of Emmett Till and the acquittal of his killers, the mob violence involved in Atherine Lucy’s entrance to the University of Alabama, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott exposed the ugly underbelly of American race relations to the world. Both the inherent violence and federal inaction in these incidents would affect the success of the narrative of racial progress the USIA sought to spread globally.43

Mamie Till Bradley was only one of the hundreds of thousands of African-Americans who migrated from the South to northern cities during the first half of the twentieth century. After her husband died in 1945 she raised her then four year old son on her own. During the summer of 1955 she sent Emmett to visit relatives in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi. On August 24 he and some friends and cousins visited the store owned by Roy Bryant that usually catered to an African-American clientele. Roy’s wife, Carolyn was working the counter that day and, while accounts differ, an encounter occurred between her and Till. She described the incident luridly while the group with the fourteen year old claimed he only whistled or said “bye, baby” as he left the establishment. Regardless of the exact nature of his actions, Till had breached the boundaries of acceptable behavior for an African-American in the social structure of Mississippi. After returning later in the day and hearing of the incident, Roy and his brother-in-law, J.W. Milam, went to the sharecroppers shack where Till was staying with his great-uncle, dragged the boy out in the middle of the night, tortured and murdered him, and threw his body into the Tallahatchie River. When his body surfaced three days

later so mutilated that he could only be identified by his father’s ring the local sheriff arrested the two white men on charges of murder and kidnapping.\textsuperscript{44}

Instead of remaining a local matter, like many other events in the South during the 1950s, Till’s death became a national and international news event. His mother played a large role in raising the visibility of her son’s death by shipping his body back to Chicago and holding an open casket funeral. She proclaimed, “Let the people see what I’ve seen. I want the world to see this.” Mrs. Till sought to connect the murder to the worldwide struggle for racial equality when she said, “If the death of my son can mean something to the other unfortunate people all over the world then for him to have died a hero would mean more to me than for him just to have died.” She wanted her son’s death to be impossible to ignore across the country and around the globe.\textsuperscript{45}

According to historian Stephen J. Whitfield, the governor of Mississippi and major publications in the state condemned the murder, but subsequent attention from outside the region began to have an effect. He claims, “The persistence of such feelings of resentment at outside intervention made it easy to shift blame in the Till case.” Complementing the problems already inherent in the use of an all white jury to judge a racial crime in the South, “because of the outside agitation, the local elite united behind the defendants.” On September 23 it took the jury only sixty-seven minutes to return a not guilty verdict and in November another local jury cleared the men of kidnapping charges.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Keith A. Beauchamp, dir., \textit{The Untold Story of Emmett Till} (Thinkfilm, 2005), 29:00-30:00.
\textsuperscript{46} Whitfield, \textit{Death in the Delta}, 28, 30, 42, 47.
Outrage within the United States appeared not only in newspaper and magazine articles, but also in personal entreaties to the justice department for government involvement in the case. Even before the trial of Bryant and Milam, scores of Americans sent letters to Washington, many commenting on how the murder would appear overseas. A card from Mr. Lesiam of Los Angeles claimed, “The eyes of the Asian and African peoples are upon us in such matters,” while another lamented, “What a shame to the whole world that such things happen in our great land.” After the trial ended, a Dr. Joseph Fennelly from New York suggested, “The whole philosophy behind this [be] evaluated with a view toward its effect to the U.S. as a world power.” Many private American citizens were aware of how other nations would view Till’s murder and how it would affect international U.S. prestige.47

Despite condemnation from varied sources, Eisenhower’s Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, remembered, “We had to turn down requests for federal prosecution of the Till case because we lacked jurisdiction.” Eisenhower did not use the FBI or allow the Attorney General’s office to get involved in prosecuting Till’s murderers due to his personal belief in the division between state and federal power and his general uneasiness in racial matters. E. Frederic Morrow, the highest placed African-American in Eisenhower’s administration as the Administrative Officer for Special Projects, claimed that at a meeting on December 19 of other African-Americans in the administration, including the Director of Minorities of the Republican National Committee Val Washington, “We were unanimous in feeling that the Republicans missed the ball when

47 Letters to Department of Justice, RG 60, Box 171, NA; For a survey of domestic reactions see Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 43-50.
no prominent member of the Administration spoke out against the handling of the Till matter.” The murder and acquittal undermined the USIA’s narrative of progress in American race relations and the lack of action from the federal government further diluted the agency’s efforts.48

In neighboring Alabama a young African-American woman named Autherine Lucy had finally been admitted to the University of Alabama after a three-year class action lawsuit following her initial rejection. After the Supreme Court decided that the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, which declared racially segregated schools unconstitutional and laid the groundwork for desegregation, extended to schools receiving tax dollars, she was able to register in February 1956. A quiet girl by temperament who wanted to be a librarian, she had “decided ‘it was my task’ to proceed on behalf of those who had never been permitted to study at the university.” Her determined stand against segregation and white supremacy would be met by resistance from local authorities and mob violence.49

Lucy had only attended the university for two days, but over the following weekend Ku Klux Klan activity in the city increased, including the burning of crosses near the school. Mobs assembled and harassed other African-Americans. When Lucy returned on Monday, a group of about two thousand whites met her and chased her to her


first class. She was finally rescued by a highway patrolman and laid on the floor of the
car to avoid objects being thrown by the mob. As author Norma Sayre points out, despite
the previous admittance of African-Americans to all-white schools in the South, “the
Lucy case was the first occasion when a black student’s admission to a Southern
university was savagely opposed.” The trustees suspended Lucy the next day citing her
personal safety and on March 1 they expelled her on the narrow legal grounds that her
lawyers had accused them of associating with the violent mob.50

Domestic reactions to the mob violence and Lucy’s subsequent expulsion were
not as widespread as those to Till’s murder and focused mainly on the issue of
desegregation and not America’s position in the Cold War. When discussing the response
of New York Governor Averell Harriman, Sayre claims he “charged Attorney General
Herbert Brownell with failing to enforce the law, and he said President Eisenhower was
taking the case too ‘lightly.’” Democratic presidential hopeful Adlai Stevenson also
suggested that Eisenhower address the incident. The president, according to Sayre,
“‘deplored’ the rioting and said federal ‘interference’ was undesirable.” His belief in the
separated powers of the federalist system again precluded any action. Brownell
remembered, “Our inability to act because we lacked the power to do so hampered us in
the case of Autherine Lucy…..we monitored the situation closely, but the federal court’s
action left us no avenue to force Lucy’s readmission to the university.” Eisenhower again
failed to move his administration to act to defend the civil rights of African-Americans.51

50 Ibid., 164-168.
51 Ibid., 165; Brownell, Advising Ike, 228n3.
The situation in Alabama caused great consternation for Morrow and his reactions revealed fears over what could happen without a response by the administration. As with the Till case, he believed the lack of a public statement by the president condemning the incident would undermine the already faltering image of the administration concerning civil rights. On March 1 he discussed the announcement that the federal courts in Alabama had ordered Lucy’s readmission, the negative responses already appearing in Tuscaloosa, and claimed, “We obviously have the makings of a first-class race riot.” He met with Max Rabb, whom Eisenhower had appointed to deal with minority groups, to develop a plan of action in case more mob violence erupted. 52

As the episode continued, Pach and Richardson relate how “when Lucy won reinstatement in federal court, the university expelled her, an action the court refused to overturn for lack of proof that it was racially motivated.” At that point Morrow suggested, “At a propitious time the President issue a strong, ringing statement deploiring the breakdown of law and order in the South and the ignoring of civil and human rights, and pledging his office to do what it can to restore sanity, decency, and order to this section of the country.” Morrow never got his wish. Even the mob violence was not enough for the president to justify any sort of intervention to maintain public order and enforce federal law, as in the case of Little Rock a year and a half later. America’s international image would suffer as the nation appeared ruled by the mob. 53

At the same time Autherine Lucy was experiencing her ordeal, other African-Americans in the same state were involved in a similar struggle. On December 1, 1955

Rosa Parks famously refused to give up her seat to a white man on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The police arrested and booked her, but shortly afterwards she left jail when a friend paid her bond. African-American lawyers and preachers in the city quickly learned what had happened and began to distribute flyers and encourage others to avoid using buses the next week in protest. Leaders of the African-American community in the city, including Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to help run the protest. Local authorities arrested King and others several times over the next year as the boycott continued, including a mass indictment of eighty-nine boycott leaders on 21 February 1956 on charges of conspiracy. The initial goal of the movement was to end segregation on the local bus system, but it certainly had much larger implications for racial equality in America.54

The white population of the city did not accept such protest and agitation peacefully. According to Stewart Burns, “The bus boycott carried on in the face of legal repression, white intimidation, and sporadic violence,” including attacks on King’s home and African-American churches in the city. Even the state of Alabama opposed the boycotters by trying to shut down the NAACP and the MIA car pool in the city. On June 5, 1956 a federal court in Montgomery ruled the bus segregation laws of the city and the state to be unconstitutional, the United States Supreme Court upheld the decision on November 13, and the boycott ended successfully on December 20. The court decision proved a large step towards expanding the influence of the Brown decision because it argued that Brown “reached beyond public schools to other forms of legalized racial

segregation.” Lasting a full year, the boycott showed the world a group of people willing to take action to change their city. Foreign audiences also saw the state government try to stop the movement and the violence the boycotters encountered from whites in the city.  

At times domestic responses placed the boycott in a global context. An article in the *Montgomery Advertiser* described the variety of reporters present to cover the events in Alabama. In addition to listing correspondents from national newspapers and the “Negro press,” the article mentioned Indian, English, and French reporters. The chairman of the sociology department at Atlanta University praised the boycotters and said, “Their actions offered a symbol that could act as a safeguard against the spread of Communism in troubled Asia and Africa.” A visit by African-American Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, an undersecretary of the United Nations, revealed how U.N. officials noticed the boycott. He claimed, “[A] no more convincing blow could be struck against the enemies of democracy and liberty than the acceptance of all Americans as equal without regard to race.” The statement contained an implicit argument that any lack of effort to achieve such equality could be construed as aiding the enemies of America.  

Although federal court decisions ended legal segregation on buses in the city and the orders were generally adhered to by the white population of Montgomery, the president again refused to get involved. He disliked any situation where popular passions were strong and he even implicitly laid some blame on the African-American population when he wrote in his diary, “The Montgomery police had to convoy buses through the

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55 Ibid., 14, 27-8.  
Negro sections of town to prevent bloodshed.” When asked about the trial of Martin Luther King, Jr. during the events in Montgomery the chief executive answered, “As I understand it, there is a state law about boycotts, and it is under that kind of thing that these people are being brought to trial.” Here his belief in states rights informed his opposition to federal involvement. He further espoused, “I believe we should not stagnate, but again I plead for understanding, for really sympathetic consideration of the problem that is far larger.” Such understanding and consideration, which for Eisenhower would include the feelings of white southerners, precluded any rapid change in rights for African-Americans. The lack of action from the president and his administration, combined with the violence occurring during the boycott, overshadowed the positive aspect of the federal court decisions which put an end to the ordeal. Another racial event undermined the USIA narrative of progress in racial issues and even the limited steps taken by the federal courts would not significantly bolster the American image.57

As President Eisenhower avoided racial issues outside the federal government, his propagandists struggled to stem the tide of negative reactions to American race relations and to these events in particular. Osgood comments on the “striking contradiction in Eisenhower’s thought and behavior here. He believed more strongly than perhaps any other president in the importance of public persuasion as an instrument of foreign policy, but he convinced himself that he could do nothing to affect views about race in his own country.” His views on the use of propaganda to convince foreign populations to identify

with the United States contrasted markedly with his failure to take concrete steps to
change the perception of how his administration handled racial issues. He would not, and
could not according to his conceptions concerning the limited reach of federal power,
give his “psy-warriors,” as Osgood terms them, the direct action they needed to enhance
the American image and to advance the narrative of racial progress in American race
relations.58

Eisenhower’s attitudes and actions reflect one of the main conclusions of
Borstelmann, who argues, “The essential strategy of American Cold Warriors was to try
to manage and control the efforts of racial reformers at home and abroad, thereby
minimizing provocation to the forces of white supremacy and colonialism while
encouraging gradual change.” He claims they did so because they “hoped effectively to
contain racial polarization and build the largest possible multiracial, anti-communist
coaalition under American leadership.” Adding nations to the free world would enhance
the national security of the United States in its global struggle with the Soviet Union. One
of the primary ways to achieve this was to convince foreign populations to identify with
the interests of the United States. Yet, American racial violence seriously complicated
this goal and Dudziak notes “the government’s inability to control the story,” of progress
in American race relations which the USIA wanted to spread globally.59

As the murder of Emmett Till and the acquittal of his killers, Autherine Lucy’s
struggles with the University of Alabama, and the events in Montgomery received
international attention in late 1955 and early 1956, U.S. propagandists closely studied the

59 Borstelmann, Cold War and the Color Line, 2; Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 250.
reactions to these events by diverse foreign audiences. Despite the damage to America’s image by the incidents, they also presented an opportunity for the USIA to measure the success of its narrative. Agency officials wanted to see if calm, factual reports, according to their definitions, appeared in the global press. They also sought to identify steps they could take to repair America’s image. These events therefore provide a window on a moment in the mid-1950s in which Eisenhower’s propagandists tried to understand the way racial issues played out in a global context. These endeavors also revealed how individual racial incidents became issues in the minds of American policymakers that could potentially affect not just American prestige, but also the success of American goals and policies worldwide and the security of the nation in the Cold War.
CHAPTER 2
THE USIA NARRATIVE IN EUROPE

Eisenhower’s propagandists were very active in Europe trying to convince foreign populations to adopt the U.S. position in many areas, including the United States Information Agency’s interpretation of American racial issues. Alliances with industrialized, democratic European nations were crucial to maintaining a solid anti-communist bloc and the way European populations viewed the Untied States was important to American policymakers. During the Cold War the USIA sought to describe American race relations in terms of the progress of the African-American minority within the context of a democratic system. Incidents of racial violence, such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, undermined both the image of America as a land of freedom and equality and the narrative concerning race the USIA sought to tell the world.

Agency officials closely examined European reactions to these three racial events on the basis of its own criteria for success in propaganda and to understand other ways that the issue of race operated in the global Cold War environment. They found that conservative and moderate media generally adhered to aspects of the USIA story while socialist and communist papers contained more critical responses. The intensity of reaction therefore often, but not always, depended on political outlook. Agency officials also connected reactions to American racial violence with domestic or foreign policy issues in other nations. They commented on how French problems with North Africa and the developing Congo question in Belgium, for example, contributed to the way these
nations viewed race in the United States. Many times, however, agency officials could not place the reactions in the larger context of the relationships between the United States and various European nations. A limited understanding of the positions of Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, and Austria in the Cold War led to a lack of recognition of how race fully played out in Europe. Only in France did agency officials seem to explore every angle when examining reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents.

A detailed study of the reactions to these events demonstrates how U.S. prestige suffered. In the outlook of the USIA, American foreign policy and possibly national security would be affected because foreign populations did not fully adopt its narrative. Yet, economic and military ties between Western Europe and the United States served to limit the threat to national security perceived by agency officials and informed by their emphasis on the success of their narrative. The very real violence and visibility of American racial incidents, however, caused the complete triumph of the USIA story to remain an elusive dream. The agency’s narrative of progress in American race relations appeared throughout Western European press reactions, but, always accompanied by an awareness of the destructiveness of racial events, never dominated European perceptions of the United States. Mentioning progress in racial matters often brought to mind previous violence and the two sides of the issue often seemed inextricably linked. U.S. officials sought to understand the European reactions to these racial events in order to gauge the success of the agency’s narrative in each country, and in the region as whole, and to identify steps the United States could take to repair and maintain America’s image in the future.
The USIA belief in its narrative of progress did not coincide with its stated goals of achieving a factual treatment of American racial incidents. When trying to develop credibility with foreign audiences “domestic news that may be received unfavorably abroad must be covered in a strictly factual manner, not ‘explained away.’” While the specific facts of the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents would not exactly bolster U.S. prestige, policymakers believed that “both USIA’s official character and its need for credibility create strong pressures for authenticity in news reporting.” The agency sought to establish a record with foreign populations of honesty and candor that could then be utilized when advancing its own views. Yet only simply reporting the facts of American racial violence would certainly not benefit the American image. Therefore when the agency spread information advancing the notion of progress in American race relations it deviated from its own stated goals of objective facts by putting incidents in such a context. Propagandists remained attached to their propaganda. Hoping to see factual accounts in foreign reactions therefore meant not the details of racial incidents, but the existence of the agency’s own ideas.60

Foreign responses identified as “emotional” were those which were critical of the United States and did not adhere to USIA propaganda. Agency officials felt a rational approach, by which they meant the adoption of the right context for racial incidents, to be important because it was “not possible instantaneously to convert anyone from communism to a neutral position.” They further believed, “Such a long, difficult task calls for reason, not emotion.” Therefore, invective responses to American race relations

were termed “emotional.” While U.S. officials believed themselves objective by wanting foreign press accounts to treat racial incidents on the merits of the facts, they actually wanted responses to conform to their own story of racial progress. Anything deviating from that framework was viewed as subversive to agency goals and therefore tagged with paternalistic language that presented their own approach as superior. By claiming its interpretation was the correct view of American race relations, the USIA diverged from its stated goals of pure objectivity. The idea that “showing pictures of Negroes and whites together, without social labels, permits the audience to draw its own conclusions about tolerance and equality in the U.S.,” would only work if the agency’s narrative of racial progress was present in the minds of the viewers. Indeed, success when “the audience should be permitted to draw the necessary parallels and implications from the message,” could only be achieved if the latter held the correct interpretation. Yet, because the agency could not escape a conceptual framework based on “factual” versus “emotional” reporting, foreign reactions must be examined largely in those terms to see how American propagandists in the 1950s perceived their level of success or failure.61

By the end of 1954 the USIA was well established on the European continent. The agency had sixty-six posts in twenty nations, employing some 388 Americans in addition to numerous locals. Officials often tried to influence elites in these countries in order to have a greater impact on the larger population. An NSC report on USIA efforts in Western Europe from the first half of 1954 mentioned how the “USIA now concentrates greater effort toward influencing leaders who are judged capable of influencing, in turn, that mass audience which, because of limited funds, the Agency

61 Ibid., 143, 146.
cannot regularly reach directly.” An important segment of this elite consisted of those who would voice reactions to American racial events. The direct targeting of foreign writers and editors with personal propaganda efforts made the failure of the USIA narrative regarding the violent domestic American racial events of the mid-1950s all the more disappointing. Those individuals the agency deemed most important when maintaining America’s image did not always follow the USIA line.62

The perception of communist propaganda advances in some European countries and the importance of certain European press elements heightened the USIA desire to export its narrative of racial progress globally. Scandinavian countries voiced some of the most vehement reactions to American racial violence in the mid-1950s and as early as mid-1954 the NSC noted, “In Finland, Norway, and Sweden, some program emphasis was shifted to northern areas, where backward economic conditions and inadequate communications with the Western World have invited increasing Soviet propaganda activity.” The same NSC report mentioned, “The Agency completed plans for reopening its Bern office at the request of the U.S. embassy. The office fills an urgent need to work in close contact with the internationally influential Swiss press and counter growing Communist efforts in that field.” A year later the NSC combined the above endeavor to influence prominent individuals with a “recognition of the continued influence and prestige of the Swiss press throughout the world,” when it said that the primary goal of the new Public Affairs Officer in Bern was “to establish personal contact with key editors

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and publishers throughout Switzerland and to supply them with factual information concerning U.S. foreign policy and its motivation.” Agency officials wanted influential European press outlets to carry the American interpretation of issues, including the USIA narrative concerning race.  

