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**Black Conservatives and the Policy of Constructive Engagement,  
1981-1989**

**By Jessica Anne O'Connor (B.A. Hon)**

A Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education and Arts

Australian Catholic University

27 April 2022

## Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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## **Abstract**

Critics and scholars alike have most often considered Black conservatives a kind of ‘Blackface on white power.’ In their view white conservative benefactors enlist the racial identity of African American conservative intellectuals as apologetic resources, to deflect accusations of racism. Such depictions are particularly evident with regards to the role Black conservatives played in advancing the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement toward apartheid South Africa. Black conservatives were highly engaged with the problems of apartheid and the condition of Black South Africans in the 1980s but took positions often at odds with the majority of African American civil rights activists in the liberal tradition, who campaigned instead for economic sanctions and total corporate disinvestment from South Africa. Instead, as this thesis shows, Black conservatives believed that Black South African development was best achieved through continued US economic investment, corporate-sponsored community development, and educational programs. In their view, these were the tactics that had served Black Americans well after the end of slavery. Further, their interests in anti-communism and Cold War geopolitics meant that Black conservatives were anti-revolutionary and favoured pragmatic and gradual approaches to reform over political confrontation and radical change of the apartheid state.

This thesis comprises the first scholarly critical engagement with the thought and praxis of these conservative African American intellectuals and leaders on apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. Specifically, it examines their attitudes to apartheid South Africa, their practical engagement with the Reagan administration’s policies, and their relationship with anti-apartheid activists in the United States and abroad. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of literature challenging the marginalisation of Black conservatism in African American history and widens the scope of black internationalism to include a conservative internationalist and developmentalist tradition whose depth and breadth has as yet been little accounted for.

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## Introduction

On 23 June 1990, the newly freed anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela was juggling a “jam-packed” schedule in Boston, Massachusetts. As deputy leader of the African National Congress (ANC), he had only been released from prison in February of that year, after serving 27-years for his role in the struggle against the apartheid system of racial domination in South Africa. Mandela’s schedule during this brief stop on his 12-day and 8-city tour of the United States seemed to resemble that of the other cities; the primary objectives were to raise money for the ANC and to encourage the continuation of international pressure on South Africa’s government. On what was the hottest day in Boston that year, Mandela travelled across the city for a variety of public events and political meetings. As with every other stop on the tour, “Mandelamania” was evident in Boston, with crowds lining the streets hoping to catch a glimpse of the anti-apartheid activist and leader.<sup>1</sup> However, the stop at Boston was unique in its personal significance for Mandela. He was there not only to fulfil his statesman responsibilities, but also to meet with Robert Brown, a Black public relations expert whose career had focused on brokering peace between US corporations and African American communities.

Brown met privately with the 71-year-old Mandela in the latter’s hotel room at the Copley Plaza Hotel. Art Harris, a journalist for the *Washington Post* who had been following Mandela on his tour, described the scene:

Bob Brown, 55, a two-decade Republican, wore his trademark gray suit and burgundy tie. Mandela, African revolutionary, sporting a white hotel bathrobe, plopped down on a couch in his suite. He asked everyone to leave the room except the visitor.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Greene II, “When Nelson Mandela Came to America,” *Jacobin Magazine*, Jul. 9, 2020. <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/07/nelson-mandela-anti-apartheid-south-africa> (accessed 12 April 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Art Harris, “The Man Who Aided Mandela,” *Washington Post*, Jun. 30, 1990, C1.



The relaxed informality of Mandela indicated a level of familiarity, and indeed this was not the first time the two men had met. Brown was one of the few people granted permission to visit Mandela in prison, a privilege typically extended only to lawyers and family members. He was granted this access in 1987 with approval coming from the South African President P.W. Botha himself. Brown had left the 1987 meeting as the Mandela family's representative in the United States, entrusted with the guardianship of the eldest Mandela daughter, Zenani.<sup>3</sup> For the next seven years Brown and his wife were Zenani Mandela's "American parents," and personally financed her life in the United States, including hers and her husband's studies at Boston University.<sup>4</sup>

According to Brown, Mandela insisted on making time for the 1990 hotel meeting, despite his gruelling schedule, to say "thank you for what you have done for my family."<sup>5</sup> Brown was one of the few African Americans to develop a personal connection with Mandela. Even the leaders of the US anti-apartheid movement like Randall Robinson and Jesse Jackson were not granted this intimate level of access. Indeed, Brown often found himself at odds with these activists in debates over the role of the United States in ending apartheid. Unlike Robinson and Jackson and later Mandela, Brown was against the imposition of economic sanctions and other economic and diplomatic restrictions on the apartheid state. Brown, a Republican and a conservative, instead supported the Reagan administration's controversial policy of Constructive Engagement, which sought to use economic and diplomatic incentives to encourage reform in South Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> Zenzani Mandela in Juan Williams, "Daddy Stayed in Jail. That Was His Job," *Washington Post*, Nov. 8, 1987, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong By Doing Right: How a Child of Poverty Rose to the White House and Helped Change the World* (New York: Convergent Press, 2019), 237.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Brown quoted in Harris, "The Man Who Aided Mandela."

That an African American, who had experienced both Jim Crow segregation and the benefits of civil rights activism, opposed the tactics and strategies of the anti-apartheid movement is puzzling. It is no surprise that histories of the US anti-apartheid movement highlight the central role of African American activists and the ways they emphasised the link between US support for apartheid and domestic racism. Historian Robert Massie, for example, explained the US anti-apartheid movement as “the natural extension” of “civil rights and racial justice into the international sphere.”<sup>6</sup> The images of racial violence in South Africa undoubtedly reminded many African Americans of their own encounters with white racism and white brutality. Further entrenching the connection between African Americans and anti-apartheid activism was the success of Black organisations like TransAfrica in developing publicity for the opponents of Constructive Engagement.

Historian Francis Nesbitt, for example, concluded that African Americans who attempted to influence U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa “fell into three broad ideological camps: left, nationalist, and liberal.”<sup>7</sup> As Nesbitt continued, “each of these perspectives has a distinct history and was represented in the anti-apartheid movement with varying intensity.”<sup>8</sup> However, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981 saw these ideological camps united in opposition to the Republican President and his approach to apartheid South Africa. TransAfrica, a liberal organisation staffed by middle class professionals and academics, was largely the driving force behind the organisation and spread of African American anti-apartheid activism.

By the mid-1980s they had successfully framed the Reagan administration and US corporations as in league with a racist and oppressive government and called for an end to the

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 258.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (Indiana University Press, 2004), vii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

governmental and business complicity.<sup>9</sup> They called for the imposition of economic sanctions against the apartheid regime and greater recognition and support for Black activists in South Africa. As historian Nicholas Grant explained, these liberal activists shared an “anticolonial agenda, constructing symbols and identifying markers that not only challenged apartheid but also continued to point out the existence of a shared racial identity across borders.”<sup>10</sup>

As social scientist Y. G-M Lulat argued, it was the activism of the TransAfrica-led Free South Africa Movement that led to the “major tangible achievement” of the US anti-apartheid movement: the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 and the imposition of economic sanctions against South Africa.<sup>11</sup> The narrative advanced by TransAfrica and the histories since advances the work of TransAfrica and other Black anti-apartheid activists as imbued with the moral certainty of the civil rights movement.<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, histories of African American engagement with the problem of apartheid have concentrated on those who fit the mould of a civil rights activist. In only concentrating on those African Americans who opposed the policy of Constructive Engagement, however, historians have marginalised Black conservative perspectives and actions. As historian Robert Larson has argued, “In examining the history of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States, it is tempting to fall into the trap of seeing opposition to apartheid as a linear process toward sanctions on South Africa.”<sup>13</sup>

Closer scrutiny of the US anti-apartheid debates of the 1980s reveals that Brown was not the only African American to promote Constructive Engagement as an alternative to the

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<sup>9</sup> For More information on African American liberalism in this period see: Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Y. G-M Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa: A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 485.

<sup>12</sup> The anti-apartheid activists intentionally made these connections themselves. For an example of this see: Daniel T. Fleming, *Living the Dream: The Contested History of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Zebulun Larson, “The Transnational and Local Dimensions of the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement” (PhD Diss., Ohio State University, 2019), 1.

economic sanctions and disinvestment demands made by the anti-apartheid movement. Brown was part of a small but influential group of Black conservative intellectuals, businessmen, religious leaders, and policymakers, who supported the policy. When they have received coverage, it has most regularly been associated with the rightward shift in American politics in the 1980s. However, as this thesis aims to show these Black conservatives can better be understood in the context of a long-running conservative tradition within African American communities. From the publications of intellectuals such as Thomas Sowell to the corporate activism of Reverend Leon Sullivan and the bureaucratic manoeuvring of public officials like Ambassador Alan Keyes, the 1980s saw the proliferation of Black conservative perspectives on the problem of apartheid and US foreign policy toward the racist South African state.

While philosophical divisions existed, these Black conservatives were united in three key aspects. First, they believed that advancement could be best achieved through economic, rather than political, means. Consistent with a conservative Black internationalist understanding of development, these Black conservatives advocated for the economic advancement of Black South Africans through private sector and market-based approaches. According to this view, not only would this reduce poverty and improve the lives of Black South Africans, but it would also undermine and challenge the apartheid government's control and regulation of the economy. Second, these Black conservatives underscored the importance of education, particularly vocational training, as a source of both individual and collective uplift. Finally, the Black conservatives were anti-communist and anti-revolutionary, favouring pragmatic and gradual approaches to reform over political confrontation and radical change. These Black conservatives found their positions on South Africa did not align with many of the goals and strategies of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement.

They were, however, in step with the Reagan administration's policy of Constructive Engagement. This policy outlined a strategy of diplomatic and commercial engagement with

South Africa that sought to leverage US influence to bring regional peace and contain the spread of communism in the region. The Reagan administration sought to encourage the white regime to make gradual reforms of the apartheid system and encourage the work of ‘moderate’ Black South African leaders, like Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, who renounced communism and revolutionary tactics. A key component of Constructive Engagement was the goal of Black empowerment, which saw the Reagan administration provide \$US91 million in educational aid and endorse the Sullivan Principles.<sup>14</sup> Like Black conservatives, the Reagan administration’s focus was on free market economics, Black education, and anti-communism in the context of the Cold War.

This thesis, “Black Conservatives and the Policy of Constructive Engagement, 1981-1989,” critically engages with the thought and praxis of these conservative African Americans in relation to apartheid South Africa in the 1980s for the first time. Specifically, this thesis examines Black conservative attitudes to apartheid South Africa, their political and intellectual activities in support of the Reagan administration’s approach to the racist state, and their relationship with anti-apartheid activists in the United States and abroad. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of literature challenging the marginalisation of Black conservatism in African American history and demonstrates that the Black conservatives’ activities in relation to apartheid in South Africa can be understood, not simply as a “Blackface on white power,” nor as an African American sub-branch of the Reagan-era Right, but as a considered and contextualised expression of a longer Black conservative intellectual tradition in the United States.

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<sup>14</sup> Pauline H. Baker, *Update: South Africa: Time Running Out: The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1989), 24.

## Black Conservatives and the ‘Aberration’ Narrative

Scholars who have examined Black conservatives have typically focused on their positions on topics such as affirmative action, gender, education reform, and welfare. Although Black scholar and activist Cornel West argued in 1986 that “the widespread support Black conservatives receive from Reaganite conservatives...has much to do with their views on U.S. foreign policies,” scholarly analysis of Black conservatism has been concentrated on the domestic sphere of American politics.<sup>15</sup> Until now little attention has been paid to Black conservative engagement with international affairs beyond West’s accusation that they were “mere apologists for pernicious U.S. foreign policies.”<sup>16</sup> The sidelining of foreign policy in scholarly analysis of Black conservatism is particularly striking in relation to South Africa. Few foreign policy issues captured more attention than the problem of apartheid in the 1980s. West’s contention that Black conservatives were relatively silent on the policy of Constructive Engagement has remained largely unexamined and unchallenged.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as this thesis will show, Black conservatives were not only vocal supporters of the policy of Constructive Engagement, but in some cases were actively involved in its implementation.

One reason that Black conservative involvement in the anti-apartheid debates in the 1980s has been overlooked is the tendency of scholars to emphasise the progressive traditions in African American history. As Black conservative Jamil Jivani has observed, “Black conservatives are written out of the discourse. We are disruptive and inconvenient by our very existence.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, scholars have overwhelmingly understood African American history as a struggle of Black progressive empowerment in the face of white conservative backlash.

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<sup>15</sup> Cornel West, “Unmasking the Black Conservatives,” *The Christian Century*, Jul. 16, 1986, 645.

<sup>16</sup> Cornel West, “Assessing Black Neo-Conservatism,” in *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Africa World Press, 1988), 58.

<sup>17</sup> West, “Unmasking the Black Conservatives,” 645.

<sup>18</sup> Jamil Jivani, “Silencing of Black Conservatives,” *National Post*, Apr. 22, 2021, A1.

Understandably, this dominant narrative in Black history displaces Black conservatism, ultimately a minority perspective, from the foreground of the historical story. All too often, however, Black conservatives have simply been presented as aberrations or race-traitors without a deeper interrogation of their motivations or philosophies.<sup>19</sup> For critics and scholars alike, Black conservatives have been seen as a kind of ‘Blackface on white power’—using their racial identity as a defence against accusations of racism from their conservative benefactors and conservative policies.

By contrast, Leah Wright Rigueur offered a refreshingly original interpretation of Black history in her 2015 book *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power*, demonstrating the many ways that the Black freedom struggle and the American conservative movement intersected between 1964 and 1980.<sup>20</sup> As Rigueur explained, “when we look at Black politics and American conservatism as fully irreconcilable concepts, it... fails to attend to the past” and “in doing so, scholars have overlooked a very real and significant Black political tradition.”<sup>21</sup> Angela Dillard, another scholar of Black conservatism, is currently examining the ways Black conservatives participated in the civil rights movement. While this work is yet to be published, Dillard has explained that the project “widens” the Black freedom struggles to include ideological diversity and connect the “civil rights conservatism” of activists like James Meredith and Roy Innis with a longer intellectual tradition.<sup>22</sup> This thesis shares aspects of their approach, establishing the ways Black

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<sup>19</sup> For example, see: Christopher Alan Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts: The Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism, From Booker T. Washington to Condoleezza Rice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Randall Kennedy, *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008); T. Owens Moore, “A Blueprint for Black Power: Analysis of the Buffoonery of Black Conservatives,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 2 (2013): 40-52.

<sup>20</sup> Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Angela Dillard, “Ideological Diversity and the “Wide” History of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Starting Points Journal*, May 17, 2020. <https://startingpointsjournal.com/ideological-diversity-and-the-wide-history-of-the-civil-rights-movement/>; Angela Dillard, “Civil Rights Conservatism,” *Hauenstein Center’s Progressive/Conservative Summit*, May 3, 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw3Q7RYFlqg>.

conservatives in the 1980s advocated their own strategies for racial progress in South Africa, and considering the ways these strategies can be understood within the longer Black conservative tradition in the United States. In doing this, the thesis adds to developing literature emphasising the significance of conservatism in the African American experience.

Like African American history in general, historical accounts of Black internationalism have largely focused on liberal and radical expressions of racial politics and solidarity. As historian Michael O. West argued in his examination of Booker T. Washington's influence on African development, "Pan-Africanism is generally regarded as an inherently emancipatory force," and "viewed from this angle" Black conservatives in any era "appear to be embarrassing aberrations."<sup>23</sup> This perception has so far also informed the history of African American internationalism in the 1980s: indeed, the first histories of the 1980s anti-apartheid movement were largely written by the liberal and radical activists themselves. Those historical accounts that include Black conservatives consider them only in relation to others—how white conservatives *use them* for their own agendas and how they *betrayed* African Americans and Black South Africans. The reductive assumption that Black conservatives are anomalous exceptions or sellouts has prevented historians interrogating and understanding their perspectives, influence, and impact.

While a comprehensive analysis of the role of conservatism in African American engagement with the world has yet to be written, scholars who have written about Booker T. Washington have sometimes examined his international influence. Manning Marable, for example, established his academic career in the 1970s with his research on Washington's relationship with Black nationalists in Africa and the "intellectual groundings for conservative

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<sup>23</sup> Michael O. West, "The Tuskegee Model of Development in Africa: Another Dimension of the African/African-American Connection," *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 3 (1992), 386-7.



Black Nationalism throughout the Black diaspora.”<sup>24</sup> Since this time, historians like Michael O. West have included Washington in their scholarship on Pan-Africanism.<sup>25</sup> Scholars like Ira Dworkin and Andrew Zimmerman have examined Washington’s philosophy on colonialism, African development, and the role of African Americans in the world.<sup>26</sup> This thesis will draw on this work and consider the ways in which Booker T. Washington’s philosophy was foundational to a tradition of conservative Black internationalism that can be traced into the 1980s and the positions of Black conservatives on Constructive Engagement.

Perhaps the most sustained consideration of Black conservatives and South Africa during the apartheid years (1948-1994) is Ron Nixon’s *Operation Blackwash: Apartheid South Africa’s 46-Year Propaganda War on Black America*.<sup>27</sup> The short book was published by a small South African e-book developer that specialised in journalist-style essays. While not focusing on Black conservatives specifically, Nixon considered the work of African Americans who opposed the imposition of economic sanctions on South Africa. While offering valuable information in parts, the collection of case studies compiled by Nixon ultimately lacked depth of analysis by advancing the aberration narrative of conservative Black internationalism. Nixon argued that African American opposition to sanctions was “an elaborate campaign” by the

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<sup>24</sup> Marable would publish at least five articles in the 1970s on this topic based on his PhD research. See for example: W. Manning Marable, “Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism,” *Phylon* 35, no. 4 (1974): 398-406.

<sup>25</sup> West, “The Tuskegee Model of Development in Africa,” 386-7; Milfred C. Fierce, *The Pan-African Idea in the United States, 1900-1910: African-American Interest in Africa and Interactions with West Africa* (New York: Garland, 1993); Edward O. Erhagbe, “African-Americans and the Defense of African States Against European Imperial Conquest: Booker T. Washington’s Diplomatic Efforts to Guarantee Liberia’s Independence, 1907-1911,” *African Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (1996), 55-65.

<sup>26</sup> Ira Dworkin, *Congo Love Song: African American Culture and the Crisis of the Colonial State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also: Andrew E. Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and the Shaping of African Industrial Education* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017); Julia Tischler, “‘The Only Industry That Can Make Us Hold Our Own’: Black Agrarianism in South Africa from a Transatlantic Perspective, ca. 1910-1930,” *American Historical Review* (2021): 1396-1423.

<sup>27</sup> Ron Nixon, *Operation Blackwash: Apartheid South Africa’s 46-Year Propaganda War on Black America* (Johannesburg: Mampoor, 2013). This was later expanded into a book that covered both the U.S. and Britain. Ron Nixon, *Selling Apartheid: South Africa’s Global Propaganda War* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

apartheid government.<sup>28</sup> In this vein, any African American opposing sanctions was evidence of the apartheid government's propaganda campaign and the individual's betrayal of the Black communities in the US and South Africa. As Nixon argued, the involvement of civil rights leaders was an example of the "influence game at its most cynical."<sup>29</sup>

Historian Jessica Ann Levy has begun the work of countering these assumptions in her work on African Americans in American corporations and their advocacy for empowerment politics in both the US and Africa since the civil rights movement.<sup>30</sup> In her article "Black Power in the Boardroom: Corporate America, the Sullivan Principles, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement," for example, Levy argued that scholars need to move beyond the rhetoric of 'sellout' when considering the work of Reverend Leon Sullivan. Levy, instead, examined Sullivan and his work on the Sullivan Principles in the context of Black power and Black capitalism, situating Sullivan's conservative approach to South Africa within a civil rights tradition.<sup>31</sup> Further, Levy's examination of Sullivan highlights the intersection of African American participation in corporate boardrooms with the expansion of business activism and the rise of corporate social responsibility. While Levy remained critical of Sullivan's politics and the limitations of the Principles, she was careful to place him in historical context and to examine his positions closely.

Adopting a similar approach to Levy, this is the first sustained empirical study of modern Black conservatives that evaluates their activities in relation to Constructive Engagement and South Africa. In examining this topic, this thesis will merge and expand a number of separate but intersecting strands of African American historiography. Firstly, the

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<sup>28</sup> Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Jessica Ann Levy, *Black Power Inc.: Corporate America, Race, and Empowerment Politics in the U.S. and Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, yet to be published).

<sup>31</sup> Jessica Ann Levy, "Black Power in the Boardroom: Corporate America, the Sullivan Principles, and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle," *Enterprise & Society* 21, no. 1 (2020): 170-209.

thesis examines Black conservative engagement with foreign policy, which has so far been almost entirely overlooked in the studies of Black conservatism. Secondly, it situates Black conservatives within the history of African American engagement with South Africa for the first time. Finally, the thesis contributes to the emerging literature on African Americans within the conservative movement in the United States. This multipronged historiographical approach both draws on and challenges the viewpoints of each field; breaking down the methodological barriers that have siloed Black conservatism from both Black internationalism and conservatism in US foreign policy. Each of these claims will be considered in more detail below.

## **Black Conservatism**

Conservatism within African American communities in general remains a relatively understudied area of Black history. As political scientist Angela K. Lewis has explained, Black conservatives challenge the “enduring dilemma” of African American scholarship since the civil rights era: its liberal emphases and assumptions.<sup>32</sup> While Black conservatives have existed throughout American history, they only came to media and scholarly attention with the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court hearing in 1991. According to historian Angela Dillard, “the storm of controversy that erupted over this appointment” drew attention to the existence of an alternative to the “liberal thinking” that had dominated intellectual and political understandings of African American communities.<sup>33</sup> Slowly, scholarship emerged that sought to ‘decipher’ Thomas and linked his philosophy to a small but increasingly influential group of Black Americans, whose members came from a variety of professional backgrounds, but whose

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<sup>32</sup> Angela K. Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community: To The Right and Misunderstood* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Angela Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 27.

principles coalesced into what came to be called the Black conservative phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> A new wave of scholarship later appeared in response to the rise of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice in the George W. Bush administration in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> As Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph explained in *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America*, Black conservatives had become an “increasingly visible stratum” in American society and required further examination.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these scholarly attempts to understand African American conservatives, these individuals continued to face condemnation as ‘counterfeits’ by the left and unqualified praise as ‘colour-blind visionaries’ by the right.<sup>37</sup> As historian Leah Wright Rigueur explained, Black conservatives were “simultaneously invisible and hypervisible: isolated political misfits who provoke[d] extreme reaction.”<sup>38</sup> They were hypervisible because of the ways in which both liberals and conservatives continued to use them in justification of policy positions and attitudes. Yet, at the same time Black conservatives remained invisible, their ideas and arguments dismissed as antithetical or irrelevant, useful only in caricature as validation of another’s viewpoint. Even as political scientist Mack Jones predicted in the 1980s that “the political thought of the new Black conservatives...could influence the course of the Black struggle in the United States,” there continued to be a “failure to appreciate Black conservatism as a bona fide intellectual movement.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Black Conservatives in the United States* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: New Africa Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Louis Prisoek, *African Americans in Conservative Movements: The Inescapability of Race* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); Clarence Lusane, “What Color is Hegemony? Powell, Rice, and the New Global Strategists,” *New Political Science* 27, no. 1 (2005): 23-41.

<sup>36</sup> Eds. Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph, *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Ondaatje, “Counterfeit Heroes or Colour-Blind Visionaries? The Black Conservative Challenge to Affirmative Action,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 23, no. 2 (2004): 31-50.

<sup>38</sup> Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Mack Jones, “The Political Thought of the New Black Conservatives: An Analysis, Explanation and Interpretation,” in *Readings in American Political Issues*, ed. Franklin D. Jones and Michael O. Adams (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1987), 23; and Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*, xix.

Yet surveys and studies have consistently shown that African Americans are the most socially conservative demographic in the United States, and many issues important to the Black community reflect conservative attitudes—opposition to abortion and gay marriage, support of capital punishment and school prayer, are just some examples. In her research, political scientist Angela K. Lewis found that since 1980 at least one quarter of African Americans have identified as conservative.<sup>40</sup> Despite this ‘organic’ conservatism within African American communities, there remains a distinction between the small cohort of Black political conservatives and the social conservatism of the large Black majority. To explain this discrepancy commentators have distinguished between “Black conservatives” and “conservative Blacks.”<sup>41</sup> As journalist Clarence Page explained,

The former is a relatively small, if high-profile movement of avowed conservatives who happen to be Black. The latter best describes the Black masses who harbor many conservative attitudes, but part company with traditional party lines, especially the line that says Black people make too much of racism.<sup>42</sup>

The term ‘Black conservative’ then has been used to refer specifically to those African Americans who rose to prominence with the Reagan administration, and those who have followed them in the same vein. By making this distinction scholars have effectively excluded those deemed to be ‘Black conservatives’ from the mainstream of African American experience. As sociologist Corey D. Fields argued, “They are positioned as marginal to the African American community,” and in doing so, “their political beliefs are maligned as racially

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<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> See for example: Tasha Philpot, *Conservative But Not Republican: The Paradox of Party Identification and Ideology Among African Americans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Joshua Farrington, *Black Republicans and the Transformation of the GOP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Clarence Page, *Showing My Color: Impolite Essays on Race and Identity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 194-5. See also: Andrea Y. Simpson, *The Tie That Binds: Identity and Political Attitudes in the Post-Civil Rights Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 4.

inauthentic.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the term ‘Black conservative’ is such a politically loaded term that many continue to reject the label.

The reality is that African American conservatism is as diverse as it is complex. Some Black conservatives are militantly colour-blind and individualistic, while others preach race-consciousness and collective uplift. While African American conservatism has heretofore been a ‘tale of two conservatisms,’ this thesis considers both Black political conservatives (associated with the right-wing of the Republican Party) and conservative Blacks (an underexamined segment of African American communities). By considering all expressions of Black conservatism as a continuum rather than separate phenomena, this thesis challenges the argument that Black conservatives were simply a symptom of the Reagan era. While their views found particular expression and acclaim in this conservative epoch, they were drawing on a long-running tradition of African American thought.

Since Black conservatives have focused most of their attention on domestic issues concerning race and class in American life, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars have spent most of their time assessing Black conservative thought in these areas. However, Black conservatives did not confine themselves to the domestic sphere. As Robin D.G. Kelley noted in his examination of transnationalism in the works of Black scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, even “conservative ones... paid attention to international contexts.”<sup>44</sup> Black conservatives did not limit themselves to domestic politics and argued for positions on various international issues, including the Middle East, Africa, the Soviet Union, and Latin America. They demonstrated a commitment to strong national defence, willingness to use force, suspicion of multilateral negotiations, and the emphasis on maintaining American interests.

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<sup>43</sup> Corey D. Fields, *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African American Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 61.

<sup>44</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, “But a Local Phase of a World Problem: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883-1950,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999), 1051.

True to their conservative orientation, during the Cold War, many Black conservatives were stridently anti-communist, unilateralist, and hawkish, supporting increased military spending, intervention in Central America, closer ties to Israel, and challenging Soviet adventurism in the Third World.

However, while scholars have noted the “typically overlooked importance of Black conservatives to conservative US foreign policy agendas,” an in-depth examination of Black conservative engagement with foreign policy has yet to be undertaken.<sup>45</sup> Even works that consider Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell, and their rise to the position of Secretary of State, have focused on their perspectives on domestic political issues in order to understand their conservative philosophy. Legal scholar Christopher Bracey, for example, provides short biographies of each in his book *Saviors or Sellouts*, considering their positions on civil rights, affirmative action, and family values, offering little analysis of their area of expertise.<sup>46</sup>

Clarence Lusane’s *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race, and the New American Century*, is perhaps the most comprehensive study of Black conservatives and foreign policy to date.<sup>47</sup> Yet Lusane’s examination of the impact of Powell and Rice on US foreign policy is obscured by the broad scope of the research, which encompasses a history of African American engagement with US foreign affairs since 1789, and the history of African American membership of the Republican Party since 1895. When Lusane does consider Powell and Rice specifically it is through an examination of other people’s opinions, particularly of the international and African American communities, on their performance as Secretary of State for a Republican administration. Another area of focus for Lusane were the ways in which the Bush administration leveraged the racial identities of Powell and Rice in order to advance

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<sup>45</sup> Deborah Toler, “Black Conservatives,” in ed. Chip Berlet, *Eyes Right! Challenging the Right Wing Backlash*, (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 296.

<sup>46</sup> Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*, 160-175.

<sup>47</sup> Clarence Lusane, *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race, and the New American Century* (New York: Praeger, 2006).

its own political agenda. In other words, like much of the literature on Black conservatism in general, Lusane's study focused on the moral condemnation and the political uses of Powell and Rice, rather than genuine engagement with their own ideas, motivations, and actions.

As the rise of Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell demonstrates, Black conservatives have been politically visible in the foreign policy sphere. Further, while Powell and Rice came to lead foreign policy decision-making in the Bush administration, they were by no means the only Black conservatives in history to be influential in this area. By looking beyond the domestic sphere and into the international arena, where Black conservatives have sometimes been prominent actors, this thesis addresses a significant gap in the literature on Black conservatism. The thesis critically examines the ways in which Black conservatives, broadly defined, have engaged with the world, and more specifically, the influence they had on US foreign policy toward the apartheid state in the 1980s.

### **Black Internationalism**

Just as the international arena has been overlooked in the literature of Black conservatives, Black conservatives have been overlooked in the literature on African American internationalism. Historians have traced the transnational dimensions of the African American experience back to the time of slavery. The Republic of Liberia, established as a settlement of the American Colonization Society in 1847 for freed or escaped slaves, remained "a key reference point" to understand African American engagement with Africa.<sup>48</sup> The Back-to-Africa movement and the settlement of Liberia had lasting impacts on African Americans. Importantly, the concept of Back-to-Africa regained prominence with the Pan-Africanism of

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<sup>48</sup> James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 162.



Black nationalist Marcus Garvey and his organisation the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) in the early twentieth century. Garvey, inspired in many ways by the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, led one of the largest Pan-African movements with around two million members from 43 countries. As historian Robert Trent Vinson argued, “the ascent of Garveyism...added a prophetic ‘Africa for the Africans’ Christianity to Washington’s economic, educational and moral principles.”<sup>49</sup> UNIA emphasised racial pride, economic self-reliance, and a shared destiny for all African peoples and attempted to implement this vision through a variety of Black-controlled corporations and emigration to Africa.

Another dominant strand of African American engagement with Africa that can be traced from the settlement of Liberia is the role of Christianity and the belief in Providential Design. Some strands of Providential Design thought were closely tied to the idea of a ‘fortunate fall,’ the belief that God had created American slavery so that Africans could experience the ‘Great Awakening’ and convert to Christianity.<sup>50</sup> Inherent in this belief was that African Americans were a chosen people with a divinely ordained mission to evangelise the African continent and “redeem the race.”<sup>51</sup> As L.K. Williams, president of the National Baptist Convention in the 1920s, argued,

The work of saving Africa is largely the task of American Negroes.  
Others have gone there with gunpowder, rum, firearms and propaganda

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Trent Vinson, “‘Sea Kaffirs’: ‘American Negroes’ and the Gospel of Garveyism in Early Twentieth Century Cape Town,” *Journal of African History* 47 (2006), 289.

<sup>50</sup> David Killingray, “The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s-1920s,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 1 (2003): 3-31.

<sup>51</sup> Donald F. Roth, “The ‘Black Man’s Burden’: The Racial Background of African American Missionaries in Africa,” in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 31-40; James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robert Trent Vinson, “Providential Design: American Negroes and Garveyism in South Africa,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, eds. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 130-154.

to exploit the Africans, but we must go there carrying the open Bible and the uplifted Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Scholars have examined this religious impetus in the missionary work of African Americans and shown that African Americans were agents of capitalism and a ‘civilising mission’ in Africa, as well as Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Historian Elisabeth Engels, for example, examined the complexity of African American missionary “encounters” with colonial Africa and the ways missionary work was “a counter-culture of Pan-Africanism.”<sup>54</sup> Missions were an important part of the ties that comprised the Black American connection to Africa. As historian Sylvia M. Jacobs, for example, argued, these African Americans “strove not to return to Africa physically but to establish cultural, economic and political links.”<sup>55</sup>

Scholars such as Brenda Gayle Plummer, James Meriwether, Penny von Eschen, Carol Anderson, and Kevin Gaines have focused on the twentieth century and demonstrated African American engagement with international affairs and their attempts to influence American foreign policymakers.<sup>56</sup> This literature has tended to focus on the continuing and evolving role of Pan-Africanism and political advocacy in African American engagement. Unsurprisingly, these scholars have focused on the civil rights era, examining the ways in which the Black American freedom struggle intersected with the post-war anticolonial and liberation

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<sup>52</sup> L.K. Williams quoted in William J. Harvey, *Bridges of Faith Across the Seas: The Story of the Foreign Mission Board National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.* (Philadelphia: Foreign Mission Board National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., 1989), 2.

<sup>53</sup> See for example: Killingray, “The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa,” 3-31; Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

<sup>54</sup> Elisabeth Engels, *Encountering Africa: African American Missionaries in Colonial Africa, 1900-1939* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2015), 36.

<sup>55</sup> Sylvia M. Jacobs, *The African Nexus: Black American Perspectives on the European Partitioning of Africa, 1880-1920* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 10.

<sup>56</sup> See for example: Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*; Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

movements. While this scholarship largely does not continue past the late 1960s, recently scholars have begun to extend the consideration of Black internationalism into the 1970s.<sup>57</sup>

Like the literature on Black internationalism broadly, historical accounts of African American engagement with southern Africa have also concentrated on the period up to the civil rights movement and freedom struggles of the 1960s.<sup>58</sup> Many of the African American leaders of the twentieth century, from W.E.B. DuBois to Martin Luther King, Jr., linked their campaign against Jim Crow and American racism with the fight against apartheid in South Africa. This is unsurprising, after all segregation was ‘apartheid’ in the American south. As historian Robert Massie explained, these activists felt a kinship with those suffering under apartheid because both South Africa and the United States were “two countries born of European curiosity and greed, imbued with high principle yet scarred by racial cruelty, and destined to influence each other’s wobbly modern path toward justice.”<sup>59</sup>

The connections between African Americans and Black South Africans, and the twin systems of racial discrimination, has received attention from scholars across disciplines, from comparative history to international relations.<sup>60</sup> One important work is Nicholas Grant’s

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Talton, *In This Land of Plenty: Mickey Leland and Africa in American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Plummer, *In Search of Power*; Seth M. Markle, *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964-1974* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017); James Farquharson, *African Americans and the Nigerian Civil War: ‘Black America Cares’* (New York: Routledge, yet to be published); James Austin Farquharson, “‘Black America Cares’: The Response of African Americans to the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970” (PhD. Diss., Australian Catholic University, 2019); Adom Getachow, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>58</sup> See for example: Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012); Nicholas Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Iris Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation’: Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 547-566; Lewis Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr. and South Africa* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, xi.

<sup>60</sup> See for example: George Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Thomas Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The*

*Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945-1960*, which outlined the transnational linkages between African American and Black South Africans in the battle against white supremacy during the early Cold War. Grant's research considered a selection of activists from across the political spectrum, from Black radicals like Paul Robeson to moderate groups like the American Committee on Africa. Indeed, Grant acknowledged the importance of paying attention to "voices from across the political spectrum" because of the "valuable insight into...Black internationalism."<sup>61</sup> However, like many scholars of Black internationalism, Grant's analysis across the political spectrum tends also toward exclusion of African American conservatives.

Grant's consideration of Max Yergan, one of the leading African American activists concerned with South Africa in this period, is a case in point. Yergan's early career as a Baptist Missionary in South Africa and as a founding member of the anti-colonial organisation Council on African Affairs, has been well-documented.<sup>62</sup> However, in what his biographer David H. Anthony calls an "about face," Yergan underwent a rightward shift with the rise of McCarthyism to become a "Cold Warrior" who decried the Council's association with the Communist Party.<sup>63</sup> While other members of the Council leadership, such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois, faced charges of subversion and were blacklisted, Yergan continued to travel between the United States and South Africa. This period of Yergan's life has been less well-documented, with most accounts highlighting his betrayal of the Council and his allies in the

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*United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> See for example: Charles Denton Johnson, "Re-Thinking the Emergence of the Struggle for South African Liberation in the United States: Max Yergan and the Council on African Affairs, 1922-1946," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 171-192; David H. Anthony, "Max Yergan in South Africa: From Evangelical Pan-Africanist to Revolutionary Socialist," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (1991): 27-55; David H. Anthony, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Alex Lichtenstein, "Up From Redemption: A Biography of Max Yergan," *Radical History Review* 99 (2007): 267-271.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony, *Max Yergan*, 231.

ANC in South Africa. In his book, Grant also advanced this narrative of betrayal. Like Lusane's consideration of Powell and Rice, Grant focused his analysis on the ways the US and South African governments used Yergan for their own political gain—in this case to “legitimize apartheid”—as well as the condemnation he received from the Black communities in these countries.<sup>64</sup>

Largely absent is an engagement with Yergan's own perspective, or any attempt to understand him within a larger tradition of conservatism in African American history. In presenting Yergan in this way, Grant implicitly accepts the argument that the existence of African American conservatives is “surprising” and “aberrant.”<sup>65</sup> As this thesis demonstrates, however, there is insight to be gained by engaging with and evaluating the ideas and actions of the actors themselves. Black conservatives pursued deliberate and evolving political and personal objectives that warrant examination in their own right. Moreover, the conservatism Grant identified in Yergan, far from being aberrant, can be found throughout the history of African American interactions with South Africa.

Robert Trent Vinson's *The Americans Are Coming!: Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* provides an extensive study of the impact of African Americans (from a broad range of philosophies) on Black South Africans until the onset of World War II. While not explicitly considering the influence of conservatism in these transnational links, Vinson establishes the connections between Black South Africans and sources of Black conservatism in the United States, including Booker T. Washington and African American missionaries.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Vinson argued that one of the earliest examples of African American interest and influence in South Africa can be traced back to the 1890 tour of

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<sup>64</sup> Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together*, 42-47.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming!*, 28.

the Virginia Jubilee Singers, a theatrical troupe of formerly enslaved African Americans.<sup>67</sup> The leader of the troupe, Orpheus McAdoo, was a graduate of Hampton University and classmate of Washington. Key tenets of Washington's conservative philosophy were evident in the Jubilee Singers' time in South Africa. As Vinson argued, these performers "internationalized African American struggles for full citizenship" in their advocacy for US diplomatic protection for Black Americans from the racial politics of the region.<sup>68</sup>

The Jubilee Singers, in asserting their American citizenship over their kinship with Black South Africans, were the first to become 'honorary whites'—those deemed 'sufficiently civilised' and who were therefore exempt from the worst aspects of South Africa's racially discriminatory laws. They were certainly not the last to receive this offensive 'honorary' status. For example, throughout the 1970s and 1980s Black conservative economist Walter E. Williams was a frequent visitor to the apartheid state. Williams was able to travel extensively and even to live and work in 'white only' areas because of his 'honorary white' status. The similarities run deeper than the willingness to accept honorary white status, however. Like the Black conservatives of the 1980s, McAdoo "personified" Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* narrative in his performances, outlining the progress African Americans had made in their own racial uplift.<sup>69</sup> For both the Black conservatives and the Jubilee Singers, racial progress was to be found in education, moral sobriety, and economic empowerment. As Vinson argued, the Jubilee Singers "were inspirational evidence that access to Western education,

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<sup>67</sup> Other scholars agree, see: Laura Chrisman, "American Jubilee Choirs, Industrial Capitalism, and Black South Africa," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 274-296; Chinua Akimaro Thelwell, "Toward a 'Modernizing' Hybridity: McAdoo's Jubilee Singers, McAdoo's Minstrels, and Racial Uplift Politics in South Africa, 1890-1898," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 3-28.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Trent Vinson, "Up From Slavery and Down with Apartheid! African Americans and Black South Africans Against the Global Color Line," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018), 301.

<sup>69</sup> Vinson, "Up From Slavery and Down with Apartheid!," 300. See: Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901).

Christian piety, and entrepreneurial capitalism could transform Blacks into first-class citizens in a racially inclusive country.”<sup>70</sup>

While largely outside the scope of this thesis, the point to be made here is that the influence of conservatism on African American engagement with Africa in general, and South Africa in particular was both salient and continuous throughout the twentieth century. From the rise of industrial education in the early 1900s and the ‘civilising’ work of African American missionaries into the 1920s, to the respectability politics of Madie Hall-Xuma in the 1950s, and the work of Yergan in the 1960s and 1970s, conservatism has been a prominent force in transnational connections between African Americans and Black South Africans. By recognising the salience and durability of conservatism in African American engagement with South Africa, this thesis works to challenge the aberration narrative that has marginalised Black conservative perspectives in the histories of Black internationalism. Importantly, by connecting the Black conservatives of the 1980s with the philosophies of key figures, like Booker T. Washington, Max Yergan, and Madie Hall-Xuma, the thesis demonstrates continuities and consistencies in Black conservative thought. As Brenda Gayle Plummer points out “Black Americans never expressed a single, monolithic opinion on international matters.”<sup>71</sup> This is particularly true in the 1980s as a resurgence of African American interest in South Africa corresponded with the rise of contemporary Black conservatism.

### **The Reagan Administration and Constructive Engagement**

Ronald Reagan’s election victory in 1980 heralded the triumph of a rightward political shift in the United States. This movement was, more than anything, a rejection of the liberal

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<sup>70</sup> Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming!*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Darryl C. Thomas, “Cedric J. Robinson and Racial Capitalism: Africana Liberation Resistance Structures and Black Internationalism in the Twenty-First Century,” *African Identities* 11, no. 2 (2013), 134.

agenda that had dominated US politics since the 1960s. Instead of policies in favour of affirmative action, increased welfare expenditure, and a regulated liberal economy, the Reagan administration emphasised individual liberty, cuts to public spending, and limited government. But the ‘Reagan revolution’ was also a rejection of the Carter administration’s foreign policy.<sup>72</sup> Carter had taken office in 1977 with an ambition to reframe US foreign policy around human rights and arms control.<sup>73</sup> By the end of his term, this approach was largely considered a failure as the Soviet Union appeared to expand its sphere of influence and former US allies collapsed into civil disorder. President Reagan’s foreign policy, in contrast, was based on a conservative internationalism that combined realist understandings of power with liberal goals of expanding freedom and democracy.<sup>74</sup> This vision gave the United States foreign policy a renewed sense of righteous nationalism, prioritised traditional allies and asserted muscular leadership in the Cold War. The Reagan administration’s approach to South Africa, Constructive Engagement, was in line with its larger foreign policy vision.

The policy of Constructive Engagement was first conceived by Georgetown University foreign policy scholar Chester A. Crocker in an article for *Foreign Affairs* in December 1980. Published just after the 1980 election, “South Africa: Strategy for Change” essentially served as Crocker’s application for the role of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.<sup>75</sup> The thirty-nine-year-old had initially joined the campaign team of George W. Bush only to shift his focus to Reagan once he had secured the Republican nomination. Crocker’s policy framework outlined a strategy of improved relations with the apartheid state. This renewed engagement, Crocker argued, provided the United States more influence and opportunity to promote change

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<sup>72</sup> For more information see: David Carleton and Michael Stohl, “The Foreign Policy of Human Rights: Rhetoric and Reality from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 7 (1985): 205-229.

<sup>73</sup> For more information see: David Skidmore, “Carter and the Failure of Foreign Policy Reform,” *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (1993): 699-729.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Nau, “Conservative Internationalism,” *Policy Review*, Jul. 30, 2008.

<https://www.hoover.org/research/conservative-internationalism>.

<sup>75</sup> Chester A. Crocker, “South Africa: Strategy for Change,” *Foreign Affairs* 59, no. 2 (1980): 323-351.



in South Africa, bring about regional peace in southern Africa, and contain the spread of communism. Constructive Engagement, as the policy became known, was “neither the clandestine embrace” of the white regime as had occurred during the Nixon administration, nor “polecat treatment” favoured by the Carter administration.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, Crocker, named after his great-grandfather President Chester A. Arthur, was one of the few conservative African specialists in the field and had regularly published scathing attacks on the Carter administration’s approach. In one 1979 article for the *Washington Post*, Crocker argued that US African policy had been corrupted by “runaway ethnic diplomats” and was dictated by domestic racial politics.<sup>77</sup> According to Crocker, Carter’s foreign policy had been a “national disaster” because of the “unrestrained” Andrew Young, whose appointment as US ambassador to the United Nations had been more about the representation of a “domestic constituency” than protecting US interests in the world.<sup>78</sup> According to Crocker, Young’s identification with the Third World was antithetical to the function of an American diplomat, who should be appointed to “represent our immensely complex society—with its kaleidoscope of ethnic, racial, religious, and other groups.”<sup>79</sup> Further, it was a “grotesque” lack of belief in America that led Young to consider the Gulags in the Soviet Union equivalent to the US justice system—ultimately giving adversaries a free pass and punishing allies.<sup>80</sup>

Constructive Engagement, in contrast, ensured the United States maintained its status as a superpower, improved relations with anti-communist allies, and contained the spread of communism in the region. Domestic “frustrations” would not be carried over into a foreign policy that prioritised US national interests and accepted the legitimacy of US power as a force

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>77</sup> Chester A. Crocker, “Andy Young: A Runaway Ethnic Rafshooning the World,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 1979.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

for good in the world.<sup>81</sup> As the Ford Foundation's Pauline H. Baker argued in her report on the policy, Constructive Engagement was "far more nuanced and ambitious" than previous policies.<sup>82</sup> Crocker believed that a number of factors had coalesced to create an opportunity for the United States in the region. The first of these was the 1978 election of P.W. Botha as Prime Minister of South Africa and the shift toward reformist politics and "Friedmanite" economics.<sup>83</sup> As Crocker argued, "the obscure politics of Afrikanerdom have become more pragmatic and seemingly rational, less tribal and ideological."<sup>84</sup> Second, the regional conflicts in Namibia and Angola were "tantalizingly close" to being resolved.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency provided a new credibility with the apartheid government because of the United States' desire to improve bilateral relations with anti-communist allies.

Crocker argued the goal of US policy toward South Africa was "to foster and support" change toward a nonracial system while "minimizing the damage to our interests in the process."<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, Crocker's policy framework sought to strategically employ incentives to encourage moderates within the South African government to gradually reform the apartheid system. This meant a closer relationship with the white government and positive economic and diplomatic engagement. The economic pressures advocated by the United Nations and liberals in the United States were repudiated by Crocker on the basis that "the option for U.S. disengagement hardly exists in practice...by its nature and history South Africa is a part of the Western experience and an integral part of the Western economic system."<sup>87</sup> Further, the advocates of disengagement "suffer[ed] from an inflated notion of American power."<sup>88</sup> As

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Pauline H. Baker, *Update: South Africa Time Running Out: The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years* (New York: Ford Foundation Foreign Policy Association, 1989), 9.

<sup>83</sup> Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 328.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 345.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 327.

Crocker explained, “the recent American experience, most notably in Iran, should have made it clear that effective coercive influence is a rare commodity in foreign policy.”<sup>89</sup> “The real choice” in US policy toward South Africa, Crocker argued, was not engagement or disengagement, but rather the nation’s “readiness to compete with our global adversaries” and “take the initiative” in southern Africa.<sup>90</sup>

In reality many of the building blocks of US policy remained consistent. The United States continued to honour the 1977 United Nations arms embargo against South Africa.<sup>91</sup> The US also continued its policy of non-recognition of South African Bantustans (ethnic homelands). The Bantustan policy was a central tool of the apartheid regime since the 1950s, essentially stripping South African citizenship from Black people and making them temporary migrants who could be forcefully ‘repatriated’ from urban centres at any time. Importantly, the goals of US policy remained the same—the end of the apartheid system and political representation for Black South Africans. As political scientist Michael Clough argued, “substance changed far less than symbolism... Reagan officials changed tactics and adjusted strategy but pursued the same objectives as their predecessors.”<sup>92</sup>

Despite articulating similar goals to those of the previous Administration, Constructive Engagement’s apparent “tone of empathy” for the apartheid government was met with disapproval by liberals and radicals in the United States.<sup>93</sup> Activists in African American communities were particularly critical of the policy.<sup>94</sup> As an editorial in the Black newspaper

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 326.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 345.

<sup>91</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Security Council Resolution 418, Dec. 4, 1977,” <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/66633>.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Clough, “Beyond Constructive Engagement,” *Foreign Policy* 61 (1985), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Crocker, “South Africa: Strategy for Change,” 350.

<sup>94</sup> For more information see: Jessica OConnor, “‘Racism Anywhere Threatens Freedom Everywhere’: The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Black America’s Anti-Apartheid Movement,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2015): 44-58; Stephen Tuck, “African American Protest During the Reagan Years: Forging New Agendas, Defending Old Victories,” in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies*, ed. Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies (London: Palgrave, 2015), 119-125; Nesbitt, *Race For Sanctions*, 111-118.

*Afro-American* asserted, Crocker's approach put the United States government "in bed with racists" and in an "unholy alliance with South Africa."<sup>95</sup> Nathaniel Clay of *Chicago Metro News* echoed this sentiment when he wrote:

It is heartening to see the Black community rising up in anger at the attempt by the Reagan administration to clean up South Africa's image...whether we are successful or not, Black Americans have a moral obligation to oppose Reagan at every turn in his tilt towards four million whites on a continent of half a billion Blacks.<sup>96</sup>

Black conservatives, in contrast, were broadly in agreement with the strategies outlined in Constructive Engagement. Some Black conservatives agreed with Crocker that domestic racial politics and transnational ethnic solidarity should not inform U.S. foreign policy. In this view, the United States, a vast and varied nation, required a foreign policy that reflected the best interests of all Americans, and advanced US strategic interests in the Cold War.

An independent review of Constructive Engagement ordered by President Reagan concluded in January 1987 that the policy had failed to bring change in southern Africa.<sup>97</sup> The apartheid system would come to a rapid end only a few years later with the demise of the P.W. Botha regime and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990. Ultimately, the end of apartheid was the result of internal politics, regime change, and sustained local activism not US policy. There have been a number of scholars who have evaluated the role of Constructive Engagement on South African politics and the Reagan administration's policy successes and failures with regard to apartheid South Africa.<sup>98</sup> This broader political context provides the

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<sup>95</sup> "In Bed with Racists," *Afro-American*, Apr. 4, 1981, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Nathaniel Clay, "Blacks Have a Right to Oppose Reagan's Africa Policy," *Chicago Metro News*, Sept. 19, 1981, 3.

<sup>97</sup> *A U.S. Policy Toward South Africa: The Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on South Africa, January 1987* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O, 1987), vi.

<sup>98</sup> See for example: Gunther Hellman, "The Collapse of 'Constructive Engagement': U.S. Foreign Policy in Southern Africa," in *The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of Strength?* Ed. Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler, 265-286 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2019); Alex Thomson, "A More Effective Constructive Engagement: US Policy Towards South Africa After the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986," *Politikon* 39, no. 3 (2012): 371-389; Alex Thomson, "Incomplete Engagement: Reagan's South Africa Policy Revisited," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (1995): 83-101; J. Davies, *Constructive Engagement?* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007).

backdrop for a debate on race and politics within Black America in the 1980s that lies at the heart of this thesis. As this thesis will demonstrate, African American engagement with South Africa and Constructive Engagement was more nuanced and varied than previous scholarship suggests and reflects wider fissures in Black political philosophy.

## **The Thesis**

As Rigueur noted, often when considering Black conservatives “the question of *why* quickly becomes a more loaded inquiry: *How could they?*”<sup>99</sup> This thesis avoids the pitfalls of such a loaded inquiry by actively engaging with, and centring, the thought and praxis of the Black conservative actors themselves. The thesis is an empirical archival study driven by the work of Black conservatives who voiced alternative approaches to the US anti-apartheid movement and outlined their own vision of US relations with South Africa. It does so by utilising a variety of published and publicly available works, including the academic publications of Black conservative intellectuals Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams. Likewise, I have examined the myriad of newspaper articles, op-eds, and syndicated columns, speeches and memoirs written by and about Black conservatives in order to develop a comprehensive picture of Black conservative attitudes, opinions, and activities toward South Africa in the 1980s. The private papers of Black conservatives and government documents, particularly correspondence for Black conservatives working within the Reagan administration such as Ambassador Alan Keyes and Ambassador Edward Perkins, I also used as key primary sources.

The thesis also incorporates a broad range of sources from other individuals and organisations active in the debates on Constructive Engagement. These sources include the personal papers and publications of key members of the conservative establishment in order to

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<sup>99</sup> Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 3.

investigate their relationship with Black conservatives, such as the conservative magazine *National Review* and the personal papers of its editor, William A. Rusher. The work of anti-apartheid activists, the Black press, and other African American figures have also been considered. Importantly, I find in these documents fresh insights into the way Black conservatives' engagement and involvement in debates on the problem of apartheid took place within African American communities. In utilising these sources, the thesis challenges the presumption that Black conservatives were simply apologists for conservative foreign policy agendas or 'sellouts' willing to subvert Black solidarity in both the US and abroad for their own gain.

Chapter One, "We Must Do More Than Protest—We Must Prepare and Produce," examines the work of 'conservative Black' American Reverend Leon Sullivan, and Black conservatives Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams—three key individuals who outlined their understanding of, and approach to, the problem of apartheid South Africa in the years prior to the Reagan administration. This chapter will briefly consider their philosophies in connection to earlier examples of Black conservative engagement with South Africa and demonstrate that there is indeed a long-running and significant conservative intellectual tradition in African American thought and activism in relation to the apartheid state. The chapter closes with a comparison of these perspectives and the policy of Constructive Engagement.

Chapter Two, "I've Never Known a More Stout-Hearted Defender of America," examines the work of Franklin A. Thomas, David Bolen, and Alan Keyes—key Black conservative individuals from the philanthropic, private, and government sectors, who supported Constructive Engagement during the Reagan administration's first term. In considering the work of Thomas and Bolen, both previously underexamined "conservative Blacks," alongside Keyes, the 'quintessential' Reaganite Black conservative, the chapter

highlights the commonalities in their philosophies and approaches. In doing so, it argues that Black conservatives and conservative Blacks are more connected than typologies suggest. Covering the period 1981-1984, the chapter establishes the central arguments of Black conservatives as the anti-apartheid movement in the US and South Africa began to gain momentum.

Chapter Three, “All My Skinfolk Ain’t Kinfolk,” examines Black conservative perspectives on Constructive Engagement at the peak of the US anti-apartheid movement, 1985-1986. The chapter traces the attempts by Black conservatives to launch public campaigns to counter the mass protests and increasing pressure for economic sanctions and corporate disinvestment. The chapter shows that not only were Black conservatives engaged with the problem of apartheid and the African American-led US anti-apartheid movement, but that their engagement was consistent with their worldview. In doing so, it will illustrate important distinctions between the individual actors considered, from the increasingly dissenting views of Leon Sullivan to the lobbying of ultraconservative J.A. Parker.

Chapter Four, “Quiet, Low-Key, and Dignified,” considers the attempts by the Reagan White House to give Black conservatives more visibility in the framing of Constructive Engagement to counteract the growing anti-apartheid sentiment in Congress as the Administration began to lose the battle against a policy of economic sanctions between 1986 and 1987. In particular, this chapter traces the Administration’s search for an African American to serve as ambassador to South Africa, and the impact Edward Perkins was able to make in this role. More broadly, the chapter focuses on the ways in which Black conservatives worked within the Reagan administration, and the US government generally, to influence US policy toward South Africa and affect change in the apartheid state. In doing so, it challenges the idea that these Black conservatives were simply career opportunists and demonstrates their connections to conservative Black internationalist traditions.

Just as the debates on Constructive Engagement broadened to include U.S. relations with Angola in the late 1980s, Chapter Five, “I Hate Communism More Than I Hate Apartheid,” expands the geographical scope of the thesis to include the negotiations for peace in southern Africa in the final years of the Reagan administration. The chapter considers the work of Black Americans for a Free Angola and their attempt to build African American support for Jonas Savimbi in his battle for power in Angola. It specifically focuses on religious African Americans from the South, who were both conservative and maintained a commitment to civil rights, and thus found themselves in the centre of a foreign policy debate between opponents of Communism and proponents of racial solidarity. This chapter demonstrates that while Black conservatism found particular expression and attention during the Reagan administration, these values and perspectives were not due simply to Reaganism, but were rather a prevalent expression of African American political thought.

By focusing on African Americans with a conservative set of political values and foreign policy views, this thesis will present a nuanced picture of racial identity in modern America and highlight the diversity of African American understandings of race, diasporic connections, and the role of the United States in the world. To date, the historical understanding of African American attitudes and responses to the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement has focused on the opposition of liberal and radical anti-apartheid activists. These activists and their work have been understood as an extension of the civil rights movement—or its more radicalised anti-colonial variants—into the international sphere. Those African Americans who did not agree with the anti-apartheid activists, and instead supported Constructive Engagement and economic involvement, have been dismissed as aberrations and not worthy of further investigation. This aberration narrative too has pervaded in the histories of African American engagement with South Africa beyond the 1980s and thwarted scholarly



understanding of Black conservatives or the role of Black conservatism as an intellectual tradition.

By examining the Black conservatives of the 1980s and evaluating them in the context of the tradition of Black conservatism, this thesis reveals previously unrecognised political and ideological diversity within African American communities in relation to international affairs. In doing so, this thesis provides a framework in which to understand the perspectives of those like Robert Brown whose values more closely aligned with Constructive Engagement and the Reagan administration than the anti-apartheid movement. As historian Charles Eagles observed, while Black conservatives were not the “heroes” that historians of the African American experience have tended to favour, “they too deserve examination and explanation.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Charles Eagles, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,” *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 4 (2000), 843.

## **Chapter One: “We Must Do More Than Protest—We Must Prepare and Produce”: Black Conservatism and South Africa, 1976-1981**

On 29 January 1976, eighteen executives met in secret at an IBM training centre in Sands Point, Long Island. They were there at the behest of the Reverend Leon Sullivan, civil rights activist and the first African American on the board of General Motors. With the help of IBM chair Frank Cary, Sullivan had managed to convince the leaders of fifteen of the largest American companies with business interests in South Africa to attend the meeting. They had been seemingly invited to “exchange information” about each corporation’s operations because of the “attention which is being devoted to the presence of major companies...in South Africa.”<sup>1</sup> In reality, however, they were there for Sullivan to pitch his idea for a corporate social responsibility program in South Africa. Sullivan had recently returned from a tour of the vocation training facilities that he had established in African countries including Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana. On his return to the United States, Sullivan made a transit stop in Johannesburg. While there he had met with several Black South African business leaders who had urged him to advocate for the same working conditions in South Africa that were employed in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

Sullivan’s hesitance to publicly share the reason for the meeting with the executives was understandable. The executives had been facing a wave of pressure to disinvest in South Africa from anti-apartheid activists in the United States who were responding to the rise of widespread strikes in the apartheid state. Sullivan knew that US corporations had previously resisted calls for improved working conditions in South Africa by Congressman Charles Diggs

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 389.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Sullivan, “Agents for Change: The Mobilization of Multinational Companies in South Africa: Perspectives,” *Law & Policy in International Business* 15, no. 2 (1983), 428.

(D-MI).<sup>3</sup> Until this point, corporate responses to these pressures had cited concerns over the legality of such interference in the domestic policies of a sovereign nation.<sup>4</sup> Further, the pressure on US corporations to act as progressive political forces in South Africa differed fundamentally from powerful prevailing understandings of the role of business. As influential free market economists like Milton Freidman and Frederick Hayek had argued, the central function of business was the search for profit.<sup>5</sup> Sullivan, in contrast, sought to build on his decades of experience in community organising devoted to the goals of Black home ownership, employment, and economic development in order to develop a new understanding of corporate responsibility.

For the executives at the meeting at Sands Point, who were not clergy with community work experience, the idea that US corporations should take an active role in shaping South African society was a hard sell. This was also why Sullivan had assured the business leaders in attendance that the meeting in Sands Point was secret and informal.<sup>6</sup> Sullivan's corporate social responsibility program would require these executives to understand their organisation as both economic and social institutions. As scholars Kenneth Gray and Robert Karp argued, this perspective required corporations to acknowledge that "their own self-interest forces them to be concerned with society and community and to be predisposed to shoulder responsibility."<sup>7</sup> Many of the executives at the meeting remained unconvinced about taking a public stand on

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<sup>3</sup> Alvin B. Tillery, "Foreign Policy Activism and Power in the House of Representatives: Black Members of Congress and South Africa, 1968-1986," *Studies in American Political Development* 20, no. 1 (2006): 88-103.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa: Historical Dimensions of Engagement and Disengagement* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 280.

<sup>5</sup> See: Milton Freidman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Frederick Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

<sup>6</sup> Harry Amana and James Cassell, "Rev. Sullivan, U.S. Firms Hold Secret Meeting on S. Africa's Racist Policies," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Mar. 13, 1976, 1 & 7.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth R. Gray and Robert E. Karp, "Corporate Social Responsibility: The Sullivan Principles and South Africa," *Visions in Leisure and Business* 12, no. 4 (1994), 4.

the issue of apartheid. Even Sullivan's own company, General Motors, was reticent to undertake this significant reimagining of US corporate power.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Sullivan utilised the threat of the anti-apartheid movement's growing calls for sanctions and disinvestment as leverage. In particular, he pointed to the growing number of African American politicians and their interest in US ties to the apartheid state. His key ally Frank Cary had only to point to IBM's recent experience in Gary, Indiana as an example of the domestic cost of continued involvement in South Africa. A small industrial city close to downtown Chicago, Gary had one of the highest concentrations of African Americans in the country and had elected one of the first Black mayors in 1968. Gary had been just one "Black American city" targeted by anti-apartheid activist campaigns for municipal disinvestment resolutions.<sup>9</sup> Only one month before the meeting at Sands Point, IBM had been one of four companies Gary City council had passed a resolution to divest from.<sup>10</sup>

After a tense meeting and another eighteen months of negotiations, six of the executives endorsed Sullivan's approach. By the time the official program "Principles of Equal Rights for United States Firms in the Republic of South Africa" was announced, there were twelve signatory companies. Later renamed the Sullivan Principles, the employment code comprised of six requirements: non-segregation of work facilities; equal and fair employment practices; equal pay; the initiation of training programs to prepare non-whites for management positions and technical jobs; a policy to increase the number of Blacks and non-whites in supervisory

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<sup>8</sup> Levy, "Black Power in the Boardroom," 190.

<sup>9</sup> Anti-apartheid Committee for Selective Purchasing, "Gary, Indiana City Council Votes for Anti-Apartheid Boycott, Press Release, Dec. 10, 1975." *African Activist Archive*.  
[https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3819](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3819).

<sup>10</sup> Sandy Boyer, "Divesting From Apartheid: A Summary of State and Municipal Legislative Action on South Africa, American Committee on Africa, Mar. 1983, 3." *African Activist Archive*.  
[https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10176](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10176).

positions; and finally, work to improve the quality of life for Blacks and non-whites outside the work environment in areas like housing, transportation, school, and recreation.<sup>11</sup>

Sullivan was one of a cohort of civil rights leaders that emerged as corporate executives in the 1970s. These former activists found themselves at odds with the radicalism of the Black Power movement and were critical of the riots which they saw as causing destruction to Black neighbourhoods and communities.<sup>12</sup> Their work in corporate America embodied a conservative understanding of Black Power, one that emphasised economic empowerment and the benefits of capitalism and private sector development. As this chapter aims to show, these emphases aligned with nearly a century of conservative internationalist thought on the part of Black Americans engaged with Southern Africa. Sullivan's vision linked business and corporate activities to racial progress and the empowerment of Black workers in both the US and South Africa. The ideological foundations of Sullivan's program for corporate social responsibility in South Africa were established in his earlier civil rights initiatives that both complemented President Nixon's idea of Black capitalism and reflected longer intellectual and political traditions within African American communities.

This chapter firstly examines the work of Leon Sullivan, particularly the creation of the Sullivan Principles, and considers the Black conservative traditions that informed his approach. In doing so, the chapter establishes the Sullivan Principles as a significant and influential expression of Black conservatism that was at the heart of anti-apartheid debates in the United States from the late 1970s. As political scientist Donald Culverson argued, 1977 was a major turning point in US relations with apartheid South Africa marked by a renewed interest in Africa by the Carter White House and the gradual expansion of disinvestment activism at a

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<sup>11</sup> "Sullivan Principles," in Desaix Myers III, with Kenneth Propp, David Hauck, and David Liff, *U.S. Business in South Africa: The Economic, Political, and Moral Issues* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), Appendix B.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Adam Davies, *Mainstreaming Black Power* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 2-3.

state and local level.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, the late 1970s was also a watershed moment for African American participation in the debates on US policy toward South Africa, demonstrated in the appointment of Andrew Young to US ambassador to the United Nations and the creation of the African American foreign policy lobbying organisation TransAfrica. Commencing, as this chapter does, in the late 1970s, thus offers an important vantage point from which to view the development of later Reagan era policies.

The chapter then turns to the writings and philosophies of two leading Black conservative intellectuals of the period, Thomas Sowell, and Walter E. Williams. These two iconoclasts typified the stereotype of the Black conservative, regularly accused of being “Uncle Toms” associated with the Reagan administration.<sup>14</sup> Both were economists who rose to prominence with the Reagan revolution as vocal critics of the civil rights establishment and liberal activism more broadly. While many of the “new cadre” of Black conservatives focused exclusively on domestic politics, Sowell and Williams waded into the debates on the problem of apartheid and US relations toward South Africa. Sowell and Williams outlined their solutions in their academic work, drawing on the key conservative principles of individualism, limited government, and the free market.

By considering the work of central figures of both conservative Black and Black conservative thought, this chapter challenges the propensity to dichotomise and separate these groups. The chapter demonstrates that there were a variety of Black conservative perspectives on apartheid and US policy toward South Africa as the Reagan administration established the policy of Constructive Engagement. While these individuals were not wholly united by shared agendas, political commitments, or ideas, they did share a conservative outlook that

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<sup>13</sup> Donald R. Culverson, “The Politics of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United States, 1969-1986,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (1996), 139.

<sup>14</sup> The epithet Uncle Tom remains associated with Black Conservatives. See: Dir. Justin Malone, *Uncle Tom: An Oral History of the American Black Conservative*, Malone Pictures, 2020.

emphasised pragmatic and gradual reform, anti-communism, and development through economic uplift. By considering the work of these Black conservatives within a longer tradition of African American thought and activism, the chapter challenges the typology of Black conservatives as simply opportunists and puppets of powerful white interests.

### **Situating Leon Sullivan in the Tradition of Black Conservatism**

As the architect of the Sullivan Principles, Reverend Leon Sullivan influenced the direction of US relations with South Africa, both diplomatically and commercially, for years to come. A brief biographical sketch of Sullivan shows how his civil rights work informed the inclusion of concepts of corporate partnership and community uplift in the Sullivan Principles. Sullivan's early career seemed to follow a path towards liberal and politically focused civil rights activism. However, his belief in self-help initiatives, respectability politics, and economic empowerment as the foundations of Black advancement led Sullivan to wage a conservative and economic civil rights battle of his own. As Sullivan wrote, "If people wanted something changed, they would have to go out and work for change."<sup>15</sup> A firm believer in the dignity of employment over welfare, Sullivan advocated for community development and collective uplift through individual economic improvement and moral ideas of giving. The Sullivan Principles were both a continuation and expansion of his previous work, merging rich Black American traditions with corporate social responsibility initiatives.

The work of Sullivan has, until recently, been underexamined in the literature on African American engagement with South Africa. Francis Nesbitt's *Race For Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946-1994* is a case in point. Ostensibly a history of

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<sup>15</sup> Leon Sullivan, *Moving Mountains: The Principles and Purposes of Leon Sullivan* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1998), 6.

Black American engagement with the problem of apartheid, Nesbitt solely considered the activism of African Americans who supported economic sanctions.<sup>16</sup> The Sullivan Principles were relegated to a single footnote. Indeed, Nesbitt dismissed Sullivan's work to a sentence evaluating the role of the Polaroid experiment.<sup>17</sup> According to Nesbitt the only thing noteworthy was that

South Africa had welcomed Sullivan's principles, which, like the Polaroid 'experiment,' had posed little threat to the system of apartheid but could be used as leverage in international relations.<sup>18</sup>

Nesbitt's meagre consideration of Sullivan is one example of how Black conservatives have been relegated by scholars to the margins of historical analysis. This treatment also resembles the approach of scholars of Black internationalism generally: the contributions of African Americans who defied progressivist expectations of what Black politics *ought* to look like have been largely diminished. Some have been denounced as sellouts and pawns of the U.S. government and corporate greed.<sup>19</sup>

Recently, historians have begun to re-evaluate the anti-apartheid work of Leon Sullivan and the impact of the Sullivan Principles.<sup>20</sup> Jessica Ann Levy has argued that Sullivan should be understood within the transnational history of Black Power and the rise of free-market politics. According to Levy, Black Power, which had roots in Black radicalism and Black militancy, was "appropriated" by those like Sullivan "to the perpetuation of American capitalism."<sup>21</sup> In Levy's view, the "Black empowerment" programs developed by Sullivan that promoted industrial education, community development, and entrepreneurship increasingly

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<sup>16</sup> Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions*, vii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 96 & FN85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest studies of the Sullivan Principles concluded that its "gradualism and utility" were a "tool for corporate propaganda." See: Elizabeth Schmidt, *Decoding Corporate Camouflage: U.S. Business Support for Apartheid* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1980), 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> See: Mattie C. Webb, "People Before Profit? Ford, General Motors, & the Spirit of the Sullivan Principles in Apartheid South Africa (1976-1984)," *Ethnic Review* 44, no. 3 (2021): 64-87; James B. Stewart, "Amandla! The Sullivan Principles and the Battle to End Apartheid in South Africa, 1975-1987," *Journal of African American History* 96, no. 1 (2011): 62-89.

<sup>21</sup> Levy, "Black Power in the Boardroom," 868.



usurped the more radical goals of the Black Power movement like reparations, economic justice, and pan-African identity.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, historian Zeb Larson, situated the Sullivan Principles within the U.S. anti-apartheid movement and also viewed them as reflecting broader concerns over the intersection of economic globalisation and human rights during the Cold War.<sup>23</sup> As Larson explained, scholars have focused on the wrong aspects of the Sullivan Principles and in doing so have “misse[d] their true significance.”<sup>24</sup> As both Levy and Larson contended, scholars “need to move beyond” the rhetoric of “sellout” and instead seek to “understand” Sullivan’s true significance, most notably his approach and impact as a Black American concerned by apartheid in South Africa.<sup>25</sup> Despite this renewed focus on Sullivan, he is yet to be considered as a part of a longer African American conservative tradition. However, a closer examination of Sullivan’s work within the context of Black conservatism reveals a consistency in his philosophy and approach.

The absence of analysis regarding Leon Sullivan and Black conservatism is emblematic of scholarly treatment of Black conservatism more generally. Scholars have distinguished between the small ‘inauthentic’ cohort of Black conservatives who gained prominence in conservative organisations from the 1980s and the ‘authentic’ conservatism of a large segment of African American communities. This division particularly emphasises the differing perspectives on racial identification and the role of racism in society. Scholars have largely focused on the “new” Black conservative movement that “emerged” with the Reagan administration in 1980 and their perspectives on public policy, their ties to mainstream

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<sup>22</sup> This will no doubt be considered in detail in her upcoming book: Jessica Ann Levy, *Black Power, Inc.: Corporate America, Race, and Empowerment Politics in the U.S. and Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, yet to be published).

<sup>23</sup> Zeb Larson, “The Sullivan Principles: South Africa, Apartheid, and Globalization,” *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 3 (2020): 479-503.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 482.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 480; Levy, “Black Power in the Boardroom,” 170.

conservative movements, and their relationship with the Republican Party.<sup>26</sup> Less attention has been paid to the philosophies of those who political scientist Angela K. Lewis labelled “Afrocentric conservatives,” that remained committed to the idea of linked fate and operated as a part of the African American voting bloc.<sup>27</sup> The result is that Black conservatives have been presented as radically out-of-sync with the majority of African Americans and Afrocentric conservatives rendered all but invisible.

The work of Leon Sullivan can be understood within the tradition of Afrocentric conservatism, which blended conservative ideas of self-help with strong racial identity and collective uplift. His philosophy incorporated key tenets found in his socially conservative Black Protestantism, particularly the focus on religious devotion, morality, and patriarchal family structures. As Sullivan preached in his sermon *The New Morality in the Church*,

Moral decay in America is seeping deeper and deeper into all parts of our national culture and our national institutions, deeper and deeper into our homes, our schools, our governments, and even our churches. The church must concentrate its effort toward pulling together the family and developing the home.... the home is the main cornerstone for the teaching of spiritual truths and moral values.... As goes the home, so goes the nation—and so goes the world.<sup>28</sup>

Libertarian ideas of limited government and the free market are also evident at times in Sullivan’s philosophy. As he explained in his 1972 book *Alternatives to Despair*,

I would not depend on the mayor, the governor, or even the president of the United States to solve the problem of job opportunities for Blacks.... I believe that free enterprise is the best way to economic

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<sup>26</sup> See for example: Michael Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Joshua Farrington, *Black Republicans and the Transformation of the GOP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Corey D. Fields, *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African American Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Louis Prisoek, *African Americans in Conservative Movements: The Inescapability of Race* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Angela K. Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community: To the Right and Misunderstood* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 57. See also: Tasha Philpot, *Conservative But Not Republican: The Paradox of Party Identification and Ideology Among African Americans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Leon Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), 67-8.

prosperity that I know of in the world today. It is the best of economic systems for economic prosperity and economic opportunity.<sup>29</sup>

However, Sullivan differed from other conservatives because of the centrality of Black identity, racism, and the idea of “collective self-advancement” in his worldview.<sup>30</sup>

This difference has meant that Sullivan has not been considered a part of the Black conservative tradition. Yet as Lewis argued, Sullivan’s form of Black conservatism—Afrocentric conservatism—is just as prevalent in African American thought. Afrocentrism is, however, often misunderstood because there is no white or mainstream equivalent.<sup>31</sup> Sullivan’s Afrocentric conservatism resembles and builds on the traditions of Booker T. Washington, a leading figure of Black conservative philosophy. Washington’s conservative program of economic and educational advancement defined the “Age of Accommodation” in African American freedom struggles during the “nadir” of race relations in America.<sup>32</sup> Just as Washington advocated for Black economic development and the idea of “collective racial enterprise,” Sullivan rejected the individualism of libertarian conservatism.<sup>33</sup>

Many of Sullivan’s ideas also reflected Booker T. Washington’s famous autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, in which he credited perseverance, hard-work, and education as the source of his success.<sup>34</sup> Sullivan’s work links uplift through self-help to the attaining of these same virtues. Historians such as David Sehat have argued that Washington’s “conception of racial developmentalism,” for example, was focussed on “modelling proper bourgeois values and respectable social mores.”<sup>35</sup> Importantly, the industrial education system that Washington

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<sup>29</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 51-2.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Smock, *Booker T. Washington in Perspective: Essays of Louis R. Harlan* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901).

<sup>35</sup> David Sehat, “The Civilizing Mission of Booker T. Washington,” *Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 2 (2007), 325.

established with the Tuskegee Institute taught Black students the skills and training for economic advancement but also built their ‘personal character.’