One of the most visible examples of the way Eisenhower’s propagandists tried to familiarize European populations with African-Americans involved the opera *Porgy and Bess*, which was composed by the internationally recognized George Gershwin. The State Department sent the production abroad to German and Austrian theaters in 1952 and hoped it would demonstrate to European audiences the progress African-Americans, who made up most of the cast, were making in American society. Historian David Monod relates how State Department officials announced in a press release that one of the stated aims of the event was to refute charges “that the colored people have no opportunity to develop their abilities beyond slave status.” Performing an opera by such a celebrated artist as Gershwin would demonstrate the cultural advancement of African-Americans in American society.

Monod judges the opera a failure as a propaganda tool because the violence and stereotypes in the performance only reinforced those already held by German and Austrian reviewers unfamiliar with African-Americans. Some commentators also believed they were seeing actual American society, not just American art. Although *Porgy and Bess* did not achieve the goal of the State Department “to counter direct Soviet

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charges regarding American cultural backwardness and racial cruelty,” U.S. officials apparently misunderstood the reviews by squeezing “the complexity of local perception and reaction into the Cold War’s binary conceptual categories,” and labeled the endeavor a success because it presented American ideas and culture. Money from the President’s Fund, established during the mid-1950s by the federal government to promote American entertainment abroad, helped the cast travel to Latin America and some Mediterranean countries as a showcase of African-American acting talent and American art in general. The episode highlights some of the practical, visible efforts the United States undertook in Western Europe to demonstrate the progress of African-Americans, in this case actors, in American culture and society.65

The USIA and the State Department used a variety of means to promote progress in American race relations in Europe. Osgood relates how “the agency’s [USIA] propaganda to all countries included special programming on the accomplishments of African Americans.” A prominent effort included celebrating Abraham Lincoln’s birthday “with books, pamphlets, and special programs presenting Lincoln as a symbol of freedom, justice, and racial equality,” and placing African Americans in the context of progress throughout American history. Mary Dudziak’s description of the widely distributed USIA pamphlet “The Negro in American Life,” with its emphasis on American democracy and progress for African Americans, reveals extensive agency efforts to convince others of their interpretation. In addition to these major endeavors, Osgood describes numerous smaller agency efforts. The USIA “distributed features on African American leaders to local newsreel companies, promoted music by African

65 Ibid., 305-310.
American musicians on radio programs, published biographies of prominent African Americans, and gave paperback books on ‘the American Negro’ to secondary schools and universities.” Even more influential were the constant “press items illustrating the progress African Americans had made since emancipation,” which U.S. officials consistently provided to foreign news services for inclusion in their publications or broadcasts. Beginning in 1954, the USIA widely utilized the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to provide clear evidence that progress was being made in American race relations. All these efforts were present in Europe where close contact with members of the local press and elites provided avenues to distribute a constant stream of material relating to the progress being made by African Americans.66

By the end of June 1955, mere weeks before the murder of Emmett Till, USIA officials were growing increasingly concerned with advance of Soviet propaganda concerning cultural issues. The agency reported that in Western Europe “cultural activities…continued to increase as a countermeasure to the Soviet ‘cultural offensive.’” According to Osgood, after Stalin’s death communists increased their participation in trade fairs fourfold and “the number of Soviet cultural delegations, including tours by theatrical, musical, and dance groups, tripled between 1953 and 1955.” Part of the U.S. efforts involved projects created by the Operations Coordinating Board Working Group on Cultural Activities in which a variety of groups, from orchestras to comedy acts to athletes, traveled abroad to present aspects of American society to foreign populations. NSC officials mentioned, “It is significant to note that several of the groups and some of

the individual artists were of the Negro race. The cultural attainments of these Negroes were living proof to foreign audiences of the great progress achieved by the race under the American democratic system.” Eisenhower’s propagandists were trying to give European populations tangible evidence of the narrative the USIA was trying to export. Yet as the USIA subsequently endeavored to understand the European reactions to the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, it realized its previous efforts in Europe had not established the agency’s story of progress as the dominant interpretation of American race relations.67

The USIA conducted several surveys during 1956 of European opinion concerning race in the United States. By far the longest and most comprehensive study was a report titled, “World-Wide Press Comments on the Racial Problem in the U.S. – 1956.” This fifty-seven page survey of foreign reactions to race in the United States examined attitudes in every area of the world, from Latin America to the Middle East, the Soviet Union to South Africa. Similar to some American embassy and consulate officials, the authors of the report at times commented on other factors that may have influenced the reactions. USIA and State Department officials closely watched the extent to which foreign press services reflected the USIA goals of factual reporting and of placing the incidents in the context of overall progress in racial matters.68

67 Osgood, Total Cold War, 216-217; NSC 5525, FRUS, 533.
The preface of the report identified some of the major events directing attention to race in the United States and included some general comments on the nature of the reactions. The Till case was prevalent, but also “the demonstrations connected with the admission of Miss Autherine Lucy to the University of Alabama and the boycotting of buses in Montgomery by Negroes of that city furnished an opening for those who wanted to attack the U.S.” Communist information outlets caused the most uproar, but “the intensely nationalistic and color conscious press in many parts of the world” also reacted vehemently. Agency officials recognized that nationalism and the presence of a racialized lens influenced foreign press condemnations of the United States. Encouraging news came from the fact that “in all areas, a number of papers presented an objective and balanced picture of segregation.” The USIA narrative was therefore present in every global region and this demonstrated a measure of effectiveness in agency efforts to present the American side to racial events.69

The USIA also tried to quantify European reactions to American racial issues and undertook a study of Western European attitudes towards race in the United States between April 16th and May 2nd of 1956, with the final report submitted on July 24th. Titled, “Opinion About U.S. Treatment of Negroes,” the study focused on Great Britain, West Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. Using about eight hundred samples from each nation with people over the age of twenty-one, “interviewing was done by contract under local auspices, with no indication to respondents of American interest in the surveys to bias answers in any way.” The anonymous research demonstrates the level of accuracy the agency desired in the study because respondents would feel more willing

69 Ibid., i.
to express their true feelings if they thought the United States was not involved in the survey. The foreword of the document cautioned that the percentages were not to be taken as “absolute precision, but as useful estimates.” The two most important sections of the report covered the general view of how the United States treated African-Americans as well as more specific issues that affected how Europeans viewed American race relations.70

Western European populations clearly identified the three prominent racial incidents which occurred during the latter half of 1955 and into 1956 as factors in how they viewed the United States. USIA officials noted, “The Autherine Lucy case qualifies as not less than an international cause celebre” and “appreciable portions also cite the Nat King Cole incident [in which the African-American singer was attacked on stage by whites], the Emmett Till murder, and the Alabama bus strike [in Montgomery].” After asking people to rank the U.S. treatment of African-Americans on a scale from very good to very bad, the agency found “unfavorable opinion varies from 28 per cent in Italy to a remarkable 75 per cent in the Netherlands.” The latter nation contained the largest reservoir of negative feeling towards the United States concerning racial issues. Great Britain followed with a negative opinion rate of 63 percent. France was at 54 percent and West Germany 35 percent. In two of America’s closest and most important allies during this period, Great Britain and France, over half of the survey respondents indicated a negative view of the United States and its handling of racial issues. Such high

percentages revealed that the USIA narrative was not convincing foreign populations to view American racial violence in the context of progress in race relations.\textsuperscript{71}

In an effort to understand these negative opinions, the study asked respondents to identify specific issues or events influencing their impressions. As mentioned above, the Lucy case loomed large in this part of the survey. Percentages in each country directly linking the incident to their unfavorable impression of the United States were as follows: the Netherlands 36 percent, Great Britain 29 percent, France, 27 percent, West Germany 24 percent, and Italy 5 percent. While Italians did not base a high percentage of their ill will towards the United States directly on the Lucy case, they indicated displeasure over a variety of other American racial issues such as intolerance and discrimination. Not only did America’s closest allies contain a high level of negative feeling towards the United States concerning race, but in mid-1956 around a quarter of survey respondents specifically mentioned the Autherine Lucy case. The latter incident therefore had a significant affect on the ability of the USIA to develop its narrative of racial progress in Western European nations.\textsuperscript{72}

The survey also revealed links between unfavorable impressions concerning American race relations and both the Montgomery bus boycott and the Till murder. Six percent of both the British and Dutch public mentioned Montgomery and the boycott specifically and 8 percent of French respondents fell under the heading “racial discrimination in buses and restaurants.” Furthermore, 13 percent in France, 3 percent in Italy, and 2 percent in Great Britain identified the murder of Emmett Till as the reason for

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 5-8.
their negative opinion of race relations in the United States. Although several other factors appeared in each nation’s response, the Lucy case topped the list in every country but Italy and the other two incidents were often notably on the minds of Western Europeans. Such quantification revealed the significant attention and subsequent criticism directed towards the United States during the first half of 1956 on the issue of race.\(^{73}\)

In the same report, the USIA endeavored to identify areas concerning race in which Western European populations viewed the United States in a more favorable manner. Near the top of categorized lists for each nation were comments on desegregation in schools, on buses, and in general policy. There were also headings such as “the government tries to improve the situation of the Negroes by enacting legislation,” (4 percent in Germany), “government opposes segregation and improves situation of Negroes,” (3 percent in Netherlands, and “Eisenhower stands up for Negroes,” (2 percent in Netherlands). Recognition of government efforts on behalf of African Americans existed alongside a general approval of the progress of desegregation in the United States. The USIA narrative had achieved limited success in that some Western Europeans believed the agency’s story concerning race relations, but the raw numbers were not in America’s favor. Only 7 percent in Italy, 9 percent in both Germany and France, 13 percent in Great Britain, and a surprising 28 percent in the Netherlands registered any sort of favorable impression, which then broke down further into categories. Indeed, the beginning of the report claimed, “The positive side of U.S. race relations shows but limited evidence of impact with only comparatively small proportions citing any favorable recent impressions in regard to treatment of Negroes in America.” The USIA

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 5-8.
narrative of progress in racial matters was struggling in Western Europe during the first half of 1956 and the Lucy, Till, and Montgomery cases in large part contributed to those problems. 74

The USIA’s long survey of international press reactions to violent American racial events demonstrated the agency’s desire to understand how successful its narrative had been in individual European countries. If foreign accounts of the incidents appeared in a calm, factual manner and put the events in the context of the progress being made in American race relations then the image of the United States benefited. Inflammatory, emotional language and biased headlines, according to the agency’s definitions, challenged the image of the United States as a land of democracy and freedom and in the minds of some American policymakers, held the potential to undermine American national security in the Cold War. Closely examining the European reactions in individual nations to the Till murder, the Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott was crucial for the agency to gauge the success of its narrative.

According to Gunter Bischof, “Neutral Austria…tried to build bridges between East and West and practiced a growing neutralist equidistance [sic] in the Cold War.” The Central European nation experienced quite different perspectives on American racial issues despite, among other efforts, USIA inclusion of information on African-American jazz musician Louis Armstrong and baseball player Willie Mays in packages given to Austrian youth. Government sponsored newspapers, conservative in nature, reported events factually and often commented favorably on the progress of integration.

74 Ibid., ii, 9-11.
“Similarly, the few independent papers which reported the desegregation issue did so factually and without bias, despite an obvious sympathy for the Negro cause.” USIA officials claimed that socialist papers, on the other hand, often included headlines revealing their bias, such as when an article on the University of Copenhagen’s offer to Lucy to attend there was titled, “Denmark Puts America to Shame.” Some of the most damaging things to appear in the Austrian press were cartoons. The Socialist Arbeiter-Zeitung, had “a burly man with a big cigar sitting on the steps of Alabama University and thereby blocking entrance to a Negro girl, which bore the legend ‘Why don’t you enter, Miss Lucy? We live in a free country and our schools are open to all.’” Visually blatant charges of hypocrisy did not advance the USIA story.75

An interesting balance usually did exist, however, in socialist newspapers because “in sharp contrast to the biased Communist treatment, Socialist papers also took notice of positive aspects.” Agency officials also described some of the extensive Austrian communist treatment of the Lucy case and other aspects of American racial problems. One paper, Volksstimme, contained a “race-hatred corner” and other articles in both the latter paper and Der Abend on the Lucy case made connections between Americans and Nazis. Such animosity towards the United States from communist organs was expected in the Cold War climate and USIA officials were pleased that only these accounts lacked a context of the narrative of progress. The agency did not, however, fully understand how

the struggle within Austria over whether or not to accept American cultural ideas was reflected in the different reactions to American racial violence.\textsuperscript{76}

As the 1950s progressed, according to Nils Arne Sorensen and Klaus Petersen, “Denmark entered the American sphere in politics and economics.” This closer relationship in part influenced the way Danes responded to American racial violence. The initial reactions in Denmark to Autherine Lucy’s expulsion from the University of Alabama gave evidence that some papers in that nation had adopted the USIA narrative. After discussing an invitation by the University of Copenhagen for Lucy to enroll there, the First Secretary of the embassy, Ward P. Allen, commented, “Even staid Conservative Berlingske Tidende is moved to editorialize, but, with a more sober approach, seeks to place the problem in a historical perspective.” Another conservative paper, Dagens Nyheder claimed that segregation was diminishing in the United States and Social Demokraten, likely a more moderate paper, discussed the beneficial aspects of the Brown v. Board of Education decision.\textsuperscript{77}

USIA officials noted how the radical Liberal Politiken “adds, however, that prejudices cannot be broken down overnight by the passage of a law, and that tolerance requires time to bear fruit.” The most derogatory comments came from the independent Information, but even this paper was able to distinguish between the different regions of the United States. The Danish press therefore often tempered negative responses by placing the events in the context of progress and a realization that change would have to

\textsuperscript{76} USIA, “World-Wide”, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{77} Klaus Petersen and Nils Arne Sorensen, “Ameri-Danes and Pro-American Anti-Americans: Cultural Americanization and Anti-Americanism in Denmark After 1945”, in Stephan, \textit{The Americanization of Europe}, 139; AmEmbassy Copenhagen to Secretary of State, February 9, 1956, RG 59, 811.411/2-956, Box 4157, NA.
be achieved slowly and both the USIA’s story of progress in civil rights and notice of Eisenhower’s desire for gradual change appeared in Danish reactions. As “the early 1950s saw an upswing in concern [in Denmark] over the cultural consumption [of America] of children and adolescents,” USIA officials were again unable to place reactions to racial events in the context of America’s deepening relationship with Denmark. The agency did not realize how the responses reflected the potential conflicts created among those who encouraged or discouraged acculturation to American cultural values.78

Events such as the Autherine Lucy case allowed those who opposed closer connections with the United States to focus protest on a tangible manifestation of the overarching racial problem foreign populations disliked in the United States. “Danish preoccupation with America’s racial problem remains constantly at an abnormally high level and when the issue becomes dramatized and individualized in some unfortunate incident as the instant case, the Danes react with an emotion seemingly out of character with their usual easy-going manner.” Ward Allen went on to comment, using a Biblical metaphor, that “irritation over the excessive Danish preoccupation with the beam in the other fellow’s eye should not obscure the real and continuing damage to American prestige from such tragedies as the Emmett Till case and the unfortunate riots attending Miss Lucy’s efforts.” He expressed concern that factual, progressive treatments of racial incidents were often absent and claimed that American press outlets deserved some of the responsibility for the visibility of racial violence due to their wide coverage of these

78 AmEmbassy Copenhagen to Secretary of State, February 9, 1956; Petersen and Sorensen, “Ameri-Danes and Pro-American Anti-Americans”, 135.
events. He also urged “intensified efforts of the U.S. press and Government to give a balanced picture in reasonable perspective.” Previous USIA efforts to present the story of African-Americans as one of progress and events of racial violence as aberrations influenced reactions to events such as the Lucy case, but that did not change the fact that such visible incidents still served to undermine American rhetoric.  

American dominance in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which linked the United States and Western European nations in a military alliance directed against the Soviet Union, and U.S. support for German rearmament in 1950 led to a high level of anti-Americanism in France. Deepening problems in maintaining overseas possessions also influenced the French attitude towards America’s predominant economic and military power. Richard J. Barnet has even suggested, “For France in 1954 and 1955 her weakness was her only strength; French leverage on the United States consisted only in the power to surrender in Indochina.” When news of American racial violence broke in Europe, French publications were ready to criticize the United States.

USIA officials reported that French newspapers contained a large number of negative articles and often neglected the USIA narrative. Even “though editorials on the subject were rare, slanted headlines and commentaries left little doubt where French press sympathy lay,” and this attitude spanned the political spectrum. U.S. officials suggested that a sensationalist tradition in French journalism also influenced the reactions. Specific racial incidents included “the Till case which was the most widely reported in the French

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79 AmEmbassy Copenhagen to Secretary of State, February 9, 1956.
press, [and] the Autherine Lucy affair was reported in great detail.” Even smaller stories about legislation passed in southern states “were snapped up by the press and the steady appearance of them undoubtedly served to increase the Frenchman’s already exaggerated notion of the importance of the problem in the U.S.” Papers outside Paris also gave heavy coverage to racial incidents, such as the Lucy case.81

Robert H. McBride, the First Secretary of Embassy in Paris, agreed as he commented on the level and type of reactions to the Till case found in some of the major French newspapers. His account demonstrated that American officials understood other myriad influences on foreign public opinion. The communist paper Secours Populaire Francais reported in a manner to be expected from such a source. More disturbing was the response of the Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l’Antisemitisme (LICA), which, with its strong anti-communist credentials, still criticized the United States. McBride postulated that such similar reactions occurred because “the trial broke at a time French sensitivities were aroused over foreign criticism of the French handling of the North African situation. The acquittal of Bryant and Milam [Till’s killers] gave the French an opportunity, which was eagerly seized, to point to racial problems in the United States and to indulge in an outraged sense of indignation and innocence.” The verdict provided a focus for the redirection of French frustration over the way their struggle in Algeria caused damage to their own global image. France’s determination to maintain its most important overseas colony, with over a million French settlers, had led to the formation of the Front de Liberation Nationale in 1954 by Algerian rebels seeking full independence. As the conflict descended into violence, American policymakers

81 USIA, “World-Wide”, 4-5.
stepped up pressure on the French to find a peaceful solution and the Algerian resistance sought to “internationalize the Algerian question,” according to historian Matthew Connelly. Resentment against U.S. interference and concern over the nation’s international prestige informed some French reactions to American racial violence. A rapid dwindling in the number of responses followed, apparently because “a brief flurry assuaged wounded French pride.” U.S. officials implicitly questioned the seriousness of the challenge to American prestige by placing reactions in the context of larger French foreign policy.82

USIA officials also correctly identified French foreign policy issues informing the responses. “The implied argument that the U.S. has no right to reproach France for oppressing Arabs in North Africa when it mistreats Negroes in the South,” was prevalent. The report also concluded that some French reactions “certainly represented neutralist and nationalist opinion which is eager to discredit the U.S. in any way it can.” According to both State Department and USIA officials, French domestic and foreign policy factors influenced French press reactions to American racial incidents. When compared to how the agency understood the factors influencing other European responses, U.S. officials were able to accurately assess the situation in France.83

West German views were generally more conciliatory than those in America’s other major European Cold War allies. The USIA reported, “The non-Communist press on the whole reported the desegregation issue objectively and in a restrained manner,

endeavoring to be brief but factual,” and “while the Communist press sought to exploit the Lucy case as an integral part of its anti-American propaganda, it did not resort to the extremes of sensationalism that it normally gives such anti-American items.” Agency goals of factual reporting and recognition of the context of progress were largely fulfilled in the West German press.84

While a balanced attitude appeared in papers with a variety of political views, the government organ *Koelnische Rundschau*, best displayed the point when it said, “The Supreme Court made a bold, progressive and democratic decision…but it also acted realistically when it demanded the end of segregation, yet, allowed time for its gradual implementation.” The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* connected racial problems in the United States to Nazism in a more conciliatory manner than similar communist efforts when it said the difference between the two “was ‘the fact that cases of intolerance are always discussed publicly in the U.S. and thus eventually exposed as violations of human dignity’ and thus give rise to ‘hope’ that eventually ‘the equality of Negroes…as provided for by law’ will be attained.” The open nature of American democracy was therefore instrumental in revealing domestic problems and subsequently achieving change.85

Even though the West German press often held an interpretation of American racial events pleasing to agency officials, a cartoon in the communist *Freies Volk* appeared showing, “President Eisenhower reaching across the seas for the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, while declining ‘to do anything about Atherine Lucy in the

84 Ibid., 5-6.
85 Ibid., 7.
name of democracy [because he] could not intervene in the domestic affairs of the State
of Alabama.”” Even when the USIA narrative of progress appeared, condemnation also
informed the public reaction to American racial events. Generally, however, the political
and economic relationship between Germany and the United States since the end of
World War II precluded a large amount of anti-Americanism. Historian Alexander
Stephan argues that, in addition to the many activities of the Congress for Cultural
Freedom, an organization created to spread American culture in Europe, “in the mid-
1950s…the West German economic miracle, the growth of the German advertising
industry (under strong American influence), and technological innovations like
television, portable radios, and audio-cassette players began to fundamentally and
permanently change lifestyles and recreational behavior.” Such familiarity with American
products and values and the recent history of virulent Nazi racism contributed to the
unwillingness of West Germans to voice intense criticism of American racial problems.86

The USIA correctly identified Italian attitudes which were generally conciliatory
towards the United States, but did not put them fully in the context of the U.S.-Italian
relationship. According to David Ellwood, “In 1955 the New York Times had celebrated
the spread of American-style consumer culture to Italy, with jeans, T-shirts, TV quiz
shows, and a yearning for homes fitted with modern conveniences prominently cited.”
Part of this trend originated in the fact that “for the first thirty years of its existence the
precarious new [Italian] republic addressed its desire for support and assurance almost
obsessively to the United States.” This dependence on and influence from the United

86Ibid., 8; Alexander Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization”, in Stephan, The
Americanization of Europe, 79.
States led to an environment in which only communist publications were willing to condemn American racial incidents. Osgood points out how the USIS officials in Italy promoted African American speakers and recipients of Fulbright grants, a program designed to increase cultural exchanges, as examples of progress. Indeed, despite the negative initial reactions indicated in the earlier survey of European views of American race relations, USIA efforts in Italy seemed fruitful because “while the independent and center press devoted considerable (but not front page) coverage to the desegregation issue, the treatment was essentially factual despite a clear sympathy for the Negro and a general disapproval of the whole situation.” The USIA narrative appeared relatively healthy in Italy in 1956. 87

The Conservative Il Mattino of Naples emphasized gradualism and Christian Democratic papers Il Popolo and La Discussione also demonstrated a balanced understanding of American racial events when it combined comments on the dynamic of racism in a democracy with a realization of how the government was working for African Americans. The paper “contended editorially that the racial issue is incompatible with the values of Western civilization,” but “mitigating this criticism was its approval of President Eisenhower’s anti-racist stand as well as the gradual progress that has been achieved under American constitutional procedures.” Agency officials were pleased that, in non-communist publications, “in all instances these stories were sober and factual.” The relatively calm, factual reporting and recognition of progress in American race

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relations appearing in conservative and moderate Italian papers indicated the success of the USIA narrative in that country.  

Yet, as agency officials correctly expected, alongside these positive responses was a vehement communist treatment of American racial violence. Led by the prominent *L’Unita*, the Italian communist press widely covered the events, including multiple stories about both the Till and Lucy cases. In discussing the former incident the paper criticized the American government for not intervening. “*L’Unita* and the other papers of like persuasion kept up the flow of articles unremittingly,” and the USIA noted with an element of sarcasm how another communist paper, the “*Avantil*, for example, affected puzzled perplexity at the United States, which claims to be the cradle of liberty.” The good news for the United States was that an increasing cultural relationship with the United States and an ongoing dependence on American aid created an environment in which American racial violence was mainly used only by communist press outlets to criticize the United States.  

Dutch newspaper writers expressed a similar understanding of the American dilemma. Agency officials reported that while the Lucy and Montgomery incidents received wide coverage, “with the exception of the Communist press, recent criticism has been tempered more than in the past with an acknowledgement of strides made in eliminating racial discrimination and optimism about the future.” The Labor *Het Vrije Volk*, the liberal *Algemeen Handelsblad*, and the conservative *Trouw* all commented on the time it would take to achieve change. Another good indication for America’s efforts

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89 Ibid., 11-12.
to explain racial violence was how “President Eisenhower’s press conference statements deploring the violent demonstrations against Miss Lucy also received wide favorable publicity in the non-Communist press.” The Dutch media had generally adopted the USIA view of gradual progress in American race relations and also recognized the efforts of the government to achieve change. 90

A slightly different pattern emerged in press comments in Norway, with the leading communist paper Friheten giving less coverage to the Lucy case than the liberal Dagbladet. The latter contained an editorial in February, which “declared that watchful Asians will see this as fresh evidence that the West is not to be trusted, that race prejudice remains a live reality among white people.” USIA officials noted the widespread coverage of the Lucy case in every prominent paper, including front page stories and photographs. Even conservative publications carried these types of reactions, but an element of the USIA narrative appeared in that “many of these have been moderate in tone and have attempted to explain both sides.” The Norwegian response to the Lucy case undermined America’s image and generally challenged the USIA narrative in a country in which the agency had been worried about the advance of communist propaganda. 91

An awareness of Portugal’s own racial issues characterized the response to the Lucy case in that nation. Henry Clinton Reed, American Consul at the consulate in Oporto, reported, “The Portuguese pride themselves on having no racial bias.” He claimed the wide publicity given to the Lucy incident had “made a profound impression on the Portuguese people,” and included an editorial in his report to the State Department.

90 Ibid., 12-13.
91 Ibid., 13-14.
Ramos de Almeida, the author, wrote, “The world witnessed in open-mouth perplexity this outburst of racial discrimination, as merciless as it was ferocious.” Almeida went on to claim that racial prejudice was nonexistent in both Portugal and Brazil. Although Reed did not comment on the fact that Portugal still retained colonies in Africa and elsewhere, he mentioned that Almeida’s articles had frequently appeared in *O Journal de Notícias*, a primarily middle-class newspaper with the second largest circulation in Portugal. News of American racial violence therefore reached a large segment of the population not easily susceptible to communism due to their economic standing. Although the U.S. relationship with Portugal was not particularly strong or important in the 1950s, American prestige everywhere mattered to American policymakers.92

Swedish responses to American racial violence reflected the very high level of attention given to American racial problems in that country. Sweden’s neutrality and lack of desire to join NATO allowed it to maintain an independent voice, unlike the German and Italian cases where closer relationships with the United States led to less vehement criticism. Despite these facts, Dag Blanck argues that Sweden still generally desired to emulate the economic and political systems of the Western democracies and “Swedish criticism of the U.S. has…mainly been couched in cultural terms.” America’s treatment of its racial minorities was an issue ingrained into the culture of the United States as much as it was an issue over political or economic rights, and the USIA clearly identified the intensely negative Swedish reaction to American racial violence. Joseph Sweeney, First Secretary of Embassy in Stockholm, began his report by saying, “Swedish papers

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92 American Consulate, Oporto, Portugal to Secretary of State, March 14, 1956, RG 59, 811.411/3-1456, Box 4157, NA.
portray America’s racial situation as bad and seriously worsening, and this has unquestionably resulted in damage to America’s prestige.” He criticized the press for presenting the issues in an unbalanced way by not discussing advances in desegregation and thereby neglecting the emphasis on progress in race relations that the USIA desired to see in foreign reporting of American racial events.93

USIA officials reported that in February of 1956 thirty-one stories addressing race in the United States appeared in the three major Stockholm papers. Covering mainly the Lucy case and to a lesser degree the Montgomery bus boycott, “by their very nature they were sensational.” Some papers did recognize the USIA narrative and Eisenhower’s attitudes, as when an article on the Lucy case in Svenska Dagbladet “conceded that progress was being made in race relations, albeit slowly.” The Morgon-Tidningen claimed, “No Republican president has done so much to promote full civil rights for Negroes as has Eisenhower,” and further discussed the effects of racial problems on the upcoming elections. As in Norway, the communist press carried fewer stories about race in the United States than non-communist papers, but did cover the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents. Intense criticism in the Swedish media severely undermined the USIA goals of factual reporting and the spread of a narrative of progress in American race relations.94

Swiss neutralism opened avenues to criticism of American racial violence, yet the USIA narrative was also present. An article forwarded by George Freimarck, Second

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Secretary of Embassy and Public Affairs Officer, came from the September 24 issue of Le Democrate and contained a heated reaction to the verdict of the previous day titled, “A Disgusting Parody of Justice in the State of Mississippi.” After recounting the facts of the murder and trial the writer stated, “Even if in strict accordance with the law the verdict is valid, this parody of a trial remains a scandal which must cause an uproar in the whole of the United States. The country’s national prestige is at stake.” Carrying an implicit challenge to the idea that the rule of law meant justice in the southern states, the author ended with a concise reminder of the effect the verdict in the Emmett Till case would have on the international prestige of the United States.95

Freimarck also included an article from another Swiss paper, Gazette de Lausanne, more amenable to the USIA’s story concerning race. After a statement of the facts of the case and some comments on how race was a difficult issue for the United States, the paper reminded its readers of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision legally ending segregation and of President Eisenhower’s efforts in desegregating the Department of Defense. Demonstrating an understanding of the different regions in America, the author commented, “Whereas the southern states cling to their old prejudices, the North – just as it did ninety years ago – proves itself both more intelligent and more humane,” by not experiencing such a high level of racial violence, at least in the mid-1950s.96

The article even praised the United States for taking the initiative in achieving reform and not simply waiting until condemnation came from other areas of the world.

95 AmEmbassy Bern to Secretary of State, September 30, 1955, RG 59, 811.411/9-3055. Box 4157, NA.
96 Ibid.
“Meanwhile the enlightened and generous Americans have not awaited a voice from 
Europe to take cognizance of the tragic problem which segregation constitutes. All 
available documentation on this is authentically American, extremely honest.” Such 
recognition of the truthful character of U.S. reporting on racial issues reflected the USIA 
goal of credibility and the agency’s desire for foreign populations to see America making 
progress towards racial equality. USIA policy had therefore experienced a tangible 
measure of success in Switzerland preceding the Till murder.97

Another dispatch a week later from Freimarck, however, contained a more 
negative article. The Socialist paper *La Sentinelle* published an editorial on October 4, 
which made a similar distinction as that in *Gazette de Lausanne* when it argued, “If only 
the part of the population of the United States who offers the world this sad performance 
could become aware how shameful such discrimination between the races is.” With an 
underlying charge of hypocrisy the author questioned, “Why indeed does not America, 
instead of sending us periodically one or the other of its popular preachers or successful 
healers, make use of these people for its own benefit?” If America truly wanted to exhibit 
its espoused values of equality it should direct some of its information activities inward. 
Despite this jab at American propaganda, USIA efforts to convince the internationally 
influential Swiss press to adopt its narrative of progress in American race relations had 
been relatively successful.98

Belgian responses to American racial problems were widespread and Frederick 
M. Alger, Jr. of the American embassy in Brussels, reported that despite a previous

97 Ibid.
98 AmEmbassy Bern to Secretary of State, October 6, 1955, RG 59, 811.411/10-655, Box 4157, NA.
indifference to American racial matters, the Till and Lucy cases began to reveal the problem to the Belgian public. “The press of all shades of political opinion and public leaders with whom the Embassy officers have talked have been astonished at and have strongly condemned the racial prejudice evident in such recent cases.” Intense negative reaction appeared in both public press outlets and private conversations with Belgian officials. Yet according to Alger, Belgians overall seemed to hold a balanced understanding of the situation in the United States that also included recognition of progress in race relations. “The bad effects caused by publicity surrounding incidents of racial conflict may be in part offset by growing awareness of the considerable gains made by the colored population in recent years and a greater appreciation of the steps being taken to eliminate desegregation.” Alger also believed that charges of hypocrisy against the Eisenhower administration for publicly opposing European colonialism were limited because the Belgians were “becoming increasingly aware of a potentially serious racial problem of their own in the Belgian Congo. While they have taken steps recently to eliminate racial discrimination in their colony, they know very well that many of their colonists are not paragons of racial tolerance.” American officials therefore identified foreign policy problems in Belgium influencing how that nation reacted to American racial incidents in a way that limited the damage to American prestige. Once again, however, the USIA narrative appeared alongside condemnation of racial violence in the United States.99

99 AmEmbassy Brussels to Secretary of State, March 20, 1956. RG 59, 811.411/3-2056, Box 4157, NA.
By mid-1956 the United States Information Agency recognized that its narrative of racial progress did not dominate the European view of American race relations. After studying Western European reactions to American racial violence in 1955 and 1956, agency officials concluded, “Press coverage was heavy with a fair amount of comment. In most countries the stories did get major play and much of the comment was restrained. But even where there was no adverse editorial comment, slanted headlines showed the disapproval of the press.” When the USIA’s story did appear, comment on the violence of the incidents often accompanied it, and the agency’s limited claims of success were therefore not always accurate.100

European reactions to the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott also did not satisfy the agency’s goals of calm, factual reporting. Many editorials contained language condemning the United States for these violent racial incidents and many articles that reported only the facts still appeared with biased headlines. American policymakers deemed this pattern dangerous not only to the American image, but to American national security. The agency believed the way to defeat communist propaganda, and therefore convince foreign populations to identify with the United States, was to maintain calm, factual reporting on even those aspects of American race relations which deviated from the narrative of racial progress. Yet this actually meant an inclusion of the USIA interpretation of race in the United States and an avoidance of “emotional,” critical responses.

Failing in both its goals, the USIA tried to understand other factors influencing European reactions in order to determine further steps Eisenhower and his propagandists

100 USIA, “World-Wide”, i.
could take to repair the American record on race. The degree to which a newspaper followed the USIA line often depended on its political outlook, with socialist and communist publications more antagonistic towards the United States and moderate and conservative papers more often toeing the agency line. Foreign policy factors, such as France’s conflict in Algeria or Belgium’s relationship with its colony in the Congo, also affected the success of USIA goals with the former case contributing to an increased amount of condemnation and the latter apparently creating an environment of understanding of American racial issues.

American policymakers also often exaggerated the threat to America’s image and, in their minds, national security, by not placing the reactions in the larger context of U.S. relations with various European nations. West German and Italian press services muted their criticism based on close relationships with the United States. Austria and Denmark experienced diverse responses as reflections of the debate within those nations over how close they should emulate American values, while Sweden voiced some of the most sustained criticism based on its nonaligned status. The USIA seemed to most correctly identify the factors influencing the intensely negative French reactions, but in general had problems linking responses to American racial events to the larger relationships the United States maintained with European countries.