Such a blend of Protestantism, libertarianism, and Booker-T-style developmentalism, came together with Sullivan’s Afrocentrism and internationalism also. His sense of transnational Afrocentric solidarity can be seen, for example, in his 1971 speech to the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order Elks of the World in North Carolina. There he argued,

We want to be free....in Lagos, in Nairobi, in Johannesburg, in Harlem, in Watts, and on Beale Street, we want to be free...free of humiliation, free from the indignities of the world that has put a premium on being White and a penalty on being Black.<sup>36</sup>

Yet this sentiment, though widely expressed in African American communities, was for Sullivan an aspect of his conservatism, especially when tied to his belief in gradual change.

Freedom, he continued,

will not come through emotionalism; it will not come through mass meetings; it will not come by marching or by making noise or by trying to burn the town down.... We must not delude ourselves with false hopes. Equal opportunity and full recognition in a White-dominated world will not come easily. There will be no “freedom now”. The realities of our situation indicate that it will take years to right the wrongs we face today.<sup>37</sup>

Sullivan called for Black people the world over to rid themselves of utopian visions and feelings of racial inferiority, arguing that Black advancement could only come from a collective strategy of education, pragmatic political decisions, and harnessing the power of capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

These conservative principles informed Sullivan’s civil rights work and later the creation of the Sullivan Principles.

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<sup>36</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 119. The Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World is an African American fraternal organisation established in 1897. For more information see: Theda Skopel, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 121.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 121-123.

## The Lion of Zion

Sullivan's pedigree in the civil rights movement was clear from early on. Sullivan became a Baptist preacher at the age of 18 and began his career in the church while still in college. A formative turning point came after a chance meeting with Reverend Adam Clayton Powell while preaching at the First Baptist Church in Charleston in 1943. The famed minister of the Abyssinian Church in Harlem had traveled to West Virginia to attend an NAACP rally and happened to hear the young Sullivan preach. Impressed, Powell convinced Sullivan to join the Great Migration and move to New York.<sup>39</sup> Sullivan attended the Union Theological Seminary, then at the vanguard of socially progressive, ecumenical Protestant intellectual life in the US. Indeed, Sullivan's time at the Union Theological Seminary coincided with the development of Christian Realism by leading theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and others—a prominent philosophy in Protestant activism and theories of social change, and, later, in international relations.<sup>40</sup> Situated in Morningside Heights, just to the west of Harlem, it also had many threads of connection to Harlem-based Black culture and politics.

Sullivan became involved in this political milieu, campaigning for Powell's election to the House of Representatives (a position he held for over 25 years), serving as president of A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement, and working closely with Bayard Rustin.<sup>41</sup> Each of these civil rights leaders had a significant impact on Sullivan's intellectual and political development—particularly his emphasis on anti-radicalism, community

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<sup>39</sup> For more information on the impact of the Great Migration on Black politics in New York see: Keneshia N. Grant, *The Great Migration and the Democratic Party: Black Voters and the Realignment of American Politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020), 93-124.

<sup>40</sup> Michael G. Thompson, "An Exception to Exceptionalism: A Reflection on Reinhold Niebuhr's Vision of "Prophetic" Christianity and the Problem of Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 833-855.

<sup>41</sup> For more information see: Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum, 1991); Andrew E. Kersten and Clarence Lang (eds), *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

organisation, and economic empowerment.<sup>42</sup> However, the independent-minded Sullivan also at times found himself at odds with his intellectual mentors, especially their left-of-centre philosophies and political ambitions. Importantly, Sullivan believed that federal civil rights were not enough to guarantee equality. As Sullivan argued, “early on, I came to the sobering realization that solutions could not be found in government alone,” instead people would have “to take responsibility for improving their lives.”<sup>43</sup> According to Sullivan, African Americans would also have to confront and deal with problems within their own communities, particularly drug addiction and gang violence.<sup>44</sup> Believing that the solution to these problems was to be found in the Black Church, Sullivan spent his time in New York developing programs to encourage Harlem gang members to join the church through the provision of athletic activities.<sup>45</sup>

His focus on self-help initiatives continued when he moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1950. Sullivan was appointed pastor of the Zion Baptist Church, a historical Black church that was founded in 1882 in one of the largest African American populations in the North. He held this position until 1988. By the time Sullivan arrived in Philadelphia, white flight and post-war deindustrialisation had decimated the city. In response, he formed community organisations to address problems of housing decay, community relationships with the police, closing bars, and providing adult supervision to children.<sup>46</sup> Just like his previous work, this community organisation was based on an Afrocentric conservative idea of communal racial uplift through individual responsibility and moral living. As historian

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<sup>42</sup> Leon Sullivan, *Build Brother Build: From Poverty to Economic Power* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith, 1969), 46.

<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 10; Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 53.

Matthew Countryman argued, Sullivan's endeavours were closer to Booker T. Washington's approach than it was to the civil rights activism of the era.<sup>47</sup>

That is not to say that Sullivan was not supportive of the civil rights movement's efforts. For example, he hosted a meeting for the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom organised by Martin Luther King, Jr. to pressure the federal government to support voting rights and school desegregation.<sup>48</sup> However, Sullivan saw his own efforts as a "spin-off of the civil rights movement," focusing on practical steps to prepare African Americans for their newfound opportunities.<sup>49</sup> As Sullivan frequently preached, "the day has come when we must do more than protest—we must now also prepare and produce."<sup>50</sup> Central to Sullivan's civil rights efforts was his emphasis on Black employment and economic empowerment. By 1958 he had developed the Selective Patronage movement in coalition with other ministers in Philadelphia. Their slogan, "don't buy where you don't work," illustrates Sullivan's early strategy and his willingness to utilise economic boycotts and sanctions against corporations.<sup>51</sup> Reflecting on the Selective Patronage movement, Sullivan explained in 1971 that the goal was to "harness" unified "purchasing power" and "use it in such a way that no business, large or small, would dare close its doors to the equal employment of our people."<sup>52</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. seemed to agree with this approach. Inspired by Sullivan's Selective Patronage movement, King developed Operation Breadbasket as an economic arm of

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 48-52.

<sup>48</sup> Bayard Rustin came to Zion Baptist Church to deliver the meeting's opening address, describing the work of the civil rights activists in the south including the Montgomery Bus Boycott and highlighted the central role of the Black church. Countryman, *Up South*, 86.

<sup>49</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Mark Bricklin, "8,000 Jam N. Phila. Training Center Opening Sunday," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jan. 28, 1964, 1.

<sup>51</sup> For more information see: Justin Gammage, "Black Power in Philadelphia: Selective Patronage and the Effectiveness of Direct Action Protest," *Journal of Black Studies* 48, no. 4 (2017): 373-390.

<sup>52</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 123.

the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>53</sup> Established in 1962, and closely resembling Sullivan's Selective Patronage movement, the goal of Operation Breadbasket, was to desegregate jobs and create new employment opportunities for African Americans through buying and boycotting campaigns. For Sullivan, selective patronage was a tool used to "breach" white economic control; an effective first step but only the beginning of the "economic emancipation of Black people."<sup>54</sup>

While Jesse Jackson emerged as a civil rights leader because of his work for Operation Breadbasket in Chicago into the 1960s, Sullivan refocused his energies on the next step of his vision by developing a community investment program known as the 10-36 Plan. The 10-36 Plan saw members of the Zion Baptist Church contribute ten dollars a month for 36 months. At the end of the period participants received shares in Zion Investment Associates, a for-profit company founded by means of the monthly investments. As Sullivan explained,

One day I preached a sermon at the Zion Baptist about Jesus feeding the five thousand with a few loaves of bread and a few fishes... So I said, that is what I am going to do with the church community.<sup>55</sup>

From 1964 the company purchased real estate including apartment buildings and a shopping centre. These investments were also focused on community development, addressing the needs of adequate housing and Black employment. Proceeds from the 10-36 Plan were also placed in the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust, an organisation that funded economic and community development projects. For Sullivan the 10-36 Plan was "reverse welfare" and changed participants mentalities from "hand out" to a philosophy of "put in."<sup>56</sup> As Sullivan wrote,

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<sup>53</sup> Enrico Beltrami, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago: Between Civil Rights and Black Capitalism," in *The Economic Civil Rights Movement: African Americans and the Struggle for Economic Power*, ed. Michael Ezra (New York: Routledge, 2013), 125.

<sup>54</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Nathaniel Bracey, "The Progress Movement and Community Development: The Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust," *Journal of African American History* 96, no. 1 (2011), 90-1.

<sup>56</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 95-6.



“Instead of people continuing to be a drain on society, they were building up a reverse” and “uplift[ing] the community as well as themselves.”<sup>57</sup>

Sullivan’s strategy of utilising “community capitalism” only expanded in the era of Black Power. Where many activists became more radical after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Sullivan found himself more aligned with Nixon’s understanding of Black power. As Nixon explained in a 1968 campaign speech, African Americans should be targeting economic power, “for from this can flow the rest—Black pride, Black jobs, Black opportunity, and yes, Black power.”<sup>58</sup> For Sullivan a key problem in the post-civil rights era was the lack of skills among African Americans that prevented them from succeeding in the newly available jobs. As Sullivan sermonised, “integration without preparation was frustration.”<sup>59</sup> The solution to inequality, according to Sullivan, was in the hands of African American communities. African Americans would only be able to earn the respect of white Americans through moral and responsible living. As he wrote in 1968, “we cannot expect to integrate the suburbs with relief checks.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, African Americans had to develop their economic capability through “Skill Power” and financial freedom through the use of “Green Power.”<sup>61</sup>

To promote such economic capacity, the preacher established the Opportunities Industrialization Center, an education and job training organisation. As Sullivan explained to President Nixon in a 1974 telegram:

OIC is here to build. We want to build the attitudes of men and women who have lost pride in themselves and faith in the free enterprise system and in our American way of life. We want to build motivation in people

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Nixon quoted in Dean Kotlowski, “Black Power—Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise,” *Business History Review* 72, no. 3 (1998): 409-445.

<sup>59</sup> Leon Sullivan, “Employment and Manpower Problems in the Cities: Implications of the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,” *Hearings Before Congress of the United States, Joint Economic Committee, May 28, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 203.

<sup>60</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in “Organization and Operation of the Small Business Administration,” *Hearings Before the Select Committee on Small Business House of Representatives, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, July 1969* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1969), A51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

so a worker will add to the productivity of the country, each giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay...<sup>62</sup>

While Sullivan's approach was amenable to the Nixon administration's reimagining and appropriation of Black Power, the OIC was also, more importantly, the natural progression of his community development work. The OIC's motto, "We Help Ourselves," reflected the key ideas of developmentalism and self-help. It resembled, in this sense, a post-civil rights incarnation of Booker T. Washington's philosophy and work at the Tuskegee Institute.

Like Washington's Tuskegee Institute, the OIC emphasised vocational training, practical experience in trades, as well as basic academic knowledge and personal care. Sullivan's emphasis on moral living and economic skills development was perhaps best demonstrated in the Feeder Program, the "backbone of the OIC effort."<sup>63</sup> Not only did the Feeder program offer lessons in mathematics, and reading and writing, but also the development of a "positive attitude."<sup>64</sup> Each of these units was designed to address what Sullivan saw as a lack of self-respect due to African American experiences of racism and oppression. As Sullivan explained in a 1986 article for *Yale Law & Policy Review*,

The Feeder Program consisted of courses ranging from the study of black history to the study of etiquette, hygiene, and basic grammar, all designed to inspire trainees to lift their sights above their present condition and aspire to a better quality of life.<sup>65</sup>

The Feeder Program was based on a similar idea to Washington's "civilizing" lessons at Tuskegee. As Washington explained in *Up From Slavery*,

In addition to the usual routine of teaching. I taught the pupils to comb their hair, and to keep their hands and faces clean, as well as their clothing...I gave special attention to teaching them the proper use of

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<sup>62</sup> Leon Sullivan, "Telegram to President Nixon," quoted in Thomas Gaston, "Statement of Executive Director, Dayton Opportunities Industrialization Centers on Impact of Federal Policies on Employment, Poverty, and Other Programs, April 19, 1973," *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Employment, Poverty, and Migratory Power* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 2111.

<sup>63</sup> Ford Foundation official quoted in Eric Augenbraun, "'Stand on Your Feet Black Boy! Leon Sullivan, Black Power, Job Training, and the War on Poverty,'" (Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 68.

<sup>64</sup> Leon Sullivan, "From Protest to Progress: The Lesson of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers," *Yale Law & Policy Review* 4, no. 2 (1986), 367.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

the tooth-brush and the bath... I am convinced that there are few single agencies of civilization that are more far-reaching.<sup>66</sup>

In a similar way, the Feeder Program was concerned with Black men “reasserting their manhood” through a traditional understanding of family life.<sup>67</sup> These units were created to address ‘deficiencies’ that Sullivan viewed as being particularly serious within the Black community.

Sullivan’s inclusion of “manners and morals” in the vocational training programs, likewise, drew on the tradition of “respectability politics” that had long been a dominant force in the Baptist church.<sup>68</sup> At the heart of this approach was a focus on individual behaviour and success. As Washington wrote, “We want young men and women to go out, not as slaves of their daily routine, but masters of their circumstances. But the structure must be built a brick at a time, and no act is without its influence.”<sup>69</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Sullivan argued, “without inner resources such as motivation, discipline, and the will to succeed, no amount of external support will make a [person] independent and self-reliant.”<sup>70</sup> Importantly for his approach to South Africa, proponents of Black respectability politics such as Sullivan, rejected radicalism and revolutionary rhetoric. Instead, they argued that sustainable change would best be achieved through gradualism and reform, as members of the Black community attained economic stability, an education, and other markers of middle-class success.

Just as Washington’s pedagogy emerged as a dominant approach to Black education in the US and colonial Africa, as historians such as Andrew Zimmerman have shown, Sullivan’s OIC model proved just as far reaching on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>71</sup> Historian V.P. Franklin

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<sup>66</sup> Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Leon Sullivan, “New Trends in the Development of Self-Help in the Inner City,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 112, no. 6 (1968), 360.

<sup>68</sup> The concept of respectability politics was developed by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>69</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Working with the Hand* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904), 181.

<sup>70</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 11.

considers Tuskegee and the OIC as two “major examples of the movement of educational ideas and practices by and for African Americans from the United States to Africa.”<sup>72</sup> By 1971, there were 75 OIC branches across the country and several in African nations including Nigeria, Ghana, Lesotho, Botswana, and Kenya—each established by Sullivan but run by the local communities.

### **A ‘Conservative Black’ Approach to South Africa**

The ‘Lion of Zion’s’ conservatism, combined with his genuine commitment to Black progress, presented an opportunity for General Motors (GM). GM hoped the appointment of an African American to the board of directors would bring an end to a wave of civil rights shareholder activism. The newly appointed member of the Board of GM quickly made waves within the company. First, Sullivan publicly declared his support for a resolution for the company to leave South Africa.<sup>73</sup> He then testified before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa, where he called for “a total economic, political, and social disassociation with South Africa.”<sup>74</sup> Such a call may have resembled his earlier program of “selective patronage,” only this time writ large on an international scale.

However, the company executives soon made it known that Sullivan was expected to refrain from sharing his dissenting views on company activities with the public if he expected to remain on the board of directors and have any influence at GM. As historian Jessica Ann Levy has argued, this situation was a particular pressure that African American executives faced as they gained a foothold in corporate America. According to Levy, “as hypervisible

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<sup>72</sup> V.P. Franklin, “Pan-African Connections, Transnational Education, Collective Cultural Capital, and Opportunities Industrialization Centers International,” *Journal of African American History* 96, no. 1 (2011), 58.

<sup>73</sup> Jerry M. Flint, “A Black Director of G.M. Will Vote Against the Board: Black General Motors Director Plans to Vote Against the Board,” *NYT*, Apr. 9, 1971, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Levy, “Black Power in the Boardroom,” 170.

members of the corporation occupying roles specifically designed to mitigate tensions with the community... Black executives bore a particular responsibility for upholding a positive corporate image.”<sup>75</sup>

The recent events at Polaroid no doubt played a role in the concerns of GM executives. In 1970 two African American workers at Polaroid in Cambridge, Massachusetts discovered their company was selling its technology to the South African government for the creation of its passbooks. The husband-and-wife team formed the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement and threatened to launch a national boycott of the company unless it withdrew from South Africa.<sup>76</sup> At the time, Polaroid’s operations in South Africa were only a small fraction of its business. However, the company’s board included a number of liberal powerbrokers who reacted to this threat publicly. Polaroid announced a temporary ban on the sale of its I.D. systems to South Africa and placed full-paged advertisements in newspapers across the United States demonstrating its commitment to “take the subject seriously.”<sup>77</sup> Polaroid then sent four employees to South Africa to investigate the situation and develop a response.

The result was a one-year trial of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Known as the “Polaroid experiment,” the company raised Black wages, increased job training, and established scholarships for Black education and cultural organisations.<sup>78</sup> The details of the experiment were widely advertised by Polaroid in a public relations blitz, including in major newspapers as well as twenty Black newspapers across the country.<sup>79</sup> The Polaroid

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<sup>75</sup> Levy, “Black Power in the Boardroom,” 183.

<sup>76</sup> Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, “Polaroid Colorpack III...Imprisons a Black South African Every Sixty Seconds, Pamphlet from 1970,” *African Activist Archive*.  
[https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-8096](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-8096).

<sup>77</sup> A copy of these advertisements was later published in a document created by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement. See: “Polaroid and South Africa, Pamphlet Mar. 21, 1971, 18-20,” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3865](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3865).

<sup>78</sup> Erik P. Eckholm, “Polaroid’s Experiment in South Africa: Enlightened Engagement and the Structure of Apartheid,” *Africa Today* 19, no. 2 (1972): 36-51.

<sup>79</sup> Eric J. Morgan, “The World is Watching: Polaroid and South Africa,” *Enterprise & Society* 7, no. 3 (2006), 536.

Revolutionary Workers Movement and the apartheid government condemned the experiment. For the African American employees-turned-activists, the experiment was seen as a smokescreen to justify the company's continued presence in South Africa. The activists persisted in calling for complete withdrawal and added that the company should contribute its profits earned in South Africa to African liberation organisations.<sup>80</sup> Unsurprisingly, Polaroid fired these employees due to their "persistent activities in fomenting public disapproval of the enterprise which employs you."<sup>81</sup>

When faced with the decision to maintain his own vocal support for corporate withdrawal from South Africa or his continued position on the board of GM, Sullivan chose to remain on the board and attempt to push for change from within. As Sullivan explained to the 1971 GM Annual Meeting,

I really did not know how I would fare in this new role as a member of the General Motors Board, because I am an outspoken person, unwilling to permit my voice or my opinions be controlled by anyone.<sup>82</sup>

Sullivan accepted the role in order to "help...make profits" but also "help the development and the growth and the progress" of minority populations.<sup>83</sup> While Sullivan initially supported corporate disinvestment and economic sanctions in line with civil rights leaders, the strong reaction from General Motors made it clear that such an approach was unlikely to occur. Sullivan's pragmatism and belief in gradual change—just like Washington's one brick at a time approach—meant that he began to look for workable alternatives. It was only after meeting with Black South African business leaders in Johannesburg in 1975 that Sullivan reconsidered his support for corporate disinvestment. Sullivan left South Africa convinced that US

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<sup>80</sup> Including a statement to the UN Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid. Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, "Statement on Demands, New York, Feb. 3, 1971," *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3610](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-3610).

<sup>81</sup> A copy of this letter was then published by Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, "Polaroid and South Africa," 24.

<sup>82</sup> Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 153.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

businesses could play a similar role in South Africa as they had in North Philadelphia. Here, the element of the OIC he drew on was its emphasis on uplift and development through the private sector, rather than the “selective patronage” logic of the earlier call for sanctions. And for Sullivan, it was equally important that once he had “breached” corporate intransigence through having them acquiesce to small demands, he could then keep pushing for more change.

While the Polaroid Experiment was considered a failure by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, it ultimately established a moral justification for continued corporate involvement in South Africa. Sullivan leveraged this corporate social responsibility approach in the meeting at Sands Point against the “fears of violence and communism” regarding the end of white rule in South Africa.<sup>84</sup> Despite the initial hesitance of executives to support Sullivan’s initiative, the Soweto Uprising in June 1976 and the subsequent outburst of anti-apartheid activism in the United States convinced a number to join.<sup>85</sup> When the Sullivan Principles were officially announced at a press conference in Washington, D.C. in March 1977, twelve of the biggest companies were represented.<sup>86</sup> Just over six months later, the number of signatories had grown to fifty-four. Of these signatories, some, like Sal Marzullo of Mobil Oil and David Bolen of DuPont, emerged as genuine supporters of the Principles and made serious and sustained efforts to implement them. As Larson argued, others simply signed in order “to improve their public relations stance” in the United States.<sup>87</sup> For Sullivan, the Principles were a culmination of his corporate, community, church, and civil rights work.

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<sup>84</sup> Levy, “Black Power in the Boardroom,” 188.

<sup>85</sup> Footage of the South African police opening fire and killing Black children protesting the introduction of Afrikaans in schools dominated international media and sparked renewed anti-apartheid protest across the globe. Within South Africa the Soweto Uprising marked a new era in Black protests that continued to grow into the 1980s. See: David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: From Racial Domination to Majority Rule* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> These companies were: American Cyanamid Company, Burroughs Corporation, Caltex Petroleum, Citicorp, Ford Motor Company, General Motors Corporation, IBM, International Harvester Company, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, Mobil Oil Corporation, Otis Elevator Company, and Union Carbide Corporation.

<sup>87</sup> Larson, “The Sullivan Principles,” 491.

As Sullivan had done in his community-based work in the US, he created a number of organisations to administer the Sullivan Principles. In 1978 he formed the Industry Support Unit, Inc., a committee of signatory company representatives tasked with demonstrating the progress their companies were making in South Africa. In reality, this organisation functioned as a “conduit for obtaining funds” used to evaluate and promote the Sullivan Principles.<sup>88</sup> The committee funded a small staff and retained Arthur D. Little consultancy firm to develop and undertake a monitoring system. Arthur D. Little sent an annual questionnaire to each signatory company and then evaluated their progress for a fee. At the same time, signatory executives were divided into sixteen task forces (eight in the US and eight in South Africa), providing an overarching advisory system and specified strategies to implement each principle.<sup>89</sup> Another “centrepiece” of the Sullivan Principles was the International Council for Equality of Opportunity Principles, the non-profit organisation that signatory companies used to implement the community development programs to improve Black South African life outside of the work environment, including the support of education, housing, and health facilities.<sup>90</sup>

In continuity with Sullivan’s lifetime work, the leadership of the International Council included Black church leaders. Such inclusions had the short-term benefit of consolidating support for the Principles and deflecting criticism against the signatory companies from other religious organisations that were advocating for complete withdrawal from South Africa. One such leader was Reverend Ralph Abernathy, the civil rights activist and former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). An exemplar of what Angela Dillard has called “civil rights conservatism,” Abernathy was sympathetic to Sullivan’s approach to

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<sup>88</sup> “ISU Meeting Minutes,” quoted in Stewart, “Amandla!,” 74.

<sup>89</sup> These committees were formally known as the “Statement of Principles Industry Advisory Committee.” For more information on the organizational structure of the Sullivan Principles, see: Prakesh Sethi and Oliver Williams, *Economic Imperatives and Ethical Values in Global Business* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2001).

<sup>90</sup> Originally the organisation was called the International Council for Minority Equality of Opportunity Principles. See: “Statement of Purpose to the Constitution and By-Laws of Sullivan Principles,” quoted in Stewart, “Amandla!,” 67.



economic empowerment and community capitalism.<sup>91</sup> Abernathy joined the board in July 1979, two years after his retirement from SCLC and what would be, by his own account, his conservative awakening. Indeed, by 1979 Abernathy found himself more aligned with Black conservatives than his former activist colleagues.

Critics like Elizabeth Schmidt argued that the Council served as “camouflage” for continued US business ties (and support of) the apartheid regime.<sup>92</sup> The American Committee on Africa, a leading anti-apartheid organisation, agreed with this assessment and devoted considerable resources to lobbying against the Sullivan Principles.<sup>93</sup> This argument was similar to the historical narrative that has dominated literature on Black conservatives: that they were voiceless puppets, mere instruments, of white conservative masters. One variant of this argument was that the reason Sullivan developed the Principles was simply pressure from the GM board. However, as this section has shown, the ethos and developmentalist vision of the Principles were deeply continuous with Sullivan’s approach to community engagement and development through economic and educational advancement. More so, Sullivan’s own developmentalism reflected wider and longer continuities with the traditions of Afrocentric conservatism and Booker-T-style developmentalism.

### **Early Challenges of the Sullivan Principles**

Signatory companies found the evaluation process of the Principles difficult, and argued that confusion over deadlines, requirements, and evaluation criteria weakened their commitment to comply. By October 1979, some of these issues were dealt with by the time of the third annual report, which found that three-quarters of all signatory companies had achieved

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<sup>91</sup> Rev. Ralph Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 591-2.

<sup>92</sup> Schmidt, *Decoding Corporate Camouflage*.

<sup>93</sup> Larson, “The Transnational and the Local Dimensions of the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement,” 120.

the first principle and had desegregated their South African facilities.<sup>94</sup> The progress made toward the other five principles was mixed. While many of the corporate executives were pleased with this progress, Sullivan attempted to leverage this success to push for more change. Indeed, Sullivan “amplified” the expectations of the fifth and sixth principles to include supporting the right of Black South Africans to form or belong to government registered unions, and condemnation of the apartheid government’s pass and influx control laws.

Sullivan’s attempts to widen the scope of the Sullivan Principles was initially widely condemned by the signatory companies. However, this changed in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising, and the subsequent anti-apartheid activism that emerged in the United States calling for companies to either withdraw or participate in corporate social responsibility efforts. By the time the Reagan administration had established Constructive Engagement as its official policy toward South Africa in 1981, more than 130 American companies had signed onto the Principles and ended visible signs of racial discrimination in their workplaces, including the segregation of restrooms and lunchrooms.<sup>95</sup> Signatory companies had also funded around five thousand scholarships, and “adopted” 150 schools in Black urban areas—funding the development of facilities, equipment, and education tools.<sup>96</sup> The signatory companies also pointed to the employment of around three thousand non-white managers as a sign of the impact of the Principles.<sup>97</sup>

Despite Sullivan’s continued sermonising on the role of corporate activism in South Africa, the combination of a decline in anti-apartheid activism in the United States and weakening South African economy in the early 1980s led to diminished corporate commitment

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<sup>94</sup> Arthur D. Little, Inc., *Third Report on the Signatory Companies to the Sullivan Principles* (Philadelphia: International Council for Equality of Opportunity Principles, 1979).

<sup>95</sup> Arthur D. Little, Inc., *Sixth Report of the Signatory Companies to the Sullivan Principles* (Philadelphia: International Council for Equality of Opportunity Principles, 1982), 36.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>97</sup> Only around 500 of these managers were in a supervisory role over white employees.

to the Sullivan Principles. Executives, expecting an acknowledgement of their attempts to meet the six principles, were instead met with admonitions on what more needed to be done.<sup>98</sup> As Sullivan admitted to journalists, he would “embarrass and chastise” the signatories that he found wanting. The fraught relationship was evident by 1982, when Sullivan was forced to cancel the annual meeting of chief executives when it became clear that most were not going to turn up.<sup>99</sup> Sullivan later reflected, “I believed the ultimate mission would be accomplished, but working toward that goal was often difficult and painstaking.”<sup>100</sup> More than just the tense relationship between Sullivan and the executives, the annual reporting process also remained a hurdle.

By the early 1980s, each company was expected to submit a 55-page questionnaire to Arthur D. Little. Depending on the size of the corporation, the fee to cover the cost of the evaluation was between \$1,000 and \$7,000. Unsurprisingly, this process was criticised as being onerous. The head of Union Carbide South Africa told journalist Stratford Sherman, “the red tape is so daunting...that new signatories [should] be assigned experienced buddies in the manner of scuba divers facing the perils of the deep.”<sup>101</sup> A further disincentive to complete the paperwork was the lack of transparency in the grading system used by the consultation company. The questions, forms, and grading system changed frequently between 1979 and 1986 and the process was never transparent. After his investigation, Sherman concluded that the system was “byzantine.”<sup>102</sup> By 1983, companies which thought they would get a failing

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<sup>98</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 72.

<sup>99</sup> David Hauck, Meg Voorhes, and Glen Goldberg, *Two Decades of Debate: The Controversy Over U.S. Companies in South Africa* (Washington: Investor Responsibility Center, 1983), 110.

<sup>100</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 72.

<sup>101</sup> James Rawlings quoted in Stratford Sherman, “Scoring Corporate Conduct in South Africa,” *Fortune*, Jul. 9, 1984, 168. Scholars like James B. Stewart agreed, see: Stewart, “Amandla!,” 74.

<sup>102</sup> Sherman, “Scoring Corporate Conduct in South Africa,” 168.

grade (and the anti-apartheid activist attention that came with it) did not pay the evaluation fee and withdrew as signatories.<sup>103</sup>

Despite frustrations with the red tape and accusations that Sullivan was moving the goalposts, those who remained were committed to their corporate social responsibility programs in South Africa. As William Broderick of Ford Motor Company told the *New York Times* in 1983, “they’re the ones who haven’t cut the mustard anyway,” before concluding, “to have companies that signed and didn’t do anything did more harm than good.”<sup>104</sup> By the publication of the Seventh Report, all remaining signatories had successfully implemented the first three principles—desegregation of work facilities, equal employment practices, and equal pay.<sup>105</sup> These companies also tended to be more supportive of the amplifications and the inclusion of “more radical projects,” including lobbying the apartheid government against legislation to restrict Black movement in urban areas and to legalise Black unions.<sup>106</sup> As Ford Motor Company’s Robert Corp explained, they remained committed to the Principles because it justified their presence in South Africa and there was “no other credible person or movement around which the companies can rally.”<sup>107</sup>

Having a person to rally behind became increasingly important from the early 1980s as anti-apartheid activists targeted corporations through shareholder activism and large-scale divestment. In the United States, the Sullivan signatories were increasingly “deluged” with

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<sup>103</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Tamar Lewin, “Rev. Sullivan Steps Up His Anti-Apartheid Fight,” *NYT*, Nov. 6, 1983, 12.

<sup>104</sup> William Broderick quoted in Lewin, “Rev. Sullivan Steps Up His Anti-Apartheid Fight,” 12.

<sup>105</sup> All except Firestone which was still in the process of desegregating its facilities. Arthur D. Little, Inc., *Seventh Report of the Signatory Companies to the Sullivan Principles* (Philadelphia: International Council for Equality of Opportunity Principles, 1983).

<sup>106</sup> Sullivan Principles Industry Support Unit, “US Companies Guidelines for Action on Behalf of Social Change in South Africa, Jun. 25, 1984,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Corp quoted in Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 525.

requests to rationalise their continued presence in the apartheid state or risk disinvestment.<sup>108</sup> These appeals were usually from universities, pension funds, and other large institutions which were facing their own pressures from anti-apartheid activists to divest their holdings from companies with ties to the apartheid state.<sup>109</sup> State governments and city councils were particularly effective targets for anti-apartheid activists, as they controlled large pension funds, university endowments, and were also a sizeable market for goods and services. In 1980, for example, the state government of Connecticut passed a divestment bill, which mandated the withdrawal of state funds from corporations which had not adopted the Sullivan Principles. Massachusetts joined in 1983, when it passed legislation to divest all holdings in companies doing business in South Africa.<sup>110</sup> Without Sullivan and the Principles corporations were an easy target for anti-apartheid activists.

More than simply a program for incremental workplace reform, the Sullivan Principles were an example of Black activism in the international arena that influenced the language and approach of government and corporate international relations. Sullivan received the support of large multinational corporations (and therefore some influence over their approach to apartheid South Africa), the U.S. government, as well as church groups, philanthropic organisations, universities, and labour unions. As Matthew Countryman later argued, “Rather than an ideological contradiction,” Sullivan’s focus on economic and moral development as the key to Black South African progress “reflected the worldview of many in [the] Black community.”<sup>111</sup> Sullivan’s work was situated within the traditions of Afrocentric conservatism in a way that

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<sup>108</sup> Mark Huber, “For U.S. Firms in South Africa, The Threat of Coercive Sullivan Principles,” *Heritage Foundation*, Sept. 12, 1984. <https://www.heritage.org/international-economies/report/us-firms-south-africa-the-threat-coercive-sullivan-principles-0>.

<sup>109</sup> For more information regarding this anti-apartheid activist strategy see: Janice Love, *The U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement: Local Activism in Global Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1985).

<sup>110</sup> Sandy Boyer, “Divesting From Apartheid: A Summary of State and Municipal Legislative Action on South Africa, *Report by American Committee on Africa*, 1983,” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10176](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10176).

<sup>111</sup> Countryman, *Up South*, 110.

saw the private commercial sector (which in the context of the 1980s meant corporate integration and the free market) as the key to racial progress and advancement – both for African Americans in the United States and Black people in South Africa.

### **Counterfeit Heroes? Black Conservative Intellectuals**

Sullivan's approach to South Africa can be understood as an expression of conservative Black internationalism. It is arguably because of his conservatism that he remains overlooked or criticised in literature on African American anti-apartheid activism. Yet his ties to African American communities also makes him an outlier in current understandings of Black conservatism. Sullivan's rise in the corporate world preceded, and in many ways foreshadowed, the Black conservative phenomenon that seemed to 'appear' in 1980. Because of the typologies that have defined 'Black conservative vs. conservative Black,' the work of Sullivan has yet to be analysed alongside that of Black conservatives. The fact is that Black conservative engagement with the problem of South Africa has largely remained absent from scholarship. Leading intellectuals of the contemporary Black conservative movement, Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams, in particular, also outlined their understanding of, and approach to, apartheid South Africa. While they did not share a common agenda or approach with Sullivan, they did share a particular philosophical outlook that emphasised anti-revolutionary reform, pragmatic approaches to development, and the importance of personal responsibility.

These 'new' Black conservatives came to media attention after a conference in San Francisco in December 1980. The Black Alternatives Conference, as it became known, brought together a collection of right-of-centre Black thinkers to challenge progressive Black

“orthodoxy” and develop new approaches for African American advancement.<sup>112</sup> As the primary organiser, Sowell made it clear that the delegates were there to deal with the failures of the civil rights approach that, in his view, had defined Black politics since the late 1960s. According to Sowell, African Americans could not continue to “simply run around claiming that the sky is falling—as popular as that sometimes seems.”<sup>113</sup> Instead, he called on the participants to “accept the responsibility of seeking and devising new approaches for the decade ahead.”<sup>114</sup> This “watershed event” is widely considered by scholars to be the genesis of modern Black conservatism.<sup>115</sup> Those who agreed with the rightward shift in American politics and culture were able to “come out of the closet” and demonstrate their commitment to the pillars of conservatism, individualism, limited government, and the free market.<sup>116</sup>

The conservative tone of the conference was unmistakable. Not only was the conference funded by the right-wing Institute for Contemporary Studies, the attendees had also been carefully chosen for their conservative or “alternative thinking.”<sup>117</sup> It was also evident from the participation of Edwin Meese, Legal Counsel to incoming President Reagan, that the approaches discussed during the conference might inform the incoming Reagan administration’s activities in relation to civil rights and shape its engagement with African American communities more broadly. Meese told the audience that he was there to find a “new conservative leadership” to join the Administration.<sup>118</sup> Unsurprisingly, many of the African American delegates saw their careers take off in the years following the conference. Several,

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Sowell, “Politics and Opportunity: The Background,” in *The Fairmont Papers: Black Alternatives Conference, San Francisco, December 1980* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), 4.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>115</sup> See for example: Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America*, 3; Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*, xviii; Tate and Randolph, *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States*, 1; Fields, *Black Elephants in the Room*, 50.

<sup>116</sup> Walter E. Williams quoted in Arch Parsons, “Black Conservatives Grow More Visible, But No More Organized,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Jul. 11, 1991, 1A.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Sowell, “Politics and Opportunity,” 3.

<sup>118</sup> Edwin Meese, “A Significant Beginning,” in *The Fairmont Papers: Black Alternatives Conference, San Francisco, December 1980* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), 157.

like Clarence Thomas, Clarence Pendleton, and Samuel Pierce, were appointed to senior government positions, as head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, chairman of the Civil Rights Commission, and Secretary of Housing and Development respectively.

While many of this “new cadre” of Black conservatives focused exclusively on domestic politics, several were active in debates on the problem of apartheid and US relations toward South Africa. Two of the most prolific were economists Sowell and Williams. Speaking at the Fairmont Conference, Williams gave perhaps the most sustained censure of government intervention, arguing that taxi tokens, trucking licences, and the minimum wage were all examples of policies that had historically excluded African Americans.<sup>119</sup> Further, Williams used this opportunity to compare the history of the minimum wage in the United States and South Africa. Williams argued it was white racist unions that had been the major drivers of minimum wage laws in both nations—clear evidence that the intent of such policies was to prevent Black people from competing fairly.<sup>120</sup> Presenting the audience with examples of Black men who had lost their source of income because of these government policies and controls, Williams decried, “these Black men did not need special programs...they needed government to get off their backs.”<sup>121</sup>

Williams’ academic research became focused specifically on the economic impacts of the minimum wage on minority employment. This research led him to conclude that government intervention was harmful to those it was intended to help. His work on the economic impact of government policies on African Americans was published in his first book in 1982, *The State Against Blacks*.<sup>122</sup> His interest in, and experience of, apartheid South Africa

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<sup>119</sup> Walter E. Williams, “Legal Barriers to Black Economic Gains,” in *The Fairmont Papers: Black Alternatives Conference, San Francisco, December 1980* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), 30.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>122</sup> Walter E. Williams, *The State Against Blacks* (New York: New Press, 1982).



inspired his 1989 book *South Africa's War Against Capitalism*.<sup>123</sup> In it he rejected the argument that apartheid was a product of South African capitalism, in which mining and industrial entrepreneurs exploited Black workers through government controls. Instead, Williams argued that apartheid was a form of affirmative action against Blacks, and a socialist welfare protection racket for whites. Williams' interest in and knowledge of the apartheid system came from his frequent travels to South Africa.

### **A Black Conservative Approach to South Africa**

Williams travelled to South Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s on lecture tours. In 1979 Williams spent three months living and working in the apartheid state. Williams was there as a visiting academic for the Free Market Foundation, a libertarian anti-apartheid think tank based in Johannesburg. Early in his academic career Williams had not established himself as a leading Black conservative intellectual. However, his work on the minimum wage and evolving ties to conservative think tanks in the United States played a role in his introduction to Leon Louw, director of the Free Market Foundation.<sup>124</sup> Williams and Louw shared a libertarian philosophy and agreed that apartheid should be understood as “creeping communism.”<sup>125</sup>

Williams' lecture tours in South Africa included diverse audiences of Afrikaners, British, Black, Colored, and Indian peoples. In these lectures Williams pointed to the minimum wage laws as evidence that apartheid was a socialist system designed to prevent free market

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<sup>123</sup> Walter E. Williams, *South Africa's War Against Capitalism* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

<sup>124</sup> Louw would later be nominated for a Nobel Prize with his wife for their work on South African race relations. See: Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa: The Solution* (Bisho, South Africa: Amagi Publications, 1986).

<sup>125</sup> Leon Louw, “Interview with Anthony Wile, Nov. 20, 2011,” *The Daily Bell*, <https://www.thedailybell.com/all-articles/exclusive-interviews/anthony-wile-leon-louw-on-sinking-south-africa-and-how-free-market-thinking-can-help-recover-prosperity/>.

economics. As he argued, “socialism, not capitalism, has been the major socio-economic barrier for Blacks, serving as a tool to benefit white South Africans at the expense of their Black countrymen.”<sup>126</sup> Recalling one exchange he had with a student at the University of Transkei, Williams asked a student who claimed to be against capitalism,

Do you think you have the right to live wherever you please? Yes, he said. And be able to work for whoever is willing to hire you? Do you think you ought to be served in restaurants and hotels? He again said yes. I explained to the class that laissez faire capitalism, or what some people call free markets, is consistent with the choice preferences demonstrated by the student’s answers to my questions.... What Blacks needed, I said, was a free-market economic system: the right to work for whomever they please; the right to buy and sell whatever they want from and to anyone they chose.<sup>127</sup>

He highlighted the “true irony” of the arguments made by anti-apartheid groups, including the African National Congress, that criticised apartheid as an expression of capitalist greed and who advocated for an interventionist government.<sup>128</sup> Williams’ positions were controversial with many Black audiences, and also white ones. As Williams revealed, “I often met a hostile reception.”<sup>129</sup>

These hostile receptions did not prevent Williams traveling to South Africa on multiple occasions. Unlike many African American liberal and radical activists who were denied visas to travel to the country, Williams was given ‘honorary white’ status that allowed him to live and work in ‘white-only’ areas. This system, evident from the treatment of the McAdoo performing troupe at the turn of the century, granted rights and privileges to non-whites in South Africa. While some could not overcome feeling the “harsh irony” of visiting South Africa only to “be isolated from the cruelties to which other Black men were continually subjected,” Williams was not among them.<sup>130</sup> Instead, for Williams, this process highlighted

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<sup>126</sup> Walter E. Williams, *Up From the Projects: An Autobiography* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 2012), 122.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>130</sup> E.R. Braithwaite, *‘Honorary White’: A Visit to South Africa* (London: Bodley Head, 1975), 14.

the absurdity of such a race-based system. In his autobiography, *Up From the Projects*, he later wrote that, “we had no problems with apartheid, because...the necessary paperwork was done to make us ‘honorary white people.... just about every day, we were wined, dined, and entertained.’”<sup>131</sup> This convoluted bureaucracy reminded Williams of his past experience in the army. Labelled a trouble-maker while in the army because of his “provocative” reaction to segregation, Williams was transferred to Korea in 1963.<sup>132</sup> On arrival he was asked to complete his paperwork in order to be assigned a job. Recognising the racial bias of the form, Williams marked that he was “Caucasian.”<sup>133</sup>

The South African government allowed William to work from an office at Rands-Afrikaans University after granting him ‘honorary white’ status. It was here that he “gained an understanding of,” but “not necessarily sympathy for,” the Afrikaner perspective on Black South Africans.<sup>134</sup> Williams was particularly concerned that Black South Africans were not equipped for leadership. As he explained in one lecture, “very few South Africans were for true liberty. Blacks...as demonstrated elsewhere in post-colonial Africa, simply wanted to change the color of the dictator.”<sup>135</sup> Williams’ criticism of Black South Africans in this regard continued throughout the 1980s and indeed for the rest of his life. For him, the most important consideration was not the end of apartheid, but rather what system of government that replaced it. Pointing to the violent and corrupt dictatorships that replaced European colonialism in other African nations, such as the genocidal regimes in Uganda, Rwanda, and Nigeria, Williams frequently asked provocatively, “were Blacks better off under apartheid?”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 122.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 54; this was just one incident, more of Williams challenges to US racism are shown in the documentary “Walter Williams: Suffer No Fools,” dir. Tony Machi, 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 124.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>136</sup> See for example: Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 126; Williams, *South Africa’s War Against Capitalism*; Walter E. Williams, “W.H. Hutt and *The Economics of the Colour Bar*,” *Journal of Labor Research* 18, no. 2

Williams' stance on apartheid South Africa was just one example of his controversial views. During the 1980s, he regularly courted controversy for his divisive positions and public pronouncements. As historian Michael Ondaatje has argued, "the notoriously prickly" Williams "looked to portray himself as a harsh truth teller."<sup>137</sup> His career as a public intellectual began in 1980. In that year he was appointed as the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University and began a syndicated column called "A Minority View" for Heritage Features Syndicate. As a libertarian economist and graduate of the University of California, Williams was influenced by the Los Angeles School of economics whose economists focused on the "opportunity-cost" vector in price theory.<sup>138</sup> One of the key thinkers that inspired Williams was Armen Alchian, a product of the Chicago School, a leading expert on property rights and the hidden costs of regulation.<sup>139</sup>

For Williams this approach provided a model to examine the different experiences of bigotry in different settings, and the importance of effects over intentions.<sup>140</sup> As one former student explained, Williams taught that "discrimination is merely a synonym for 'choice'."<sup>141</sup> Key to Williams was the idea of self-ownership and private property rights. One of the earliest proponents of this classic liberal philosophy was John Locke, who argued that "self-ownership" was the natural right of a person.<sup>142</sup> Unsurprisingly, the concept of self-ownership also has a

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(1997): 191- 203; Walter E. Williams, "South Africa After Apartheid," *Townhall*, Jan. 9, 2002.

<https://townhall.com/columnists/walterewilliams/2002/01/09/south-africa-after-apartheid-n901392>; Walter E. Williams, "South Africa Question," *CNS News*, Sept. 5, 2018. <https://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/walter-e-williams/walter-williams-south-africa-question>.

<sup>137</sup> Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America*, 37.

<sup>138</sup> This approach analyses the role of relative price in decision making and the structures in which these exchanges take place. See: Jerry L. Jordan and William T. Gavin, "Armen Alchian's Contribution to Macroeconomics," *Economic Inquiry* 34, no. 3 (1996): 496-505.

<sup>139</sup> Walter E. Williams, "Peddling Victimhood: Who Cares About You?" *Capitalism Magazine*, Oct. 2, 2019. <https://www.capitalismmagazine.com/2019/10/peddling-victimhood/>.

<sup>140</sup> Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 83.

<sup>141</sup> Caleb Fuller, "The 'E' Stands for 'Excellence': Remembering Walter E. Williams," *Daily Surge*, Dec. 11, 2020. <https://dailysurge.com/2020/12/the-e-stands-for-excellence-remembering-walter-e-williams/>.

<sup>142</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government* (1609, reiss., New York: Yale University Press, 2003).

long history in Black America and was one of the central arguments of the abolitionist cause.<sup>143</sup>

As the foremost Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass proclaimed to a white crowd in April 1865,

The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us. I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall!...If the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone!...—your interference is doing him a positive injury.<sup>144</sup>

In many ways, it can be argued, Douglass' criticism of benevolent intervention resembled the arguments of modern Black conservatives against paternalistic government policies. For Douglass it was essential that former slaves be given true freedom and treated equally under the law.

Indeed, Williams referred to Douglass' philosophy in his book *Race and Economics: How Much Can Be Blamed on Discrimination?*<sup>145</sup> According to Williams, self-ownership and property rights were “the essence of human flourishing” and were used as a “sort of yardstick” to evaluate the “morality of any action.”<sup>146</sup> In his view, policies and actions could only be considered moral if they preserve self-ownership and individual liberty. As Williams argued,

My initial assumption is that we each own ourselves. I am my private property and you are yours. If we accept the notion that people own themselves, then it's easy to discover what forms of conduct are moral and immoral. Immoral acts are those that violate self-ownership. Murder, rape, assault, and slavery are immoral because those acts

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<sup>143</sup> For a more detailed history of Self-help in African American philosophy see: Gayle McKeen, “Whose Rights? Whose Responsibility? Self-Help in African American Thought,” *Polity* 34, no. 4 (2002): 409-432.

<sup>144</sup> Frederick Douglass, “What the Black Man Wants: A Speech before the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, April 1865,” accessed 14/07/2021. <https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/1865-frederick-douglass-what-Black-man-wants/>.

<sup>145</sup> Walter E. Williams, *Race and Economics: How Much Can Be Blamed on Discrimination?* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2011), 3-4, 18, 25, 26.

<sup>146</sup> Abigail R. Hall, “Walter E. Williams: Scholar, Teacher, and Public Intellectual,” *Independent Review*, Jul. 1, 2021, 127.

violate private property. So is theft, broadly defined as taking the rightful property of one person and giving it to another.<sup>147</sup>

Williams' understanding of self-ownership was also inspired by the work of Ayn Rand. In fact, Williams credited Rand's work in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* and *The Virtue of Selfishness*, with developing his understanding of self-ownership and the morality of the markets.<sup>148</sup> As Rand argued, this "...means, in practice, a man is to be judged, not by his own character and actions, but by the characters and actions of a collective of ancestors."<sup>149</sup>

Williams' perspective on South Africa was consistent with his libertarian philosophy. Indeed, the centrality of the individual in Williams' thinking led him to view racial solidarity as a form of collectivism. This was why Williams viewed the apartheid system as a form of 'creeping communism.' However, his criticism of racial collectivism in South Africa also extended into the anti-apartheid movement and the goal of replacing a white regime with Black rule. The greatest tragedy for Williams would be to simply replace white socialism for Black socialism. Instead, he advocated for "true liberty" where individual rights were protected, and the free market could operate unimpeded. At heart Williams was an iconoclast and contrarian, willing to accept 'honorary white' status in order to highlight the absurdity of government policy on racial identity and the notion of racial identity itself. While Sowell agreed in many ways with Williams' argument, he presented a slightly different perspective on the situation in South Africa. For Sowell, the apartheid system was an example of the perversity of affirmative action policies and a society only partially 'assimilated' into western 'civilisation'.

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<sup>147</sup> Walter E. Williams, "Moral or Immoral Government," *Jewish World Review*, Dec. 8, 2010. <https://jewishworldreview.com/cols/williamns120810.php3#.YDV7KS2z23U>.

<sup>148</sup> Walter E. Williams, "Interview with Sara Pentz," *Atlas Society*, Mar. 1, 2006. <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/tnis-interview-with-walter-williams>. Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 1967); Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet, 1964).

<sup>149</sup> Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 126.

## Thomas Sowell and *Race and Economics*

By the time Sowell stood at the podium at the Fairmont Hotel for the Black Alternatives' Conference in 1980, he had already proven himself to be an articulate and passionate conservative.<sup>150</sup> His status as a public intellectual was established in 1975 with the publication of *Race and Economics*, a comparative study of the economic development of ethnic groups in the United States.<sup>151</sup> Using empirical analysis, Sowell argued that those ethnic minorities that had slowly built the economic capacities of their communities through entrepreneurialism were much better placed than African Americans who had focused excessively, in his view, on political activism and supporting flawed liberal social policies.<sup>152</sup> For Sowell, the deteriorating condition of the Black poor in the United States was evidence that government-controlled initiatives – epitomised by programs associated with Great Society—were huge barriers to African American advancement. He suggested, “If the history of American ethnic groups shows anything, it is how large a role has been played by attitudes—and particularly attitudes of self-reliance.”<sup>153</sup>

As a protégé of the Nobel Prize winning economists Milton Friedman and Gary Becker, Sowell's work embodied the style and approach of the Chicago School of Economics, with its focus on neoclassical economic principles and rejection of Keynesian economic models.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Between 1971 and 1975 he had published four treatises on economics: Thomas Sowell, *Economics: Analysis and Issues* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman & Co., 1971); Thomas Sowell, *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (New York: David McKay Co., 1972); Thomas Sowell, *Say's Law: A Historical Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Thomas Sowell, *Classical Economics Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Race and Economics* (New York: David McKay Co., 1975).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>154</sup> Milton Friedman would be awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 1976 for his work on the failures of Keynesian monetary policy (government spending control the economy) during the Great Depression. Arguably the most important school of economic thought, the Chicago School was known for its advocacy of a market-led economy and limited government intervention. For more information see: Niklas Olsen, “From Choice to Welfare: The Concept of the Consumer in the Chicago School of Economics,” *Modern Intellectual History* 14, no. 2 (2017), 507; Jason Riley, *Maverick: A Biography of Thomas Sowell* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), chapter one.

Indeed, the ideological underpinnings of Sowell's treatise were so similar to Friedman's that one reviewer labelled him "more Friedmanite than Milton Friedman himself."<sup>155</sup> The deep libertarian scepticism toward government in *Race and Economics*, for example, resembled Friedman's arguments in his 1962 bestselling *Capitalism and Freedom*. Even greater than the influence of Friedman, however, was the influence of Gary Becker. As Sowell explained, he was "especially indebted" to Becker and his model of discrimination.<sup>156</sup> Becker's "pioneering" 1957 study of racism in the labour market expanded the field of economics to include analysis of sociological factors including racial discrimination.<sup>157</sup> Becker showed the ways in which the labour market had developed a "taste for discrimination" against African Americans, whether because of declining productivity, loss of customers, or another reason.<sup>158</sup> Sowell agreed with Becker's assumptions, approach, and findings, and utilised this model of discrimination in his own work.

By the early 1980s, Sowell had expanded his analysis of the intersection of race and economics beyond American borders. These initial thoughts were published in 1983 in *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective*.<sup>159</sup> This study applied the same model of discrimination to a number of international case studies, including apartheid South Africa. In considering the role of race in the economic development of South Africa, Sowell argued that Black South Africans faced many economic barriers and had been prevented from

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<sup>155</sup> William K. Tabb, "Review: Economics of Racism, USA: Roots of Black Inequality and Race and Economics," *Challenge* 19, no. 1 (1976), 94.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Sowell, "Gary Becker: Economist Explored Discrimination," *Creators Syndicate*, May 6, 2014. <https://www.creators.com/read/thomas-sowell/05/14/gary-becker-1930-2014>. Becker's influence would be even more pronounced in Sowell's later works on race and culture. See for example, Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Thomas Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures: An International History* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Thomas Sowell, *Migrations and Cultures: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Thomas Sowell, *Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>157</sup> See for example: Gary Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957); and Gary Becker, *Human Capital* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).

<sup>158</sup> Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination*, 14.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983).



competing in a free market since colonial times. As Sowell explained, “Apartheid is a policy not simply of separation but of subordination, and even systemic humiliation, of non-whites.”<sup>160</sup> Utilising Becker’s model, Sowell argued that South Africans had to “compensate” for this discrimination through higher productivity and a willingness to accept lower wages in the first instance. As their productivity rose, according to Sowell, eventually Black workers’ worth to employers would also increase and result in an additional “cost” for those who practiced anti-Black discrimination in hiring.<sup>161</sup>

While Sowell agreed that “white supremacy was the cornerstone” of South Africa, he did not consider apartheid as a particularly special case of oppression.<sup>162</sup> “History,” he wrote, “was a bottomless pit of wrongs.”<sup>163</sup> The implication here was that Sowell’s wide-ranging historical perspective allowed him to ‘see’ that “being appalled by the policies of South Africa does not imply a belief that the whole problem is in the minds of racists.”<sup>164</sup> For Sowell, Black South Africans were “only partially acculturated to European values, language and behavior,” and needed to develop a better appreciation for western civilisation and its values.<sup>165</sup> Examining the Black community in a similar way to distinguished sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, Sowell argued that many of the ills within the Black community, both in the US and South Africa, were due to the social pathologies of the Black family.<sup>166</sup> While these were controversial positions to hold, they were in line with the Black economist’s conservative worldview and shared by other Black conservatives.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 252.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, chapter 4. See also: E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1939); E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoise* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

Sowell and Williams also joined consistently these other Black conservatives in criticising liberal African American ‘elites’ for their narrow focus on the ills of apartheid while ignoring the atrocities of Black regimes in Africa. A similar critique has been made by Black African scholars such as George B.N. Ayittey, who argued that while African American leaders had “Eagle-eyed clarity” on the “brutal injustices heaped upon Blacks by white colonialists” they were “hopelessly blind to the equally heinous injustices meted out by African leaders upon their own Black people.”<sup>167</sup> As Ayittey insisted, while African Americans were tireless in their anti-apartheid campaigns for democracy in South Africa, they continued to “coddle and consort” with Black African tyrants who ruled “de facto apartheid regimes” favouring their own ethnic groups.<sup>168</sup> For Black conservatives like Sowell and Williams, the US anti-apartheid movement presented them with another opportunity to criticise and undermine the traditional civil rights leadership in the United States.

### **A Black Conservative Intellectual Tradition?**

Both Sowell and Williams found themselves at the forefront of the Black conservative “vanguard” that achieved success during the Reagan revolution.<sup>169</sup> These intellectuals and professionals were aligned with, and supported by, mainstream conservative organisations like the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institution.<sup>170</sup> This relationship was one of the characteristics that separated the small number of ‘Black conservatives’ from the wider group of ‘conservative Blacks.’ Black conservative Shelby

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<sup>167</sup> George B.N. Ayittey, “The United States of Africa: A Revisit,” *Annals of the American Academy* 632, no. 1 (2010), 93. For more information on Ayittey’s argument see: George B.N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), chapter 11.

<sup>168</sup> Ayittey, “The United States of Africa,” 92.

<sup>169</sup> William Greider and Harold J. Ligan, “A New Black Vanguard,” *Washington Post*, Jul. 25, 1978.

<sup>170</sup> Hanes Walton, Jr., “Remaking African American Public Opinion: The Role and Function of the African American Conservatives,” in *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America*, ed. Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 149-150.

Steele attempted to explain the difference in his book *A Dream Deferred*. According to Steele, a conservative Black was considered conservative “under his American identity,” but liberal “under his racial” one.<sup>171</sup> Black conservatives, in contrast, were “liberal by their American identity” and “conservative in terms of their group identity.”<sup>172</sup> This distinction arguably harkens back to W.E.B. DuBois’ understanding of double-consciousness, or the idea of African American identity as defined by “twoness.”<sup>173</sup> Ultimately this distinction has served as a measurement of authenticity and “Blackness,” with Black conservatives lacking credibility and authenticity in the eyes of their liberal and radical critics.

Yet, both Sowell’s and Williams’ backgrounds were hard to discuss as being inauthentically Black. Both grew up poor in ghetto communities: Sowell in Harlem and Williams in the same North Philadelphia neighbourhood in which Leon Sullivan worked. Both worked in non-skilled jobs before serving in the military and going on to university during the civil rights era. Sowell graduated magna cum laude at Harvard University in 1958, received his master’s from Columbia University in 1959, and his doctorate in economics from the University of Chicago in 1968. Williams graduated from California State College at Los Angeles in 1965 and earned his master’s and PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1966 and 1972 respectively. During this time, Sowell was a Marxist and Williams a “radical” sympathetic to Malcolm X. In fact, Williams recalled that he looked like “a Black Panther,” because of his propensity to wear “dashikis, a beret, and a tiger’s tooth necklace.”<sup>174</sup> Both were conservatives by the time they began their academic careers in the 1970s.

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<sup>171</sup> Shelby Steele, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 8.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Du Bois famously wrote: “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” See: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClurg and Co., 1903), 3.

<sup>174</sup> Williams, *Up From the Projects*, 78.

Even with their shift to the right, both men continued to acknowledge the influence of African Americans on their thinking. Indeed, Williams considered Sowell as one of his biggest intellectual influences, but also valued the insights of Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X, who eschewed government intervention.<sup>175</sup> Sowell credited his intellectual development to his mentors as an undergraduate at Howard University, the famous historically all-Black college. In particular, Sowell cited the influence of English Professor Sterling Brown for the development of both his “plain” and incisive writing style, and his understanding of “the pitfalls of a victim mentality.”<sup>176</sup> As Sowell later recalled, Brown had given “the best advice” to him as a young academic when he said: “Don’t come back here and tell me you didn’t make it ‘cause white folks are mean.”<sup>177</sup>

More than anyone, however, Sowell considered Dr. Marie D. Gadsden as his “most important confidante” in both his personal and professional life.<sup>178</sup> Sowell regularly corresponded with “Mrs G,” even as she traversed the globe as the vice president of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and later as the first Black woman to chair Oxfam.<sup>179</sup> In her work for the Phelps-Stokes Fund, she sought to strengthen the educational links between Black Africa and African Americans—in South Africa there was a long history of encouraging industrial education associated with Booker T. Washington.<sup>180</sup> As Sowell rose to prominence as a Black conservative intellectual in the United States, his mentor was coordinating programs to educate Black refugees from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and other African nations. Her belief that the

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 92-93; Walter E. Williams, “The Worst Enemy of Black People,” *Creators Syndicate*, Jan. 2, 2019. <https://www.creators.com/read/walter-williams/12/18/the-worst-enemy-of-black-people>.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Sowell, *A Personal Odyssey* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 117.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Sowell, “The Death of Mrs. G,” *Creators Syndicate*, Mar. 29, 2012. <https://www.creators.com/read/thomas-sowell/03/12/the-death-of-mrs-g>.

<sup>179</sup> Not known for his affirmations, Sowell would break that pattern when reflecting on his relationship with Gadsden. In one article for example Sowell would call her “a gem of a human being.” See: Thomas Sowell, “A Personal Odyssey from Howard to Harvard and Beyond,” *Journal of Blacks in Education* 30 (2000), 123.

<sup>180</sup> For more information see: Julia Bates, “U.S. Empire and the ‘Adaptive Education’ Model: The Global Production of Race,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2019): 41-54; Eric S. Yellin, “The (White) Search for (Black) Order: The Phelps-Stokes Fund’s First Twenty Years, 1911-1931,” *The Historian* 65, no. 2 (2002): 319-352.

problem of newly-independent nations in Africa was the lack of “middle-level manpower...ready to assume the duties attendant to independence,” is reflected in Sowell’s concerns for Black leadership in South Africa.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, this was a primary concern shared by all three Black conservatives covered in this chapter. These men argued that the end of apartheid was only the beginning; more important was the system that replaced it and ensuring that Black South Africans had the necessary cultural and vocational training to create and seize the opportunities in front of them.

The positions of these Black conservatives on the problem of South Africa reflected more than just the influence of their intellectual mentors, however. Their conservative worldview can be traced to a long intellectual tradition in African American history. As this chapter has shown, this can be seen in Frederick Douglass’ articulation of self-ownership, the developmentalism of the Baptist Church, and Booker T. Washington’s self-help approach to Black economic development. Importantly, many of these ideas and traditions also informed African American engagement with South Africa in the 1980s and before. The idea that the African American experience was closely connected to the Black experience in South Africa was not just the purview of the left. As Booker T. Washington told the South African Commissioner of Education in 1909, there “was no very great difference between the native problem there and the negro problem in America.”<sup>182</sup>

Washington influenced debates on education and developed ties to both white colonialists and Black nationalists in South Africa at the turn of the century.<sup>183</sup> He offered industrial education to Black South Africans as a tool of self-help and economic independence

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<sup>181</sup> Marie Gadsden quoted in Adam Bernstein, “First Black Woman to Chair Oxfam America Board,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 29, 2012, B7.

<sup>182</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Letter to E.B. Sargent, Jun. 30, 1909,” in *Booker T. Washington Papers, vol. 10*, ed. Louis Harlan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 398.

<sup>183</sup> For more information see: James Campbell, “Models and Metaphors: Industrial Education in the United States and South Africa,” in *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa*, ed. Ran Greenstein (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 90-134.

and to white colonialists as a method to ‘civilise’ the ‘native’ population and teach them the “correct attitude to work.”<sup>184</sup> Reflecting on his activities, Washington wrote,

When I had been a student...it was one of my ambitions, as it has been the ambition of a great many other Negro students before and since, to go out someday to Africa as a missionary. I believed that I had got hold at Hampton of a kind of knowledge that would be peculiarly helpful to the Native Africans and I felt that my interest in the people out there, vague and indefinite as it was, would in some way or other help and inspire me in the task of lifting them to a higher plane of civilization.<sup>185</sup>

Washington’s emphasis on education, self-help, and even the importance of ‘civilising’ Black South Africans can also be seen in the perspectives of Sullivan, Sowell, and Williams. The idea that African Americans had a special duty to help in the development of Africa is an important part of African American history and one that cuts across the political spectrum.

Throughout the twentieth century, African American conservatives continued to engage with South Africa through missionary work. As historian Paul Harris explained, “Like Booker T. Washington, promoters of African American participation in African missions hoped to advance racial reconciliation in the South by demonstrating blacks’ capacity for self-help and usefulness in work of mutual interest.”<sup>186</sup> This can be seen in the missionary work, for example, of the Galangue Industrial mission in Angola (1919-1950), in South Africa at the Middledrift Mission of the National Baptist Church (1901-1920), and later the work of Max Yergan in Fort Hare (1920-1936) on behalf of the YMCA.<sup>187</sup> These missionaries expressed scepticism and opposed Black South African involvement in radical Black nationalist movements like

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<sup>184</sup> Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 24; Andrew Paterson, “‘The Gospel of Work Does Not Save Souls’: Conceptions of Industrial and Agricultural Education for Africans in the Cape Colony, 1890-1930,” *History of Education Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2005), 392.

<sup>185</sup> Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of Race from Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1909), 36.

<sup>186</sup> Paul W. Harris, “Racial Identity and the Civilizing Mission: Double-Consciousness at the 1895 Congress on Africa,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 18, no. 2 (2008), 149.

<sup>187</sup> For more information see: Sylvia Jacobs, *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982); Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming!: Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2012); Kate Burlingham, “Into the Thick of the Fray: Black Missionaries, American Adaptive Education, and the Foundations of United States Foreign Relations with Angola,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 28, no. 3-4 (2015): 261-287.

Ethiopianism and Garveyism. Instead, they established industrial missions that focused on practical education, religious service, moral enrichment, and economic development. In many ways the missionary work of these organisations was closely tied to the domestic expressions of developmentalism and the idea of redemption through racial uplift evident in the United States. As two of the largest organisations in African American communities, the missionary work of the conservative-inclined National Baptist Church and YMCA was more representative of Black thought and praxis than scholars have previously assumed.

These conservative principles can also be seen in the work of Madie Hall-Xuma, a highly-educated African American woman who relocated to South Africa to marry African National Congress (ANC) president Alfred Xuma in 1940. As historian Iris Berger argued, Hall-Xuma “promoted a powerful combination of Victorian womanhood, Christian devotion and ‘American Negro’ modernity” in South Africa.<sup>188</sup> While in South Africa, Hall-Xuma led the Women’s League of the ANC and launched the Zenzele Clubs (meaning “do it yourself”), a network of women’s organisations associated with the international YWCA. Importantly, Hall-Xuma found herself to be a bridge between African Americans and Black South Africans at a critical juncture in history.<sup>189</sup> As the civil rights movement in the United States gained ground in the 1950s, the South African government tightened apartheid restrictions on its Black population. The Group Areas Act was passed in South Africa and led to the forced removal of Black people, including Hall-Xuma, from city areas in the same years that saw *Brown vs. Board* and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. After 23 years of service in South Africa Hall-Xuma became known as ‘mother of the nation,’ linking African American conservatism with the conservative faction of the African National Congress—demonstrating that the connections between the

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<sup>188</sup> Iris Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation’: Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001), 549. Similar conservative Black internationalism can be seen in the National Council of Negro Women’s support of the African Children’s Feeding Scheme. See: Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together*, chapter 8.

<sup>189</sup> P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912-1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 340.

Black freedom movements in the US and South Africa included conservative expressions of pan-African identity and approaches to progress tied to the idea of racial developmentalism.<sup>190</sup>

Black conservatives continued to be engaged with the problem of apartheid South Africa into the 1960 and 1970s. Max Yergan, who spent ten years as a missionary in South Africa, returned to the United States and established the Council on African Affairs with Paul Robeson. This anti-colonial organisation with close ties with the Communist Party emerged as one of the most influential anti-apartheid bodies in the United States and included Ralph J. Bunche, W.E.B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, Mary McLeod Bethune, E. Franklin Frazier, and Alfred Xuma as members.<sup>191</sup> Like many African American organisations during the Cold War, the Council was closely monitored by the FBI and suspected to be a communist front. Indeed, Yergan publicly broke from the Council after other members refused to “disavow communist ties.”<sup>192</sup>

After breaking from the organisation he helped found, Yergan travelled across both South Africa and the United States extensively until his death in 1975. Having played a part in a communist incursion of the ANC and the CAA, he warned Black activists of the dangers of communism—including a young Nelson Mandela in the midst of a defiance campaign against pass books.<sup>193</sup> On one such trip in November 1964, for example, Yergan spent one month on a lecture tour of South Africa with the support of the South Africa Foundation, a corporate-funded think tank. During this tour he expressed support for the apartheid government’s attempts at “separate development” and the creation of ethnic homelands for Black South

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<sup>190</sup> Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation,’” 549.

<sup>191</sup> Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18-20.

<sup>192</sup> Max Yergan quoted in David Anthony III, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 233.

<sup>193</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 73.



Africans.<sup>194</sup> As Yergan told the press, this approach gave Black South Africans “more dignity and self-respect” and the opportunity to reach their “fullest ambitions.”<sup>195</sup> He returned to the US and joined with conservative journalist William A. Rusher to form the American African Affairs Association to educate Americans on developments in Africa, and to lead various fact-finding trips to South Africa and Rhodesia.<sup>196</sup> As his biographer David Anthony III wrote, Yergan emerged as a “‘point man’ for counterrevolution” in South Africa.<sup>197</sup> Like the Black conservatives of the 1980s, Yergan was considered a sellout and condemned by anti-apartheid activists in the US and South Africa.

These brief vignettes demonstrate that African Americans of a conservative orientation were also seriously engaged with South Africa and the problem of apartheid throughout the twentieth century. These examples not only challenge some of the traditional liberal assumptions within the literature on Black internationalism, but also provided ideological and philosophical context for the Black conservatives and their engagement with South Africa in the 1980s. As the chapter shows, these historical actors shared a belief in advancement through economic self-help and industrial education, racial uplift through respectability politics, an aversion to radicalism and communism, and a belief in American and African American exceptionalism. The consistent and continuous examples that can be drawn from history of Black conservative engagement with South Africa suggest the need for scholars to move beyond simplistic labelling of these individuals as outliers or “aberrations,” and instead recognise a Black conservative intellection tradition and the existence of a conservative Black

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<sup>194</sup> “US Negro Sociologist Praises South Africa’s Apartheid Policy; On Tour, He Says System Gives More Self-Respect and Dignity to Blacks,” *NYT*, Nov. 30, 1964, 6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Anthony Lake, *The Tar Baby Option: American Policy Toward Southern Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 72.

<sup>197</sup> Anthony, *Max Yergan*, 275.

internationalism. Indeed, acknowledging this history makes it difficult to dismiss Black conservatives and their ideas as irrelevant or inauthentic.

### **A Brief Note on Authenticity**

Throughout the 1980s Black conservatives like Sowell and Williams were seen as adversaries of liberal and radical African American activists and politicians, and in many respects they were. In contrast, conservative Blacks like Leon Sullivan were considered to be more respectable members of the Black community and assumed to be working towards the same goals, albeit with different strategies. Sullivan, then, unlike Sowell and Williams, had a certain ‘authenticity’ as a Black leader. Yet, when it came to the problem of South Africa, even Sullivan seemed to be too far at odds with the liberal Black leadership and was thus criticised as a sellout and puppet in much the same way as Sowell and Williams. The importance of authenticity and community ties for leadership should not be underestimated. The constraints on African American racial authenticity have been labelled *Blackthink* by legal scholar Kimberly Jade Norwood.<sup>198</sup> According to Norwood, *Blackthink*:

Presumes that all Blacks are unquestionably liberal, pro-affirmative action...pro-welfare, and most definitely anti-Republican. Some segments of our society...will devalue and marginalize those that fail to comply with *Blackthink*. These segments of society are the self-appointed guardians of Blackness, the ‘Soul Patrol’...Autonomy and difference are stifled; acquiescence is embraced and rewarded. The price for failing to succumb is high. The dissenter... is *de-Blacked* ... a cultural stamp or label that the target does not want to be Black and does not identify with Black people, causes, or culture.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Kimberly Jade Norwood, “The Virulence of *Blackthink* and How Its Threat of Ostracism Shackles Those Deemed Not Black Enough,” *Kentucky Law Journal* 93 (2005): 143-198.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 147-8.

Political scientists Ishmail K. White and Chryl N. Laird, likewise, pointed to the use of “racialized social constraint” and “social sanctioning” in African American communities.<sup>200</sup> This racial reasoning was also why many African American leaders continued to view freedom in Africa in racial terms and focus on apartheid South Africa.

Even Black radical democratic scholars like Cornel West have noted the “pitfalls of racial reasoning” evident in African American leadership.<sup>201</sup> According to West, racial reasoning results in a closing-ranks mentality that prevents African American leaders from challenging or denouncing any Black leader with a claim to “racial authenticity.”<sup>202</sup> Historians Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Leah Wright Rigueur have broadly agreed with this assessment, arguing that “much ink has been spilled over the leeriness within the Black community of...conservative ideology,” with “more than a few pundits and scholars” considering Black conservatives “not *really* Black at all.”<sup>203</sup> The heterodox thinking of Black conservatives has largely been seen to be undermining group interests, and therefore Black conservatives themselves have been assumed to be ‘traitors.’

The approaches to the problem of South Africa by these three men were different in many ways, however at heart they shared a common conservative outlook. This outlook emphasised the importance of moderate (anti-revolutionary and particularly anti-communist) reform, the power of the free market and capitalism to empower and improve the lives of Black South Africans, and concern for their moral and cultural development. These ideas were consistent with their personal conservative philosophies that were apparent in work that predated the Reagan administration and in areas beyond the problem of South Africa. Further, the

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<sup>200</sup> Ishmail K. White and Chryl N. Laird, *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 15.

<sup>201</sup> Cornel West, “Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning,” in *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 34-49.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>203</sup> Emphasis in original. Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Leah Wright Rigueur, “‘Breaking Bad’ in Black and White: What Ideological Deviance Can Tell Us About the Construction of ‘Authentic’ Racial Identities,” *Polity* 47, no. 2 (2015), 176.

values and strategies that informed Sowell's, Williams', and Sullivan's internationalism were evident in the engagement of other Black conservatives with Southern Africa throughout history. This longer intellectual tradition of Black conservative engagement with South Africa ultimately challenges the logic of *Blackthink* and the propensity to dismiss alternative perspectives as both aberrant and a sign of racial betrayal.

Far from being the sole purview of an intellectual elite, the Black conservative ideology advanced by Sullivan, Sowell, and Williams, among others, also had its disciples within the wider Black community, with business and church groups often chief among them. Indeed, the 1979 survey conducted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "believed to be the most thorough survey ever taken on American attitudes toward South Africa," found that as many as 21 percent of African Americans did not support disinvestment but rather supported trade with South Africa.<sup>204</sup> The survey further found that 19 percent did not want restrictions on U.S. investments there. Perhaps most surprisingly, and significantly, almost half (43 percent) of Black respondents did not want the U.S. to support Black South African organisations willing to use violence, including the ANC and Nelson Mandela.

These survey results align with the findings of Angela Dillard and other scholars, who have argued that a significant share of the Black community is conservative.<sup>205</sup> The views demonstrated in the survey, importantly, were in contrast to African American anti-apartheid activists in the United States who called for complete withdrawal from South Africa. Yet the strong progressive politics of traditional Black leaders, and of most scholars, has led to this grouping being dismissed or overlooked in academic studies. Despite the prevalence of the progressive anti-apartheid movement in the literature on African American engagement with

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<sup>204</sup> Milfred C. Fierce, "Black and White American Opinion Towards South Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 20, no. 4 (1982), 676-678.

<sup>205</sup> Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner Now?*; Katherine Tate, *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

South Africa, there were a significant minority of African Americans who were interested in the issue but whose values aligned more closely with the approach of the Reagan administration and its policy of Constructive Engagement. The policy's focus on anti-communism, economic engagement, and diplomatic encouragement of reform in many ways echoed that of Black conservatives.

Black conservatives argued that the most effective way to leverage US influence in the apartheid state was through the private sector. By deepening economic ties to South Africa, for example, Sullivan hoped to recreate American business practices and strengthen the foundation of Black capitalism. Sullivan, Sowell, and Williams all believed that market-based approaches not only reduced the suffering of Black South Africans, but also undermined the apartheid government's counterproductive regulation of the South African economy. These Black conservatives also agreed that the white population in South Africa could become leading reformers of the apartheid system. According to this view, the economic empowerment of Black South Africans would make continued control of the economy more expensive and lead to pressures from the business sector for reform.