While the USIA at times misunderstood or could not directly affect these factors, agency officials recognized many of them and such knowledge moved them to undertake both domestic and international efforts in the mid-1950s to repair U.S. prestige. Eisenhower’s propagandists understood that European criticism of American race
relations would not disappear unless the United States took concrete steps in both the domestic and international arenas to convince foreign populations it was serious about racial equality. Elsewhere in the world, nonwhite populations responded similarly to American racial violence and, in the minds of USIA officials, U.S. goals and policies in some regions faced the very real possibility of failure.
CHAPTER 3
THE USIA NARRATIVE IN THE NONWHITE WORLD

By the mid-1950s the Eisenhower administration had deemed the Third World important to American national security. U.S. officials believed that both denying the manpower, material resources, and potential industrial might of nonaligned nations to the communist world and gaining these benefits for the free world were crucial in the global Cold War. American Cold War ideology included a commitment to prevent communist advances everywhere and American policymakers viewed every Third World nation through the lens of its potential to enhance or limit U.S. credibility. Dire consequences for the future course of American democracy also loomed in the minds of American policymakers should the Third World become a communist bastion. Eisenhower sought to persuade Third World peoples that their interests were the same as those of the United States and established new government agencies and organizations to achieve this goal. While U.S. officials wanted the world to view America as a land of freedom and democracy in which all races coexisted peacefully, violence and discrimination against African-Americans, particularly in Southern states, undermined such a rosy picture of the United States.

The nonwhite populations of Third World nations could identify with the struggles of America’s largest nonwhite majority in the mid-1950s and Eisenhower’s newly created government entities, including the United States Information Agency, tried to explain American race relations to the world. The agency wanted to present incidents of racial violence factually and calmly as aberrations in the context of an overall advance
in the rights of African-Americans. As noted previously this actually meant an adherence to the USIA interpretation of American race relations advancing the notion of overall progress. Agency criticisms of foreign responses that did not conform to its view were termed “emotional” even if the reactions did appear in an objective manner. Pursuit of “factual” reporting meant the existence of the USIA narrative and the absence of language painting the United States in a negative light. Therefore, if American race relations appeared in foreign press outlets in what USIA officials deemed the correct context, the American image would benefit and the United States could consequently attract allies to the anti-communist camp to bolster its national security. The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, provided the USIA with evidence of American progress towards racial equality it could present to the world. Continuing violence against African-Americans in the mid-1950s, however, eroded the gains made by the agency’s publicizing of the *Brown* decision.

In 1956 the USIA conducted an exhaustive study of the Third World response to the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott. One region in particular, the Middle East, did not seem to pay particular attention to race as its populations deemed other factors, such as the Arab-Israeli dispute or Arab nationalism, more important. In the Middle East the USIA narrative was not overtly present, but neither was there a significant challenge to the American image. Egypt led the way in using American racial problems to try to advance Arab nationalism, but USIA officials understood that the nonwhite population of this region did not often identify
with other nonwhite populations and correctly concluded that racial problems did not
directly affect U.S. goals or power in the region. Opponents of the United States in the
region could still use race to chastise the United States, however, so it remained
important for American race relations to improve. In every other region the USIA
narrative appeared, but was accompanied by condemnation of American race relations.

As in Europe, agency officials also identified myriad domestic and foreign policy
factors specific to foreign nations influencing the intensity and tone of their responses.
European colonial control played a part in increasing the vehemence of reactions,
especially in French possessions and recently independent Francophone countries. Some
nations, particularly in East Asia, restrained their commentary on American racial
violence in order to maintain good relations with the United States or to remain
committed to a completely neutral position in the Cold War. U.S. officials generally
understood how incidents of racial violence played out in the Third World and this
knowledge contributed to their views about what steps they could take to repair
America’s international image.

While USIA officials did not believe reactions to American racial events could
significantly affect U.S. goals in the Middle East, the Far East, or Latin America, they did
not fully understand the U.S. relationship with the last region. American support for
authoritarian governments, readiness to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries,
and unwillingness to alter economic relationships created an environment in which
American racial violence would add to the increasingly negative U.S. image. USIA
officials were most correct when they worried about American prestige in Africa and
South Asia, particularly India. In the former region nationalism, colonial issues, and local views on race affected the potential effectiveness of the USIA narrative. Although the agency left out the important issue of India’s policy of neutrality, it noted the heightened awareness of racial matters among Asian populations and realized that in India, South Asia, and Africa these racial events carried serious potential to undermine U.S. goals and policies. The agency, however, generally understood how the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott undermined both short and long term U.S. influence in certain Third World regions by affecting the success of particular policies and threatening the identification of nonwhite populations with the United States.

USIA efforts to export its narrative of progress in American race relations to the nonwhite populations of the Third World received a boost from the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. In mid-1954 the agency reported, “Throughout the NEA area [Near East, South Asia, and Africa], USIA exploited to the fullest the anti-segregation decision of the U.S. Supreme Court.” Placing articles in foreign media outlets, the USIA endeavored to both show the *Brown* decision as an example of government action to benefit African Americans and to more generally advance the idea of progress in American race relations evidenced by such a sweeping, albeit yet to be fully enforced, change. Officials further identified two regions in which American propaganda benefited the most when they reported, “This decision was of especially far-reaching importance in Africa and India.” In other agency documents, including its 1956 survey, officials consistently commented on the heightened racial consciousness of Indian and African populations and the USIA
believed the *Brown* decision to have had an impact on the way those peoples viewed the United States. For example, according to Kenneth Osgood, in India the USIA distributed photographs of white and black children studying together and “sent over twenty different news stories on the ruling to nearly a thousand newspapers around the country.” He relates how the agency also devised an exhibit titled “New Triumph for Racial Equality in U.S.” celebrating the case. Mary Dudziak describes how the Voice of America, a radio program for American propaganda, immediately began beaming the story into Eastern Europe and other areas of the world to demonstrate progress.¹⁰¹

In Africa, a global region where populations could most closely identify with the African-American minority, the USIA undertook extensive efforts to publicize the *Brown* case. Agency officials claimed, “In Africa…the decision is regarded as the greatest event since the Emancipation Proclamation, and it removes from Communist hands the most effective anti-American weapon they had in Black Africa.” Officials tried to expand the reach of their propaganda by placing “articles on the decision….in almost every African publication.” The United States pursued an intense and sustained propaganda effort in Africa to present progress towards desegregation and equality in American race relations.¹⁰²

Throughout 1954 American propagandists continued to tell foreign populations about the *Brown* decision and what it represented. NSC officials reported, “In Africa, extensive initial USIA publicity on the anti-segregation decision of the U.S. Supreme Court was followed by accounts of progress in de-segregation [although the agency gave

¹⁰² NSC 5430, *FRUS*, 1785.
no specific examples] and by a series of stories on eminent American Negroes.” Officials further mentioned how “desegregation stories also were emphasized in India.” Despite these efforts, the agency admitted that in the Near East, South Asia, and Africa, one of its prime tasks in supporting U.S. objectives involved “confronting colonial and white supremacy issues.” The USIA promoted the Brown decision throughout 1954 and beyond, but still had to deal with the reality of continuing racial discrimination and violence in the United States. The murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott limited the success of the agency’s narrative in the Third World in the mid-1950s.103

During the 1950s the Middle East became increasingly important as a source of oil to fuel the recovered economies of Western Europe. As Cold War competition shifted to the Third World, the United States also sought allies strategically positioned close to Soviet territory and Middle Eastern nations were prime candidates. While U.S. officials admitted that nonwhite populations could potentially identify with the victims of American racial violence, they seemed relieved that Middle Eastern reactions to racial events in the mid-1950s were limited. According to the USIA, “News coverage and comment on the Lucy case, the Montgomery bus boycott, and other recent racial incidents in the United States have been particularly prevalent only in Egypt.” U.S. officials’ racial views influenced their further claim that “only in Israel may there be said to be any degree of sophistication with regard to the question.” The USIA concluded that the Middle East, important for its natural resources and strategic location close to the

103 NSC 5509, FRUS, 516, 514.
Soviet Union, did not express the level of animosity over American racial events found in other global regions.\(^{104}\)

Agency officials identified distinctions between Arab populations and other nonwhite peoples. The USIA claimed race did not directly inform Middle Eastern views because racial consciousness was “an attitude which is not prevalent among Arabs in general.” Such reasoning led to a conclusion that “feeling on the issue…is not intense, nor will prevailing attitudes toward racial developments in the United States materially influence public opinion response to U.S. policies in the international field.” American policymakers therefore believed domestic racial violence would not seriously obstruct American objectives in the region based on racial views alone. This trend appeared in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, and Israel. The Lebanese voiced more criticism, but the USIA still did not believe U.S. prestige was under threat in that nation. Yet agency officials often failed to recognize the more subtle interconnections between race and economic and political factors in the region. Conclusions concerning government involvement in reactions in Egypt were correct, and the agency also estimated that the loss of prestige in Turkey would not particularly affect U.S. policies due to that nation’s relatively close relationship with the United States.\(^{105}\)

Egyptian writers voiced the most vehement and sustained criticism in the region of American race relations. The Till case appeared in publications only a few times in the fall of 1955, but in February 1956 articles about the Lucy and Montgomery incidents proliferated. Agency officials lamented that accounts of American racial problems

\(^{104}\) USIA, “World-Wide”, 19.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 19, 22-25, 36.
appeared “in general with little attention given to efforts for improvement.” Another troubling issue in the Egyptian press involved how “frequently editorials have failed to indicate that the incidents reported have resulted from the integration problem only in the Southern section of the United States. The implication is that all of the country is having such trouble.” Egyptian claims of the whole United States drifting into violence undermined the USIA goal of demonstrating progress in racial issues. One paper, Al-Qahirah, even held up an alternate model for Egypt to follow when it suggested, “The U.S. should learn from India, which… ‘in a few years achieved social justice and equality among its citizens.’” Missteps by the American government did not help matters, as when “withdrawal of an invitation to an Egyptian journalist to visit the U.S. because of pro-Communist sympathies caused editorial writers to denounce racialism in the U.S.” Such actions contradicted the USIA narrative’s emphasis on benevolent government action towards nonwhite minorities.  

USIA officials accurately placed some of the blame for such intense reactions on the Egyptian government. The agency claimed, “It is apparent that the press, and the Government, which controls it, are seeking to direct public opinion in this anti-American campaign, because, according to USIS officials, there has been comparatively less privately voiced criticism than newspaper publicity.” American policymakers were able to identify how a hostile regime influenced responses. The United States had an uneasy relationship with the Arab nationalist government of Gamal Abder Nasser due to his claims that the United States sought to exploit the natural resources and populations of the region. Nasser’s desire to chart a middle course in the Cold War upset the Eisenhower

106 Ibid., 20-21.
administration who, as historian Salim Yaqub argues, “sought to contain the radical Arab nationalism of…Nasser and to discredit his policy of ‘positive neutrality’ in the Cold War, which held that Arab nations were entitled to enjoy profitable relations with both Cold War blocs.” During the 1950s U.S.-Egyptian relations deteriorated and U.S. officials understood that racial violence could not undermine America’s image much further in a nation already predisposed to view the United States in a critical light. Agency conclusions that the Egyptian government was involved in the extremely negative reactions to American racial violence were valid in light of this hostile relationship. 107

Turkey’s own internal racial issues and an understanding of America’s domestic political process influenced reactions in that nation to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents. Regarding the Lucy case, the Ankara paper Ulus claimed, “The U.S. has a weak point in human rights ideology of which she claims to be the leader,” but did say, “The case is making the anti-Negro south accept the new idea of White and Negro equality.” The USIA narrative of progress appeared, but implicit and explicit charges of hypocrisy again accompanied the story. U.S. officials identified Turkey’s own racial issues and stated, “For years the Turks have been subject to severe criticism for their treatment of minorities, especially the Armenians, and it must have been with a bit of relief that they saw the shoe pinching the United States.” At least one Turkish paper, Cumhuriyet, refuted this conclusion when “it contrasted the plight of Negroes in the Southern states with minority groups [Christian Armenians and Muslim Kurds] in Turkey.

107 Ibid., 22; Salim Yaqub, Containing Arab Nationalism (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.
and stated that these minority groups in Turkey have it much better than do the Negroes.”

The agency identified internal racial diversity as a factor in how another nation viewed
American racial violence. \(^{108}\)

Other articles in the same paper commented on how the American domestic scene
influenced American foreign relations, suggesting that perhaps America’s support for
Greek claims to the island of Cyprus was meant to distract attention from racial violence
in addition to seeking the American Greek vote. Despite these challenges to U.S. prestige
in Turkey, USIA officials concluded that such reactions would not be a detriment to the
goals of American policy in the region. “It is not considered likely that the views
expressed in the Greek and Turkish press represent anything that would be manifested in
the way of official sentiment or have any bearing on U.S. policy objectives.” The extent
of the USIA narrative and the success of the important goal of maintaining America’s
image were, however, limited due to the domestic and foreign policy issues influencing
reactions in this populous and geopolitically strategic nation. Turkey’s position in the
North Atlantic Treaty Organization, its participation in the U.S.-supported Baghdad Pact,
its adherence to the Eisenhower Doctrine, and its reception of substantial amounts of U.S.
dollars, revealed a relatively close relationship with the U.S. This familiarity, begun in
earnest with Truman’s extension of aid to the Turks in order to fend off communist
advances in the late 1940s, served to limit the animosity Turkish press outlets expressed
about American racial issues. Although the USIA claimed that the American image had
suffered, political and economic ties dominated the relationship between the United

States and Turkey. Racial issues may have caused a dip in U.S. prestige, but they did not significantly affect the partnership.109

While the Till and Lucy cases appeared in Israeli papers, responses largely pleased the USIA. U.S. officials warned, however, that in the nation becoming America’s closest ally in the Middle East, “although the [Brown v. Board of Education] ruling of the Supreme Court against segregation received considerable attention…it is the opinion of USIS officials that the recent incidents have detracted somewhat from the credit that decision gained for the United States in Israel.” Overall, however, race in the United States posed relatively less of a direct challenge to America’s image in the Middle East than elsewhere in the world. Those countries demonstrating a higher level of negative reaction to American racial violence did so due to factors such as Arab nationalism or a communist viewpoint, according to the agency, and were therefore already predisposed to criticize the United States. Most Arab nations predominantly viewed American racial violence through the lens of their own political or economic concerns and negative reactions appeared only if they could be used to oppose American policies or actions. USIA officials were able to identify these dynamics and demonstrated a nuanced understanding of how racial issues operated in the Cold War world. The agency further concluded that domestic racial violence did not threaten the American image in the Middle East apart from factors it could not control.110

109 Ibid., 32; Yaqub, Containing Arab Nationalism, 38, 98, 321.
The relationship between the United States and African populations became strained during the late 1940s and into the 1950s. Upon entering office the Eisenhower administration adopted an approach which sought to validate its claims to support self-determination for all peoples while also retaining close ties with the industrialized European nations who were needed as anti-communist allies. Thomas Noer relates Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ words that the United States should maintain “a moderate, middle-ground position,” when trying to please both European and nonwhite colonial populations. Eisenhower and other administration officials shared this view based on their personal and, at times paternalistic, views. James Meriwether claims, “The dominant argument contended that rapid decolonization would damage the overall anti-communist effort, for quickly ending white rule would lead to weak, unstable indigenous governments that would be susceptible to Soviet or Chinese control.” Such lukewarm enthusiasm for the freedom of black Africans combined with violent events against nonwhites in the American South to seriously threaten U.S. credibility and goals in Africa. A no-win situation developed when European colonizers used racial incidents to lash out at the United States for its stances on colonialism. While colonized black Africans were not predominantly concerned with what white Europeans thought, those reactions still ensured high visibility of American racial problems in popular African newspapers. Taking these relationships and trends into account, the USIA correctly concluded that race was the predominant lens through which both white and black Africans and their European overlords viewed the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine
Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott and accurately realized the enormous loss of U.S. prestige which resulted.\textsuperscript{111}

African news media were distinctly more responsive to racial problems in the United States than publications in the Middle East. USIA officials commented, “African newspapers generally gave wide factual coverage along with frequent hostile editorials in the subject of American racialism.” Even when the USIA narrative appeared, negative reactions seemed to overwhelm the story of progress in racial affairs and affected the ability of Eisenhower’s propagandists to project a beneficial image. Accounts of American racial violence which the agency deemed biased and unfair troubled USIA officials, who lamented, “In many areas, particularly independent countries, the reporting took sensational forms, reflecting both the immaturity and irresponsibility of local editors.” The agency’s fear that “emotional” treatment of racial events opened the door to anti-American feelings appeared founded in African reactions.\textsuperscript{112}

Even those areas of Africa still held by America’s European allies voiced criticism because “the issue was used by the European-managed press to attack America’s anti-colonialism.” Press management by the Belgian government in the Congo led to an emphasis on undermining American anti-colonialist rhetoric and the \textit{Chronique Congolaise}, \textit{Le Courrier d’Afrique}, and \textit{La Presse Africaine} all covered the Lucy and Till cases with implicit charges of hypocrisy. Similar trends occurred in British East Africa, Portuguese Angola, and especially in French possessions such as the Ivory Coast, the


\textsuperscript{112} USIA, “World-Wide”, 26.
Cameroons, and Madagascar. USIA officials understood how the divergent views, at least officially, concerning colonialism voiced by the United States and its European allies threatened the success of its narrative.113

The United States similarly lost prestige in the eyes of both black and white South Africans. According to Thomas Noer, despite U.S. claims to universal freedom and equality “the decision to continue cooperation with South Africa despite its racial policies was a logical expression of Cold War priorities,” to support those nations who were officially anti-communist. The United States also had significant economic investments in Africa’s largest economy, including interest in several minerals and in material used to produce atomic weapons. South Africa’s location on the southern tip of the continent also made it strategically important as a place to control shipping lanes from the Indian Ocean, especially after the Suez Canal came under Nasser’s control. The United States also maintained some military facilities in the country. Despite official American rhetoric of equality and freedom, therefore, American policymakers acquiesced in the establishment of a racist apartheid system in South Africa. Beginning in 1948 the minority white population exerted increasing control over the black majority and South Africa and the American South began to look eerily similar to many around the globe. Although, as Thomas Borstelmann relates, “many in the [Eisenhower] administration began to fear that the brutalities of anti-Communist apartheid might drive Africans into

113 Ibid., 27-29, 31.
the arms of the Communist Party,” U.S. officials in the 1950s were unable to nudge their white allies towards a more accommodating government.114

This was partly due to the racial views held by American policymakers, but also resulted from South African perceptions that a nation allowing similar treatment of colored peoples had no business telling them to change. Communist papers in South Africa reported on the Lucy and Till cases while “the public was generally ‘amused’ that the United States was experiencing the kind of trouble that she had so often lectured about to the Union. South Africans have been bitter for some time about the ‘bad press’ they are given in the United States.” Agency officials pictured black South Africans as usually looking to the United States or the United Nations for help, but “it can be assumed that the stories have reinforced their sense of despair.” American racial violence and material support for the apartheid regime damaged U.S. prestige in the eyes of the black South African majority.115

For what it was worth, USIA officials did report that white South Africans recognized how America was making progress. “Generally, it is felt, European South Africans realize that considerable progress has been and is being made in the United States…and that the publicity as a result, has not greatly harmed America’s position.” The USIA narrative had made some advances and agency officials believed that American goals of maintaining an anti-communist ally in South Africa had not been compromised, but yet another American ally had used these incidents to undermine

American criticisms of their own actions. Even the benefits of the recognition of progress in the white South African press, which also supported the apartheid practices of the government and were the only ones allowed a “free” voice, were limited if the United States wanted to export a narrative of progress in race relations to a predominantly black continent. Although official American rhetoric on apartheid presented the U.S. in opposition to the practice, the reality of U.S. material support for the South African government undermined its claims of racial egalitarianism. As in other areas of Africa dominated by whites, both black and white populations criticized American racial violence and the USIA correctly understood the threat to America’s image.  