Further, the prosperity and personal improvement that occurred for Black South Africans in the free market would deepen their distrust of communism and disillusionment with socialist policies. This, in turn, removed the spectre of communist revolution and white fears of Black rule. Implicit in the emphasis on white-led reform was a scepticism regarding the ability of Black South Africans to rule. This was particularly the case with Sowell and Williams, who argued that the Black population in South Africa was only partially acculturated to the institutions of western civilisation and lacked the necessary cultural development to run a modern nation. Ultimately, Black conservatives agreed that sustainable reforms would require the support of the apartheid government and the wider white population. Sowell, Williams, and Sullivan all considered the end of apartheid as just one step toward Black

freedom in South Africa. More important for these men was ensuring that Black South Africans were prepared and had the necessary skills to lead when freedom came. The ultimate tragedy in South Africa, according to this view, would be the replacement of white oppressors with Black oppressors.

This chapter has examined the thought and work of three key Black conservatives in relation to the problem of apartheid in the 1980s and demonstrated their alignment with the goals of Constructive Engagement. Importantly, they shared an anti-communist view that rejected revolutionary strategies, including political unrest and radical change, and instead favoured pragmatic and gradual approaches to reform through economic development. They considered personal improvement, education, and cultural development as necessary steps to prepare Black South Africans for rule. By widening the scope to include both kinds of Black conservative, the chapter has provided an insight into Black conservative engagement with the problem of apartheid in South Africa. Importantly, the chapter has begun the process of examining different conservative perspectives and illustrating that African Americans adopting these perspectives in relation to U.S. relations with South Africa were not as out-of-sync with the Black community as previous studies have assumed. As both historical examples and contemporary survey results make clear, Black conservatism was a part of the story of African American engagement with South Africa.

## **Chapter Two: “A Man Who Walked Quietly But Left An Indelible Footprint”: Black Conservatives and the Policy of Constructive Engagement, 1981-1984**

On 28 September 1984 Ambassador Alan L. Keyes stood before the United Nations General Assembly. He was there to explain US opposition to a UN resolution that called for the condemnation of South Africa’s new constitution. As he told the room of diplomats, “the difference between members” was not in their opposition to apartheid – the US considered the racist system just as repugnant – but over “how best to encourage practical movement away from the apartheid system.”<sup>1</sup> Keyes criticised the UN resolution for a number of reasons. As he continued,

Our strong revulsion against the injustice of apartheid and our deep compassion for the victims of the recent disturbances there does not authorize us or this General Assembly to indulge in violent rhetoric that can only exacerbate an already tragically violent situation... Nor is it within the competence of this body... to declare the constitution of South Africa or that of any other state null and void.<sup>2</sup>

Keyes’ speech at the General Assembly articulated the philosophical foundations of his understanding of international relations, US power, and the best approach to take in ending apartheid.

The problem of white rule in southern Africa was a consistently central focus of the United Nations (UN). Since April 1961, motions calling for comprehensive sanctions against the apartheid regime were frequently introduced at the UN. As political scientist Newell M. Shultz argued, these resolutions enabled the General Assembly to go “on record” as supporting the use of “sanctions against South Africa as a means of ending apartheid,” even

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Keyes, “Opposition to the General Assembly Draft Resolution on the Policies of Apartheid: Statement by the Representative at the United Nations (Keyes) before the UN General Assembly, Sept. 28, 1984,” in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1986), 847.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

if it “lacked the mandate” to enforce it.<sup>3</sup> For Keyes this approach was evidence of the flaws of the UN system. As Keyes later explained, the attempts to “delegitimize” South Africa were part of the Soviet Union’s “war by other means.”<sup>4</sup>

Keyes was a dedicated and articulate defender of the Reagan administration’s foreign policy. In the UN Keyes worked to implement the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, a foreign policy that increased US support for anti-communist dictatorships around the world. Constructive Engagement was ultimately the regional expression of this policy in southern Africa. While technically outside the bounds of his position, Keyes was “obsessed” with the problem of apartheid and racial justice in South Africa.<sup>5</sup> Keyes’ interest in South Africa led to him being a vocal advocate for Constructive Engagement at the UN. He was not the only Black conservative who was “obsessed” with South Africa in the early years of the Reagan administration.

This chapter will examine the work of three of the leading Black conservative figures who were engaged with, and influential in, US relations with the apartheid state in the early 1980s. The three have been chosen because they represent a cross section of various interconnected spheres of influence in US foreign relations with South Africa, encompassing not just official foreign policy per se, but also the role that corporate and philanthropic sectors played in engaging with Constructive Engagement as it crystallised in the early 1980s. As this chapter demonstrates, Black conservatives in the corporate and philanthropic spheres were just as important to the realisation of Constructive Engagement as diplomats like Alan Keyes. Alongside Keyes, therefore, the chapter examines the philanthropic leadership of Franklin A.

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<sup>3</sup> Newell M. Stultz, “Evolution of the United Nations Anti-Apartheid Regime,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1991), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Keyes, “Speech on the United Nations and American Foreign Policy, Ashbrook Center, Mar. 9, 1989.” <http://www.keyesarchives.com/transcript.php?id=1>

<sup>5</sup> Phil McCombs, “Alan Keyes the Question of Justice,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 18, 1987, D1.



Thomas at the Ford Foundation, as well as the corporate social responsibility initiatives spearheaded by David Bolen at E.I. Du Pont de Neumours and Company. By exploring the thought and praxis of these three leading exponents of Constructive Engagement, the chapter argues that traditional Black conservative ideas of racial developmentalism and internationalism informed not only their thinking and actions but also US relations with apartheid South Africa. Far from being a mere subset of Reaganism, their conservatism became a resource informing the shape of Reagan-era foreign policy. The way that US corporations and philanthropic organisations, such as those led by Thomas and Bolen, were involved in South Africa became pivotal to the Reagan administration's attempts to improve diplomatic relations with the apartheid state.

The chapter begins with an examination of the work of Franklin A. Thomas, the first African American president of the Ford Foundation. Thomas emerged in 1981 as one of the leading experts on US policy toward South Africa, after co-authoring a policy framework in 1980 as part of a Rockefeller Foundation study. As Reagan settled into the White House, Thomas attempted to influence the direction of the incoming Administration's policy. While ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts, the report *South Africa: Time Running Out*, proved to be one of the most important studies on the topic. The report informed corporate, philanthropic, and educational approaches to South Africa throughout the 1980s and beyond. Thomas' deep understanding of US policy toward South Africa led him to argue that Constructive Engagement had significant limitations and relied on questionable assumptions. Importantly, Thomas believed that the US government's emphasis on strengthening diplomatic ties with the white regime to encourage reform needed to be supplemented through relationships with South Africa's existing conservative and moderate Black leadership. Instead of joining the US anti-apartheid movement in its condemnation of Constructive

Engagement, Thomas utilised the Ford Foundation to address these concerns and work with US policy.

The chapter then considers the work of David Bolen, a former ambassador who, throughout the 1980s, implemented the Sullivan Principles as International Director of E.I. Du Pont de Neumours and Company. Having previously served as ambassador to the southern African countries of Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland during the Nixon administration, Bolen had critical insight into the politics and culture of the region. This experience led Bolen to believe that significant cultural changes needed to occur in family dynamics before Black South Africans would be able to find individual success in a free market. It was also as ambassador that Bolen met Reverend Leon Sullivan in 1975, who was in Botswana to establish an international branch of OIC, his vocational training organisation. Impressed with Sullivan's work in Botswana and his emphasis on personal development as well as vocational training, Bolen became an ardent and vocal supporter of the Sullivan Principles.

Returning to the work of the 'quintessential' Black conservative, the chapter will close with an examination of Alan Keyes and his participation in the implementation of Constructive Engagement. Keyes' rapid rise in the Reagan administration linked him to the 'new' Black conservative movement that emerged at the Fairmont Conference in 1980. Keyes was considered "a charter member" of Black conservatism and had "little popularity" with progressive African Americans as a result.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, Keyes' advocacy for the Reagan administration's policy resembled the reasoning of neoconservatives like his mentor Jeane Kirkpatrick and former roommate William Kristol. Keyes' own conservatism, however, was

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<sup>6</sup> Arch Puddington, "Review of Alan Keyes, *Masters of the Dream: The Strength and Betrayal of Black America*," *Commentary* 99, no. 2 (1995), 72.

“steeped in religious piety as a social, moral, and political barometer,” and the idea that traditional family values were central to a functioning society.<sup>7</sup>

## **Constructive Action**

May 1981 was a busy month for the Reagan administration and the implementation of Constructive Engagement. Despite being in the middle of a protracted and bitter confirmation struggle, Chester Crocker had embarked on a three-week trip to introduce himself to key African leaders and consult with other representatives of the Western Five (Germany, Britain, France, and Canada) on the status of Namibia. The media considered this tour “an inauspicious start” for the Reagan administration’s Africa policy.<sup>8</sup> Crocker found himself “snubbed” by several African leaders despite his efforts to reassure them that Constructive Engagement did not mean “an endorsement of apartheid.”<sup>9</sup> He likewise found himself dismissed by the South African government. Prime Minister P.W. Botha, only days away from an election, refused to meet with him and told the media that his refusal was due to Crocker’s friendliness with the apartheid state’s communist neighbours.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of a meeting with the South African Prime Minister, Crocker spent two days in a diplomatic meeting with Foreign Minister R.F. ‘Pik’ Botha and Defence Minister Magnus Malan. In an attempt to smooth the waters and demonstrate his commitment to working with the apartheid government, Crocker invited the Foreign Minister to make an official visit to

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Keyes, “Road to the White House, Interview on C-Span, Sept. 9, 1999.”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070815234556/http://www.renewamerica.us/archives/transcript.php?id=97>; Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph, “Introduction,” in *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3.

<sup>8</sup> “Diplomacy, Rough Start in Africa: Bumpy Mission,” *Time Magazine*, Apr. 27, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Chester Crocker quoted in “Diplomacy, Rough Start in Africa: Bumpy Mission.”

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, “Botha Faults Reagan’s Africa Aide Over Aborted U.S. Visit by Military,” *NYT*, Apr. 17, 1981.

Washington, D.C. the following month.<sup>11</sup> This invitation explained why Crocker spent May 1981 preparing and hosting the South African official, even as Senator Jesse Helms continued his attempt to block Crocker's confirmation. Importantly for Crocker's authority, Botha's visit to the White House included a surprise meeting with President Reagan. This "handshake meeting" was largely symbolic, as it signalled to the South Africans and Senator Helms that the Reagan administration was serious in its support of Constructive Engagement.

Just as Crocker was beginning to assert his vision of Constructive Engagement, a review of US foreign policy toward South Africa was published by the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic organisations in the United States, was attempting to influence the approach of the new Administration. Its report, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, was the result of a two-year and multimillion-dollar study that involved 11 commissioners, 14 staff, three policy-advisors and a "battalion of consultants."<sup>12</sup> As the title suggested, the report concluded that:

The formulation of new approaches to the problem is urgent. There is already violence in South Africa. If genuine progress toward meeting the grievances of South Africa's Blacks is not made soon, it will intensify and spread. Time is running out.<sup>13</sup>

In mid-1981, with a framework based on "constructive action," the report competed with Constructive Engagement for the mantle of official US policy.<sup>14</sup> The Rockefeller's policy framework resembled Constructive Engagement in many ways, even as it challenged some of the key assumptions of Crocker.

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<sup>11</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation Between R.F. Botha and Chester Crocker of the US Department of State, April 15, 1981." *Wilson Center Digital Archive*.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118259.pdf?v=c5d4d30f65738076168f531e1b71f98a>.

<sup>12</sup> Francis A. Kornegay, Jr., "Review: *South Africa: Time Running Out*," *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs* 14, no. 2 (1981-2), 102.

<sup>13</sup> Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, *South Africa: Time Running Out* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), xxii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, xxvii.

*Time Running Out* outlined a policy framework that called for the “simultaneous pursuit” of five core objectives.<sup>15</sup> The first objective was the expression of the US’s fundamental opposition to apartheid through the continuation of arms and nuclear embargoes that had been placed on South Africa by the UN in 1977 alongside the continued refusal of diplomatic recognition of the Bantustans. The second objective was the promotion of genuine power sharing through the exertion of US influence on the South African government. While the report agreed with Crocker that the US had “limited leverage,” it argued that the United States should encourage reform using both “inducements and pressures.”<sup>16</sup> The third objective was the development and support of ‘moderate’ Black leadership within South Africa, particularly leadership that renounced violence and revolutionary tactics. The fourth objective was stronger diplomatic and economic ties between the US and South Africa’s regional neighbours. The Report called for increased investment and aid programs for the newly-independent Black-led nations in the region such as Zimbabwe. The economic development of the region, the report argued, would weaken their dependence on the apartheid state and enable negotiations for regional peace.<sup>17</sup> The fifth and final objective addressed the concerns of US conservatives regarding reliance on South African minerals. Ultimately, the report emphasised the search for, and development of, a consensus policy that “integrated” diverse perspectives and reflected both US strategic interests and South African realities.<sup>18</sup>

To be sure, there were a number of similarities between the two policy frameworks. Like Constructive Engagement, *Time Running Out* concluded that the political system in South Africa was in the process of change and could be influenced by the United States. Likewise, the major objective of both frameworks was the containment of Communism in the region and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, xxv.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, xxvi.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 445.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, xxv.

the prevention of a violent revolution against the apartheid regime.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, the report agreed with Crocker that US corporations should not accede to calls for disinvestment made by the United Nations and US anti-apartheid activists. Both frameworks agreed that the white population controlled the direction of reform in South Africa.

However, the report also challenged some of the assumptions underpinning Constructive Engagement, notably the understanding of Prime Minister P.W. Botha as a reformist. Crocker had concluded that the US could work with Botha because, “apart from revolution,” the only reforms that could occur in South Africa would be through the white government.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, *Time Running Out* pointed to the ways in which the South African government restricted the freedoms of Black South Africans. As the report concluded, “if anything, recent actions of the government indicate the hardening of attitudes on civil rights under the national security rubric.”<sup>21</sup> The report also disagreed with Crocker’s argument that the South African government remained the US’s best ally against the spread of communism in the region. Rather, the report argued that the apartheid regime was the biggest liability in this regard, as it allowed the Soviet Union to present itself as being on the side of racial justice.<sup>22</sup> Where Crocker argued that US policy should focus on regional stability at the expense of domestic reform, *Time Running Out* concluded that regional peace would be most effectively achieved through a negotiated settlement within South Africa.<sup>23</sup>

The Rockefeller Commission hoped that the Reagan administration would incorporate the proposed framework into US policy. Copies of the report were sent to members of the Reagan administration (including the President himself) and private briefings were provided

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>20</sup> Crocker, “South Africa: Strategy for Change,” 337.

<sup>21</sup> Study Commission, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 391.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

for Chester Crocker and Vice-President George Bush.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the battle Crocker was facing with his confirmation, the report initially found a largely unsympathetic audience with the policymakers within the Reagan administration. As one White House memorandum argued, it was “suspected” that the report would simply “reflect liberal perceptions” of US policy toward apartheid South Africa.<sup>25</sup> However, on closer examination they found “responsible judgements” that were “very much in line...with Chet Crocker’s thinking.”<sup>26</sup> Most importantly, according to the NSC Director for Africa Fred Wettering, the White House was “pleased to note the absence of most knee-jerk liberal incantations.”<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, *Time Running Out* did not play a central role in the development of US policy toward South Africa during the Reagan administration. The Reagan administration dismissed the report’s emphasis on developing ties with the Black South African community, due to the report’s difference regarding the role of the apartheid government in the spread of communism in the region. During the first year of the Reagan administration, and despite this eventual rejection of the Rockefeller report, “two orientations” dominated discussions on US policy toward South Africa—Constructive Engagement and *Time Running Out*.<sup>28</sup> Further, the report was written for the general public and made widely available, which meant that the Rockefeller Commission played an important role in disseminating information to the public on the problem of apartheid and US policy toward South Africa. The detailed study quickly

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<sup>24</sup> Franklin A. Thomas would send several letters and copies to the White House. Franklin A. Thomas, “Letter to President Reagan, Apr. 29, 1981,” and Franklin A. Thomas, “Letter to President Reagan, Jun. 25, 1981,” ID#025536, Box 163, WHOM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library; Milfred C. Fierce, “Looking Back at South Africa: Time Running Out,” *Africa Report* 29, no. 3 (1984), 63.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Wettering, “Memorandum for Richard V. Allen, Request for Meeting with Members of the Study Commission on US Policy Toward Southern Africa, May 6, 1981,” ID#025536, Box 163, WHOM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>26</sup> Fred Wettering, “Memorandum for Richard V. Allen, Meeting with Delegation from the Study Commission on US Policy Towards South Africa, May 20, 1981,” ID#025536, Box 63, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Larry W. Bowman, “The Strategic Importance of South Africa to the United States: An Appraisal and Policy Analysis,” *African Affairs* 81, no. 323 (1982), 188.

became a cornerstone resource for researchers and students interested in this topic.<sup>29</sup> The report too, combined with the personal influence of Chairman Thomas, had more success in influencing the approach of the private and philanthropic sectors. As human rights lawyer Gay McDougall argued, the “study was on the bookshelf of every CEO in the country.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Franklin Thomas and the Ford Foundation**

While the Reagan administration was initially suspicious of the liberal perceptions of the Rockefeller report, many of the report’s authors were concerned that it would be dismissed for being too conservative.<sup>31</sup> Anti-apartheid activists in the United States seemed to agree, criticising the report’s conclusion against disinvestment and support of activist anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa. As the report justified,

Having considered both sides of the argument, we conclude that there is not much of a choice... There is no evidence that, even if there were a concerted move by foreign corporations to pull out of South Africa, such an action would produce the kind of changes Black South Africans want and the United States supports. And, as we saw in South Africa, the presence of foreign companies does bring tangible benefits to a segment of the Black population.<sup>32</sup>

Nor did the report’s findings align with the goals and strategies of the US anti-apartheid movement. As one critic explained, the blame for such a conservative perspective was due to the Commissioners “deference” to the philosophy of Ford Foundation chairman Franklin A. Thomas.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the leadership of Thomas in *Time Running Out* led to some mistakenly

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<sup>29</sup> Aluka (digital library on Africa) considers the report to be a “core reading”.

<https://www.aluka.org/stable/10.5555/al.sff.document.cbp1008>. See also: *Resources in Education*, vol. 20 (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1985); Sam Bryan, “Focus on South Africa: Time Running Out,” *Institute of Education Sciences*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ290656>.

<sup>30</sup> Gay McDougall in “An Evening with Franklin Thomas, Nov.11, 2017,” *History Makers*. <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/aneveningwithfranklinthomas>.

<sup>31</sup> Franklin A. Thomas, “South Africa: Time Running Out,” Speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, May 31, 1985 (New York: Reprinted by Ford Foundation, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Study Commission, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, 380.

<sup>33</sup> Kornegay, “Review: South Africa: Time Running Out,” 103.



labelling the report as “the Ford Foundation Report.”<sup>34</sup> Thomas, the first African American president of the Ford Foundation, had faced criticism for his conservative approach to philanthropic work.

Thomas’ leadership of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation from 1967 gave him a national profile. Senator Robert F. Kennedy created the community development agency as a Great Society initiative tasked with rebuilding the “decaying, riot-ruined” neighbourhood.<sup>35</sup> The skills and strategies on community redevelopment that defined Thomas’ experience with this initiative formed the basis of his later work. Thomas served as president and chief executive officer of the project for ten years, and in that time was credited with raising around \$63 million for redevelopment efforts that created 116 businesses, 3,300 jobs, and the construction of a commercial space. The Restoration Corporation also provided jobs and training programs to seven thousand residents and assisted in the renovations of homes on 96 blocks, as well as the construction of over 600 new housing units. Despite these achievements, the work of the Corporation was controversial, with some in the neighbourhood criticising Thomas for working too closely with the white establishment and focusing attention on corporate investment over community engagement.<sup>36</sup> This accusation followed him to his work in South Africa.

After Thomas resigned from the Restoration Corporation in 1977, he was appointed President of the Ford Foundation after the organisation considered over two hundred candidates. Thomas was appointed to the role to save the organisation from financial ruin. Like many other organisations, the Ford Foundation suffered from the stagflation of the 1970s and

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<sup>34</sup> Jennifer Davis, James Cason, and Gail Hovey, “Economic Disengagement and South Africa: The Effectiveness and Feasibility of Implementing Sanctions and Divestment,” *Law & Policy in International Business* 15, no. 2 (1983), 529.

<sup>35</sup> John Kifner, “From Brooklyn Restoration to Ford Foundation: Man in the News,” *NYT*, Jan. 30, 1979.

<sup>36</sup> Tom A. Davies, “Black Power in Action: The Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Robert F. Kennedy and the Politics of Urban Crisis,” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 3 (2013), 750.

was forced to use its capital to meet its grant obligations. While conducting the review on US policy toward South Africa Thomas simultaneously prevented Ford from “spending itself out of existence” by “tak[ing] the place apart.”<sup>37</sup> As one Ford Foundation insider told the press in 1981, Thomas’ restructure plan was “in harmony with the more pragmatic, if not conservative mood in the country.”<sup>38</sup> By the end of May 1981, Thomas radically changed the direction and culture of the Ford Foundation. More than 20 senior officers, three vice presidents, and a series of programs were purged from the organisation. The Old Boys Club and lifetime employment was replaced with limited contracts and competitive grant processes.

Under Thomas’ leadership the focus of philanthropic programs shifted towards urban poverty and sustainable community-led programs. There were areas in which Thomas had expertise as former president of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps demonstrating an understanding of shared racial experiences at home and abroad, he also made South Africa a key priority.<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, the work of the Ford Foundation in South Africa aligned with the recommendations of the *Time Running Out* study. During the 1980s, the Ford Foundation increased its funding for projects in the Black South African community “five-fold,” as Thomas leveraged the power of the Foundation to apply “moral pressure” on the apartheid government.<sup>41</sup> Reflecting Thomas’ experience in ‘Bed-Stuy,’ the Ford Foundation applied a two-pronged approach to development in South Africa. The first prong promoted the importance of corporate partnerships to create opportunities for economic advancement. The second prong focused on community development, particularly local leadership and

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<sup>37</sup> Franklin A. Thomas quoted in Kathleen Teltsch, “Streamlining the Ford Foundation,” *NYT*, Oct. 10, 1982, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Waldemar A. Neilson (a Ford Foundation insider) quoted in Kathleen Teltsch, “Transitional Pains at the Ford Foundation,” *NYT*, Feb. 8, 1981, 20; Orde Coombs, “Fear and Trembling at the Ford Foundation,” *New York Magazine*, Sept. 28, 1981, 30-34.

<sup>39</sup> Franklin A. Thomas, *Ford Foundation Annual Report 1981* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1981), v.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Slack, “A Conversation with Franklin Thomas,” *Foundation News & Commentary* 36, no. 2 (1995), 10.

<sup>41</sup> David Bonbright, “The Ford Foundation in South Africa 2: A Look Back at Funding Liberation Struggles,” *Life After the Ford Foundation (LAFF) Newsletter*, Summer 2015.

community participation—ostensibly these programs needed to embody self-help strategies and community uplift.

Perhaps inspired by the Ford Foundation's role in the civil rights movement as a key supporter of the National Urban League and the NAACP, under Thomas' leadership the philanthropic organisation supported 'constructive' programs and 'moderating forces' over direct action and protest in South Africa.<sup>42</sup> Just as it had done for the National Urban League, Ford Foundation's grants focussed on economic and educational advancement and, like with its grants to the NAACP, legal challenges to apartheid in the 1980s.<sup>43</sup> As Thomas explained, the Ford Foundation's strategy was "to reinforce Black South Africans' notion that they had rights...that's no small thing in a country that tells you you're a non-person."<sup>44</sup> One important example of this support for the legal challenges against apartheid was the establishment of the Legal Resources Center (LRC). The LRC was one of the leading beneficiaries of the Ford Foundation and a public interest firm that took on cases to defend anti-apartheid activists.<sup>45</sup>

The Centre was established in 1978 by Black South African lawyer Arthur Chaskalson with the aim "to encourage belief in the value of law as an instrument of justice."<sup>46</sup> The strategies and goals were largely reminiscent of the work of the NAACP during the civil rights movement. This was understandable considering the important role Jack Greenberg and other prominent civil rights lawyers played in the early years of the LRC.<sup>47</sup> One of the landmark

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<sup>42</sup> For more information on Ford Foundation and the civil rights movement see: Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Sam Collings-Well, "From Black Power to Broken Windows: Liberal Philanthropy and the Carceral State," *Journal of Urban History* (2020): 1-21.

<sup>43</sup> Timothy Gibbs, "Mandela, Human Rights and the Making of South Africa's Transformative Constitution," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45, no. 6 (2019), 1136.

<sup>44</sup> Franklin Thomas quoted in Stephen Golub, "Battling Apartheid, Building a New South Africa," in *Many Roads to Justice: The Law-Related Work of Ford Foundation Grantees Around the World*, eds. Mary McClymont and Stephen Golub (New York: Ford Foundation, 2000), 19.

<sup>45</sup> Adam Habib and Rupert Taylor, "South Africa: Anti-Apartheid NGOs in Transition," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations* 10 (1999), 75.

<sup>46</sup> John Price, "The Legal Resources Centre and Human Rights in the 1990s," *De Rebus*, Jul. 1992, 497.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Ellmann, *Arthur Chaskalson: A Life Dedicated to Justice for All* (London: Picador Africa, 2019), 228-271.

cases won by the LRC in the 1980s was that of Meholo Tom Rikhoto, an “unassuming Black man,” who was attempting to challenge apartheid from “within.”<sup>48</sup> The engineer spent many years in court fighting for permanent residency in South Africa. By June 1983, the South African government fought Rikhoto all the way to the Supreme Court only to lose the landmark case. Fearing an “invasion” of Black South Africans with the weakened influx control, the apartheid regime explained that only those with “approved” housing were eligible.<sup>49</sup> Despite the government’s attempts to limit the impact of the Rikhoto case, it was still considered a success in the non-violent approach against apartheid.<sup>50</sup>

Like the Ford Foundation’s sponsorship of the NAACP in the early years of the civil rights movement, its contributions to the LRC were designed to challenge racial inequality in a politically moderate way through the court system. As scholars from the Carnegie Corporation argued,

South Africans skilfully adapted the tactic of test case litigation applied by NAACP lawyers in the American civil rights movement...These cases contributed to the gradual dismantling of apartheid laws regulating movement...and became a part of the process of chipping away at the edifice of apartheid policies.<sup>51</sup>

The Rikhoto case was a test of the apartheid government’s sincerity in its reform agenda. The success or failure of this legal challenge to apartheid laws determined the effectiveness of one of Thomas’ key reform strategies. As journalist Paul van Slambrouck explained, coming at the time of increasingly violent guerrilla attacks by the ANC, the case was seen “as nothing less

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<sup>48</sup> Paul van Slambrouck, “How One Black Man Forced South Africa to Change a Race Law,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Jun. 17, 1983.

<sup>49</sup> Rebecca Hamilton, “The Role of Apartheid Legislation in the Property Law of South Africa,” *National Black Law Journal* 10, no. 2 (1987): 153- 182.

<sup>50</sup> Zackie Achmat, “Law, Politics, and Social Transformations,” *International Journal of Legal Information* 32, no. 2 (2004), 238.

<sup>51</sup> Patricia Rosenfield, Courtenay Sprague, and Heather Mckay, “Ethical Dimensions of International Grantmaking: Drawing the Line in a Borderless World,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004), 59.

than a crucial test of whether there remain[ed] for Blacks an alternative to violence.”<sup>52</sup> Both the Ford Foundation and the Reagan administration watched the South African response closely.<sup>53</sup>

While the work of the LRC was eclipsed by the anti-apartheid activism and civil disobedience that swept through South Africa from 1983, it proved that legal strategies had potential to effect change in South Africa. For Thomas, the program was an important risk management strategy for the Ford Foundation. To continue to have access to Black South Africans the Ford Foundation had to walk a narrow path between the white government and anti-apartheid activists who were calling for US withdrawal. Both sides preferred that the Foundation was not active in South Africa, the white government because it provided avenues of development for Black South Africans and anti-apartheid activists because they saw the Foundation’s work as propping up the apartheid regime.

By emphasising the link between LRC legalism and that of the NAACP during the civil rights movement, Thomas made it difficult for conservatives in both South Africa and the US to criticise the Ford Foundation’s work against the apartheid government, an anti-communist ally and safeguard of American strategic interests. The overt connection between the LRC and NAACP further affirmed the link between the African American freedom movement and the Black South African struggle against apartheid.<sup>54</sup> In establishing the Ford Foundation’s program in this way, Thomas addressed and attempted to mitigate against African American

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<sup>52</sup> Paul van Slambrouck, “How One Black Man Forced South Africa to Change a Race Law,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Jun. 17, 1983.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, “A Ruling on Residency Agitates South Africa,” *NYT*, Jun. 19, 1983, A3.

<sup>54</sup> David Bonbright, “The Ford Foundation in Apartheid South Africa—Soft Solutions to Hard Problems,” *Alliance Magazine*, Sept. 2003. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/the-ford-foundation-in-apartheid-south-africa-soft-solutions-to-hard-problems/>.

critics of the Foundation's continued involvement in the apartheid state and particularly its conservative approach.

Thomas was a frequent visitor to the apartheid state and was actively involved with the programs, people, and problems of South Africa. It was this personal commitment to South Africa that enabled Godfrey Pitje, a former colleague of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, to "gatecrash" Ford headquarters and obtain a personal meeting with Thomas in 1984. During the meeting, Pitje successfully lobbied for support and emerged with the Ford Foundation as the largest sponsor of the Black Lawyers' Association—a relationship that saw the philanthropic organisation fund research that provided the "intellectual foundations" of the post-apartheid constitution in South Africa.<sup>55</sup> Similar to its support of the LRC, the Ford Foundation provided funding for the Black Lawyers' Association not only to challenge apartheid laws, but to also invest in the training and development of Black South African lawyers to assume key leadership roles in the creation of a post-apartheid political system.

Despite the Ford Foundation's association and support of these moderate anti-apartheid organisations and their work to undermine the legal structures of apartheid, Thomas continued to face criticism from activists in the United States who advocated for complete withdrawal. According to Andrea Smith, one such activist, the continued involvement of philanthropic organisations like the Ford Foundation lent legitimacy and respectability to the apartheid regime.<sup>56</sup> From this perspective, investment of time and resources into South Africa only extended the life of the apartheid government. Further, it was argued, complete withdrawal, including from philanthropic organisations supporting Black South Africans, would lead to a rapid decline and collapse of the government and make way for a post-

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<sup>55</sup> Gibbs, "Mandela, Human Rights and the Making of South Africa's Transformative Constitution," 1146.

<sup>56</sup> Andrea Smith, "Introduction," in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 14.

apartheid Black-led system of government. This view was clearly in conflict with Thomas' strategy of moderate reform and piecemeal change with the goal of a slow evolution into true democracy.

Most controversially, in the view of anti-apartheid activists in the United States, was the Ford Foundation's continued commitment to corporate investment in South Africa and its support of the Sullivan Principles. While, by the 1980s, the Ford Foundation was a separate organisation to the Ford Company, both organisations became targets and experienced sustained pressure to withdraw during this period. The Ford Foundation, like many large institutions and corporations, was the target of shareholder activists who used their votes on investment resolutions to promote withdrawal and disinvestment.<sup>57</sup> Despite these pressures, Thomas resisted the "tendency toward political correctness," and the calls to join in the strategies of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement and instead remained committed to his approach.<sup>58</sup> Ford remained committed to the framework outlined in *Time Running Out* and expanded its involvement in South Africa and resisted shareholder activism to divest its fortunes from corporations with interests in the apartheid state.

Instead, the Foundation used its own shareholder power to encourage corporations to adopt a more responsible approach to their business in South Africa. Indeed, as the 1980s wore on, the Ford Foundation was increasingly vocal in its shareholder activism and eventually demanded that corporations be active Sullivan signatories in order to retain the organisation's investment.<sup>59</sup> By 1987, the companies that had refused to sign up to the Sullivan Principles were officially considered "inappropriate investments" and the Ford Foundation actively

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Massie, "Moral Deliberation and Policy Formulation: A Study of Eight Institutional Investors' Approaches to South African Disinvestment" (PhD Diss. Harvard University, 1989). For more information on this strategy see: Phillip A. Broyles, "The Impact of Shareholder Activism on Corporate Involvement in South Africa During the Reagan Years," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 28, no. 1 (1998): 1-19.

<sup>58</sup> Bonbright, "The Ford Foundation in Apartheid South Africa."

<sup>59</sup> H.J. Welsh, *How Institutions Voted on Social Responsibility Shareholder Resolutions in the 1987 Proxy Season* (Washington, D.C.: IRRC, 1987), 14.

divested its stocks.<sup>60</sup> The Ford Foundation remained committed to its involvement in the apartheid state and continued to support US corporations operating in South Africa, even as it faced pressure from anti-apartheid activists to disinvest. As the Foundation's program officer for the South Africa division David Bonbright recalled that Ford's program was "clearly in technical violation of the worldwide calls for political, cultural, scientific and economic boycotts."<sup>61</sup> However, Bonbright continued, Thomas defended Ford's continued involvement in South Africa "against all critics."<sup>62</sup>

### **Thomas' Impact on South Africa**

Thomas' expertise on South Africa, his relationship with corporations, and arguably his racial identity, made Ford Foundation a complicated target for anti-apartheid activists. Historian Robert Massie concluded that in comparison to other organisations, Ford had significant "latitude" and "discretion" in its work in South Africa which allowed them "to maintain a controversial policy" of engagement under Thomas.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps Thomas' leadership remains underappreciated because of his conservative approach to South Africa. His appointment to the largest philanthropic organisation in the United States made him an influential African American with the power to influence US involvement in South Africa. Indeed, as civil rights activist Vernon Jordan commented, Thomas was "the most significant Black appointment in my time."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ford Foundation quoted in Massie, "Moral Deliberation and Policy Formulation," 245.

<sup>61</sup> David Bonbright, "The Ford Foundation in Apartheid South Africa: Soft Solutions to Hard Problems," *Alliance Magazine* Sept. 1, 2003. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/the-ford-foundation-in-apartheid-south-africa-soft-solutions-to-hard-problems/>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Massie, "Moral Deliberation and Policy Formulation," 247.

<sup>64</sup> Vernon Jordan quoted in Janice Simpson, "Our Man at Ford," *Black Enterprise*, Sept. 1980, 40.



Colloquially known as “the fat boy in the canoe,” Ford Foundation was studied by the other large philanthropic organisations because its actions made “a difference to everybody else.”<sup>65</sup> In the 1980s, the Foundation’s role became more pronounced as the Reagan administration cut funding to social services and expected philanthropic organisations to fill the gap. During his leadership of the Ford Foundation, Thomas helped set the direction of American philanthropy and the orientation of international social development programs. His emphasis on tangible results over theoretical approaches, self-directed community projects, and partnerships with private corporations came to define the field of international development for years to come.<sup>66</sup> Thomas’ commitment to continued involvement in the apartheid state likewise determined the trajectory of US philanthropic work in apartheid South Africa throughout the 1980s.

Thomas leveraged personal relationships with US corporate boards to advocate for the policy framework in *Time Running Out*, in particular the alignment of philanthropic and corporate strategy. As Thomas had demonstrated during his tenure leading Bedford-Stuyvesant, this approach overcame the limitations of government spending and interference. While focusing the resources of the Ford Foundation on South Africa, Thomas also advocated for broader corporate adoption of the Sullivan Principles. Not only did Thomas urge the companies on whose boards he sat to adopt the Principles, he proffered his views across his broader professional network. This included sharing his views in private with company directors and corporate managers with influence in businesses where Thomas had no formal role. As Robert Massie argued, Thomas had “exceptional access” to the “top ranks of American

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<sup>65</sup> Dean Rusk president of the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1950’s was known to describe Ford Foundation this way and the analogy stuck. See: Mark Dowie, *American Foundations: An Investigative History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 206.

<sup>66</sup> “Description: Ford Foundation Records, Office of the President, Office Files of Franklin Thomas,” *Rockefeller Foundation Archives*. <https://dimes.rockarch.org/collections/HmCvVySdEvH4KCYb3ecVLX>.

business, academic and politic elite.”<sup>67</sup> Just as Thomas had done in his work in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Thomas used the private sector to strengthen South Africa’s Black middle class and develop moderate Black leadership that could challenge the appeal of more radical political organisations.

While the true impact of Thomas’ work on South Africa is difficult to measure, supporters have considered him “seminal” to US relations with South Africa in the 1980s.<sup>68</sup> As Richard Parsons, CEO of Time Warner, recalled, Thomas had “his sleeves rolled up” and was “in the trenches” with South Africans.<sup>69</sup> Just like his previous work on urban renewal and African American development, Thomas brought a pragmatic approach to South Africa in which liberal ideals were “blended” with conservative strategies.<sup>70</sup> Thomas used his influence within the Ford Foundation and within corporate boardrooms to ensure practical programs were implemented that could improve the lives of Black South Africans. In many ways, Thomas worked in tandem with Constructive Engagement and filled the gaps within the official policy regarding the development of a Black middle class and moderate Black leadership. As historian Robert Massie concluded, it was Thomas’ “close connection” to both African American communities and the private sector elites, combined with “his willingness to avoid public pronouncements,” that “made him so effective.”<sup>71</sup>

Franklin Thomas continued to “walk quietly” in South Africa, where he served as a “bridge builder” and negotiated the reconciliation of opposing sides at the end of apartheid. In 1986, he acted as the “trusted convenor” in a meeting between the Afrikaner Broederbond and

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<sup>67</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 478.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Parsons, “An Evening with Franklin A. Thomas, Nov.11, 2017,” *History Makers*.

<sup>69</sup> Parsons, “An Evening with Franklin A. Thomas.”

<sup>70</sup> This description was used for the Bedford-Stuyvesant restoration project by a Robert Kennedy biographer. See: Edward Schmitt, *President of the Other America: Robert Kennedy and the Politics of Poverty* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 139; Franklin A. Thomas, “President’s Review,” in *Ford Foundation Annual Report 1982* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1982), v-ix.

<sup>71</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 478.

the African National Congress. The gathering was groundbreaking—it was the first time that members of each group had met with each other, and importantly, it marked the beginning of the apartheid regime’s willingness to negotiate with the ANC.<sup>72</sup> Thomas again served as mediator between warring South Africans in 1993, when he convinced Nelson Mandela and South Africa’s president F.W. de Klerk to meet with President Bill Clinton. He also served in a similar role as “special envoy” to facilitate the reconciliation of Nelson Mandela and Gatsha Buthelezi, whose disagreements had escalated into violence between their respective supporters.<sup>73</sup>

In 1996 Thomas retired from the Ford Foundation and took up a new role overseeing the US office of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund.<sup>74</sup> By this time, his impact on South Africa was firmly established. Even critics acknowledged the important role the Ford Foundation’s funding of moderate legal reformers played during the drafting of the post-apartheid Bill of Rights.<sup>75</sup> Further, the Foundation’s approach successfully disconnected anti-apartheid work in South Africa from some of the more radical goals of the ANC. Activist Andrea Smith went as far as to admit that the Ford Foundation successfully “divert[ed]” the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa from an “anti-capitalist to pro-capitalist movement.”<sup>76</sup>

Just like his previous work on urban renewal and African American development, Thomas brought a pragmatic approach to South Africa. Thomas arguably embodied an Afrocentric conservatism. In a similar vein to African American leaders like the National

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<sup>72</sup> Neil A. Lewis, “South African Rebels Meet with A Top Afrikaner,” *NYT*, Jun. 16, 1986, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Princeton Nathan Lyman, *Partner to History: The U.S. Role in South Africa’s Transition to Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 141.

<sup>74</sup> “Media Statement: Sadness on the Passing of Franklin Thomas,” *Nelson Mandela Foundation*, Dec. 24, 2021. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/media-statement-sadness-on-the-passing-of-franklin-thomas>

<sup>75</sup> Joan Roelofs, “How Foundations Exercise Power,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 74, no. 4 (2015), 670.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, 14.

Urban League's Vernon Jordan and Leon Sullivan, Thomas emphasised community-led uplift and economic self-help. This approach had a significant impact on the scope and direction of inner-city restoration in both the United States and South Africa. At the very least, it was the Ford Foundation's investment in moderate and conservative Black leaders in the 1980s that helped to build the talent base that formed the post-apartheid regime.<sup>77</sup> As the African American oral history archive *History Makers* explained, Thomas "was a man who walked quietly, but left an indelible mark" on US relations with South Africa.<sup>78</sup> It was arguably Thomas' 'quiet' approach to Black empowerment in both the United States and South Africa that has led to his work being overlooked in African American history. His emphasis on negotiations, legal challenges, and self-help initiatives was counter to the largely activist and protest driven anti-apartheid movement that has been the focus of civil rights-oriented scholarship.

### **A Black Conservative in the Diplomatic Corps**

For those like Thomas, U.S. corporations which embraced the Sullivan Principles were a source of positive change in the apartheid state. Importantly for Black conservatives, this approach encouraged the development of Black South African leadership that supported a capitalist and democratic society and created a challenge to the more radical impulses of anti-apartheid organisations like the ANC. David Benjamin Bolen was a leading supporter of Reverend Sullivan's conservative approach to anti-apartheid activism. In the 1980s, as an associate director of international affairs at E.I. Du Pont Neumours and Co., Bolen advocated

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<sup>77</sup> The Bridgespan Group, "Case Study: The Anti-Apartheid Movement," an article in the series under "Audacious Philanthropy: Lessons from 15 World-Changing Initiatives," *Harvard Business Review*, Sept. 2017, 3.

<sup>78</sup> "Description: An Evening with Franklin Thomas, Nov.11, 2017," *History Makers*.

for the social and economic development of Black South Africans through U.S. corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Born in 1923 in Hefflin, Louisiana, Bolen had direct experience of life under racial segregation. Growing up in the segregated South, Bolen's talent and determination led to his athletic success on the world stage. Despite racial hurdles, Bolen was able to continue his passion for athletics at college: by the age of 25 he made the U.S. Olympic Team and competed in the London Games in the 400 metres. Bolen's athletic prowess also opened other international opportunities for him, with the star runner competing in events in Greece, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. When he graduated in 1950, Bolen left with both a degree in economics and a new passion, international diplomacy. "Impressed" with the American diplomats he had encountered in Europe Bolen immediately joined the Foreign Service.<sup>79</sup> This was an ambitious career path for an African American: in 1948, Edward R. Dudley was the first Black career officer to hold the rank of ambassador when he was appointed to the US Embassy in Liberia.

This was the era of decolonisation and independence movements in Africa, and when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into being. The period was also the height of the international influence of African American diplomat Ralph Bunche, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his mediation efforts in the Middle East.<sup>80</sup> As historian Michael L. Krenn has argued, it was during this period that civil rights and US foreign policy "collided."<sup>81</sup> Bolen was one of the few African Americans who started the process of

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<sup>79</sup> Jae Jones, "David B. Bolen: Highly Regarded United States Ambassador (1974-1976)," *Blackthen*, Feb. 2, 2019. <https://Blackthen.com/david-b-bolen-highly-regarded-united-states-ambassador-1974-1976/>. Accessed Dec. 9, 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Charles P. Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999)

<sup>81</sup> Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

integrating the “lily-white” State Department. His ambition was only matched by his success as he turned his attention to a career in the foreign service.

As one close friend, Ollie B. Ellison, reflected, it was only a matter of time before Bolen made it to “the top” of the diplomatic corps.<sup>82</sup> Even for Ellison, who was himself an African American career foreign service officer, Bolen’s appointment to ambassador “came several years in advance of our most optimistic estimates.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, Bolen was one of eight African Americans appointed to professional positions in the Foreign Service in the period, and one of three who later served as an ambassador. He reached the height of his diplomatic career in 1974 at the age of 51. President Nixon appointed Bolen to the role of ambassador and Bolen went on to serve as U.S. ambassador to the southern African nations of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland—three small nations surrounded by the Republic of South Africa.

Bolen took his position in southern Africa just as the political landscape drastically changed. A military coup in Portugal on 25 April 1974, led to the end of Portuguese colonies in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. Angola and Mozambique, “two bulwarks of white supremacy” in southern Africa, collapsed almost overnight.<sup>84</sup> Angola was ensnared in a brutal civil war that continued until 2002. Mozambique, in contrast, came under the power of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), a Marxist nationalist party under Samora Machel. Bolen served as ambassador in these three countries while the controversial policies of Henry Kissinger created diplomatic tensions across the continent.<sup>85</sup> Despite the political developments accompanying Bolen’s assignment, Botswana was a stable, democratic, and multi-racial state.

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<sup>82</sup> Ollie B. Ellison, “Letter to David Bolen, Dec. 26, 1973,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 8, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 376. Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) would follow in 1979.

<sup>85</sup> For more information see: Steven O’Sullivan, *Kissinger, Angola and US-African Foreign Policy: The Unintentional Realist* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

As ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, Bolen's work reflected his belief in the conservative principles of development, respectability politics, and family values. This was demonstrated by his support of, and advocacy for, the establishment of an Opportunities Industrialization Corporation, International (OICI) in the area.<sup>86</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, the OIC was a self-help and technical training organisation originally developed in Philadelphia during the 1960s by Reverend Leon Sullivan to improve the employability of African Americans. By the time Bolen was working in southern Africa the OIC had spread to over 150 American cities, as well as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. When Sullivan visited Botswana in June 1975 Bolen escorted him to meetings with political and corporate leaders. As Bolen telegrammed to Kissinger on 18 June 1975, an OICI made "a significant impact in demonstrating U.S. interest in Botswana's development...[and] should receive full USG support."<sup>87</sup> This trip proved important for both men. Bolen had found an African American leader who shared his views on economic development. These views informed the Ambassador's approach to southern Africa for the rest of his career. For Sullivan, it was this trip to southern Africa that inspired the creation of the Sullivan Principles and the rise of corporate social responsibility of US companies in the region.

Three years after Bolen left southern Africa, President Carter appointed him ambassador to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries had been recently established in 1974 and East Germany was a key site for diplomatic confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this role Bolen, who was fluent in German, became the first African American to serve behind the Iron

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<sup>86</sup> David Bolen, "Speech for OICI Dinner, May 24, 1975 in Gaborone, Botswana," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>87</sup> David Bolen, "Department of State Telegram: Rev. Leon Sullivan's Visit to Botswana, Jun. 18, 1975," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

Curtain.<sup>88</sup> Just as in southern Africa, Bolen's priority as ambassador to East Germany was the expansion of American business ties.<sup>89</sup> However, Bolen's approach to East Germany was in conflict with the Carter White House and the rest of the Embassy staff. As one political officer explained, the Embassy was "fraught with tension" and underwent an official inspection by the Foreign Service. This investigation provided "an extremely negative report" of Bolen. As the Political Officer reflected, the problem was "difficult to pin down," but the "question of race obviously looms."<sup>90</sup> Reaching the pinnacle of his career only to face controversy, Bolen retired from the Foreign Service in 1979.

### **Constructive Change**

When Bolen returned to the United States, he was ready to begin his third career in the private sector. Bolen was approached by DuPont, a chemical and engineering conglomerate, to manage its international holdings and international public relations. As in his diplomatic career, Bolen spent most of his time at DuPont working on the problems of southern Africa. Before his appointment, South Africa was only a minor concern for the company, making up less than 0.2 percent of its total international business. Moreover, with a miniscule staff presence in the apartheid state, the company was not a Sullivan signatory—instead it considered itself an unofficial "endorser" of the Principles.<sup>91</sup> This changed under Bolen, who dedicated much of his time at the company—whether in meetings, public engagements, writing reports—to

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<sup>88</sup> "African American History Month: Honoring African American Trailblazers in Diplomacy," *National Museum of American Diplomacy*, Feb. 1, 2020. <https://diplomacy.state.gov/u-s-diplomacy-stories/african-american-history-month/v>.

<sup>89</sup> David Bolen, "USA Leipzig Spring Fair '79 Industrial Electronics and Instrumentation US Commercial Exhibition," Flyer, Mar. 1979 in *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 11, Folder 3], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>90</sup> E. Wayne Merry, "Interview with Charles Stuart Kennedy, Feb. 19, 2010," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training: Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, 96. <https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Merry-E.-Wayne.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> J.A. Klacsmann, "Memo: Proposed Branch Sales Office in Southern Africa, Jul. 15, 1981," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.



DuPont's presence in South Africa as the anti-apartheid movement forced companies to justify their presence. As Bolen explained in one meeting,

There is increasing pressure in the Congress, from state legislatures, universities, church groups and other institutional investors calling for divestment or prohibiting investment of pension funds in stocks of firms doing business in South Africa. Implementation of the Sullivan Principles has been our most effective day-to-day means of handling this situation.<sup>92</sup>

One of Bolen's first official acts was to make the company an official signatory to the Sullivan Principles. In 1982, as DuPont expanded its presence in South Africa and increased staff in the country, the corporation became an official Sullivan signatory. Dedicated to the Principles, Bolen ensured that the South African office was fully integrated and adhered to its mission to be "a model of social responsibility."<sup>93</sup> By April that year, Bolen was heavily involved in the administration of the Sullivan Principles, serving on the corporate committee tasked with streamlining the structure of signatory participation.<sup>94</sup> Only a few months later, Bolen was also appointed co-chairman of the Sullivan Task Group responsible for the training and education of Black people in South Africa.<sup>95</sup> By 1983, Bolen actively participated in the task group dedicated to the development of Black enterprise, where he worked with the African Bank and the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the proactive approach DuPont took towards implementing the Sullivan Principles, the company received a fail grade in their first evaluation by Arthur D. Little. The consultation company warned that the "program lacked balance" and only focused on some of

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<sup>92</sup> David Bolen, "Talking Points: South Africa: Sullivan Principles, n.d.," 2, *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>93</sup> "Du Pont in South Africa: Statement on Principles," undated, *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>94</sup> S.G. Marzullo, "Letter to Bolen, Apr. 12, 1982," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>95</sup> David Bolen, "Sullivan Principles: Sixth Report on Signatory Companies," Nov. 10, 1982, *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 2], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>96</sup> David Bolen, "Memo: Sullivan Progress Report No. 7 DISA: South Africa, Jul. 2, 1983," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

the Principles.<sup>97</sup> In response to this disappointing result Bolen suggested the South African branch of DuPont undertake a thorough study of each criterion and,

Keep a detailed diary of activity, particularly management time devoted to education, training, community development, and support of Black business. Much could be done in these areas which is not necessarily a function of additional expenditures, but an increased input of staff, time, and effort.<sup>98</sup>

Not content with addressing the negative review from afar, Bolen also visited South Africa to personally assess DuPont's implementation. During the four-day trip in November 1982, Bolen consulted a broad range of opinions to ascertain the impact of the Sullivan Principles.<sup>99</sup> He met with the Minister for Internal Affairs F.W. de Klerk to discuss the direction of the South African government's reforms. Despite being on friendly terms with the future president of South Africa, Bolen was not convinced that the apartheid government's plans were genuine and would appease anti-apartheid activists.<sup>100</sup> For Bolen, this insincere agenda by the South African government meant that US corporations needed to continue their social responsibility commitments, not only to improve the lives of Black South Africans but also to prevent a violent revolution and the ensuing economic instability.

Bolen also met with leaders of the South African Federal Union and other Black conservatives to hear their thoughts on the Sullivan Principles and US involvement in the apartheid state. These leaders included Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, Moses Maubane of the African Bank and Sam Motsuenyane, chairman of the Black Chamber of Commerce. These leaders assured Bolen that US companies were a key part of the "socio-economic change" that was

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<sup>97</sup> David Bolen, "Memorandum to Du Pont Office in South Africa, Nov. 10, 1982," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> David Bolen, "Memorandum to R.M. Aiken, Nov. 11, 1982," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>100</sup> Bolen had met de Klerk at an event in the US and made an impression on the South African. F. W. de Klerk, "Letter to David Bolen," and David Bolen, "Memorandum to R.M. Aiken, Nov. 11, 1982," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

“essential” for the Black South African community.<sup>101</sup> For the Black businessmen in particular, these changes included the development of a skilled labour force that was capable of governance in a post-apartheid South Africa. Further, these leaders agreed with US conservatives’ arguments that a booming economy increased Black employment and improved the lives of Black workers and their families. This economic change would undermine the system of apartheid and enlarge the size of the consumer market to reinforce economic growth.<sup>102</sup>

Over the next twelve months DuPont staff made a concerted effort to meet Bolen’s expectations of a positive grade. Like many companies operating in South Africa, one of the hardest Principles for DuPont to implement was the training and promotion of skilled Black workers. Attempts to hire more non-white employees in skilled positions at DuPont proved unsuccessful until DuPont sponsored a trainee in the finance department. This trainee later became the first Black South African to be accepted into the Association of Commercial and Financial Technicians of South Africa, the leading professional association for accountants in the country. The corporation also expanded its contributions in education beyond its South African office, funding five bursaries for the Sullivan-funded industrial school Pace Institute, ‘adopting’ two Black schools, and participating in the US-South Africa Educational Exchange Program.<sup>103</sup> When the Seventh Report was released by Arthur D. Little, Bolen was relieved to find that DuPont had been assessed as “making progress”—the second highest grade possible.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Bolen, “Memorandum to R.M. Aiken.”

<sup>102</sup> “NAFCOC President Tells Overseas Business ... Disinvestment No Good for Black Progress,” *African Business*, April 1974.

<sup>103</sup> David Bolen, “Letter to Norman Jaskol of Public Employees’ Retirement Association of Colorado, Sept. 13, 1983,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>104</sup> David Bolen, “U.S. Corporate Presence in South Africa, Feb. 14, 1983,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

Bolen's former diplomatic career also provided him access to senior foreign policy officials in the Reagan administration. He regularly corresponded with Secretary of State George Shultz and Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker. In 1982, when Constructive Engagement came under attack from sanctions legislation, Crocker sought Bolen's advice. For example, in early April 1982, the African Bureau staff invited Bolen to attend a working luncheon to discuss the "public image and perception" of the Administration's policy.<sup>105</sup> Bolen advised the State Department that the issue was "pressing" and required immediate action if the Administration was to retain control of US policy toward South Africa. He recommended that Crocker deliver a "high-level policy statement" for Congress in order to "promote better understanding" of the Administration's programs and actions.<sup>106</sup> In a follow-up letter the former diplomat even offered his editing services, promising to make improvements on the policy statement if required.<sup>107</sup>

Like his contemporaries Sullivan and Thomas, Bolen's approach to South Africa embodied conservative ideas that have a long tradition in Black political thought. Bolen believed that the best way to improve the lives of Black South Africans and prepare them for post-apartheid rule was through economic engagement and development. As Bolen explained in 1983, "I am persuaded on the basis of practical experience in South Africa and elsewhere around the world that the most effective approach to changing political and social environments is constructive involvement."<sup>108</sup>

Bolen's earlier support for the establishment of an OIC facility in southern Africa provides insight into his belief that African Americans had the capacity to positively influence

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<sup>105</sup> David Bolen, "Letter Chester A. Crocker, Apr. 8, 1982," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> David Bolen, "U.S. Corporate Presence in South Africa, Feb. 14, 1983," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 4, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

the education and economic development of African people. This belief, and his emphasis on vocational training, resembled the industrial education of African American missionaries in South Africa and Angola. A key driver of both the OIC and the missions was the “civilising” influence of Black Americans, “to uplift Africans in order to make them more enterprising and efficient participants in commerce.”<sup>109</sup> In Bolen’s “considered judgment,” “the most potent weapon” against apartheid was “the interaction of American corporations with South Africans.”<sup>110</sup>

Bolen also supported self-help and entrepreneurial programs by Black South Africans, and he served on the board of Operation Hunger, Inc. and Urban Foundation, Inc. Both organisations were established by businessmen in order to support the economic and political development of Black South Africans. In the 1980s, Operation Hunger, Inc. funded over 200 small businesses and development projects in South Africa that fed 1.3 million people each day.<sup>111</sup> The Urban Foundation funded the Urban Foundation South Africa, a conservative organisation that focused on gradual and pragmatic changes towards a non-racial and democratic post-apartheid South Africa through education initiatives and advocacy of free enterprise in both the Black community and apartheid government.<sup>112</sup>

Despite the best efforts of Sullivan, and supporters like Bolen, the continued onslaught of anti-apartheid activism combined with an economic downturn in South Africa made corporate philanthropy increasingly difficult to justify. At the end of 1983, the South African economy sunk into a recession, shrinking profit margins and the ability of signatory companies

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<sup>109</sup> Harris, “Racial Identity and the Civilizing Mission: Double-Consciousness at the 1895 Congress on Africa,” 153.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> A.M.K. Micou and S.A. McLean, *US Support for Organizations Raising Money for South African Causes: An Introduction and a Directory: South African Information Exchange Working Paper #6* (New York: Institute of International Education, 1989), 30-31.

<sup>112</sup> Andre Kraak, “Private Sector Investment in Black Education and Training: Rescuing South African Capitalism from Apartheid’s Crisis,” *Comparative Education* 25, no. 2 (1989): 197-218.

to hire Black workers. As South African economist John Inggs argued, the recession moved South Africa, economically speaking, “from the ranks of the West” and “into the club of failing African economies.”<sup>113</sup> Tensions only heightened from 1984, as the situation in South Africa continued to worsen and economic sanctions gained more support in the US. Yet, many of the supporters of the Sullivan Principles remained committed to the importance of corporate social responsibility in encouraging positive change in the apartheid state.

### **Bolen’s Conservative Philosophy**

Like many African Americans who promoted an alternative or conservative approach to South Africa, Bolen was criticised for his role in maintaining a US presence and collaborating with the apartheid regime. This was particularly the case for Bolen, as he was tasked to respond to all correspondence regarding DuPont’s involvement in South Africa. During the early 1980s he spent much of his time convincing institutions, particularly universities and pension funds that were facing pressure to divest, to support the corporate approach. For Bolen it was obvious that “as a Black American” he was “certainly not an apologist for the South African system.”<sup>114</sup> This was not only because of his race and experience of American segregation, but also because the apartheid system “runs counter to basic American values” like the “principles embodied in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.”<sup>115</sup> As Bolen frequently insisted, American corporate “activities in South Africa [were] helping to promote peaceful change, social justice, and respect for human dignity.”<sup>116</sup> By

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<sup>113</sup> John Inggs, “An Overview of the South African Economy in the 1980s,” *South African Journal of Economic History* 9, no. 2 (1994), 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> David Bolen, “Letter to Norman Jaskol Assistant Secretary, Finance Public Employees Retirement Association of Colorado, Sept. 13, 1983,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

contrast, he argued, the US anti-apartheid movement's calls for withdrawal were simply "symbolism" and "long distance rhetoric."<sup>117</sup>

Bolen's work at DuPont and his work for the Sullivan Principles was consistent with his conservative worldview. He first outlined his own understanding of African development in an edited collection published in 1964. As a trained economist, it is unsurprising that Bolen took a largely economic perspective on big issues. Economic development, according to Bolen, was the key to "ensuring dignity, human freedom, and equality for all in Africa."<sup>118</sup> The political changes wrought by the independence movements from the late 1950s were "commendable," he wrote, but "more remains to be done economically."<sup>119</sup> This was particularly the case as he believed many of the independence movements would descend into violent dictatorships aligned with the Soviet Union.

Like many Black conservatives, Bolen believed that the biggest threat in Africa was communist totalitarianism. He argued that a combination of Soviet propaganda, anti-colonial sentiment, the temptation of a nationalised economy, and an 'African' communal culture, had "retard[ed]" African nation building.<sup>120</sup> Resembling the arguments made by Black conservative intellectuals in the United States in the 1980s, Bolen emphasised the central role of family dynamics in economic development. Where Black conservatives argued that single-parent families and welfare dependence had inhibited African American progress, Bolen argued that the "extended family system" in Africa had the same effect. As he wrote, "in effect, this institution is a built-in social security system...[that] adversely affects private initiative and thrift."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Bolen, "U.S. Corporate Presence in South Africa."

<sup>118</sup> David Bolen, "Africa," in *World Economic Problems and Policies*, ed. Herbert V. Prochnow (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 141.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 150.

Bolen believed that a cultural change to family dynamics, work culture, and the fields of education enabled Africans to develop an appreciation for economic freedom and advancement. While Africans had adopted the western notion of “one man, one vote” in their fights for independence, Bolen argued that they also needed to embody the principles of individualism and materialism. As Bolen explained,

If the desire for material goods is limited, then it is reasonable to expect that efforts to obtain them will be restrained. Limited communication facilities, mass illiteracy, lack of vertical and horizontal mobility, and related factors restrict the horizons of Africans in the bush. As these types of impediments are removed, the desire for material goods will increase as well as the amount of effort Africans are willing to make to obtain them.<sup>122</sup>

Echoing arguments made by Thomas Sowell in *Race and Economics*, Bolen argued that economic development was only possible with a change in “attitudes” which “must place a high value on hard and conscientious work, social and geographical mobility, thrift, disposition to innovate, risk-taking, and respect for the sanctity of private contract.”<sup>123</sup>

Likewise, Bolen argued that the “slave-owner mentality” meant that many Africans had “little respect for manual labor or for the dignity of labor.”<sup>124</sup> Those who were able to be educated at university, for example, chose liberal arts and law over more practical degrees in business and economics, and technical fields like agriculture.<sup>125</sup> Bolen’s solution was a combination of technical education and culture change that encouraged thrift, innovation, and hard work—in other words, training in western-style capitalism. Similar ideas were reflected in the work of Booker T. Washington, African American missionaries, and Madie Hall-Xuma.

Like Thomas, Bolen’s behind the scenes investment in Black empowerment in South Africa does not fit neatly within liberal and radical typologies and has continued to be sidelined

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid,148.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.



in scholarly writing. Central to Bolen's approach was an understanding of individualism and entrepreneurialism. Like other Black conservatives throughout the twentieth century, including Booker T. Washington and Thomas Sowell, Bolen combined these beliefs with ideas of moral living in the form of thrift and hard work. Furthermore, Bolen believed the best method to foster these cultural and economic values in South Africa was through U.S. corporate activity and corresponding social responsibility programs. Bolen encouraged Black South African economic and educational opportunities through his work at DuPont and with the Sullivan Principles. Ultimately, Bolen advocated for and implemented constructive change through business ties, more closely aligned with the work of the Reagan administration than the anti-apartheid movement.

### **Constructive Engagement**

The Sullivan Principles were the “flag-ship” Black empowerment strategy of the Reagan administration.<sup>126</sup> Support for the Sullivan Principles was one of the few crossovers from the Carter administration, which had also embraced the program as a means to improve the living standards of South Africa's Black majority. The Reagan administration's dedication to Sullivan's approach was not surprising, as both the Sullivan Principles and Constructive Engagement sought a middle ground to bring about gradual change. More than that, Sullivan was a respected figure in the Black community who the Reagan administration could point to in order to neutralise some of the criticisms levelled against Constructive Engagement. As historian Robert Massie argued, Sullivan “could be counted on to understand and support the basic principles of capitalism.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Alex Thomson, “Incomplete Engagement: Reagan's South Africa Policy Revisited,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (1995), 95.

<sup>127</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 387.

The Reagan administration's recognition of the Sullivan Principles was demonstrated in its choice of ambassador to the apartheid state. Herman W. Nickel, a political appointee and former journalist, was confirmed as the United States ambassador to South Africa in 1982. As the US ambassador to South Africa Nickel embodied the policy – and spirit – of Constructive Engagement. As he told a reporter in 1982, his job was to “lend encouragement to moderate forces” in the apartheid government, not to engage in “public lecturing or hectoring.”<sup>128</sup> Though he disliked the apartheid regime, Nickel had learnt from his previous South African experience. He spent the early years of his appointment courting National Party politicians and steadfastly avoiding controversial meetings with Black activists.<sup>129</sup>

A key role for Nickel was advising the executives of US corporations in South Africa. As these corporations faced threats of divestment and increasing demands by Sullivan, it was Nickel who encouraged the executives to remain there. As Nickel told the American Chamber of Commerce in South Africa in 1983,

Since it isn't our money, we in this government are reluctant to tell U.S. business whether to invest here or elsewhere. Yet we believe very strongly that the U.S. companies here are a positive force for peaceful change in this part of the world.<sup>130</sup>

Pointing to the accomplishments of the “socially-aware” Sullivan signatories, Nickel argued that the evidence of their impact was clear. It was their presence in South Africa that had given corporations the leverage to “persuade” the South African government “to shelve the so-called Orderly Movement of Black Persons Bill.”<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the presence of American corporations in South Africa was essential for the implementation of the US government's

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<sup>128</sup> Herman Nickel quoted in “Reagan Choice Urges Care on South Africa,” *NYT*, Feb. 26, 1982, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Herman Nickel, “Interview, Aug. 31, 1989,” by the *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, <https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Nickel,%20Herman%20W.1989.toc.pdf>; Anthony Lewis, “Abroad at Home: Alienating the Future,” *NYT*, Dec. 30, 1985, 19.

<sup>130</sup> Herman Nickel, “Constructive Engagement at Mid-Term, Speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in South Africa on Feb. 16, 1983.” *Africa Portal*. [https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Background Briefing No 15 Containing The Address On Feb 16 1983 By Us Ambassad rKfXpOM.pdf](https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Background%20Briefing%20No%2015%20Containing%20The%20Address%20On%20Feb%2016%201983%20By%20Us%20Ambassad%20rKfXpOM.pdf).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

foreign policy. As Nickel explained, business was the method by which Constructive Engagement could encourage “South Africa moving through a process of peaceful evolutionary change away from apartheid and towards a society that addresses the equities of all groups, majorities and minorities alike.”<sup>132</sup>

Reagan officials in the United States also referred to their support of the Sullivan Principles as a demonstration of Constructive Engagement as a force for positive change in the apartheid state. Reagan officials testified to the benefits of the Sullivan Principles (and Constructive Engagement) in Congress, in correspondence with citizens, and media engagements. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Princeton Lyman told the House of Representatives in 1982 that anti-apartheid legislation would only “create a large and complicated bureaucratic mechanism” and distract both the US government and corporations from “what has been achieved by the Sullivan Principles.”<sup>133</sup> Lyman continued: to do so would prevent business executives continuing to “play a constructive role in bringing about positive change in South Africa.”<sup>134</sup>

### **Another Black Conservative in the Diplomatic Corps**

A key defender of the Sullivan Principles in the Reagan administration was fellow Black conservative Alan Keyes. When special rapporteur Ahmed Khalifa criticised the Sullivan Principles in a report to the UN Economic and Social Council in 1984, for example, Keyes delivered a major statement to the General Assembly admonishing what he called the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Princeton Lyman, “U.S. Corporate Activities in South Africa, H.R. 3008, H.R. 3597, H.R. 6393, Oct. 15, 1982,” *Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade and on Africa; Committee on Foreign Affairs; House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 61.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

author's "self-righteous myopia."<sup>135</sup> Instead of the "smug" derision of the Sullivan signatories, Keyes implored the UN to look beyond "ritual diatribes" and consider the "positive role" they played in "the ability of South African Blacks to achieve concrete changes in their lives."<sup>136</sup> He continued, "it can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that those Principles have accomplished more real good for ordinary men and women in South Africa than all his invectives."<sup>137</sup> More than simply advocating for the Sullivan Principles at the United Nations, however, Keyes was himself one of the leading figures in the Black empowerment strategy of Constructive Engagement.

Unlike Thomas and Bolen who have been ignored by scholars, Keyes is one of the most prominent Black conservatives of the modern era.<sup>138</sup> This was particularly the case after he became a perennial candidate for public office, including when he ran against Barack Obama for the Illinois Senate in 2004, and subsequently sought the Republican Party's nomination for president in 2008. Keyes then became a highly visible figure in the Tea Party movement and an active proponent of the 'birther' conspiracy, even accusing President Obama of being an ISIS terrorist, a serial killer, and a "flaming red...Commie!"<sup>139</sup> Keyes' involvement in

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<sup>135</sup> Alan Keyes, "Statement by Ambassador Keyes, Alternate United States Representative to the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in the Third Committee, on Item 84 and 88, Racism and Racial Discrimination, Oct. 17, 1984," *United States Mission to the United Nations Press Release* (New York: United Nations, 1984), 5.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> See for example, Brian Calfano, "An Alan Keyes Effect? Examining Anti-Black Sentiment Among White Evangelicals," *Political Behavior* 32, no. 1 (2010): 133-156; Melissa Harris-Lacewell and Jane Junn, "Old Friends and New Alliances: How the 2004 Illinois State Race Complicates the Study of Race and Religion," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 30-50; Hanes Walton, Jr., et al., "Forecasting and Predicting the Election of an African American President: Perspectives From Campaign Managers," *Du Bois Review* 7, no. 1 (2010): 57-80.

<sup>139</sup> Alan Keyes, "In Obama's 'Strategy for ISIS, the Enemy is US,'" *Renew America*, Sept. 9, 2014; Alan Keyes, "The GOP Field: Seeded with Poisoned Pills," *WND*, May 14, 2015; Alan Keyes quoted in Jaclyn Howell, "Not Just Crazy: An Explanation for the Resonance of the Birther Narrative," *Communication Monographs* 79, no. 4 (2012), 438.

promoting wild conspiracy theories around President Obama serves as a reminder of what historian Richard Hofstadter labelled the “paranoid style of American politics.”<sup>140</sup>

For critics, Keyes’ antics reinforced their view of him as a “clown” and a “remote control Negro” who “can be used against his people by the push of a button.”<sup>141</sup> Keyes’ positions within the Reagan administration and support of Constructive Engagement were considered just one controversy in a career defined by controversy.<sup>142</sup> Many of these controversies were a product of the combative disposition and rigid theology that defined Keyes’ politics. Inspired by his intellectual mentor, the conservative philosopher Allan Bloom, Keyes believed that freedom was only possible through moral character and personal restraint.<sup>143</sup> His deep religiosity informed his ardent anti-communism and his belief that the Cold War was a battle against an evil force. Keyes’ views on the role of the United States in the world aligned with those of Reagan, and those of Reagan’s foreign policy advisor in his 1980 campaign, Jeane Kirkpatrick. Keyes met and impressed Kirkpatrick in India in 1979, so much so that when she was appointed ambassador to the United Nations in February 1981, she took the young Black conservative with her.

While Crocker’s debut trip to Africa in June 1981 has all but been forgotten as an embarrassing start for a controversial policy, the trip was notable in the career of Alan Keyes. Keyes had been assigned as a desk officer at the US embassy in Zimbabwe during its transition from white rule to the new Black leadership of Robert Mugabe. His station in southern Africa in mid-1981 meant that Keyes was available to serve as assistant to Crocker in his meetings

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Nov. 1964, 77-88.

<sup>141</sup> Deborah Mathis, “Keyes is Cast as Clown Instead of Contender for Senate,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Aug. 19, 2006, A6; A Asaullah Samad, “The Tragedy of ‘Remote Control’ Negroes,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Aug. 19, 2004, A7.

<sup>142</sup> Bunthany Cheam, “Alan L. Keyes,” *BlackPast*, Mar. 27, 2007. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/keyes-alan-l-1950/>.

<sup>143</sup> Alan Keyes, *Masters of the Dream: The Strength and Betrayal of Black America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995), vii.

with leaders in the region. It was with Keyes that Crocker first met with the South African Ministers Botha and Malan.<sup>144</sup> This tour served as final assignment in southern Africa before he returned to the United States as a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. His experience in southern Africa and on tour with Crocker sparked his interest in the region that continued well into his career.

Keyes was given the opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to the conservative approach of the Reagan administration from 11 October 1983 when he was appointed ambassador to the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The council had been one of the original six bodies created by the United Nations Charter in 1945 and was tasked with providing "overall guidance and coordination" to the UN's programs focused on development.<sup>145</sup> In this role Keyes was responsible for the US policy relating to 15 key UN agencies, including the World Health Organisation and the International Monetary Fund. In this role Keyes was tasked with the implementation of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine in the UN, as explained below.

### **Alan Keyes at the United Nations**

Keyes' rapid rise to the rank of ambassador was largely due to the mentorship of Jeane Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick was a political science professor at Georgetown University and emerged as a prominent intellectual within the conservative movement in the 1970s and the Reagan revolution. After serving as the foreign affairs advisor to Reagan's presidential campaign in 1980, she was appointed to serve as the US Permanent ambassador to the United Nations, a role that she occupied from 1981 until 1985. Kirkpatrick's prominence in this period

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<sup>144</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation Between R.F. Botha and Chester Crocker of the US Department of State, April 15, 1981," *Wilson Center Digital Archive*. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118259.pdf>.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, "About Us." <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/about-us>.

was based on the Kirkpatrick Doctrine—a foreign policy perspective that sought to reverse the failures of the Carter administration by distinguishing between right-wing authoritarianism and left-wing totalitarianism.<sup>146</sup> Kirkpatrick argued that the United States should pursue ‘quiet diplomacy’ with allies even when they are authoritarian regimes. In contrast, a punitive policy of economic retaliation, diplomatic confrontation, and public reprimand should be directed towards communist totalitarian regimes. Under Kirkpatrick, US foreign policy in the UN was centered on aggressive attacks against Soviet influence and the perceived anti-American sentiment of many of the member states.

Kirkpatrick’s influence on US foreign policy during the Reagan administration was significant; she served simultaneously as ambassador to the UN and as a member of the National Security Council. Conservative activist Richard Viguerie went as far as to say that Kirkpatrick was “second only to the President himself in giving the Administration a sense of purpose and direction.”<sup>147</sup> Importantly for Keyes, this influence extended to her authority to select her staff at the United Nations. As one critic argued, Kirkpatrick was able to load the US mission with political adherents rather than career diplomats.<sup>148</sup> Keyes, who had impressed Kirkpatrick when they met in Mumbai in 1979, was “yanked from obscurity” in India to serve in Kirkpatrick’s inner circle.<sup>149</sup> As Ambassador Harvey Feldman later recalled, the State Department initially refused to appoint Keyes, a “mid-career” officer only four years into his

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<sup>146</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (1979).  
<https://www.commentary.org/articles/jeane-kirkpatrick/dictatorships-double-standards/>.

<sup>147</sup> Richard Viguerie quoted in Adam Wolfson, “The World According to Kirkpatrick: Is Ronald Reagan Listening?” *Policy Review* 31 (1985), 68.

<sup>148</sup> Seymour Maxwell Finger, *American Ambassadors at the United Nations: People, Politics, and Bureaucracy in Making Foreign Policy* (New York: UNITAR, 1992), 289-297.

<sup>149</sup> James Alan Williams, “Interview with Raymond Ewing, Oct. 31, 2003,” *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, 127.  
<https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Williams,%20James%20Alan.toc.pdf>.

career, to the rank of ambassador.<sup>150</sup> In response, Keyes resigned from the Foreign Service and was nominated as a political appointee.