Before 1956 the USIA had been very active in Nigeria. According to Osgood, the agency “placed features on African American leaders on local newsreels, distributed biographies of prominent African Americans, promoted music by African American musicians on radio programs, and presented paperback books on ‘the American Negro’ to secondary schools and universities.” When news of American racial violence broke, therefore, USIA efforts at first appeared justified. An initial report from the American consul, Herbert T. Krueger, in Lagos claimed, “There has been almost no comment in the local press concerning the latest racial disturbances at the University of Alabama as featured in recent USIS news bulletins,” but went on to mention a derogatory cartoon that appeared in the most influential paper, the Daily Service, on February 22, 1956. A full-page article with “one of the strongest and most flagrant” communist slants came out the following day and Krueger criticized the writer for being “an irresponsible columnist who likes to attract attention without being too particular how he does it.” The Chairman of

116 Ibid., 28.
the Board of Directors of the *Daily Service* had subsequently reassured the Public Affairs officer of the embassy that it would not happen again. Sensational reporting undermined the USIA narrative, but it seemed that some newspaper editors in Lagos were apparently concerned with how their papers appeared to U.S. officials and sought to cooperate with American propaganda efforts concerning race.\(^{117}\)

Nigerians also responded to the plight of Autherine Lucy by conflating racial problems in the United States with those in South Africa. One writer mentioned the facts of the case and then commented, “The Lucy drama is but a continuation of the American Negro’s struggle for equal citizenship, ever since his emancipation.” Unfortunately for the USIA, the article then identified the Lucy case with the situation in South Africa. “Though the American race dilemma is bad enough in a nation where the blackman [sic] constitutes 10 per cent of the population, the biggest headache to African nationalists is the very existence of the same tragedy on the African continent.” A public identification of America with a regime based explicitly on racial segregation did not help the U.S. image, despite the understanding the author demonstrated of how the Lucy case fit into the overall story the USIA wished to present. Reactions in this populous African nation on the verge of independence could not be divorced from the reality of racial segregation around the globe. Correctly concluding that the U.S. image had been damaged in Nigeria,

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\(^{117}\)Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 278-9; AmConGen, Lagos, Nigeria to Secretary of State, February 24, 1956, RG 59, 811.411/2-2456, Box 4157, NA; AmConGen, Lagos, Nigeria to Secretary of State, February 27, 1956, RG 59, 811.411/2-2756, Box 4157, NA.
USIA and State Department officials lamented the lack of the success of the agency’s narrative.\textsuperscript{118}

A symbol of African independence and resistance to white colonial power, Ethiopia did not spare the United States. Despite previous USIA efforts to advance its narrative by including stories emphasizing achievements of African Americans in a newsletter it printed in Addis Ababa, “the racial question was fully covered with occasional sensational reporting.” Agency officials tried to explain the problem by commenting on Ethiopia’s long heritage and the fact that Ethiopians felt different from other Africans, but “nevertheless, discriminatory experiences in the United States have embittered them and reinforced long-standing xenophobia.” Historical factors internal to Ethiopia, such as the long tradition of actively opposing foreign domination, and language the USIA labeled inflammatory contributed to a challenge to America’s image.\textsuperscript{119}

Papers in the Gold Coast, which became the independent nation of Ghana a year later, lashed out at both the Lucy and Montgomery incidents. USIA officials commented, “The climate of opinion reflects anti-colonialism, considerable neutralism, and, recently, some interest in the possibilities of Russian aid to Africa.” According to James Meriwether, “Ghana seemingly held the potential to lead an entire slate of African nations into nonaligned status or, even worse to U.S. officials, into sympathetic alliance with the Soviet Union.” As the first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence in the post-World War II era, Ghana’s future course would set a visible example for other African

\textsuperscript{118} Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 707, AmConGen Lagos, Nigeria to Secretary of State, February 27, 1956, RG 59, 811.411/2-2756, Box 4157, NA.
\textsuperscript{119} Osgood, \textit{Total Cold War}, 279; USIA, “World-Wide”, 28.
populations on the verge of freedom. Loss of U.S. prestige in Ghana carried enormous implications for the success of gaining allies in Africa and, in the minds of American policymakers, for national security. The USIA further concluded, “Although a few favorable accounts have appeared on the integration question, sensationalist treatment of the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents have outweighed the former.” Responses the agency deemed as “emotional” and other Cold War factors again influenced the way a foreign population received the USIA story. The extremely negative reaction to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents in Ghana created a legitimate threat to American goals in Africa and agency officials were aware of how the defeat of its narrative played out in a Cold War context.\footnote{USIA, “World-Wide”, 30-31; Meriwhether, “A Torrent Overrunning Everything”, 175.}

The failure of the agency’s narrative and of factual reporting in African nations which already were or would soon became symbols of anti-colonialism and freedom in the region troubled U.S. officials. America’s European and white allies also used racial violence to criticize American anti-colonial rhetoric and created a situation in which both white and black populations expressed frustration with the United States. In a region specifically targeted by Eisenhower’s propagandists with information on American race relations, as evidenced in the above USIA reports to the National Security Council, success in establishing a dominant interpretation of the American racial dilemma was far from certain. In mid-1956 the agency concluded that in Africa “the consensus is that America’s moral position has been hurt.” The importance for national security the agency and Eisenhower placed on American propaganda and the U.S. image translated this lack of moral purity into a threat to America’s safety. A continent divided between friendly
and antagonistic nations would not benefit the United States and its regional allies in the global Cold War.\footnote{USIA, “World-Wide”, 27.}

In South Asia the USIA identified a heightened awareness of racial issues and had extensively publicized the \textit{Brown} decision in order to advance its narrative there. Agency officials believed that “the reactions in South Asia to the recent racial incidents in the United States might best be viewed against the larger context of South Asian attitudes toward racial discrimination as it is seen to affect the role of the U.S. as a world leader.” According to the USIA, the region, especially India, had long been sensitive to racial problems all over the world because of their own past experiences with discrimination in the form of white colonial oppression. America’s alliances with colonial European powers became a liability when Asian publications claimed, “The U.S. was more concerned with aiding other white nations in order to maintain its own dominant world position, and would do little to strengthen materially the colored peoples of Asia.” The United States also appeared to ignore nationalist attitudes in the region. Some American actions, such as aid to Middle Eastern and Asian nations, had enhanced the U.S. image. Recognition of “the positive actions which have been taken by the U.S. Government in solving its internal racial problems,” helped, but violent racial events still served to limit the effectiveness of the USIA narrative.\footnote{Ibid., 37.}

Agency officials also forecast that “racial discrimination and racial prejudice as shown in the treatment of Negroes in the United States will probably long continue to be
an important adverse factor in the attitude of South Asians towards the United States, which to an unknown degree may have some affect [sic] on their attitudes towards U.S. policies in the international field.” Similar to the situation in Africa, South Asian populations responded loudly to American racial problems and had the potential, according to USIA estimates, to block the achievement of U.S. goals of gaining allies with extensive natural resources, large populations, and strategic positions in the region.  

USIA assessments of the intense racial feelings found in India and other South Asian nations were certainly valid. Centuries of domination by white Europeans, ending for India only nine years before the USIA survey, had created a heightened awareness of race. The diverse ethnicities found throughout the Indian subcontinent also contributed to such a race consciousness in the region. In a limited, but original, review of Indian press viewpoints towards American racial issues between 1947 and 1953, Frenise Logan concludes, “Jim Crowism, as much as America’s negative view of neutralism, inhibited its efforts to strengthen relations with India.” Indeed, as Andrew Rotter succinctly states, “Throughout the period of Jawaharlal Nehru’s prime ministry [1947-1964], Indians remained convinced that racial inequality, more than anything else, typified American society.” The Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents would only reinforce this view.  

Racial identities played a large role in the interactions between Americans and Indians during the Cold War. American policymakers also viewed Indians through a

123 Ibid., 37.
racialized lens and distrusted their ability to resist communism. Despite very limited use of explicitly racist language, according to Rotter, American policymakers “saw Indians and other dark-sinned people as racial Others, in fundamental ways different from and inferior to whites.” While white colonialism was a thing of the past, deference to white leadership in the Cold War would help Indians avoid a neutralism they could not maintain. Yet Indians were not free from viewing the world in a racial framework. They identified with other nonwhite populations and “because India was the self-proclaimed champion of people of color everywhere, it was inevitable that its foreign policy would clash with that of the United States.” Rotter further argues that India’s embarkation on a program of modernization caused consternation among Indian leaders at using development methods so similar to their former white colonizers. Consequently, “the struggle to define the postindependence Indian self caused Indians to represent white Americans as racial Others.” Picturing each other through a racial framework created barriers to cooperation that underlay other differences such as neutralism.\footnote{Rotter, 
*Comrades at Odds*, 154-5.}

India’s neutralist path in the Cold War must not be overlooked, however, as a factor in U.S.-Indian relations. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was instrumental in organizing and supporting the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. The meeting of nonaligned nations alarmed American policymakers who had long regarded neutralism as dangerous for both those adopting the stance and the United States. As Robert McMahon relates, when Eisenhower entered office “Indian leaders worried – and with good reason – that the new administration in Washington might create additional barriers to Indo-American cooperation and friendship.” Opposition to neutralism from the president, his
secretary of state, and other U.S. officials, along with a closer U.S.-Pakistani friendship in the 1950s, further complicated relations between the United States and strategically important and populous India. While U.S. officials focused on Indian reactions to race, other issues such as neutralism had already strained the relationship and underlay many of the negative responses. Race was, nevertheless, a prominent factor in the loss of U.S. prestige and agency officials clearly understood the racial outlook of Indians.126

Previous USIA efforts to publicize the Brown case in India, noted above, were complemented by Chief Justice Earl Warren’s visit, with Eisenhower’s approval, in 1956. As head of the U.S. Supreme Court and author of the Brown decision, according to a New York Times article on his trip, Warren had been “internationally identified with American libertarianism on racial matters.” When presented with an honorary law degree at the University of Delhi, mention of his involvement in the decision “drew prolonged applause from the large audience of students, Cabinet members, diplomats, and Members of Parliament.” These endeavors seemed to bear some fruit, so the USIA claimed, because some Indians were “aware that sincere efforts [were] being made in the United States to improve the treatment of Negroes and to abolish racial segregation.” Sensational reporting in the apparently less responsible publications, according to the USIA, demonstrated that “misapprehension on the race issue still exists among those of the middle classes who have little contact with Westerners and who are encouraged both by the Communists and some sections of the press to believe in the validity of an East-West color struggle.” Communist efforts to play upon racial difference and present the Cold


A State Department dispatch from February 27, 1956 described seven articles addressing segregation appearing in Bombay newspapers during the span of a week, two of which covered the boycott in Montgomery. William T. Turner, the American Consul General, described a dynamic in which Indian public opinion was so focused on race anywhere in the world that large political developments, even in their own country, did not receive as much attention as racial issues. Consequently, “it must never be overlooked that to Indians racial discrimination of any kind in any part of the world is first-rate news.” State Department officials, who were more often in direct contact with the media in foreign countries, and USIA propagandists compiling a record of foreign responses, both recognized the heightened awareness of race in India.\footnote{AmConGen, Bombay, India to Secretary of State, February 27, 1956. RG 59, 811.411/2-2756, Box 4157, NA.}

Despite all this attention and, at times, critical treatment of the United States, Turner seemed to believe that the USIA story was prevalent in India. “My own explanation, from reading the press and from talking with Indians, is that the people of this country, who are well-acquainted with their own communal troubles, are aware that sincere efforts are being made in the United States to improve the treatment of Negroes and to abolish racial discrimination, and they recognize that progress is being made.” Indians also seemed to clearly distinguish the situation in the United States from that in South Africa, although it is noteworthy how often the two nations were compared in
international press comments. In Bombay, however, the USIA narrative of progress had not become completely dominant.  

Indians in the city of Madras focused attention on both the Lucy case and the Montgomery bus boycott. Benjamin A. Fleck, the American Vice Consul in Madras, believed this was in part due to “the comparison made by some American commentators of the bus boycott with the passive resistance technique made famous by Mahatma Gandhi.” Such a connection to a national hero heightened the visibility of the boycott. In a dispatch sent the day after Turner’s, Fleck attached an article from The Hindu titled “‘Satyagraha’ in Alabama,” which discussed the parallels between the language and actions used both by Gandhi and the African-American leaders in Montgomery. Ending on a high note, the article claimed, “A happy feature of the Alabama situation is that the Negroes are not in the position of the completely friendless,” and mentioned the support from both Catholic and Protestant clergy, American newspapers, the ACLU, and even the governor in the form of a bi-racial commission to explore racial issues. While it was not in the best interest of the USIA narrative for Indian publications to equate the boycotters’ efforts with the intense struggles of Gandhi, the noting of those who supported the African Americans in Montgomery did reveal an element of the agency’s story in that the activists had so many allies.

Christopher Van Hollen, the American Consul in Calcutta, also mentioned the connection the Indian press made between events in the United States and Gandhi, but mentioned many more negative reactions. The Hindusthan Standard, in discussing the

129 Ibid.
130 AmCongGen, Madras, India to Secretary of State, February 28, 1956. RG 59, 811.411/2-2856, Box 4157, NA.
situation in Montgomery, discussed how, despite the racial violence, there were “apologists among U.S. leaders who want to convert pigmented Asians to the American cult of democracy.” Containing a veiled charge of hypocrisy, the statement made a direct connection between racial problems in the United States and the desire to obtain allies in the Third World. Van Hollen went on to comment, “Although most of the editorials, through inference, acknowledge the U.S. government’s stand against segregation and discrimination, this point is probably lost on the reading public.” He regretted that the coverage of the Lucy case had obscured the beneficial aspects of the *Brown* decision and admitted that all the negative attention directed towards the United States had increased “considerably the existing difficulty of interpreting American inter racial relations in their proper perspective.” Negative reactions had directly undermined the story the USIA wished to present. Van Hollen also attached an article by John E. Frazer, an American touring India and speaking about the progress being made in race relations, but only one paper, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, published it. As in Europe and Africa, the USIA narrative could not escape the presence of condemnation and charges of hypocrisy targeting American race relations.131

This pattern combined with concerns over neutralism and other regional issues to produce a problematic U.S.-Indian relationship in the mid-1950s. In their examination of Indian responses to American racial incidents, USIA officials did not evaluate the full context of this relationship, even though their understanding of influences on reactions in France, the Middle East, and Africa indicated they were capable of doing so. H.W.

131AmConsul, Calcutta, India, to Secretary of State, March 13, 1956. RG 59, 811.411/3-1356, Box 4157, NA.
Brands describes how steps by the Indian prime minister towards a more conciliatory relationship with the Soviet Union and other “events in the summer and fall of 1956…cast fresh doubts upon the sincerity of Nehru’s neutralism.” Indeed, “the three years ending in the autumn of 1956 marked a low point in U.S.-Indian relations.” The strained relationship experienced further decline as racial issues mixed with neutralism and American policymakers realized and lamented the loss of U.S. prestige.

All across South Asia, and more specifically the Indian subcontinent, USIA officials accurately recognized how racial incidents in the United States in 1955 and 1956 severely affected America’s image and threatened to undermine U.S. policies and goals in the region by limiting the possibility that race conscious populations would identify and side with the United States in the global Cold War.\textsuperscript{132}

Latin Americans also responded loudly to racial violence in the United States in the mid-1950s. USIA officials were troubled that although “many of the Latin American countries have not as yet fully solved their own ethnic problems, nevertheless they are prone to criticize the U.S. for its shortcomings in this field.” The agency concluded that although both the communist and non-communist press reacted harshly to the Lucy and Montgomery cases, many papers also “attempted to analyze the historic and social causes of racial discrimination in the South and cited recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on racial questions as evidence of U.S. progress in this field.” The USIA narrative had made

inroads in the minds of America’s neighbors and, according to American propagandists, served to limit the negative effect on America’s image in Latin America.\(^{133}\)

While USIA officials were correct in recognizing the criticism emerging from Latin American press services, when examining the reactions to these racial events they did not completely take into account the larger relationship between the region and the United States. As historian Mark Gilderhus argues, Eisenhower’s concern with combating communism globally established a pattern that led “the administration to embrace anticommmunist leaders in Latin America – including repressive dictators – as allies.” Official opposition to communism significantly affected Latin American relations with the United States, as some regional populations chafed under authoritarian rule. CIA involvement in the overthrow of the leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and his replacement with the dictatorial Carlos Castillo Armas further demonstrated the willingness of American policymakers to intervene directly in the affairs of Latin American nations. While many in Latin America legitimately desired freedom and democracy, as the Eisenhower administration promised, reality often seemed to provide quite different circumstances. Latin American responses to American racial violence therefore reflected the familiarity in the region with the discrepancies between American rhetoric and action.\(^{134}\)

In some nations, such as the former French colony of Surinam, the USIA narrative was largely successful, while agency officials noted a mix of criticism and adoption of the idea of racial progress in Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Haiti,

\(^{133}\)USIA, “World-Wide”, 45.

Cuba, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica. Brazil provided a good example of USIA efforts and success in the region. USIA officials suggested that Brazilians, in an effort to avoid charges of hypocrisy themselves based on their previous enslavement of Africans, “may not have wanted to call attention to this fact by censuring others.” Indeed, as Mary Dudziak relates, Brazilians seemed quick to applaud U.S. progress in race relations as when “the Municipal Council of Santos, Sao Paulo, Brazil sent a letter to the U.S. embassy in Rio de Janeiro celebrating the Brown decision.” The Latin American press, overall, often adopted aspects of the USIA narrative, but as in Europe and elsewhere the story of progress in American race relations could not be divorced from criticism of violent events. 135

Agency officials recognized how these racial incidents damaged the American image in the Latin American press, but were unable to put the reactions in the full context of U.S.-Latin American relations. American willingness to exert political and military hegemony in the region, evidenced in the Guatemalan intervention and Eisenhower’s later support for removing Castro from power, undermined U.S. claims of self-determination and freedom. When Latin American officials, such as Brazilian ambassador to the United States Joao Carlos Muniz, requested an overarching program of economic aid similar to the Marshall Plan, they were rebuffed by the administration. Gilderhus relates, “U.S. leaders rejected any such approach as inconsistent with established policies, priorities and preferences; they favored free trade and private investment.” Such an approach had prevailed throughout the post-World War II era. The

135 Paramaribo to Secretary of State, April 16, 1956. RG 59, 811.411/4-1656, Box 4158, NA; USIA, “World-Wide”, 45-48; Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 107.
reality of the failure of capitalism to invigorate most Latin American economies combined with resentment over American predominance to create an atmosphere in which members of the Latin American press were often ready to criticize the United States. The USIA could try to advance its narrative, but as long as political and economic problems remained unsolved, cultural criticism of the United States would remain a visible part of the U.S.-Latin American relationship.\textsuperscript{136}

USIA officials were extremely concerned with reactions to American racial incidents in the area of the world the agency termed the “Far East.” Including major nonwhite American allies such as Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, public opinion there had the potential to significantly influence the effectiveness of American policies. U.S. officials noted that, in general, responses had been less numerous than expected given the assumption that Asians were usually very interested in racial issues. Some accounts chastised America for racial intolerance and the communist press was, as usual, unfriendly, but a balance existed as “the full news coverage was indicative of interest in the subject and the slightness of editorial comment reflective of restraint in expression an opinion of it.” Press in the region displayed more a lack of interest than an adoption of the USIA narrative and this suited agency officials just fine.\textsuperscript{137}

Eisenhower’s propagandists suggested the muted reactions could be to prevent creating an environment which was “embarrassing or offensive to a friendly nation.” Despite the desire of American allies to limit criticism coming from their own press,

\textsuperscript{136} Gilderhus, \textit{The Second Century}, 153-4.
\textsuperscript{137} USIA, “World-Wide”, 49.
USIA officials concluded, “Recent developments, particularly in Alabama, did not enhance their credulity of reported progressive trends in race relations today.” The agency understood that the desire to maintain conciliatory relations with the United States reduced criticism of American racial violence, especially when officials factored in the assumed usual heightened awareness of race by Asians, but still warned that such violence could not continue without possible repercussions.138

U.S. officials clearly recognized government and private limitations on negative press reactions to American race relations. According to Odd Arne Westad, America’s intimate postwar relationship with Japan was evidence of the belief that “it was only through becoming more like the United States that Japan – the only non-European economic and military power – could be redeemed.” Indeed, Westad further argues, “The experience in Japan set many of the aims [emphasis his] of US [sic] Third World policies.” Economically and politically restructuring Japan largely on the American model, as well as heavy influence in other nations such as South Korea and the Philippines, created a familiarity with the United States and led to reluctance in those countries to threaten the relationship by criticizing American race relations. Even when governments did not directly control the press, independent writers and editors were nevertheless wary of undermining the benefits gained from such a powerful ally. USIA officials clearly noticed this pattern when examining the reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents. They also accurately identified how neutral feelings in nations such as Burma and Laos led to relatively little comment in an effort to consistently adhere to a nonaligned status. “Sensational” responses from communist and communist-

138 Ibid., 49.
friendly publications were expected and placed in correct perspective by the agency. Overall, the USIA correctly understood reactions in East Asia.139

In Japan a minimal interest in American racial incidents appeared and the USIA recognized the internal factors influencing national attitudes. Ideas of local authority drew the attention of Japanese newspapers because “there was some interest in the local autonomy (States Rights) aspect of the problem in terms of post war political developments in Japan involving a similar issue.” No stories appeared in South Korea and while the Lucy case was covered widely in Manila, the USIA did not seem worried. South Vietnamese newspapers, controlled by the government, were not permitted to cover racial stories, but some French language publications carried critical articles. The agency made a connection between U.S. foreign policy and the global perception of America’s racial problems when it mentioned that South Vietnamese students “indicated some anxiety over the type of treatment they might receive when they come to the U.S. for military training since most of their training camps are located in the South.” News media in America’s major East Asian military and economic allies evinced some criticism of race in the United States, but compared to other global regions the American image did not suffer as severely.140

Former and future American enemies responded differently. North Koreans paid little attention to these incidents, but in North Vietnam “Viet Minh press and radio treatment of recent racial developments in the U.S. has been sharp.” The Lucy and Montgomery cases drew commentary and the paper Nhan Dan connected Vietnamese

139 Westad, Global Cold War, 24.
struggles with a charge of hypocrisy when it claimed, “While Americans are oppressing and despising the American Negroes, they seem to fondle the yellow-skinned Vietnamese…Is it that they pretend to be charitable just to bring the people of South Vietnam under their yoke?” USIA officials concluded, however, “Viet Minh coverage as a whole is believed to have had little impact in the area.” Racial violence in the United States complicated American efforts in East Asia, but generally only in areas already predisposed to criticize the United States. Agency officials correctly understood how either political and economic ties to the United States or the pursuit of neutralism in the Cold War limited the intensity of reactions and the damage to U.S. prestige.  

Expressions from communist China were sporadic and USIA officials believed that in criticizing racial matters the Chinese followed directions from Moscow. USIA assessments of Soviet propaganda concerning the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents put the communist pronouncements in the larger global context of the Cold War. Due to the increasing drive for influence in the Third World, “Asian and Middle Eastern audiences – special targets of Moscow’s intensified anti-colonialism propaganda – heard extensive comment about American discrimination about Negroes,” from the Soviets. The communists used the Till case to discuss racial problems in the United States, the Montgomery incident to highlight the continuing struggle for African-Americans, and, “the Lucy incident as a typical episode in present-day American life which Moscow used to expose [U.S.] bigotry.” The agency correctly understood how Soviet propagandists

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141 Ibid., 53-54.
utilized the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery events to undermine America’s global image in an effort to reduce American influence in the emerging nonwhite Third World.\footnote{Ibid., 55-57.}

Increasing awareness of racial issues by Third World nations contributed in 1956 to a decline in America’s image concerning race relations. As a superpower trying to attract allies to ensure national security and victory in the global Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union, American policymakers wanted foreign populations to identify with the United States. Racial violence complicated that goal. In fact, nonwhite populations could often more easily identify with the African-American victims of racial violence at the hands of white southerners than with white American policymakers and their rhetoric of freedom and equality. To explain these events the USIA sought to spread a narrative of gradual progress in American race relations and wanted accounts in foreign press services to adhere to the agency’s definition of calm, factual responses.

U.S. officials understood that the international reactions to the murder of Emmett Till, the Autherine Lucy case, and the Montgomery bus boycott varied depending by global region. Overall, the USIA most misunderstood the context of reactions in Latin America, missed elements in India and the Middle East, and was most often accurate in its perceptions of the responses in East Asia and Africa. In the Middle East the USIA narrative was not prominent, but neither was there a large amount of condemnation. Egyptian newspapers voiced the loudest criticisms, but agency officials determined that anti-American Arab nationalism played a large part. Reactions in Latin America contained both the USIA story and condemnation, although they were often influenced
by the worsening U.S. relationship with that region. In East Asia those press outlets the agency expected to be critical of the United States based on their political outlook were the only ones who reacted severely. In Africa and South Asia, two regions in which the USIA had highly publicized the Brown decision and other aspects of progress in American race relations, the agency correctly concluded that the intense level of condemnation threatened U.S. goals and policies. In two expansive areas of the world becoming increasingly important to the United States for their population, resources, and geographic positions USIA officials believed the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents undermined the American image and national security in the global Cold War.

The USIA’s study of the reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery cases revealed that the agency’s narrative was not dominant and needed to be reinforced. Further, agency officials often understood the myriad factors affecting responses and realized they could not directly or quickly change influences such as the political view of a newspaper writer, the existence of nationalism, or a desire for neutralism. To repair the American record on race the United States needed to undertake both domestic and international endeavors to continue to demonstrate progress in American racial attitudes. Contrary to giving up, the officials in the USIA and other parts of Eisenhower’s administration still sought to convince foreign nonwhite audiences of America’s sincerity in building a multiracial coalition to achieve victory in the Cold War.
CHAPTER 4
VISIONS OF RECOVERY

As negative responses to American racial violence appeared around the globe, the USIA and the Eisenhower administration sought ways to repair the nation’s image. While agency officials understood the complexity of foreign reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery cases, they could not quickly affect factors such as colonialism, neutralism, and the political outlooks of particular individuals of the foreign media. Throughout the Cold War the United States could not necessarily depend on attitudes of foreign populations to change on their own and this is one of the major reasons Eisenhower pursued an extensive program of propaganda. Such a situation also led USIA and other administration officials to the realization that actions by the U.S. government were areas the nation had the most direct control over in order to enhance American prestige. Mary Dudziak originated this line of argument concerning the postwar period when she claimed, “Civil rights reform was in part [italics hers] a product of the Cold War.”

International attention to domestic issues contributed to the need for change at a time when the United States sought to attract allies in its global struggle with the communist world. In part a continuation of previous USIA efforts to expand its narrative concerning racial progress and in part a response to the numerous international criticisms of the violent racial events of 1955 and 1956, the U.S. government undertook actions in 1956 and 1957 to repair the nation’s record on both civil rights and its attitudes toward nonwhite nations.143

143 Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 12.
Three main efforts constituted this renewed period of telling America’s story internationally. As it had since inception, the USIA continued its methods of spreading the idea of progress in American race relations and even claimed victory in some locales when foreign news media used stories that had originated with the agency. A major domestic event foreign populations could look to as evidence of American sincerity was the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which established government mechanisms to protect the right to vote for African-Americans. Both President Eisenhower’s 1956 State of the Union speech and Attorney General Herbert Brownell’s initial drafts of the measure indicate they thought of the measure partly in terms of its potential to benefit the international image of the United States. Encountering resistance from Southern senators, the bill emerged severely diluted in its final form and was evidence of Dudziak’s claim, “To the extent that reform was motivated by a desire to placate foreign critics, reform efforts that safeguarded the nation’s image would best respond to that concern.” The measure was, nevertheless, the first piece of legislation since Reconstruction designed to bolster African-American rights and, despite its weakness, was an example of government action the USIA could use to advance its narrative.144

Vice President Richard Nixon’s trip to the independence ceremonies in Ghana in March 1957 revealed the increasing importance of Africa in the minds of U.S. policymakers. As the United States began paying more attention to the nonwhite populations of Africa, the USIA narrative would benefit as foreign audiences saw the American willingness to listen to the needs of Third World populations. Nixon returned from the trip convinced of the importance of Africa in the Cold War and encouraged new

144 Ibid., 251.
aid packages for the continent, yet the Eisenhower administration failed to adopt a new approach to the continent. USIA officials also closely examined international reactions to the trip and concluded the American image had benefited. By mid-1957 U.S. prestige had recovered significantly due to these combined efforts by the U.S. government and its officials.

After studying the reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents, the USIA expanded its contacts and renewed its spread of propaganda to combat America’s negative record on race relations. In the agency’s semi-annual report to Congress covering July 1-December 31, 1956, officials admitted, “In many countries, press and radio played up the sensational angles of school integration incidents in the southern states.” More specifically, “In parts of Latin America and in the Far East there was heavy news play, often in inflammatory terms.” The report even noted the way Soviet propaganda tried to use American racial violence to undermine the U.S. position.145

Outlining some of the major steps taken to remedy the situation again revealed how the agency wanted its view of steady improvement in race relations to appear in foreign news outlets and some of the efforts it undertook to repair U.S. prestige. Officials described how “USIS officers in the field spent long hours with local newsmen and commentators, discussing this problem and providing factual materials to show that integration, in response to the Supreme Court decision [Brown], is gradually being accomplished.” Some of the materials used by agency officials included “picture stories

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depicting the progress of Negroes in many walks of American life… [and] statistical facts, such as the large number of Negroes now attending non-segregated colleges.” By using images and numbers showing advancements for African-Americans, the USIA maintained a belief in its methods and narrative.146

Evidence of success in some foreign newspapers encouraged the agency proudly to claim, “Attitudes were altered by such stories.” U.S. officials described how the usually socialist Le Populaire in Martinique “printed in full a USIS article on peaceful integration in St. Louis, Louisville, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.” One of Norway’s most prominent labor newspapers, Oslo’s Arbeiderbladet, included articles containing facts supplied by USIS officials on American achievements in integration. Even in problematic South Asia, the Times of Burma “dwelt on ‘the progress made in the United States toward complete integration.’” U.S. officials identified specific instances in which the USIA narrative had recently triumphed in certain foreign news media which were previously likely to criticize the United States based on their political outlook.147

These tangible measures of achievement extended to the African continent, another global region in which the racial violence of the previous year had damaged the American image. In early May 1956 in Leopoldville, capital of the Belgian Congo, Gilbert E. Bursley, the Public Affairs officer, reported, “During the past two months an increasing number of letters, of a routine nature, have been received from newspapers, Government officials, schools, missionaries and private individuals testifying to the effectiveness of USIS programming in this area.” Despite the charges of hypocrisy

146Ibid., 14-15.
147Ibid., 15.
leveled at the United States by Belgian and Congolese papers for America’s official anti-colonial stance, USIA efforts seemed to convince some in the colony to view American race relations in a better light.\textsuperscript{148}

Most of the letters dealt with various aspects of American culture and ideas, but the editor of the newspaper \textit{Semaine de l’A.E.F.} in Brazzaville, Father Legall, remarked, “I read with keen interest your feature on ‘The Contribution of the Negroes to Cultural Life in the United States.’ I wish to do an article on the subject and would be very happy if you would help me illustrate it with several pictures of American Negroes.” Legall’s words not only revealed a certain document the USIA was utilizing in the Congo at the time to spread its narrative, but also indicated the willingness of the editor of a major regional paper to advance the official American stance on progress in race relations.\textsuperscript{149}

In Ethiopia, USIA interaction with the assistant editor of the prominent \textit{Voice of Ethiopia} demonstrated how the agency could achieve success through its methods of personal contacts and suggestions of factual reporting. William Astill, the USIA country director, related the story, beginning with how the editor, Ato Gudamo Ibrahim, felt strongly about racial issues in the United States. Ibrahim had been “carrying on a regular basis the most sensational aspects of the Lucy, Till and Cole cases.” The latter incident was another prominent example of American racial violence in which African American singer Nat King Cole was attacked onstage by whites. Astill commented that U.S. officials did not necessarily object to the appearance of the incidents but to “the fact that the papers seldom if ever carried the denouements to the stories – the arrest and

\textsuperscript{148}USIS Leopoldville to Washington, May 5, 1956, RG 306, Foreign Service Despatches, 1954-65, Africa and Australia, Box 1, NA.
\textsuperscript{149}Ibid.
subsequent punishment of those causing trouble, etc.” One problem of course, as evidenced in the Till case, was the unwillingness of white juries in the American South to punish their white peers who had been charged in a racial crime. The agency nevertheless wanted foreign press outlets to cover those stories that did have endings supporting the USIA narrative. Embassy officials therefore talked with Ibrahim several times about the accounts, but did not mention they were annoyed for fear he would quickly cut off the flow of stories while developing an even more negative opinion of race relations in the United States.\textsuperscript{150}

Astill reported, “Instead of making clear the Embassy’s opinions, the PAO [Public Affairs Officer at the Embassy] told Gudamo that it seems unfair that only one side – i.e. the sensational side – was printed and that the denouement to these events was never mentioned.” Embassy officials discussed with him several times the advances made by African-Americans and some U.S. government efforts to help them. Giving the editor access to other press services in which he could view aspects of progress in American race relations as well as increasing American interest in Africa also helped accommodate Ibrahim to the USIA viewpoint. Subsequently, according to Astill, “In the past three months the only stories appearing in the papers about racial questions in the United States have been either straight reporting of news events or stories which contain a rational and unbiased presentation of the facts.” He went on to describe how U.S. officials counted it a success because leading newspapers were no longer carrying such stories and a local who had the potential to become an important news actor had come over to the American

\textsuperscript{150} USIS Addis Ababa to Washington, October 3, 1956, RG 306, Foreign Service Despatches, 1954-65, Africa and Australia, Box 1, NA.
view. Agency officials cautioned that the desire of the Ethiopian government to retain friendly relations with the United States and the consequent advice to “go lightly” on American racial issues may have also influenced the outcome. Nevertheless, “USIS does feel that its efforts to explain the segregation issue and the continuing attempts to speed up desegregation in the United States have had some cumulative effect over the past six months.” In an independent African nation often seen as a symbol by other nonwhite populations, the USIA narrative was regaining popularity in the second half of 1956.151

By late 1955, President Eisenhower and his administration were feeling pressure to do something about the increasing violence in the South. At a cabinet meeting on December 2 discussing Eisenhower’s upcoming 1956 State of the Union message, “it was recommended that the appropriate way to explore this situation would be by establishing a Congressional study to look into allegations of deprivation of the right of franchise.” Eisenhower would only protect the right to vote because such action accorded with his own perceptions concerning the reach of the national government. As Pach and Richardson relate, “The Constitution clearly provided for federal responsibility on this matter, and blacks clearly needed federal assistance in order to have equal access to this most basic right of citizenship,” due to southern roadblocks such as literacy tests, poll taxes, or violence that often kept poor, illiterate African-Americans from the voting booth.152