As a member of the Reagan administration's UN entourage, Keyes was expected to implement the two major prongs of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine. The first was the utilisation of the United States' financial contributions to push the UN toward an agenda that was in-line with American interests. For Kirkpatrick and her "adherents" like Keyes, it seemed unreasonable for the United States to contribute a quarter of the annual UN budget and abide by its international conventions when the same standards did not apply to the Soviet Union. In fact, the United States was by far the largest financial contributor to the UN, even as undemocratic nations formed the largest voting blocs. As Keyes argued,

Control of the organisation has come to rest in the hands of a majority that includes a large number of unfree undemocratic states. By simply accommodating itself to the power of this majority, the United States... would compromise essential democratic principles.<sup>151</sup>

To address this imbalance, the United States' representatives threatened to reassert their power through bilateral relations. For example, any vote against the interests of the United States in the United Nations was considered during assessments of foreign aid and other forms of diplomatic ties.<sup>152</sup>

The second prong of this strategy was directed at protecting US allies, particularly authoritarian regimes, from UN interference. As Kirkpatrick explained in her famous 1979 *Commentary* article, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," anti-American sentiment was able to flourish during the Carter administration because of its failure to support authoritarian allies facing violent internal opposition.<sup>153</sup> This failure led to regime changes that replaced autocratic

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<sup>150</sup> Harvey Feldman, "Interview with Edward Dillery, Mar. 11, 1999," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, 146. <https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Feldman,%20Harvey.toc.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup> Alan Keyes, "Fixing the UN," *The National Interest* 4 (1986), 14.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>153</sup> Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards."



allies with Soviet-aligned governments that were hostile to the United States and beset with violence, oppression, and corruption. Instead of repeating this failed “moral” stance, the Kirkpatrick adherents supported US allies against internal revolutionary forces and international pressure.<sup>154</sup> Just like Constructive Engagement, the Kirkpatrick Doctrine was based on the premise that the United States would be more effective in the Cold War through friendlier relations with problematic allies.

With the exception of the Arab Israeli conflict, no issue dominated the UN agenda—and therefore Keyes’ thinking—more than southern Africa. For the Reagan administration, the special attention and condemnation reserved for South Africa was an example of the Soviet-controlled anti-American sentiment in the United Nations. For Kirkpatrick and her entourage, South Africa remained a vital anti-communist ally that required US protection in the UN. From 1981 the US consistently defended the sovereignty of South Africa and abstained or voted against anti-apartheid resolutions in the UN.

While technically outside the bounds of his positions, Keyes emerged in the mid-1980s as a supporter of Constructive Engagement. Undoubtedly, his support was welcomed by the Administration, particularly as African American activists protested that the controversial policy was pro-apartheid and therefore racist. Echoing the Christian realist sentiments of Reinhold Niebuhr, Keyes argued that moral certitude and anticolonial aspirations were not enough to warrant South Africa’s international isolation.<sup>155</sup> It was more important that the United Nations join the US in promoting democratic principles and practices in the apartheid state.<sup>156</sup> The work towards the end of apartheid should focus not only on the elimination of the

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<sup>154</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Legitimacy and Force: Political and Moral Dimension* (Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988).

<sup>155</sup> See for example, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 265-287.

<sup>156</sup> Keyes, “Statement by Ambassador Keyes, Alternate United States Representative to the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in the Third Committee, on Item 84 and 88, Racism and Racial Discrimination, Oct. 17, 1984,” 5.

racist system but also on what form of government replaced it. As he told the UN Human Rights Commission in 1984, “We believe that righteous anger and abhorrence in the face of injustice should not blind us to the complex reality of the South African situation.”<sup>157</sup> Instead, the US would “identify opportunities to promote peaceful, positive change and devis[e] practical steps to exploit them.”<sup>158</sup>

In the view of many commentators, South Africa was a particularly good candidate for such an approach. As Kirkpatrick explained in a 1981 speech, South Africa was a two-tiered society with a small segment already living in a democracy.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, this meant that many of the necessary preconditions for a successful liberal democracy – including the rule of law and the peaceful transfer of power–were already established in South Africa. Just as importantly, the white population considered itself a part of “western civilisation” and had a desire to be accepted by democratic nations. Both these realities could be opportunities for the international community to encourage reform in the apartheid state. It was for this reason, Keyes argued, that Constructive Engagement was the best approach to South Africa. The involvement of democratic and capitalist nations in the racist state provided opportunity for Black economic empowerment, access to education, and “the pursuit of greater justice.”<sup>160</sup> In addition, Constructive Engagement also sought to “encourage and reinforce the better nature of South Africa’s whites.”<sup>161</sup> As Keyes concluded in 1984, “the only effective course is to build the future even as we destroy apartheid by making effective use of the levers of change.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Alan Keyes, “We Will Not Abandon the People of South Africa, Black or White, Feb. 15, 1984,” in *American Foreign Policy Current Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1986), 807.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, “The Problem of Namibia, address before the Overseas Press Club, New York City, Apr. 29, 1981,” in *Legitimacy and Force: National and International Dimensions, Vol. 2* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1988), 305.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Alan Keyes, “Opposition to Adoption of Economic Sanctions Against South Africa, Statement by the Representative at the United Nations Before the U.N. General Assembly, Dec. 13, 1984,” *United States Press Release* (New York: United Nations, 1984).

According to this view, the economic sanctions demanded by members of the United Nations, as well as the disinvestment strategies of anti-apartheid activists in the United States, pushed South Africa toward dysfunction and communism. Importantly, punitive withdrawal removed any positive influence toward democracy and the free market. Keyes articulated this view when he asked, “how many people is disinvestment going to educate?”<sup>163</sup> He followed this question up with another: how would withdrawal provide Black South Africans with the managerial expertise and governance experience to rule?<sup>164</sup> Where proponents of sanctions and disinvestment advocated for a “violent approach,” in Keyes’ view, he argued that they were not forced to “live amidst the rubble” of these policies that resulted in “shattered economic potential and broken dreams of progress.”<sup>165</sup> Moreover, withdrawal would enable the Soviet Union to “make use” of the power vacuum to turn southern Africa “into yet another system of subjugated client states.”<sup>166</sup>

Just as Sowell and Williams had done, Keyes drew attention to the double-standards of anti-apartheid activists in the US and the United Nations. He argued that Black-ruled nations were often held to a lower standard than South Africa, particularly when it came to human rights violations. Likewise, Keyes argued that this double-standard not only prevented African leaders being held accountable for the conditions of their people, but that it was also racist. As Keyes extolled,

those who condemn the white government of South Africa for its injustice against Blacks, but who do not even wish to verify the injustices that may be perpetrated by Ethiopia’s government against its people obviously imply that a higher standard of human rights is to be applied to whites than to peoples of other races or colors. We reject this implication. If it is racist not to care when Black people are denied their

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<sup>163</sup> Alan Keyes quoted in Brooke W. Kroeger, “UN Envoy Keeps Candor Showing,” *Newsday*, Jun. 10, 1985, 11.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Keyes, “We Will Not Abandon the People of South Africa, Black or White.”

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

rights, then it is racist not to care when Black governments deny them.<sup>167</sup>

According to Keyes, the Reagan administration ‘rejected’ the racism inherent within this line of argument and instead stood for the universal principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of Human Rights. The power of this argument was why historian Benjamin Talton concluded that Keyes was the Reagan administration’s “most effective argument” against the accusations of racism made by African American anti-apartheid activists.<sup>168</sup>

### **Keyes and Conservative Black Internationalism**

Keyes, like many of the Black conservatives covered in this thesis, faced regular criticism for his rejection of the liberal orthodoxy on South Africa. African delegates to the United Nations, for example, admitted to journalists that they struggled to understand his position. As one such diplomat told Brooke Kroeger of *Newsday*, “it’s difficult to hear someone whom you expect to sympathise speaking...as if his people never experienced slavery.”<sup>169</sup> African Americans were even more critical. Representative George W. Crockett, Jr. (D-Mich.), dismissed Keyes’ “betrayal” as the Reagan administration’s attempt to “trot out” any Black American whose “career ambition” led them to support its policy.<sup>170</sup> Free South Africa Movement’s Randall Robinson was more succinct, arguing Keyes was simply “a Black face on an anti-Black policy.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Alan Keyes, “Statement of the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs,” *Hearings Before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs’ Subcommittee on African Affairs*, Mar. 6, 1986 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986).

<sup>168</sup> Talton, *In This Land of Plenty*, 116.

<sup>169</sup> African diplomat quoted in Brooke W. Kroeger, “UN Envoy Keeps Candor Showing,” *Newsday*, Jun. 10, 1985, 11.

<sup>170</sup> Rep. George Crockett, Jr. quoted in McCombs, “Alan Keyes the Question of Justice,” D1.

<sup>171</sup> Randall Robinson quoted in McCombs, “Alan Keyes the Question of Justice,” D1.

But for Keyes, the expectation that the colour of his skin determined a particular point of view was a reductionist and ridiculous notion. Instead, he believed that “at the end of the day” any position he took as an African American would be a “contribution to... what it means to be Black.”<sup>172</sup> In the same way, Keyes’ political ideology cannot be removed from his conservative religious values. As historian Robert E. Weems argued, Keyes’ ideology should be understood as an example of “organic” Black conservatism that viewed “immorality” as the primary problem in the world.<sup>173</sup> Christopher Alan Bracey also emphasised the importance of American exceptionalism to this expression of Black conservatism. As he explained,

In a manner strikingly consistent with the best of American mythology, Black conservatives have sought to develop a body of thought, over time, to sustain the view that Blacks too, are among the chosen people with a historic mission to save and remake the world in the name of freedom and democracy.<sup>174</sup>

These ‘organic’ characteristics of Black conservatism—moral reform and American exceptionalism—have been apparent throughout African American history. Scholars have examined these beliefs in African American leaders from Jupiter Hammon in the eighteenth century, Booker T. Washington in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and contemporary Black conservatives like Keyes.

This idea is evident, for example, when Keyes wrote that African American identity “is something that emerged from and on account of our American experience, especially the experience of slavery.”<sup>175</sup> For Keyes,

The Christian ethical system made it possible for enslaved people to understand that true freedom, moral freedom, was something their captors could not take away. For the enslaved man or woman, the moment of real personal emancipation came with the willingness to assume moral responsibility for their own actions, when they realized

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<sup>172</sup> Alan Keyes quoted in Kroeger, “UN Envoy Keeps Candor Showing,” 11.

<sup>173</sup> Robert E. Weems, “The American Moral Reform Society and the Origins of Black Conservative Ideology,” in *Dimensions of Black Conservatism in the United States: Made in America*, ed. Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randolph (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 30.

<sup>174</sup> Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Keyes, *Masters of the Dream*, 7.

that, even in bondage, it was up to them to decide between good and evil.<sup>176</sup>

This view also informed Keyes' perspective on the role of the United States in South Africa. Recognising the special interest he had in the problem of apartheid, Keyes "confess[ed]" in *Our Character, Our Future* that South Africa was the one "exception" in his "general antipathy toward foreign aid."<sup>177</sup> Yet, just as he argued that African Americans could not advance while considering themselves as victims, he "realize[d] what a disservice...to South Africa's people" aid would do.<sup>178</sup> Instead of providing "charity and gestures," the United States should "build on the strengths" of South Africa's Black population.<sup>179</sup> According to Keyes, South Africa needed financial investment in order to integrate into the international economy and build on the management and entrepreneurial skills already available in the Black community.

One State Department official compared Keyes' work on South Africa to the policy fixation Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams had shown for the Contras in Nicaragua.<sup>180</sup> While this was not a particularly flattering comparison – Abrams was at the time embroiled in the Iran-Contra scandal – it did demonstrate Keyes' interest in the southern Africa situation. Like Abrams, Keyes was "willing to go into battle" for his priority project, even when it fell outside his official responsibilities.<sup>181</sup> As Keyes explained to the UN General Assembly, he supported Constructive Engagement because,

Through painstaking diplomatic effort and constructive engagement with the forces of positive change we may foster opportunities for the people of South Africa, Black and white, to realize the better destiny of their country. In his famous "I have a Dream Speech" in 1963, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King captured the spirit of such an approach. 'In the process of gaining our rightful place,' he said, 'let us not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by bitterness and hatred.' Dr. King never underestimated the

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>177</sup> Alan L. Keyes, *Our Character, Our Future: Reclaiming America's Moral Destiny* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 94.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>180</sup> State Department Official quoted in McCombs, "Alan Keyes The Question of Justice," D1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

tremendous difficulty of this positive approach, difficulties exacerbated by the stubborn realities of the southern Africa situation.<sup>182</sup>

Keyes' approach to the apartheid state was consistent with the Reagan administration's foreign policy. He emerged as a leading voice in the implementation of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine and defender of Constructive Engagement in the United Nations. However, Keyes' philosophy, particularly his emphasis on moral responsibility, can be understood as an expression of a prominent strain of Black conservative thought and an example of conservative Black internationalism.

In examining the work of Franklin A. Thomas, David Bolen, and Alan Keyes during the period 1981-1983, this chapter brings to light examples of Black conservatism in three central institutions of American internationalism—philanthropic, private, and government. Thomas, an expert on US policy toward apartheid South Africa, largely agreed with the policy of Constructive Engagement, but also recognised the limitations of the Reagan administration's approach and sought to correct them. Bolen, also an expert in southern African politics having served as an ambassador to the region during the Nixon administration, brought his experience to his role as international director at one of the largest multinational corporations, emerging as a leading corporate supporter of the Sullivan Principles. Keyes, an ideologue at home in the Reagan administration, went beyond his official responsibilities in the United Nations to advocate for Constructive Engagement with South Africa as the most fitting moral approach to international relations.

While Keyes focused on the moral and philosophical, Thomas and Bolen were more concerned with the pragmatic and every day. However, they all shared an aversion to direct action, radical politics, and revolutionary change in South Africa. All worked in their respective

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<sup>182</sup> Alan Keyes, "Transcript: Racism and the United Nations: A record of Highly Selective Concern," *Lincoln Review* 5, no. 1 (1984), 30.

areas to expand private sector-led economic development, education opportunities, and gradual cultural reform based on conservative values of the family, hard work, and thrift. Like the Black conservatives considered in the previous chapter, their approaches emphasised the role of US corporations in the economic and cultural development of Black South Africans, the power of education for personal and community uplift, and the importance of moderate reform over protest and revolution. Like the individuals covered in Chapter One, the positions of Thomas, Bolen, and Keyes can be understood within a longer Black conservative intellectual tradition and history of Black conservative engagement with South Africa. By examining the work of Thomas and Bolen, and considering it alongside Keyes, the chapter presents a more diverse picture of African American political thought in international affairs. In doing so, the chapter casts fresh light on Black conservatism, and understandings of Black internationalism, and the relationship of African Americans with the Reagan administration.

Until now, Thomas and Bolen have been largely excluded from the scholarly literature. As this chapter demonstrates, however, by broadening the definition of conservatism to include a range of African Americans and perspectives the work of Bolen and Thomas becomes visible, significant, and understandable. Further, by considering the various ways conservatism informed Black engagement with South Africa, the work of Black conservatives like Alan Keyes no longer appears completely out-of-sync with African American communities. In adopting this approach, the chapter demonstrates the important role of conservative Black internationalism in US engagement with South Africa in the early years of the Reagan administration as the policy of Constructive Engagement was established, and how this work can be understood as the continuation of an underappreciated tradition in African American thought.



As the United States' anti-apartheid movement's attack on Constructive Engagement grew, Keyes became a key figure in the Reagan administration's public relations campaign to counter the push for economic sanctions. His deeply conservative approach to international relations combined with his highly visible public presence provided the Reagan administration with a committed defender of the policy of Constructive Engagement. Black conservative voices in opposition to the anti-apartheid movement became even more important from 1984 after three African Americans were arrested at the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C., sparking a mass protest movement. This mass protest across the United States between 1985 and 1986, as thousands of activists united against Constructive Engagement and in support of economic sanctions and corporate disinvestment against the apartheid state.

### Chapter Three

#### **“All my skinfolk ain’t kinfolk”: Conservative Black Internationalism and the Peak of Anti-apartheid Activism, 1985-1986**

In October 1985, a Georgetown University senior in a grey suit stood at a lectern before his peers. As he spoke “the room explode[d] in a thunderclap of echoed condemnation.”<sup>1</sup> Deroy Murdock grinned at the commotion and continued his speech, ‘Why Disinvestment is Bad for South African Blacks, Bad for the U.S. and Good for the Soviet Union.’ The young Black conservative’s key talking points mirrored those of other conservative figures, including his mentor Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). Murdock insisted, over protests from the audience, that his Georgetown cohort should join him in encouraging more American investment in South Africa and patience with the apartheid state. Further investment, he explained, would improve the lives of Black South Africans, and support the South African President’s reforms of the apartheid system. As soon as Murdock finished speaking, he was surrounded by a “squad of angry inquisitors” and confronted with the accusation that he was not “a true Black man.”<sup>2</sup>

The angry atmosphere at Georgetown was unlike the one Murdock encountered only days earlier at the Heritage Foundation. While Murdock gave a similar speech, this time it had been at a right-wing think tank and to a crowd of enthusiastic young conservatives.<sup>3</sup> Gauging this audience’s reaction, journalist Lloyd Grove reported at the time that “Murdock’s insights on this odyssey [went] down like vintage port.”<sup>4</sup> While Murdock was still only a student, the 21-year-old had already established himself in conservative circles, working part-time for Senator Hatch, as chairman for the Reagan campaign, and as national director of the Young

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Grove, “To Be Young Black and Conservative,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 22, 1985, B2.

<sup>2</sup> Carlene Francis quoted in Grove, “To Be Young Black and Conservative,” B2.

<sup>3</sup> Deroy Murdock, “Why Disinvestment is Bad for South Africa Blacks, Bad for the U.S. and Good for the Soviet Union,” invitation by the Heritage Foundation,” *William A. Rusher’s Papers* [General Correspondence, Box 60], Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> Grove, “To Be Young Black and Conservative,” B2.

Americans for Freedom. Indeed, Murdock next appeared at the Heritage Foundation later in the month and shared a stage with Vice-President George Bush. In stark contrast to his reception at Georgetown, where he was accused of not being ‘Black enough,’ at the Heritage Foundation Murdock was received as a ‘shining’ example of the post-civil rights movement generation. Despite the different receptions he received, both Georgetown and the Heritage Foundation were stops on Murdock’s anti-apartheid campaign between 1985 and 1986.

This chapter examines those, like Murdock, who took upon themselves the task of convincing audiences that sanctions were not the best way forward for South Africa, and who did so at the very moment when anti-apartheid activism spread across the United States into a mass protest movement. By 1985 these protests had made support of economic sanctions against South Africa virtually a gospel commitment among activists and the wider US public. Responding to these protests, Black conservatives engaged in public debate hoping to provoke critical reflection on the economic impact of sanctions on Black South Africans and advance an alternative vision of economic empowerment and development.

The chapter first considers the work of the young and ambitious Murdock, tracing his one-man campaign to redirect anti-apartheid activism away from economic sanctions and disinvestment. Murdock’s campaign demonstrates that there were Black conservative activists engaged in anti-apartheid discussions, particularly on college campuses. At the peak of the anti-apartheid protest movement in the US, Murdock defended the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement and articulated a conservative Black internationalism. The chapter will then examine the public advocacy of Black conservative intellectuals Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams, expanding analysis of their work to include their syndicated columns and op-eds in which they also offered strong criticism of liberal African American leaders for their commitment to sanctions. While in many respects their arguments resembled those in their academic work, these columns demonstrated Sowell and Williams’ attempts to

engage with anti-apartheid debates and influence the general public on the problem of apartheid and US policy toward South Africa.

This attempt to engage in anti-apartheid debates through the media was also evident in the Black conservative journal *Lincoln Review*, and the activities of its right-wing editor J.A. Parker. Parker, considered by some to be the ‘father’ of the modern Black conservative movement, was a mentor for many Black conservatives including Alan Keyes, Walter E. Williams and Deroy Murdock. Throughout the 1980s, he courted controversy for his work as a paid lobbyist for the apartheid regime; his activities were held up by critics as proof that Black conservatives were indeed sellouts. This chapter examines Parker’s work and places it in the context of his “organic” conservatism and fiercely anti-communist politics.

The chapter will close with a brief examination of Reverend Leon Sullivan, demonstrating the ways increased anti-apartheid activism influenced the direction of the Sullivan Principles. While the Principles continued to determine U.S. corporate activity in South Africa and remained a central component of Constructive Engagement, Sullivan himself underwent a change of heart. Disturbed by the growing unrest and violence in South Africa and the continued opposition of anti-apartheid activists in both South Africa and the US to his approach, Sullivan spent the mid-1980s attempting to ‘amplify’ the work of U.S. corporations to include direct confrontation with the apartheid government. Sullivan threatened to withdraw his support for the Principles and advocate for complete withdrawal if his demands for greater corporate activism were not met.

By examining the involvement of Black conservatives in the anti-apartheid debates between 1985 and 1986, this chapter demonstrates that Francis Nesbitt’s exclusion of conservative perspectives in his evaluation of African American anti-apartheid activism was a

significant oversight.<sup>5</sup> By recognising the salience and durability of conservatism in African American engagement with South Africa, the chapter challenges the aberration narrative that has marginalised Black conservative perspectives in the histories of Black internationalism. The chapter shows that not only were Black conservatives engaged with the problem of apartheid and the African American-led anti-apartheid movement in the United States, but that their engagement was consistent with their worldview. In doing so, it reveals important distinctions between the individual actors under consideration, from the increasingly dissenting views of Leon Sullivan to the positions of the ultraconservative J.A. Parker.

### **The Anti-apartheid Activism of Deroy Murdock**

By the time of Murdock's speech at Georgetown, the Free South Africa Movement had been active outside the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. for almost 12 months. During this time, law enforcement officials made over five thousand arrests, which included nearly every member of the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as celebrities, students, and members of the clergy. The District Attorney had long stopped charging the protestors after their arrests in order to "prevent the clogging of the courts."<sup>6</sup> Such was the success of the Embassy protest strategy, initiated by Randall Robinson in November 1984, that satellite demonstrations emerged in cities across the United States, from college campuses to South African consulates to local government. Sit-ins—a staple of 1950s-60s civil rights anti-segregation protest in the US South—were staged in over twenty cities, including Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Cleveland, and New Orleans. It was on college campuses, where

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<sup>5</sup> Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions*, vii.

<sup>6</sup> Karyln Barker and Ed Bruske, 'Charges Against 11 Arrested in Embassy Sit-In Dropped,' *Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1984, B1.

students were protesting university investments in companies with ties to South Africa, that Murdock focused his attention.<sup>7</sup>

Murdock's foray into the debate on Constructive Engagement began on his return from a ten-day visit to the apartheid state in August 1985. In taking this trip Murdock became one of several foreign 'opinion-makers' who had accepted the invitation to undertake a free 'fact finding' mission by the South Africa Foundation.<sup>8</sup> The Foundation, largely funded by South African and American corporations, sponsored these tours in order to facilitate and disseminate a pro-business view of apartheid South Africa in the United States and, in so doing, build a public campaign in support of Constructive Engagement. Critics, including Australian sociologist Ron Witton, have argued that the Foundation was "one of the main bodies propagandising for the apartheid system on an international scale."<sup>9</sup> Through the Foundation Murdock was able to travel to Johannesburg, Cape Town, the 'independent nation' Bophutatswana, and the "African bush region near Skukuza."<sup>10</sup>

By accepting the invitation Murdock joined the ranks of many other prominent conservative 'opinion makers' who had made the journey with the South Africa Foundation, including Max Yergan, William A. Rusher, Reverend Jerry Falwell, and Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC).<sup>11</sup> While the young Murdock could not directly influence a national magazine, a religious organisation, or the Congress, he was energetic and ambitious to carve out a career in the public arena. Throughout the 1980s Murdock's articles appeared in *Conservative Digest*,

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<sup>7</sup> For example, after continued student activism, by 1988 more than 155 educational institutions—from Ivy Leagues such as Yale and Harvard to state colleges like California and Ohio Wesleyan—had announced their intention to divest from stocks tied to South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> John H. Chettle, "Testimony of the Director for North and South America of the South Africa Foundation, Before the Africa Subcommittee of the House Committee on International Relations, Jun. 3, 1977," *William A. Rusher Papers* [General Correspondence: Box 83, Folder 10], Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>9</sup> Ron Witton, "Australia and Apartheid: The Ties That Bind," *The Australian Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1973), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Deroy Murdock, "Viewpoint: Verkrampt, Verlicht, and Values," *Hoya*, Sept. 6, 1985, 9.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on American Evangelicalism and South Africa see Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chapter 7.

*National Review*, and *Los Angeles Times* and he was a guest on television shows like *Today* and *Donahue*. It was not overly surprising that the South Africa Foundation chose to fund Murdock's trip to South Africa at the height of the anti-apartheid movement. As a staunch conservative African American with close ties to politicians and journalists, Murdock was well placed to promote a strong counterview against calls for economic sanctions and disinvestment. In the months following his return from South Africa Murdock wrote articles for a variety of publications—from the Georgetown student paper *The Hoya*, to the conservative daily *Washington Times*, and the Black conservative journal *Lincoln Review*.

While the readerships of the *Washington Times* and *Lincoln Review* were already amenable to the arguments made by Murdock for increased investment in South Africa, the same cannot be said of the student paper. According to the Georgetown University Archivist, in the 1980s *The Hoya* editorial board tended to avoid publishing on divisive political issues, preferring coverage of “unifying storylines.”<sup>12</sup> Further, Georgetown was not immune from the anti-apartheid activism that had engulfed campuses across the United States and had an active chapter of the Student Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism, an organisation that coordinated campaigns for university divestment.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps in an attempt to ‘unify’ the student body behind the university administration, *The Hoya* published a series of articles by Murdock on the problem of South Africa. In the first article, published in September 1985, Murdock resolved that his trip to South Africa the month before had led him to realise that “South Africa is not a Black and white issue.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Murdock understood the division between the

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<sup>12</sup> Georgetown University Archivist, “The Hoya: A Brief History,” *Georgetown University Library* <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/special-collections/archives/essays/the-hoya-brief-history>

<sup>13</sup> “DC Student Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism,” *African Activist Archive*. <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=DC%20Student%20Coalition%20Against%20Apartheid%20and%20Racism>

<sup>14</sup> Murdock, “Viewpoint: Verkramppt, Verlicht, and Values,” 9.

whites—the Afrikaans-speaking *verkramp* and the English-speaking *verlicht*—and the ten African tribes of South Africa, as a “very much more complex and intricate” problem.<sup>15</sup>

According to Murdock, however, the role of the United States in ending apartheid was not complex—it ought to continue to engage with the nation and encourage reform. The approach of the anti-apartheid protesters, he argued, would have the opposite effect. In Murdock’s view, the apartheid regime would continue to resist international pressure and disinvestment worsen the conditions of the poor Black and ‘coloured’ populations.<sup>16</sup> In his second article, “Only Patience Will Heal,” Murdock expanded on the proper role of the United States in South Africa. Murdock recounted his experience of Soweto, witnessing the PACE Academy business school and the Pimville housing development—both funded by international companies—amid the misery of life in what many saw as a slum.<sup>17</sup> As Murdock explained, “American and Western businesses can make life better for people there, they should be encouraged and not forbidden to do so.”<sup>18</sup> But, he continued, “more than anything else, America must give South Africa time”. After all,

If America needed between ten and 122 years to assimilate a homogenous Black minority of 15 percent into a white majority society, how can we expect the white minority society of South Africa to incorporate a highly divided Black majority of 70 percent of the population in a year or two?<sup>19</sup>

These articles in the student paper not only supported the reasoning behind the policy of Constructive Engagement and the position of the South Africa Foundation, but also sought to dissuade the study body of Georgetown from participating in anti-apartheid demonstrations.

On 9 September 1985, on the day the Senate was scheduled to vote on economic sanctions against South Africa, Murdock gave a ‘statement’ on the steps of the United States

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Deroy Murdock, “Only Patience Will Heal South Africa’s Ills,” *HOYA* Sept. 13, 1985, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Capitol Building. Adapting John Lennon, he expounded, “People like us seek reform, not revolution. We condemn apartheid while realizing only patience and hard work will bring it to an end. All we are saying is ‘give peace a chance.’”<sup>20</sup> Only a few months later Murdock sat at the front of a House of Representatives committee room addressing the Youth Brain Trust of the Congressional Black Caucus. After hearing Murdock expounding on his favourite topics, Constructive Engagement and South Africa, Representative Mickey Leland (D-TX), chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, commented: “I certainly hope he changes his views by the time he gets here. He’s bright enough to be in some leadership position.... I see some hope for him. He’s just a young man. He still has time to save his soul.”<sup>21</sup> As with other Black audiences in front of which he appeared, Murdock, the Black conservative, was not well-received.

Yet he shared a common disappointment with the Brain Trust and the Congressional Black Caucus when it came to President Reagan—specifically, the president’s Executive Order, which introduced mild economic sanctions to trade with South Africa. While members of the Congressional Black Caucus argued that the Executive Order did not go far enough, for Murdock it represented the limitations of Reagan’s conservatism. Indeed, the Executive Order led Murdock to question his aspiration to work in the Reagan White House. As Murdock explained, “I once wanted to work at the White House. I’m now in the strange position where my president... has done one thing after another to lead me to be so completely frustrated that I almost feel I can’t work for the man.”<sup>22</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, his growing disappointment in the President, Murdock did not stop his personal campaign in support of Constructive Engagement.

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<sup>20</sup> Derooy Murdock, “Transcript of Statement on East Front, United States Capitol, Sept. 9, 1985,” *William A. Rusher’s Papers* [General Correspondence, Box 60] Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

<sup>21</sup> Mickey Leland quoted in Grove, “To Be Young, Black and Conservative,” B2.

<sup>22</sup> Derooy Murdock quoted in Grove, “To Be Young, Black and Conservative,” B2. Murdock also discussed his disappointment with President Reagan in letters to William A. Rusher. See: *William A. Rusher Papers* [General Correspondence, Box 60, Files 6-7] Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

In November 1985, Murdock's attempts to redirect student anti-apartheid activism away from disinvestment and sanctions led him to Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Murdock was there to debate Walter E. Fauntroy—Congressman and founding member of the Free South Africa Movement—on the virtue of divestment in South Africa.<sup>23</sup> In the debate, Murdock argued that “the drum beat of disinvestment ha[d] slowed the reform movement.”<sup>24</sup> However, the debate quickly escalated into a discussion on whether apartheid South Africa or Communism was the “greatest source of evil since Nazi Germany.”<sup>25</sup> Only days earlier Murdock had been debating Congressional staffers at George Washington University, where he insisted that any strides in undermining apartheid had “occurred because of President Reagan’s policy of Constructive Engagement.”<sup>26</sup> In early 1986 Murdock also debated members of the ANC at a Westfield High School in Virginia, with the debate sounding largely the same.<sup>27</sup>

Murdock's commitment to US relations with apartheid South Africa, however, ended abruptly in July 1986 after he suffered severe injuries in a car accident.<sup>28</sup> As the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid bill was being passed in the Senate, Murdock was in a hospital bed recovering from a spinal injury. It is perhaps unsurprising that apartheid South Africa was no longer Murdock's central concern. Temporarily looking beyond the bruising world of conservative politics, Murdock refocused his energies on campaigning for the United States government to

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<sup>23</sup> Cindy Skaugen, “CWRU Debate Centered on S. Africa Divestment,” *The Plain Dealer*, Nov. 21, 1985, 7-A.

<sup>24</sup> Derooy Murdock quoted in Skaugen, “CWRU Debate Centered on S. Africa Divestment,” 7-A.

<sup>25</sup> Skaugen, “CWRU Debate Centered on S. Africa Divestment,” 7-A.

<sup>26</sup> Derooy Murdock quoted in Judith Evans, “Apartheid Discussed at Forum,” *GW Hatchet*, Nov. 7, 1985, 1 & 14. The Congressional staffers were Kevin Callwood, a legislative aide to House Subcommittee on Africa member Mark Siljander (R-Mich.), Scott Benbow, legislative aide to Foreign Relations Committee member Senator Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.) and Saliyah Booker, staffer on the House Committee on Africa and formerly of TransAfrica.

<sup>27</sup> Derooy Murdock, “Letter to William A. Rusher, Apr. 14, 1986,” *William A. Rusher's Papers* [General Correspondence, Box 60] Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

<sup>28</sup> Derooy Murdock, “Wish I'd Had a Back-Seat Harness,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 24, 1986, A17.

make rear seatbelts with shoulder harnesses mandatory. As he wrote in the *Washington Post*, “such a step would be a judicious use of government power exercised for the common good.”<sup>29</sup>

Despite his exit from the anti-apartheid debates, Murdock had established himself as a vocal and vigorous critic of the tactics of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement. Instead of the economic sanctions and disinvestment that activists within the movement advocated for, Murdock supported the Reagan administration’s approach of Constructive Engagement and increased investment in South Africa. His perspective and conservative philosophy was consistent with many other Black conservatives operating at the time, and in the past. By considering the actions of Murdock within the frame of anti-apartheid activism, but outside the liberal and radical confines of the anti-apartheid movement, the complexity and spectrum of Black internationalism is further revealed.

### **Waning Conservative Support for Constructive Engagement**

Conservatives, like Murdock, who encouraged patience with the reformist apartheid government had to increasingly confront the reality of the violence and state oppression in South Africa. The new constitution, hailed by conservatives in the United States as a major reform, was introduced in South Africa in 1983 to widespread opposition. While the constitution granted Indians and ‘coloureds’ the vote and control over their own legislatures, it still excluded Black Africans. The United Democratic Front (UDF), a non-racial coalition of 700 organisations and over two million people, was established to oppose the new constitution through rent boycotts, school protests and worker stay-aways.<sup>30</sup> The South African government retaliated against the renewed protests and social unrest with repressive measures. In a protest

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> William Sales, ‘Making South Africa Ungovernable: ANC Strategy for the 80s,’ *Black Scholar* 15, no. 6 (1984), 4.

on 28 August 1985, for example, 28 people were killed as they marched to Pollsmoor Prison to demand the release of Nelson Mandela.<sup>31</sup> By the end of 1985, 8,000 UDF members had been detained, many others had been killed, disappeared, or fled.<sup>32</sup> The reforms that conservatives in the United States were hoping for never came; instead, the South African government continued to centralise power in President P.W. Botha.

From 1985, as the anti-apartheid movement in both South Africa and the United States continued to gain momentum, growing numbers of Republicans began to distance themselves from the policy of Constructive Engagement. Political scientist Pauline Baker in her analysis of Constructive Engagement and the reactions of Republicans to the anti-apartheid movement concluded that the issue divided conservatives more than any other issue.<sup>33</sup> Fissures in the Republican Party were emerging as early as November 1984, when members of Congress wrote to President Reagan asking him to be more forceful in his condemnation of apartheid.<sup>34</sup> One month later 35 conservative Republican Congressmen sent a letter to the South African Ambassador to the United States, Bernardus Fourie, advising him that the apartheid government could not rely on U.S. conservative support.<sup>35</sup> Hinting at a possible rupture with the Reagan administration, the Congressmen wrote that they would not allow Constructive Engagement to be used as “an excuse for maintaining the unacceptable status quo” and would back sanctions if there was no major South African policy change.<sup>36</sup> By June 1985, 56 Republicans joined Democrats in the House of Representatives to pass a bill to impose economic sanctions on South Africa.

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<sup>31</sup> “Pollsmoor March: Explanation Truth Commission Special Report,” *South African Broadcasting*. [http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/glossary/pollsmoor\\_march.htm](http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/glossary/pollsmoor_march.htm).

<sup>32</sup> “Partial State of Emergency, July 1985,” *South African History*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/partial-state-emergency-july-1985>.

<sup>33</sup> Pauline Baker, *Update: The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1989), 105.

<sup>34</sup> This will be covered in more detail in the next chapter. Amy Wilentz, Sam Allis, and William Stewart, “Not a Black and White Issue: Congress is Caught in the Tide for South African Sanctions,” *Time*, Jun. 7, 1985, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Houston, “35 GOP Lawmakers Warn South Africa on Apartheid,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 6, 1984, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Black Conservatives and the Anti-apartheid Movement in the Media**

Murdock was not the only Black conservative commentator dedicating time to the problem of South Africa and challenging the calls for economic sanctions. Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams also continued to advocate for what they saw as the pragmatism exemplified in the Reagan administration's Constructive Engagement policy. As the anti-apartheid movement gained traction in the United States, Sowell and Williams did not contain their analyses to the academic sphere. By the mid-1980s, both had nationally syndicated columns and were devoting considerable space to the anti-apartheid movement and the role of the United States in the southern Africa region.<sup>37</sup> By 1985 South Africa had become one of Williams' major preoccupations.<sup>38</sup> As chapter one demonstrated, in many ways Sowell and Williams' positions on South Africa were consistent with, and an extension of, their views on domestic race relations. Their popular columns, more so than their academic work, embodied the Black jeremiad rhetoric—lamenting the condition of Black leadership in both South Africa and the United States.

Pointing to the violent regimes in Uganda, Guinea, and Zimbabwe, Williams argued that “the history of the African continent suggests the real-world alternative to South Africa's apartheid may well be brutal oppression and slaughter.”<sup>39</sup> For Williams, these countries provided “an unpleasant reminder that Black rule, in and of itself, is no sure-fire guarantee of a better life.”<sup>40</sup> For Sowell, the chance of a communist regime replacing the apartheid state was

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Sowell wrote for the Scripps-Howard News Service, as well as one-off pieces for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*. Walter E. Williams wrote for the Heritage Foundation's Heritage Features Syndicate, as well as *The Journalist*, *Reason*, and the *New York Times*.

<sup>38</sup> Walter E. Williams, *All It Takes is Guts* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery-Gateway, 1987), 147.

<sup>39</sup> Walter E. Williams, “Let's Look Before We Leap, August 1985,” in *All It Takes Is Guts*, 165-168.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

reason enough to tolerate the status quo. In an article about wars of national liberation, for example, Sowell wrote,

‘What is the difference between a Communist tyranny and any other kind of tyranny?’ the moralizers ask.... It is the difference between an infectious and a non-infectious disease.... The biggest moral difference between Communism and other undemocratic systems is that no other systems cause so many millions of people to take desperate gambles with their lives to escape. That says it all.<sup>41</sup>

The protestations of Sowell against the “strategically questionable interventions” advanced by the anti-apartheid campaigns in the United States – interventions like economic sanctions – were grounded in the belief that such solutions presupposed unrealistic expectations of America’s power to impose solutions from outside. Moreover, Sowell believed that even if the U.S. could end apartheid and deliver political and legal equality for Black people in South Africa, the white regime’s successor could be far worse. For Black conservatives, like Sowell, a commitment to anti-communism appeared to trump commitment to anti-racism.