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151 Ibid.
In his State of the Union message to Congress on January 5, 1956, Eisenhower touched on the achievements of his administration in the area of civil rights, including the end of segregation in both the executive branch and the District of Columbia. He also discussed the deprivation of voting rights for African-Americans and proposed establishing a bipartisan commission in Congress to investigate these incidents. The president then publicly linked this endeavor to America’s international image when he said, “The stature of our leadership in the free world has increased through the past three years because we have made more progress than ever before in a similar period to assure our citizens equality in justice, in opportunity and in civil rights.” He encouraged the nation to “expand this effort on every front. We must strive to have every person judged and measured by what he is, rather than by his color, race or religion.” Such egalitarian language presented his recommendations on civil rights reform to the world as a positive step in the progress for nonwhite minorities in the United States. 153

Internal documents relating to the new civil rights bill also contained recognition of the importance it held for the country’s prestige. On March 7, 1956 Attorney General Herbert Brownell circulated to the cabinet the first draft of the proposed measure and in the final paragraph wrote, “I believe that the enactment of all of this legislation not only will give us the means to meet, fully and intelligently, our responsibility for safeguarding the Constitutional rights in this country, but will demonstrate to the world at large our determination to secure equal justice under law for all people.” Not only would the bill

help a domestic group achieve their unalienable rights, it would also improve the nation’s image abroad and bolster the U.S. record on civil rights. Although the final draft contained less explicit language concerning the world, it still made the overarching statement that the measure “will reaffirm our determination to secure equal justice under law for all people.” New government action would still demonstrate the democratic principles America stood for in the Cold War.154

U.S. officials not only wished to repair the American image in general with the new civil rights bill, but also to address the outrage over the murder of Emmett Till. In the same December 2, 1955 cabinet meeting mentioned above, at which Vice President Richard Nixon presided due to Eisenhower’s continuing recovery from his September heart attack, Brownell and others directly connected the Till incident to the civil rights recommendations Eisenhower would make in the 1956 State of the Union Speech. He mentioned how the “killings in Mississippi,” had created pressure on the Justice Department to get more involved in racial issues and further claimed that “the Till case set this off.” Nixon responded that it was a problem for the states and asked, “Wouldn’t the Congressional investigating procedure – keeping Justice Dept. out of it – be the most effective way of handling it?” Brownell and others remained adamant on having the President recommend a new civil rights division in the Justice Department. Harold Stassen, Eisenhower’s special assistant for disarmament, further indicated how Till’s murder influenced the discussion when he suggested the president praise southern states for the progress they had made. Stassen thought Eisenhower should “then make criticism

spotlight on Mississippi either by name or in direction [sic].” In his memoirs, Brownell also discussed the lack of jurisdiction the federal government had in the Till case and the consequent lack of action. He then stated, “Our proposed Civil Rights Act of 1957 would have changed that.” Domestic and international response to the murder of Emmett Till directly influenced those U.S. officials who developed the bill that would become the Civil Rights Act of 1957.155

The bill Eisenhower sent to Congress on April 9, 1956 included more than just the protection of franchise. In his statement before the House Judiciary Committee the next day, Brownell succinctly outlined the administration’s proposals as the establishment of a bipartisan commission on civil rights, the creation of an Assistant Attorney General position in the Department of Justice as the head of a new civil rights division, the adoption of provisions to protect the right to vote, and the “amendment of other civil rights laws to include the addition of civil remedies in the Department of Justice for their enforcement.” Pach and Richardson describe how, in his desire to avoid emotional responses to the bill that might impede its passing, “Eisenhower included the voting rights provision in a larger package, one that he hoped would appeal to moderates of all persuasions.” By creating new structures to deal with civil rights cases, the president sought to alleviate the concerns of integrationists without putting undue pressure on southern whites by dealing with incidents in civil courts and only on an individual basis.156

155 Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, December 2, 1955, in Gibson and Kesaris, Minutes, Reel 4; Pach and Richardson, Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 122; Brownell Advising Ike, 204.
156 Statement by Attorney General before House Judiciary Committee, April 10, 1956 in Gibson and Kesaris, Minutes, Reel 4; Pach and Richardson, Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 146.
After encountering significant resistance in Congress, the bill emerged in an even more diluted form. In 1956, according to Pach and Richardson, Democrats “accused Eisenhower of sending the bill to Congress for no other reason than to win black votes,” in his run for reelection. After winning the contest, he resubmitted the bill in early 1957. The measure passed the House with relative ease, but that summer met more opposition in the Senate. A main point of contention revolved around the inclusion of jury trials for those accused of civil rights violations. As evidenced in the Till case, southern juries of white peers would be pleased to help their neighbors against the outside efforts of the federal government. When the measure finally appeared on Eisenhower’s desk in September of 1957, “not only did it contain the jury trial stipulation, but it did not give the attorney general the power Eisenhower had requested to deal with violations of civil rights.” Southern members of Congress had been largely successful in defending the color line.  

In response to these changes Val Washington, the Director of Minorities for the Republican National Committee, condemned the dilution of the bill in language placing the whole conflict in terms of the nation’s international image. He claimed, “If the Senate had passed the Eisenhower Civil Rights Bill as the House did, it could have been pointed to as a beacon which would have cast its light over all the world.” Washington further linked it to America’s efforts to attract foreign populations in the Cold War when he said, “It would have been a signal to all darker races to rally to the cause of democracy and stand up against efforts to communize the world.” Despite this promise, “at the bar of world opinion the United States has lost one of the greatest sales points of a democracy

157 Pach and Richardson, Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 146-8.
for the recruiting of new advocates – Equality for all its citizens regardless of Race, Creed, Color or National Origin.” If foreign audiences looked closely at Eisenhower’s weakened civil rights bill in 1957 they would clearly see the victory of Southern segregationists in blocking the adoption of stronger integrationist measures.¹⁵⁸

Despite the occasional vehement opposition to the bill from those upholding the color line and the criticism of its final form by those desiring integration, Eisenhower was content with the Civil Rights Act of 1957. As Pach and Richardson explain, “The legislation conformed to his philosophy of government, since it established a disinterested fact-finding commission to report on civil rights and established enforcement procedures that relied on judicial process rather than executive compulsion.”

The internal discussion of the bill before its journey through Congress reveals how Eisenhower’s personal views affected the strength of the measure. In a cabinet meeting on March 23, 1956, Brownell broached the issue of only including civil suits and not criminal prosecution of civil rights offenders. Eisenhower “agreed in this emphasis on basing judgment on good sense and moderation instead of merely piling up laws that could not be enforced under existing circumstances.” In an even more telling episode, when the president was on the phone with Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, the former “injected that when the civil rights bill was first brought up, he devised and approved what he thought was the mildest civil rights bill possible – he stressed that he himself had lived in the south and had no lack of sympathy for the southern position.”

Eisenhower’s personal views on the need for gradual change and his familiarity with

white Southerners influenced his approach to civil rights legislation and contributed to the weakness of the measure.\textsuperscript{159}

Despite the dilution of the bill and the potential for its implementation to remain limited, it was nevertheless the first legislation adopted since Reconstruction that came down on the side of African-Americans. Robert Burk comments that the bill “gave the President his opportunity to claim a Republican civil rights victory.” Further, Burk argues that by 1956 “his recognition of the political need to provide additional gestures of support for civil rights beyond those offered four years earlier,” in part led Eisenhower to support the measure. Both domestic and international clamoring for change convinced the president that he could no longer remain complacent on civil rights. Attorney General Brownell had also suggested that in the case of Emmett Till the 1957 Act would have allowed prosecution of his murderers so it had the potential, therefore, to limit the severity and injustice of southern racial violence. According to Brownell, it also created momentum for civil rights reform because it broke “the one-hundred-year impasse in Congress on civil rights.” While the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was not as strong as legislation in the 1960s, it was still evidence of progress in American race relations the world could see and increased the reality of potential further action.\textsuperscript{160}


\textsuperscript{160} Burk, \textit{The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights}, 226, 258; Brownell, \textit{Advising Ike}, 204, 202.
The U.S. government would also undertake a major international action in 1957 to repair its image in nonwhite Third World nations. The importance of the Third World in the minds of U.S. policymakers increased as the Cold War expanded to the global south in the 1950s. A reason for this shift was the European retreat from colonialism and the granting of self-government by former colonizers. Third World peoples could now control their own destinies and choose which political system to emulate or adopt, whether in whole or in part for their own purposes. Great Britain had physically controlled large portions of the Third World and the large nonwhite populations living in those regions. The English retreat from empire in the second half of the twentieth century therefore had significant implications for the level of influence the Third World would subsequently exert in the Cold War.

Great Britain had suffered as the result of two world wars in a thirty year period and the price in both lives and treasure had seriously reduced both its will and ability to maintain a global empire. The principle of self-determination in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, espoused by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, had also inspired those who remained under the yoke of colonialism. Growing nationalist sentiment in British colonies increased the costs and reduced the benefits to be gained from any further direct control. While some European nations, such as France and Belgium, sought to hold onto their foreign territories through force, the British decided to move their colonies more quickly towards independence in order to reduce their overseas obligations. On the continent of Africa this process
officially began with the independence of Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast, on March 6, 1957.

As previously noted, James Meriwether has claimed that Ghana, under its charismatic leader Kwame Nkrumah who would become the first president, held the potential in its example to lead an entire group of nations into neutralism in the Cold War. In fact, at a cabinet meeting as early as April 27, 1956, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles recognized the importance of contacts on the African continent and claimed, “It would be highly desirable if Cabinet members could in their travel abroad include one or more African stops in their itineraries.” To establish good relations with the first sub-Saharan African nation to achieve independence and to garner goodwill throughout the continent of Africa, President Eisenhower sent Vice President Richard Nixon to formally represent the United States at the independence ceremonies in Ghana. Nixon biographer Stephen Ambrose relates that at a lunch on February 2, 1957, Secretary Dulles and the vice president decided to expand the trip to include stops in Morocco, Uganda, Sudan, Libya, Ethiopia, Liberia, Tunisia, and Italy over approximately three weeks. Such a high profile trip would presumably gain the notice of the world press and show American goodwill for African nations and their freedom.\footnote{Meriwether, “A Torrent Overrunning Everything”, 175; Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, April 27, 1956 in Gibson and Kesaris, Minutes, Reel 4; Stephen Ambrose, \textit{Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 431.}

Racial overtones would also permeate the trip and the administration decided to have E. Frederic Morrow, Eisenhower’s highest African American official who held the position of Administrative Officer for Special Projects, accompany the vice president. Morrow remembered, “Nixon had gone to many colored countries in the world before
without a Negro member in his group, and I felt that the presence of Negroes would make
his visits much more effective.” Morrow’s presence would reveal the progress being
made in American race relations by giving the nonwhite populations of Africa a visible
example of an African American with relatively high government status.162

During the trip both African leaders and peoples demonstrated a high level of interest in Nixon and his entourage. Beginning in Morocco on March 1, the group often encountered crowds in the thousands and Morrow described how the police in Casablanca estimated the number at over two hundred thousand. In the capital of Rabat, Nixon and his wife walked among the people. Morrow noticed the implications for spreading American ideals that this type of action held when he said, “The Nixons were to do this same thing many times during their visit in Morocco and elsewhere….and this display of American democracy at work could very well put queer ideas into the people’s heads,” to the chagrin of authoritarian rulers in the region. In the Cold War, every opportunity was taken to encourage others to identify with the United States, even if it was only through a handshake.163

Those whom the delegation visited also held an awareness of American and international racial issues. When they reached Ghana, Morrow was impressed by its leader Kwame Nkrumah and the feeling seemed to be mutual. The former recalled, “The Prime Minister expressed great delight at my presence…he congratulated me upon my position on the President’s staff and agreed that we both had something in common, since we were both pioneering in difficult fields.” Despite identifying how both of them were

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162 Morrow, Black Man, 125.
163 Ibid., 129.
trying to overcome legacies of white supremacy, the head of a symbolically important African nation realized the progress in American race relations by noticing Morrow and being excited about his status in the Eisenhower administration. While the general populace may not have been aware of Morrow’s presence, the elites whom the Eisenhower administration and the USIA often targeted in their propaganda efforts still influenced larger populations.  

During stops in other nations on the itinerary after the independence celebrations in Ghana were over, Morrow’s presence clarified some issues concerning race in the United States. In Ethiopia, “The legend is that Ethiopians do not want to be identified with the lowly plight of the American Negro,” who were limited in opportunity. Morrow felt he helped overcome these views when the “scores of impeccably clothed and highly educated court functionaries were not only surprised but rather proud to see a brown man in the Vice-President’s entourage.” He also believed he had improved the American image in Tunisia, where “people in this part of the world seldom see an American Negro, and certainly not one who has a position of any consequence in the United States Government.” His visibility on the trip again helped foreign elites overcome their notions about American race relations.  

American news media had apparently watched the Nixon trip and after his return Morrow wrote, “Many newspapers have speculated that I will be named Ambassador to Ghana or head of the new African desk at the State Department.” Many foreign press outlets looked to U.S. newspapers for stories on American race relations. As foreign

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164 Ibid., 138.
165 Ibid., 151.
officials and the American press noticed Morrow, larger segments of African populations would be made aware of his presence on the trip. Even if that dynamic did not occur, the further shaping of African elites’ attitudes towards American race relations would benefit the United States as barriers to cooperation were conquered.166

Nixon’s trip was not, however, completely beneficial for the image of the United States. As Ambrose relates, “The truth was that Eisenhower had given him [Nixon] almost nothing to offer the Africans, except good wishes.” Ambrose goes on to describe an episode in which, in a response to this lack of material aid, Nkrumah placed the head of the Chinese delegation at the head of the table at a large official dinner and seated Nixon near the back of the room. The leader of this nonwhite nation chose not to cater to the United States and with this action he indicated the possibility for Ghana to follow its own path in the Cold War by subtly snubbing the American delegation.167

Incidents with racial aspects also complicated the trip. Martin Luther King, Jr. attended the celebrations in Ghana and, as Ambrose notes, “The young civil rights leader stole the spotlight from all the official representatives, including Nixon. At an impromptu press conference at Ghana University, the world press hung on King’s every word.” Fresh from the successful Montgomery bus boycott, his presence again reminded the world of the continuing American racial dilemma. The most potentially devastating episode to come out of the trip occurred in Rome, on the first part of the return home for the delegation. At a party at the American Embassy the wife of the American ambassador designate to newly independent Ghana approached three African-American reporters and

166 Ibid., 155.
167 Ambrose, Nixon, 432.
said, “We are not very happy about going to this black country, but somehow we always get the dregs.” According to Morrow, “She then went on to indicate in no uncertain terms that she had nothing good to say for black people.” An inquiry followed, but the State Department cleared the ambassador of any charges and sent him to Ghana anyway. The fact that the high profile American delegation to Ghana’s independence celebration would be followed by other U.S. officials who potentially held racist views undermined the apparent sincerity of the United States to maintain friendly relations with nonwhite populations. 168

After the group’s return, Nixon met with the president about the trip and discussed its implications for American policy towards Africa. In a front page article the New York Times reported on Nixon’s conclusions and mentioned the large aid package the vice president had suggested for Africa. Reflecting U.S. concerns with security in the Cold War, his report noted that the free world needed to pay more attention to the continent and “that the future course of African development ‘could well prove to be the decisive factor in the conflict between the forces of freedom and international communism.’” Nixon also expressed a desire for the USIA to increase its efforts in “Europe and, in general, a strengthening of the caliber of the United States representation at all levels,” in order to uphold the American image. 169

W. H. Lawrence, the New York Times reporter, also described the view on racial issues Nixon brought away from his experience when he mentioned how “the Vice President cautioned that continued racial discrimination in the United States was a

168 Ibid., 432; Morrow, Black Man, 147-8.
handicap to United States influence throughout Africa.” Nixon clearly connected race and national security in the Cold War when “he said that, in the national interest as well as for moral reasons, support must be given for steps toward the elimination of discrimination in the United States.” Despite the goodwill garnered among nonwhite elites and populations by the trip, the vice president recognized the threat to America’s image and goals posed by continuing racial inequality in the United States.170

The Eisenhower administration also failed to alter its support of European colonial powers, an issue in the forefront of African minds. In a fresh discussion of what U.S. policy should be towards black African nations, titled “Statement of U.S. Policy Toward Africa South of the Sahara Prior to the Calendar Year 1960,” the NSC noted the economic relationship between Europe and Africa and concluded, “The United States, therefore believes it to be generally desirable that close and mutually advantageous economic relationships between the European powers and Africa should continue after the colonial period has passed.” Although admitting that encouraging this cooperation “manifestly has its limitations…for the foreseeable future it will remain the only logical and correct course of action to follow.” The rest of the discussion was infused with language relating the importance and success of Western European nations to their current and former colonies in Africa. Despite official American anti-colonial rhetoric, the paternalism of the Eisenhower administration triumphed when U.S. officials feared communist victory because “the African is still immature and unsophisticated with respect to his attitudes towards the issues that divide the world today.” While expressing

170 Ibid.
a desire to encourage African nationalism, American policymakers did not fundamentally alter internal U.S. attitudes toward the continent.  

Economic relationships with African nations and populations could not escape the framework of this continuing European-African connection in the mind of administration officials. After making a vague reference to current policies of “technical and economic assistance,” the NSC suggested, “Working directly with the metropolitan powers, through loans to them for specific projects in their African areas.” The government was “prepared to extend to Ghana development project loans,” and to take measures to ensure the economic stability of Liberia, but the recommendations were not accompanied by any dollar amount and the prescriptions remained vague. U.S. officials even believed it was possible to avoid providing large amounts of aid because their “success in achieving the previously-stated U.S. objective or preserving the essential ties between Europe and Africa, will probably have an important impact on the rate of Africa’s economic progress, while lessening Africa’s reliance on U.S. assistance.” Despite language throughout the NSC’s report on the importance of Africa and the prevalence of nationalism and colonialism as issues, American policymakers were unable to divorce their views of Africa from the overarching Cold War context. Such mindsets precluded major actions capable of fully developing U.S. influence in the region and establishing a concrete American image.

Yet the USIA still sought to gauge the success of the Nixon visit by once again closely examining the way foreign populations reacted. With a high-level U.S. delegation

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172 Ibid., 78, 82, 83.
attending such a symbolically important event in the Third World, press all over the world covered Nixon’s African tour. As they did with the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents, USIA officials examined the reactions to the trip based on their criteria of factual reporting and favorable comment concerning the United States. A USIA report titled, “Reactions To Vice President Nixon’s African Trip,” appeared two weeks after the *New York Times* article on Nixon’s trip to Africa. In addition to Morrow’s first-hand account of large crowds and friendly leaders, this assessment of the trip underscored the agency’s desire to gauge the effect of the tour on the American image and to see if it in fact did create goodwill towards the United States, as it was primarily designed to do. Agency officials concluded that Nixon’s Africa trip generally enhanced the American image around the globe and especially in Africa, one of the regions in which the nation’s prestige had been most seriously damaged and its goals potentially undermined by the domestic racial events of 1955 and 1956.173

The USIA was generally pleased when Western European writers looked favorably on the trip. The agency noted with satisfaction, “Both the news stories and the generally sparse and selective editorial comment interpreted both the tour and the Vice President’s report as welcome manifestations of increased U.S. interest in Africa.” Europeans recognized the visit as evidence of America’s desire to become more involved in an increasingly important region in the global Cold War. Based on its own issues with African colonies, “The Belgian press became somewhat more animated during the Ghana independence celebration and urged that the U.S. should not try to displace Europe in

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173 United States Information Agency Office of Research, “Reactions to Vice President Nixon’s African Trip,” April 23, 1957. Box 14, RG 306, NA.
developing the continent economically and politically,” but most European press services viewed the new U.S. involvement in Africa as a sound approach. With few exceptions, Western European views of Nixon’s Africa tour revealed both that Europeans encouraged America’s involvement in Africa, yet not at their expense, and that the trip had repaired America’s image in relating to nonwhite populations in the minds of some Europeans. They also seemed content with the Eisenhower administration’s attitude of subtly encouraging continued European involvement in Africa and, besides, Belgium, did not see new U.S. interest in Africa as a threat to their interests. USIA officials therefore failed to place these reactions in their full context.174

With the tour directly visiting several nations north of the Sahara, reactions in that region revealed warm sentiment for Nixon and his entourage. Moroccan papers “as a whole responded warmly to the visit,” and the intense popular reactions were “referred to as being spontaneous and exuberant.” Similar responses occurred in Tunisia and Libya. In sub-Saharan nations visited by Nixon, including Ghana, Liberia, and Ethiopia, press and popular reactions were also overwhelmingly positive and the American image benefited. Reactions varied in other areas of Africa. In British East Africa the tour appeared prominently in publications, while in French West Africa local concerns such as territorial elections remained more important. Only in the Belgian Congo and South Africa did negative reactions appear. Overall, both the USIA and Morrow accurately noted the intense interest in the American delegation. While this may not have measurably translated into a renewal of the American image, such attention demonstrated

174 Ibid., 10-11.
the esteem in which many Africans, including large numbers of commoners, held Americans.175

The Arab nationalism of Gamal Abdel Nasser and his control of the Egyptian press led to negative reactions to Nixon’s trip in that nation. According to U.S. officials, “The theme that Nixon’s trip was an expression of the colonialist ambitions of the United States in Africa,” was prominent in Egypt. Despite these isolated criticisms, the vice president’s tour demonstrated U.S. interest in Africa to nonwhite populations. Such attention would help Africans identify with the United States and alleviate the damage to the American image by the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents. USIA officials were able to identify the internal factors affecting the varied African responses to the trip, yet, as seen above in the NSC discussion, this did not translate into a new approach to U.S.-African relations.176

In India, where the USIA believed racial issues held the potential to undermine American goals, reactions to Nixon’s tour did not appear until after the publication of his report to Eisenhower. Agency officials concluded, “The general consensus was that his report ignored the most vital problem facing the peoples of Africa – the liquidation of European colonialism and the achievement of freedom.” Indian papers pinpointed the most prevalent issue in Africa, which the Eisenhower administration had yet to fully address. The *Tribune* in the city of Ambala added a racial element when it commented that this failure was “strengthening the intransigence of the whites in multi-racial African states.” Other papers warned the United States to be wary of how the Western European

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175 Ibid., 1-6.
176 Ibid., 6.
nations used communism to persuade U.S. officials to accept their policies in Africa and therefore actually open the door to communism in those nonwhite nations. The USIA knew that Nixon’s tour did not enhance the American image in India and were troubled that it reminded South Asians of practical colonial and racial issues in U.S. foreign policy which they found unsatisfactory.\\textsuperscript{177}

According to Meriwether, before Nixon set out on his trip to attend the independence celebrations in Ghana, Secretary Dulles had realized “the emergent peoples of Africa will follow with particular attention the degree of interest and sympathy which the United States accords these developments.” The world watched and the American image benefited. Most Europeans surprisingly applauded the Nixon trip, although the USIA did not identify the full context of this praise, and it was widely popular in African nations both north and south of the Sahara. Relatively negative commentary on American race relations appeared in reactions in the Belgian Congo, South Africa, Egypt, and India, but many foreign populations, especially those in the target area of Africa, generally approved of the American effort. The United States appeared to place high importance on the independence of nonwhite nations by sending the second highest U.S. official to the continent.\\textsuperscript{178}

With Morrow and African-American members of the media included in the entourage, the trip was also a symbol of progress for that minority in American society and African leaders and populations noticed. Both African elites and U.S. media had noted Morrow’s presence and their responses would either affect or reach larger African

\\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 7.
\\textsuperscript{178} Memcon of Dulles conversation with Nixon, February 2, 1957, Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 6, VP Nixon, Eisenhower Library, quoted in Meriwether, “A Torrent Overrunning Everything”, 182.
populations. USIA officials concluded that the tour had buoyed the American image in Africa and therefore helped repair some of the damage done by the violent racial events of the past two years. A sense of a new, mutually beneficial, and continuing relationship between the United States and Africa seemed to permeate reactions to the tour. The future appeared bright for relations between America and nonwhite nations, at least publicly. Continuing paternalistic attitudes of Eisenhower and his officials, despite recommendations from Nixon, overshadowed this rosy picture and the basic U.S.-African relationship would not significantly change for the rest of the 1950s.

Yet the USIA continued to believe in its narrative. In early September 1957 the agency reported to the NSC on its increased efforts in Africa. To continue the bolstering of the American image begun by Nixon’s trip, “a four reel color documentary prepared by the USIA was shown in all African countries as a follow-up on the Vice President’s visit.” Supporting the major theme of increased U.S. attention to the continent that came out of the tour, one widely utilized USIA newsreel “portrays U.S. interest in Africa and seeks to build a bridge between Africa and the U.S.” More generally, officials noted how the drive for independence in Africa created new opportunities for American propaganda and concluded, “To capitalize on this situation by improving the quality of the African program was a major Agency task during 1957.” The USIA also opened new posts in Somalia and Uganda and created information programs designed specifically for African audiences. One of the most significant steps the agency took was the development “for broadcast over local radio stations, [of] specially prepared programs detailing the accomplishments of Negro Americans together with a series of interview programs with
African leaders, specialists, and students visiting the U.S.” Using the success of Nixon’s trip, the USIA sought to continue to advance its narrative of progress in American race relations as part of a broader program to convince foreign nonwhite populations to identify with the United States in the Cold War.179

Although the USIA narrative did not dominate the international response to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents, it was nevertheless present worldwide. As the agency reached an understanding of the myriad factors potentially influencing reactions, officials could also be pleased with the presence of its story. In this way a close study of international views validated the agency’s efforts and encouraged it to follow similar measures in the future, which it would do throughout the rest of 1956 and 1957. By maintaining close, personal contacts with foreign news personnel and continuing to provide stories and evidence of progress for African-Americans, the agency could claim even more success at the end of 1956 in its semi-annual report to Congress.

Eisenhower’s support, admittedly lukewarm, of the bill that would become the Civil Rights Act of 1957 also provided the world with evidence of American progress in race relations. Despite its diluted result, the measure was still the first piece of legislation in the twentieth century designed to advance the rights of African-Americans and, at the very least, was a symbol to the world of American sincerity in moving towards racial equality. The chief author of the bill, Attorney General Brownell, thought of it partly in international terms and connected it to the murder of Emmett Till. Even Eisenhower, in

his 1956 State of the Union speech, implicitly tied the action to how the world perceived
the United States.

Nixon’s trip to Africa did the most to boost the international standing of the
United States in the mid-1950s. By demonstrating U.S. attention to the independence of a
sub-Saharan African nation and by bringing along African-Americans in his entourage,
the vice president did much to bolster U.S. prestige in the eyes of many African
populations and even adopted an appreciation for the importance of the continent in the
Cold War. Nonwhite populations viewed the trip as evidence of a new American interest
in the Third World that held the potential to begin a mutually beneficial relationship,
despite continuing administration attitudes and actions in a Cold War framework.
Subsequent Cold War history would not necessarily validate the promise of this moment
as the United States would frequently intervene in Third World nations, but in the mid-
1950s a different future at least seemed possible for the U.S.-African relationship.

These endeavors by the USIA and the U.S. government in 1956 and 1957
bolstered the nation’s international prestige concerning its relations with both its
domestic nonwhite minority and foreign nonwhite populations. Despite the numerous
negative reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents and the lack of triumph
experienced by the USIA narrative, by mid-1957 the American image concerning race
had partially recovered and U.S. officials appeared cautiously optimistic about their
continuing efforts to explain America’s racial issues to the world.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the mid-1950s concerning the intersection of race
and the Cold War was that this recovery was not to last, as the integration crisis in Little
Rock, Arkansas in September 1957 took a wrecking ball once again to America’s global image and began the cycle for the nation’s prestige all over again. When governor Orval Faubus used Arkansas National Guard troops to block the federal court ordered entrance of nine African-American teens to Little Rock’s Central High School, according to Dudziak, “Dulles told Brownell that ‘this situation was ruining our foreign policy. The effect of this in Asia and Africa will be worse for us than [the 1956 brutal suppression of the uprising in] Hungary was for the Russians.’” As long as racial events continued, the American image in the Cold War context could not be totally secure and the USIA narrative would never be completely dominant. U.S. officials within the agency and throughout the federal government would once again have to deal with international criticism of American racial violence and respond with continuing efforts to maintain and repair U.S. prestige.180

CONCLUSION

As America engaged in a global endeavor to discredit and outlast the Soviet Union and communist ideology, the domestic arena of the United States came under intense scrutiny by myriad foreign populations. U.S. officials had become increasingly interested in the nonwhite Third World for its natural resources, large population, and for strategic locations close to the Soviet Union. Even more important was the need to demonstrate American commitment to its allies around the globe and prevent perceived drastic consequences to American democracy at home. If foreign populations could not identify American goals and interests as their own, they would be less likely to side with the United States in its overarching struggle against the Soviets. Yet many nonwhite Third World populations did not view the Cold War as the primary paradigm of international relations in the mid-twentieth century. Throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s violence against African-Americans in the southern states undermined U.S. claims of equality and freedom in a democracy. In the minds of American policymakers such a threat to the American image translated into a challenge to the national security of the United States. The brutal murder of Emmett Till, Autherine Lucy’s experience at the University of Alabama, and the Montgomery bus boycott therefore revealed how individual domestic events could become matters of national security and international prestige.

When African-Americans experienced persecution and violence, nonwhite foreign populations doubted the American commitment to freedom and equality. The United States Information Agency, created by Eisenhower in 1953, tried to explain American
racial problems as aberrations in the larger progress towards full equality for African-Americans which could only be fulfilled in a democratic environment. When international news media produced dozens of articles and reactions to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents, the USIA realized its narrative had been unsuccessful. The agency’s story was not the dominant interpretation of American race relations in the mid-1950s and U.S. officials identified a very real loss of U.S. prestige due to these events. They often, however, exaggerated the consequences for national security. While the Eisenhower administration believed the American image was linked to convincing allies to identify with, and then ally with, the United States, many nations voicing criticism of American racial practices were not likely to abandon their relationships with the United States. Military and economic connections, especially with European nations, often precluded any actual loss of security due to these racial incidents. USIA officials were, however, correct in worrying about the effect racial violence would have on U.S. policies in Africa and India where populations were extremely attuned to how race affected international relations. Yet even in these areas anger over the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents built on previously established animosities towards the United States, whether toward its implicit acceptance of white colonialism or its opposition to neutralist paths in the Cold War. The agency at times showed glimpses of recognizing these other factors, but tended to express its warnings in dire language predicting the failure of U.S. policies in overseas regions. The widespread condemnation of the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery cases certainly reinforced an international environment critical of
American race relations, but USIA officials overestimated the threat to American prestige.

Failing at times to place foreign responses in the full context of U.S. relations with other nations, especially potential anti-American feeling based on internal debates, the USIA often understood many of the factors specific to individual countries that influenced the intensity of condemnation. American propagandists realized that while they could not quickly change the political outlooks and internal conditions in foreign nations, they could provide both continuing and new evidence of U.S. progress in race relations. To this end, both Eisenhower and his attorney general Herbert Brownell thought of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 partly in terms of its international influence and Vice President Richard Nixon’s tour of African nations was designed to demonstrate new American interest in that continent. The USIA and the Eisenhower administration therefore tried to increase the identification of nonwhite populations with the United States after these violent racial incidents.

The extent to which they were successful can only be measured in weeks as the crisis at Central High School in Little Rock showed the world that the United States had not yet solved its racial dilemma. U.S. prestige dipped again and negative reactions poured into the State Department from abroad. Seen in this light, the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery cases, the international response, and subsequent American actions appear to constitute one of the many cycles in the problematic relationship between race and the U.S. image. Thomas Borstelmann identifies “the tepidness of support for equality in the
United States in the era of Dwight Eisenhower,” which needed to be overcome in order to convince foreign populations of American sincerity.\textsuperscript{181}

Yet the extent to which the USIA examined foreign reactions in 1956 revealed that the Eisenhower administration was quite aware of how race affected U.S. foreign policy, contrary to Borstelmann’s claim that “the president and his advisers failed to recognize…the significance of race relations in the modern world.” Even more important, agency officials often noted the presence of their narrative among the responses. In this way, they measured success in relative terms, not in a stark division between success and failure. As early as the mid-1950s, therefore, the USIA narrative had taken hold in the minds of many foreigners and in some nations was actually dominant. Yet this did not occur everywhere and American policymakers were able to develop a nuanced recognition of conditions in other countries which often affected how foreign populations viewed American race relations. While the full context of bilateral U.S. relations with other nations often escaped USIA personnel, they nevertheless possessed considerable knowledge of the interplay between race and foreign policy.\textsuperscript{182}

Eisenhower himself also recognized the actual strength of Third World opinion and sent his vice president to Africa and supported the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction in part to assuage Third World anger over American racial violence. He appeared to acquiesce in propaganda which carried information on the \textit{Brown} decision to foreign populations, but after 1956, and before the crisis at Little Rock, seemed to develop a relatively deeper interest in how the Third World viewed American race

\textsuperscript{181} Borstelmann, \textit{Cold War and the Color Line}, 100.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 86.
relations. The president and his administration were astutely aware of the way race affected U.S. prestige, although this did not translate into any sort of major shift in domestic policy. The president’s personal involvement in Nixon’s trip and the Civil Rights Act of 1957, combined with his close working relationship with USIA director Theodore Streibert, reveal a chief executive actively working behind the scenes to maintain the American image. Indeed, in October 1953 Streibert wrote to Eisenhower that the USIA “embodies the concept of the President’s Committee on International Information Activities…that psychological activities and psychological strategy do not exist apart from official policies and actions.” The constant subsequent interaction between the head of the USIA and the president would have led to a curtailment of USIA propaganda concerning race had Eisenhower been uncomfortable with it. In this way, and with a view towards the way he understood the 1957 bill and Nixon’s journey abroad, a study of Eisenhower’s actions following the international response to the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents helps extend Eisenhower revisionism to the intersection of race and U.S. foreign policy.¹⁸³

While during the mid-1950s the USIA narrative of racial progress floundered, and U.S. officials could not accurately predict the eventual outcome, success occurred less than a decade later. In discussing the international response to the brutal treatment of African-Americans in Selma, Alabama in 1963, Mary Dudziak argues, “Overall it appeared as if the tenor of international coverage of race in America had changed. Civil rights cases no longer threatened the nation’s international prestige. Instead, they had

become moments to showcase and reinforce the lessons of the previous twenty years of U.S. propaganda: that the federal government was on the side of justice and equality, that racism was not characteristic of American society but was aberrational, and that democracy was a system of government that enabled social change.” While the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery incidents devastated U.S. prestige, they were also part of this larger process of convincing the world of an overarching American sincerity in improving race relations. The USIA did not simply throw up its hands in the mid-1950s and resign itself to failure. Despite continuing violence and negative reactions, agency officials maintained foreign contacts and trudged on with their propaganda efforts through the rest of the decade and on into an era of even larger acts of racial violence. Members of the Eisenhower administration also began to realize action was needed in order to repair U.S. prestige. Initially a blot on the nation’s record, these incidents, and the American response based on international reactions to them, played a part in the eventual reconstruction of the U.S. image in the Cold War.184

During the Cold War foreign populations viewed domestic American society as a reflection of the nation’s potential international attitudes and actions. In the mid-1950s the Till, Lucy, and Montgomery events indicated a facet of American culture other nations wished to avoid. In the minds of American policymakers this limited the willingness of other countries to adopt American political and economic structures. These events therefore highlighted the intersection of a cultural issue such as race with the political and military concerns usually dominant in the minds of U.S. officials. Dudziak poignantly claims, however, “The Cold War imperative for social change spanned a

184 Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 234-5.
particular era, and did not survive the length of the Cold War itself.” While true, the reality of international focus on the internal dynamics of U.S. society, and the pressure perceived by American policymakers based on that attention, continues in the present day. In the early twenty-first century talk of the globalization of American culture fits easily into conversation alongside political and economic issues. Increasingly rapid methods of information exchange allow foreign nations to easily pick and choose aspects of American society they wish to emulate, adapt, or discard. In the mid-1950s Third World populations did the same and, despite the wishes of the Eisenhower administration for others to adopt American ideas and ideals wholesale, refused to passively accept the character of American race relations. Actors in countries far less powerful than the United States thus exerted an influence on elements of American domestic legislation and foreign policy activities due to the Cold War environment. While the dichotomous nature of the international state system has given way to a world dominated by one remaining superpower, continuing U.S. efforts to export freedom and democracy to all parts of the globe may still give agency to those individuals and groups who must accept or reject the American version of modernity.
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