However, where Sowell was willing to tolerate apartheid for the sake of anti-communism, Williams advanced a slightly different position. Echoing his previous academic work, Williams argued,

What Black South Africans must fight is what they now have: the widespread control of a socialistic society. South Africa’s labeling of its system as capitalism is not only phony, it’s stupid. It causes Blacks, dissatisfied with the status quo, to call for socialism, failing to realize it’s been their enemy all along.<sup>42</sup>

For Williams, the system of apartheid was a socialist system and needed to be replaced with a true free-market society. In a later article written in June 1986, Williams expanded on this point, writing that,

In many important ways South Africa’s apartheid system is simply a struggle against the ‘injustices’ of capitalism, namely its lack of respect

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Sowell, “Wars of National Liberation, June 10, 1985,” in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1987), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, “South African Phonies, Sept. 1985,” in *All It Takes is Guts*, 172.

for race.... South Africa isn't the only example of the brutality of socialism. In fact, the worst human abuses in modern history came under the auspices of socialism, namely, the National Socialist German Workers' Party. You and I know them as Nazis.<sup>43</sup>

For Sowell and Williams, the push for democracy for Black South Africans was an 'unrealistic' and 'questionable' goal. Black South Africans were simply not ready for full citizenship nor equipped to exercise mature political leadership. As Sowell reasoned, "Nothing so epitomizes the tragedy of Africa as the fact that vast numbers of Blacks continue to migrate into South Africa, because things are even worse in so many other African countries."<sup>44</sup> Scepticism towards the 'one man, one vote' agenda was common among conservatives critical of the anti-apartheid movements in the U.S. and South Africa. Civil rights legend turned Black conservative, James Meredith, was another who expressed this view. Meredith decried the anti-apartheid demonstrations across the US, labelling them "distractions." More pressing issues for African Americans, according to Meredith, were the violence and corruption of Black-ruled states.<sup>45</sup>

These Black conservatives were united most strongly in their criticisms of the liberal leadership within anti-apartheid activism—both in the US and abroad. True to "the genre most characteristic of Black conservative writing," the criticism of Black liberal leaders by Black conservative intellectuals exemplified the qualities of the Black jeremiad.<sup>46</sup> For Black conservatives, the focus of their writing was generally self-critical of Black American failure to take full advantage of their potential in American life. In this same way, the Black jeremiad recognises racism at play but directs its complaints and warnings more toward Black people than American institutions. In the context of U.S. relations with apartheid South Africa, Black

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<sup>43</sup> Williams, "The War Against Capitalism, Jun. 1986," in *All It Takes is Guts*, 175-6.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Sowell, "South Africa, Aug. 12, 1985," in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Juan Williams, "James Meredith: A Change of Course," *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 1985.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Eisenstadt, "Introduction," in *Black Conservatism: Essays in Intellectual and Political History*, ed. Peter Eisenstadt (New York: Routledge, 1999), xii.

conservatives used the Black jeremiad to criticise anti-apartheid leaders in both the U.S. and South Africa and to undermine what they saw as the questionable morality of their positions.

Williams suggested that,

The history of Africa demonstrates all too vividly that things could be worse. The proposed policy of disinvestment and other economic sanctions represent the politics of frustration—doing *something* will make us sleep better. But will South African Blacks be better off?<sup>47</sup>

Williams also dismissed Bishop Tutu as “the media-appointed spokesperson for South African Blacks.”<sup>48</sup> When Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) travelled to South Africa in January 1985 Williams wrote, “If Kennedy had wanted his boots licked to the bantering of ‘Amens’ and ‘right ons,’ he should have preached to the demonstrators at the South African Embassy in Washington.”<sup>49</sup>

Even more so than Williams, Sowell devoted considerable energy to criticising liberal anti-apartheid activists, whom he sarcastically labelled “deep thinkers,” and “the morally anointed.”<sup>50</sup> In an article in August 1985, for example, Sowell wrote, “Apartheid is so clearly the most hateful racism in the world since the Nazis that it was tailor-made to attract deep thinkers who see everything in terms of lining up on the side of the angels and imposing ‘solutions’.”<sup>51</sup> One year later Sowell argued that the campaign for disinvestment had become a ‘crusade,’ “which is to say, there is no point trying to talk sense to those who believe in it.”<sup>52</sup> For Sowell, instead of civilised debate on the merits of the policy of Constructive Engagement, the anti-apartheid ‘crusade’ was being judged “by how good...the crusaders feel.”<sup>53</sup> Like his condemnation and denigration of liberal activism more generally, Sowell reproached anti-

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<sup>47</sup> Williams, “Let’s Look Before We Leap,” 167.

<sup>48</sup> Walter E. Williams, “Kennedy in Africa Jan. 1985,” in *All It Takes Is Guts*, 160-1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See for example, Thomas Sowell, “Wars of National Liberation, June 10, 1985,” in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays*, 53-4.

<sup>51</sup> Sowell, “South Africa,” 61.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Sowell, “Disinvestment in South Africa, August 11, 1986,” in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



apartheid activists for their simplistic and reductionist thinking. In a June 1986 article Sowell described the anti-apartheid activism among college students in the following terms,

The jerry-built shanties which have been springing up on American college campuses to urge disinvestment in South Africa are a perfect symbol of the students' hastily thrown-together thinking about the complex, tragic and potentially catastrophic situation in that country.<sup>54</sup>

For Sowell and Williams, the political engagement of Black liberal leaders and their campaign for Black political equality in South Africa seemed to be a bigger problem than apartheid itself.

While this critique of the Black communities in South Africa and the United States dominated in Sowell and Williams' writing, their alternative vision for Black advancement emphasising Black economic empowerment and industrial education placed them within the Black intellectual tradition typically associated with Booker T. Washington. In their articles Williams and Sowell channelled Washington's call to "cast down your bucket where you are," emphasising the importance of improving the economic and educational circumstances of Black South Africans as the most effective way to challenge apartheid. Pointing to the "overwhelming military power of the white government," Sowell argued that the "real choices in South Africa are mutual accommodation or a bloodbath and chaos."<sup>55</sup>

This argument for "mutual accommodation" echoed Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise of 1895, in which he counselled African Americans to accommodate white racism and concentrate on economic self-improvement. As Sowell explained, "a siege mentality, heightened by economic isolation, is not a promising condition for moderate voices in both races to be heard or heeded."<sup>56</sup> For Washington, and later Sowell, the implication was that Black people should accept certain political realities in the present, however undesirable, and concentrate on economic development as the best way to secure meaningful advancement.

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Sowell, "Buthelezi in South Africa, June 9, 1986," in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays*, 66-8.

<sup>55</sup> Sowell, "Disinvestment in South Africa," 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

They believed that political activism could compromise economic security and put the cause of Black freedom back even further.

Walter Williams also emphasised economic empowerment over political rights. In a June 1986 article, for example, Williams wrote, “What Blacks need now is economic freedom: the right to work for whomever they please, the right to buy and sell whatever they want, and to trade with whomever they want.”<sup>57</sup> This theme was common across Williams’ writings. In early 1985, he had explained,

Without minimizing political disenfranchisement of South African Blacks, their longer-term problem is paucity of human capital.... With the exception of a few urban Blacks, it is safe to say that most do not have the human capital that Black Americans had at Emancipation. It is easy to blame the gross injustices of the past but it’s harder to do what’s necessary to improve the situation. The right to vote, alone, won’t produce the human capital that Blacks need any more than it has in other African nations that never saw colonialization or have had long periods of independence.<sup>58</sup>

Pointing to the Black freedom struggle in the United States, Williams argued that from 1940 African Americans were already rising out of poverty; in other words, their rise pre-dated civil rights legislation and was dependent on strong economic growth rather than political activism.<sup>59</sup> The same conditions were needed in South Africa if Black people there were ever to achieve freedom and equality.<sup>60</sup> As Williams argued, “A growing, robust economy tends to reduce racial hostility and awareness; a declining or stagnating economy does the opposite.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, where anti-apartheid activists focused on economic sanctions and disinvestment to

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<sup>57</sup> Walter E. Williams, “The War Against Capitalism, June 1986,” in *All It Takes Is Guts*, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, “Kennedy in Africa,” 161.

<sup>59</sup> This argument was also made by Sowell, see: Thomas Sowell, *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?* (New York: David Morrow, 1984), 49-56; Thomas Sowell, *Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), 131-2; Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 140-1; Walter E. Williams, *The State Against Blacks* (New York: New Press, 1982), 5; Walter E. Williams, “The Welfare Debate,” *Society* 33, no. 5 (1996), 13-14.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, “Kennedy in Africa,” 161; Walter E. Williams, “The Solution, July 1986,” in *All It Takes Is Guts*, 178.

<sup>61</sup> Walter E. Williams, “Beware the Well-Intentioned,” *NYT*, May 15, 1983, 2.

force political change, Sowell and Williams de-emphasised politics and advocated for gradual change through strategic economic development.

For Sowell and Williams, the role of the U.S. in the elimination of apartheid was to encourage incremental change by championing individual freedom and democracy through economic engagement and the power of the free market. Williams outlined his recommendations for ways “Americans can constructively help Black South Africans.”<sup>62</sup> For Williams, the way to affect change in South Africa was for Americans to “keep the moral pressure on South Africa” by contacting South African philanthropic organisations to “send contributions for education,” and on-the-job training by US corporations.<sup>63</sup> Sowell, by comparison, rarely offered any instructions for the empowerment of Black South Africans, preferring to leave that for Black South African leaders like Chief Buthelezi because, “For too long, Africans have been used as guinea pigs for ideas that sounded good in Europe or America.”<sup>64</sup>

Sowell advocated for open debate over easy answers. He wrote: “No one knows at this juncture whether the strategy of Buthelezi, of the Mandelas, or of Bishop Tutu will work—or if anything will work in South Africa...We need to hear a variety of views and strategies.”<sup>65</sup> Further Sowell emphasised the limited influence of the U.S. over South Africa’s domestic policy. As Sowell wrote in March 1985,

much of the furore over the Reagan administration’s policies toward South Africa assumes that there is some ‘solution’ which Americans can impose from 8,000 miles away... neither American rhetoric nor an American boycott is going to change South Africa’s racial policy.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Williams, “Kennedy in Africa,” 161.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Sowell, “South Africa,” 62.

<sup>65</sup> Sowell, “Buthelezi in South Africa,” 68.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Sowell, “The Wonderful World of Solutions, Mar. 1, 1985,” in *Compassion Versus Guilt and Other Essays*, 23.

The suspicion of imposed political solutions and an uncompromising belief in the free market are typically understood as conservative positions, yet the Black conservatives' emphasis on economic empowerment was also part of a long tradition in the Black community.

Like other conservatives, Sowell and Williams agreed with and advocated for the objectives of Constructive Engagement—to encourage the end of apartheid through incremental changes made by the white government. They both championed the ideals of individual freedom and democracy through economic engagement and the power of the free market. Their emphasis on economic empowerment over political activism is consistent with the Black conservative intellectual tradition and has been hotly debated since the time of Booker T. Washington. The use of the Black jeremiad rhetorical style also has a long history in Black conservatism and can be traced as far back as Frederick Douglass, who, to be sure, often used Jeremiads to rail against the sins of white, slaveholding America. However, it found particular prominence among these Black conservatives as they criticised the anti-apartheid movement in both South Africa and the United States. The arguments of these Black conservatives in their syndicated columns were consistent with, and gave a wider audience to, the findings of their academic research. Further, both Sowell and Williams used their syndicated columns to engage in public debates and openly challenge the demand for economic sanctions by anti-apartheid activists.

Sowell and Williams' positions were also in agreement with those of Deroy Murdock. Where Williams and Sowell positioned themselves as dissidents and critics of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States, Murdock was arguably more idealistic. As a young campaigner for Reagan in 1980 and 1984, Murdock saw himself working in support of the Administration's Constructive Engagement policy. Murdock joined discussions on US policy toward South Africa with anti-apartheid activists not only to condemn, but to also convince, them. However, all three took a public stance on the issue and argued that anti-apartheid

activists in the United States had a responsibility to consider the problem of apartheid as a complex issue with no easy solutions. The risk of seeing South Africa as a ‘black and white’ issue, they all argued, was a US policy that worsened the conditions for Black South Africans, made the white government even more intransigent, and increased the influence of communist forces in the region. Each shared a moral aversion to communism and advocated for a more sustainable and incremental approach to the end of apartheid which ensured that Black South Africans had the necessary skills, knowledge, and approach to nation building.

### **Black Conservatives, the Radical Right, and the Anti-apartheid Movement**

While the positions of Murdock, Sowell, and Williams were considered controversial in some quarters, they seemed moderate in comparison to some of those publicised by the Black conservative think tank The Lincoln Institute for Research and Education. The positions of the Lincoln Institute were arguably to the right of the Reagan administration and often in line with far-right organisations in the United States and South Africa. As previously mentioned, the president of the Lincoln Institute, J.A. Parker, was widely considered the “founding father” of the contemporary Black conservative movement.<sup>67</sup> The title of his short biography, *The Courage to Put Country Before Color*, provides important insights into his philosophy.<sup>68</sup> By the mid-1980s Parker was using the think tank’s journal, *Lincoln Review*, to attack anti-apartheid activists in both the US and South Africa.

Parker was a member of the Board for the Council for World Freedom, the U.S. affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League, an organisation labelled by a former member as “a

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<sup>67</sup> Lee Edwards, “The Founding Father of the Black Conservative Movement,” *Intercollegiate Studies Institute*, Dec. 3, 2019. <https://isi.org/intercollegiate-review/founding-father-Black-conservative-movement/>.

<sup>68</sup> David W. Tyson, *Courage to Put Country Above Color: The J.A. Parker Story* (Philadelphia: Self-Published, 2009).

collection of Nazis, Fascists, anti-Semites...vicious racialists and corrupt Self-seekers.”<sup>69</sup> Parker saw the world through a rigid Cold War lens, with the forces of good (western civilisation and democracy) pitched against the forces of evil (communism and any critic of the United States). From this vantage point, apartheid South Africa, as an ally of the United States and anti-communist stalwart, was a positive force that needed to be protected and supported against dangerous revolutionary threats to its existence. In many ways, the views of Parker were similar to those of Max Yergan after his “about-face” in the 1950s. Indeed, Parker also became a member of the American African Affairs Association, the right-wing organisation that Yergan joined in order to oppose the spread of communism in Africa.

During the 1980s, the Institute’s journal, *Lincoln Review*, regularly featured articles by Parker on apartheid South Africa and on anti-apartheid organisations and their leaders. For example, Parker’s article, “Divestment Would Hurt Black South Africans, The Very People It Is Meant to Help,” in the journal’s 1985 winter issue, was characteristic of his hard-line position.<sup>70</sup> According to Parker, the South African government had desegregated hotels, restaurants and other public spaces, which meant that “no longer is there legislation reserving certain jobs and occupations only for whites” and “Blacks and whites receive equal pay for equal work.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Parker insisted that South African was “a society in the midst of peaceful evolution” and dismissed all negative depictions of the white regime.<sup>72</sup>

Ignoring continuing state repression and police brutality, Parker posited that any outbreaks of violence in South Africa “are not between whites and Blacks but between Blacks

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<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Stewart-Smith quoted in Scott Anderson and Jon Lee Anderson, *Inside the League: The Shocking Expose of How Terrorists, Nazis, and Latin American Death Squads Have Infiltrated the World Anti-Communist League* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1986), 88.

<sup>70</sup> J.A. Parker, “Disinvestment would Hurt Black South Africans, the Very People it’s Meant to Help,” *Lincoln Review* 5 no. 3 (1985): 1-8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

seeking reform within law and order and agitators fermenting revolution and chaos.”<sup>73</sup> Where Sowell and Williams were critical of the racism and alleged socialism of the apartheid government and somewhat critical of its supposed reformist agenda, Parker’s articles in the *Lincoln Review* were markedly more supportive of the Botha regime and more antagonistic towards Black freedom movements like the United Democratic Front and the African National Congress. Further, where Sowell and Williams pointed to what they saw as the incompetence of “civil rights turkeys,” the Lincoln Institute accused the same activists of being communist agitators and Soviet collaborators. Parker then, like Alan Keyes, embraced a version of the paranoid style of American politics.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps the most extreme expression of Parker’s position was in the Lincoln Institute’s thirty-five-page booklet, *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* in 1985. As the title of the booklet suggests, Parker and his organisation accused anti-apartheid organisations, particularly TransAfrica, of being agents of the Soviet Union; or as the booklet described them, “Communists who care not a fig for civil rights or liberty.”<sup>75</sup> The purpose of the booklet was to undermine the anti-apartheid movement in the United States and South Africa. *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* looked like any other issue of the *Lincoln Review*, with its sepia tone and brown illustrated busts. Yet, on the front cover, surrounding a map of Africa and the Caribbean, were the sketches of nine allegedly pro-Marxist figures: Randall Robinson, executive director of TransAfrica; Rep. Ronald Dellums, Democrat representing California in House of Representatives; South Africans, Oliver Tambo, president (in exile) of the ANC; Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate and Anglican cleric; Nelson Mandela, imprisoned ANC leader; and Communist leaders, Fidel Castro, President of Cuba; Sam Nujoma, SWAPO in Namibia;

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Nov. 1964, 77-88.

<sup>75</sup> John A. Davenport, “Introduction,” in *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* (Washington, D.C: Lincoln Institute for Research and Education, 1985), v.

Maurice Bishop, former President Grenada; and Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica. It seemed that the goal of the booklet and its front-page illustration was to link respected anti-apartheid activists, like Randall Robinson, Rep. Ron Dellums and Desmond Tutu, with the infamous and violent regimes of communist leaders, like Maurice Bishop.

TransAfrica was the specific target of the *Lincoln Review*'s attack. The *Lincoln Review* claimed TransAfrica was not "a spokesman for Black Americans, but for the Soviet and Cuban supported terrorist groups."<sup>76</sup> TransAfrica's support of the ANC allegedly put it "under virtual control of the Soviet Union."<sup>77</sup> The booklet went further, outlining the ways in which TransAfrica was a supporter of these regimes, and demonstrating the double-standard of the protestors' positions on South Africa. Parker's pamphlet called attention to the fact that, "While TransAfrica demands 'one man, one vote' for South Africa, it was unconcerned with the fact that no one voted in Maurice Bishop's Grenada."<sup>78</sup> This criticism that TransAfrica overlooked the corruption and violence of Black rulers was similar to criticism made by Sowell and Williams of Black African leaders, and indeed Black conservatives more generally.

The Lincoln Institute did not veil its positions in subtlety. The first page of the booklet declared that TransAfrica's goal was "the overthrow of South Africa's current pro-Western government and its replacement by terrorist groups which are financed by Moscow and pledge a communist South Africa if they are victorious."<sup>79</sup> While often similar to the positions advanced by Sowell and Williams, and other conservative critics of US anti-apartheid activism, the arguments presented in *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* were notably conspiratorial. The booklet's central claim was perhaps best captured by the following excerpt:

By embracing the ANC, TransAfrica has made clear that its goal in South Africa is not reform and the creation of a democratic, multiracial

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<sup>76</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 1.



society, but, instead, the violent overthrow of the existing government and its replacement by a Marxist-Leninist regime which would do Moscow's bidding on the African continent.<sup>80</sup>

The booklet was heavy with assertions regarding the “affinity of the anti-South Africa movement for totalitarian regimes hostile to the United States.”<sup>81</sup> These positions confirmed the Lincoln Institute as an ultra-right-wing organisation, perhaps more in line with the John Birch Society and Max Yergan than with mainstream American conservatism. Like the John Birch Society, the Parker-led Lincoln Institute conflated liberalism with communism and Soviet conspiracy.<sup>82</sup>

What is most intriguing about the booklet is the ambiguity of its authorship. While the Lincoln Institute's logo features on the bottom of the front page and an advertisement for *The Lincoln Review* dominates its final page, there is no page listing the editors or contributors as in regular *Lincoln Review* issues. The only names associated with the document were those of Allan C. Brownfeld, author of the foreword and an associate editor of *The Lincoln Review*, and John A. Davenport, author of the Introduction, and former editor of *Barron's*, a weekly financial newspaper published by the Dow Jones Company as a sister to *Wall Street Journal*. Both men were white. Furthermore, there was no author attached to the main text. After a close investigation, the booklet, published by a Black conservative think tank that claimed to be “representative of the views of Black Americans,” was in fact written by a white man: Brownfeld.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>82</sup> The John Birch Society was founded in 1958, by Robert H. Welch, to oppose the infiltration of communism in the U.S. See: D.J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A lobby of the left*, 10.

Brownfeld, a self-described “conservative curmudgeon,” was a close friend of J.A. Parker and regular contributor to the *Lincoln Review*.<sup>84</sup> The similarities between *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* and the articles authored by Allan C. Brownfeld in *Human Events* are striking. Brownfeld’s article “What are the Real Goals of the Protest Movement Against South Africa?”, published in January 1985, bears a striking resemblance to arguments presented in the booklet. A comparison of the opening paragraphs of *TransAfrica*, and “What are the Real Goals” is particularly revealing. *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* begins:

In November, 1984, shortly after President Ronald Reagan was overwhelmingly re-elected, a carefully orchestrated campaign against South Africa was launched by TransAfrica, a militant lobbying group based in Washington, D.C.

Under the leadership of TransAfrica’s Randall Robinson, members of Congress—including Representatives Ron Dellums (D-Cal.), Gus Savage (D-Ill.), John Conyers (D-Mich.), Walter Fauntroy (D-D.C.) and George Crockett (D-Mich.)—demonstrated in front of the South African Embassy, crossed police lines, and were arrested. Other prominent figures, such as singer Harry Belafonte and tennis star Arthur Ashe, joined the protests. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Black South African recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, warmly embraced this movement.<sup>85</sup>

Brownfeld’s article, by comparison, started thus:

In recent weeks, a carefully orchestrated campaign against South Africa has been launched by TransAfrica, the militant Black lobbying group based in Washington, D.C. Members of Congress—including Representatives Ron Dellums (R.[sic]-Calif.), Gus Savage (D.-Ill.), John Conyers (D.-Mich.) and George Crockett (D.-Mich.)—have demonstrated in front of the South African Embassy, crossed police lines, and been arrested. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Black South African recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has warmly embraced this protest movement.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Allan C. Brownfeld: The Conservative Curmudgeon,” *FGFBooks: Brownfeld Bio*.  
<http://www.fgfbooks.com/AllanBrownfeld/aBrownfeld-bio.html>

<sup>85</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A lobby of the left*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Allan C. Brownfeld, “What Are the Real Goals of the Protest Movement Against South Africa?” *Human Events* Jan. 5, 1985, 12.

The similarities continued beyond these passages. The following paragraph of *TransAfrica* reads:

Who are the men and women behind these protests, and what is their goal? Publicly, they express concern over Black leaders arrested in South Africa and express a desire to isolate South Africa in order to convince it to alter its racial policies. All they want, they have said, is a better life for the people of South Africa.<sup>87</sup>

Closely resembling this, the following paragraph of “What are the Real Goals” states:

Why are they protesting? Publicly, they express concern over Black leaders arrested in South Africa and express a desire to isolate South Africa in order to convince it to alter its racial policies. All they want, they tell us, is a better life for the people of South Africa.<sup>88</sup>

Both documents argue that “a number of conservatives” were “taking this group at their word” and “have expressed support for the protestors’ goal of isolating South Africa if dramatic change is not forthcoming.”<sup>89</sup>

Adding further weight to the proposition that Brownfeld was the author of *TransAfrica*, much of the additional information contained in this Lincoln Institute publication can also be found in “South Africa’s Importance to the Free World,” a pamphlet authored by Brownfeld and other *Human Events* articles, including, “TransAfrica Orchestrates South African Protests,” and “Red Carpet for An African Terrorist, But Cold Shoulder for An Anti-Communist.”<sup>90</sup> In the Foreword of *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left*, the mystery author lauded the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education for providing “a notable public service in

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<sup>87</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A lobby of the left*, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Brownfeld, “What Are the Real Goals,” 12.

<sup>89</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A lobby of the left*, 1; Brownfeld, “What Are the Real Goals,” 12.

<sup>90</sup> Allan C. Brownfeld, *South Africa’s Importance to the Free World* (New Rochelle: America’s Future, Inc., 1984); Allan C. Brownfeld, “TransAfrica Orchestrates South African Protests,” *Human Events*, Dec. 8, 1984, 4-5; Allan C. Brownfeld, “Red Carpet for an African Terrorist, But Cold Shoulder for an Anti-Communist,” *Human Events*, Jan. 22, 1983, 16 & 18; Allan C. Brownfeld, “How Soviet ‘Active Measures’ Influence U.S. Peace Movement,” *Human Events*, Jan. 8, 1983, s1-s8; Allan C. Brownfeld, “TransAfrica’s Firm Link with Mondale,” *Human Events*, Mar. 19, 1983, 4; Allan C. Brownfeld, “Solarz Sets Sights on South Africa,” *Human Events*, Jun. 4, 1983, 4; Allan C. Brownfeld, “TransAfrica: Key Threat to Reagan Foreign Policy,” *Human Events*, Jun. 20, 1981, 3-4; Allan C. Brownfeld, “South Africa Bans Would Devastate Blacks,” *Human Events*, Apr. 14, 1984, 9; Allan C. Brownfeld, “Nelson Mandela: Still A Revolutionary Marxist,” *Human Events*, Feb. 23, 1985, 5-6; Allan C. Brownfeld, “U.S. Churches Ignore Black South Africans on Disinvestment,” *Human Events*, Apr. 13, 1985, 12, 13, 14.

bringing this material together and making it available.”<sup>91</sup> Missing however was any mention of where this information was compiled from; namely Brownfeld’s articles in *Human Events*. One of the key arguments levelled by critics of Black conservatives has been that they are racial ‘sellouts’ who take directions from their white conservative masters.<sup>92</sup> In this context, authorship by a white conservative in the name of a Black conservative publication is particularly striking.

According to political scientist Deborah Toler, the *Lincoln Review* was the foremost Black conservative publication.<sup>93</sup> *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left*, was published by the preeminent Black conservative think tank, with the intention of reaching “the largest possible circulation,” including businessmen, labour leaders, educators, Congressmen and the President.<sup>94</sup> However, there is little indication that *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left* had much of an audience at all, in contrast to the writings of Sowell and Williams.<sup>95</sup> One of the few public references to the booklet was in South Africa, by a white pro-government publication, *The Aida Parker Newsletter*.<sup>96</sup> Ethel Payne, noted Black journalist, reviewed the booklet as “typical Red-baiting” and part of a larger far right counter-attack to the anti-apartheid movement.<sup>97</sup> Yet there is no evidence that the booklet reached a wider audience, nor that it led to a wider discussion or influence debates on Constructive Engagement.

While Parker’s work on South Africa did not influence public debate or even enter mainstream awareness, it provides insight into the attempts Black conservatives made to contribute to the discussions. It also highlights the central role anti-communism played in Black

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<sup>91</sup> Lincoln Institute, *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left*, iii.

<sup>92</sup> Ronald E. Hall, “Rooming in the Master’s House: Psychological Domination and the Black Conservative,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 4 (2008): 565-578.

<sup>93</sup> Toler, “Black Conservatives,” 297.

<sup>94</sup> Davenport, “Introduction,” in *TransAfrica: A Lobby of the Left*, v.

<sup>95</sup> There is little commentary on the publication in the mainstream or Black press in the United States.

<sup>96</sup> “Black US Conservative Exposes TransAfrica’s Imposture,” *Aida Parker Newsletter*, 1985, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ethel Payne, “A Silent Protest From the Dead,” *Afro-American*, Sept. 21, 1985, 5.

conservative understandings of South Africa. Parker's far-right positions and his and willingness to work with the apartheid regime over anti-apartheid organisations in the United States and South Africa, did not prevent him from being highly respected among the Black conservatives who emerged during the early 1980s. Indeed, he served as a mentor and personal friend of many, including Walter E. Williams, Alan Keyes, and Deroy Murdock. Considered a "happy warrior," he inspired younger Black conservatives to "put up or shut up" on issues they cared about.<sup>98</sup> Parker advised that Black conservatives should be open and share their views with the public, but also that they had a responsibility to have an impact on the big issues of the day.

Just like Keyes, Parker's religiosity informed his conservatism. Parker demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the precepts of "organic" Black conservatism, including the central role of morality in personal freedom. As Parker explained, "My Christian faith shaped my life of individualism, liberty, private property, and eternal salvation."<sup>99</sup> Parker believed that the Black church was the central institution in the Black community, where individuals develop an appreciation for, and practice the principles of, self-help, education, respectability politics, and a blended emphasis on the sanctity of private property on the one hand and community uplift on the other. Parker himself was always immaculately dressed and a prolific volunteer in a variety of charity organisations. One of the only African American leaders in the Young Americans for Freedom, Parker had become active in conservative politics at a young age. Indeed, he spent the 1960s and 1970s touring college campuses to warn against the dangers of liberal activism and creeping communism in American society. Recognising the need for a

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<sup>98</sup> Janice Rogers Brown, "Third Annual Jay A. Parker Lecture, Speech at the Heritage Foundation, Feb. 25, 2020." <https://www.heritage.org/courts/event/third-annual-jay-parker-reception-and-lecture>; Lee Edwards, "The Founding Father of the Black Conservative Movement," *Intercollegiate Institute*, Dec. 3, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> J.A. Parker quoted in Edwards, "The Founding Father of the Black Conservative Movement."

place for Black conservatives to exchange ideas and network, Parker established the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education and the *Lincoln Review* in 1978.

### **Skinfolk Ain't Kinfolk**

In 1985 anti-apartheid sentiment in the US continued to grow, even within conservative ranks, to the point that many on the right would not support the accusations made in the *TransAfrica* booklet. Arguably, the arguments put forth in *TransAfrica* alienated more conservatives than it convinced. The publication of the booklet, however, was not Parker's only attempt to influence U.S. debates and policy on South Africa. Parker went beyond the rejection of racial solidarity to become an agent of white supremacy, working as a lobbyist for the South Africa government throughout the 1980s. However, he was not alone. There were a small number of Black conservatives that gained exposure – and notoriety—in the 1980s specifically for their work *for* the South African government. These Black conservatives appeared to embody the adage popularised by an earlier Black conservative Zora Neale Hurston that “All my skinfolk ain't kinfolk.”<sup>100</sup>

Parker began his work as a lobbyist for the South African 'independent' Bantustan Transkei between 1977 and 1978.<sup>101</sup> The Republic of Transkei was an unrecognised state in South Africa from 1976 to 1994 and an area in the southeast that was one of two 'homelands' for people of Xhosa descent. It remained internationally unrecognised, diplomatically isolated, and politically unstable for the duration of its existence—with its sole supporter being the

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<sup>100</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1942), 188.

<sup>101</sup> Bantustan or Black homeland was an area set aside for specific ethnic groups in apartheid South Africa from the late 1970s, as a part of the apartheid government's goal of 'separate development'. Under the Bantu Homelands Act of 1970 the South African government stripped Black South African's of their citizenship and declared them citizens of their ethnic homelands.

apartheid government.<sup>102</sup> Using funds he received from the Transkei state (which received its funding from the apartheid government), Parker established the Friends of Transkei—an organisation that distributed press releases in support of Bantustan. As the director of Friends of Transkei, Parker received a monthly stipend of ten thousand dollars and an expense allowance of an extra five thousand dollars.<sup>103</sup> Coincidentally, the work for Transkei occurred in tandem with Parker’s establishment of the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education.

Parker was one of 15 agents in the United States who were tasked in this period with creating support for official recognition of the Bantustans as independent states.<sup>104</sup> In 1981 Parker also became an agent for Venda, a Bantustan in northern South Africa.<sup>105</sup> He was reportedly paid US\$36,000 a year and served in this role until 1985.<sup>106</sup> However, like Transkei, Venda remained internationally unrecognised, diplomatically isolated, and politically unstable. At the same time, Parker was the co-chair of the American African Affairs Association (AAAA), the conservative organisation that Max Yergan co-chaired from 1965 until his death in 1975. This conservative organisation, ostensibly concerned with the “the staunch defense of US interests in Africa,” enabled Parker to make numerous trips to the region.<sup>107</sup> As co-chair Parker was further able to “share his views” on U.S. policy toward South Africa (and its Bantustans) with Franklin A. Thomas and the Rockefeller Study.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Merrie Witkin, “Transkei: An Analysis of the Practice of Recognition—Political or Legal?” *Harvard International Law Journal* 18 (1977): 605-27.

<sup>103</sup> Shelly Pitterman and Steve Weissman, “A Fine Face For Apartheid: American Publisher Peddles South Africa,” *Africa Fund* (1978), *Africa Action Archive*.

[http://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.af000020\\_final.pdf](http://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.af000020_final.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> Washington Office on Africa, “South African Agents Proliferate,” *Washington Notes on Africa*, Summer/Autumn 1983, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Toler, “Black Conservatives.”

<sup>106</sup> TransAfrica, “The U.S. and South Africa: The New Right Connection,” *TransAfrica Forum*, Oct. 1982, 5. *African Activist Archive*.

<sup>107</sup> J.A. Parker, “Letter to James Lewis Kirby, Dec. 14, 1978.” *William A. Rusher Papers* [National Review, Box 128, Folder 12] Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

<sup>108</sup> Franklin A. Thomas, “Letter to J.A. Parker, Jun. 11, 1980.” *William A. Rusher Papers* [National Review, Box 128, Folder 12] Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

In 1985, Parker's work for the South African government changed. Together with fellow Black conservative William A. Keyes IV, Parker established International Public Affairs Consultants, Inc, an organisation which the South African Embassy paid US\$360,000 annually to serve as its "chief liaison with Black America."<sup>109</sup> These Black conservatives were recruited by the South African government to launch a Black-led counter offensive against the U.S. anti-apartheid movement and the daily protests outside the Embassy. Parker became a mentor for Keyes after they met at a White House event in the early 1980s. While Parker was a mentor for many Black conservatives, Keyes had particularly impressed him. Both had come from disadvantaged backgrounds and not attended university. In the early 1980s, Parker published articles by Keyes in the *Lincoln Review* and then formalised their relationship through the business venture.

Keyes, like Deroy Murdock, was young and ambitious, and had been offered a free trip to South Africa by the South African Foundation. After hitchhiking to Washington, D.C. from North Carolina in 1978, he occupied a low-level White House job. In 1984 Keyes established a Black political action committee to work for the re-election of Jesse Helms and oppose "extremists" such as the Congressional Black Caucus, Jesse Jackson, and the African National Congress.<sup>110</sup> Following the 1984 election, and after being passed over for a promotion in the White House, the thirty-year-old resigned his White House position and traveled to South Africa. Keyes recalled his unfettered access to white apartheid leaders, including the South African Minister for Foreign Affairs and Director of the Bureau of Information.<sup>111</sup> He returned to the United States with a new job as the apartheid government's liaison to Black America.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Edward S. Sherman, "The Best Man," in *Triumph of the Market: Essays on Economics, Politics and the Media* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>110</sup> Jay Parker also served as the treasurer. Edward S. Sherman, "Letter to the Editor," *NYT*, Sept. 8, 1991.

<sup>111</sup> Juan Williams, "S. Africa's Newest Lobbyist is a Black American: William Keyes' Job is to Cool Off Antiapartheid Fervor," *Washington Post*, Nov. 21, 1985, E1.

<sup>112</sup> This was his official title as outlined in the contract he submitted to the Justice Department when he registered as a lobbyist.



As liaison Keyes was tasked with arranging for African American businessmen and reporters to travel to South Africa, and with organising scholarships for Black South Africans to study in the United States. According to Keyes, he was soon “flooded by calls” by Black Americans looking for new markets in South Africa.<sup>113</sup> He claimed that there was particular interest from Black tech-companies that hoped to sell computers and join the 35 other African American companies in South Africa—though there is no evidence that occurred. Keyes also developed a media presence in the United States, giving interviews to outlets such as the *Washington Post*, *Business Week*, CNN, the Today Show and others.

These interviews sparked condemnation from anti-apartheid activists. For example, Keyes was widely criticised for his interview on CNN in which he called the ANC a “terrorist organisation” and labelled African American activists in the anti-apartheid movement “hypocrites” for supporting nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement but also the revolutionary violence allegedly advocated by Nelson Mandela.<sup>114</sup> Keyes argued that the anti-apartheid movement’s tactics and goals were not the best vehicle for helping Black South Africans. As he told the *Washington Post*, “does getting arrested in front of the South African embassy help solve any of those people’s problems or are there any programs we should put into effect if we really want to benefit those people?”<sup>115</sup> Journalist Ethel Payne responded by labelling Keyes “a real aberration.”<sup>116</sup>

Meanwhile, Parker was tasked with arranging meetings for the South African Embassy with U.S. political figures. Parker was already well-established within conservative circles having risen through the ranks of Young Americans for Freedom in the 1960s and as host of

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<sup>113</sup> William Keyes quoted in Theodore Ransom, “Black Americans in South Africa,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 28, 1987, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Williams, “S. Africa’s Newest Lobbyist is a Black American,” E1.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Ethel Payne, “Behind the Scenes: The Free South Africa Movement One Year Later, the Protest Continues,” *Afro-American*, Dec. 7, 1985, 5.

the political talk radio show *Left, Right and Center* in the 1970s. Parker had also sent ‘digest’ copies of lead articles from the *Lincoln Review* to key politicians and journalists. During the 1980s he worked as a consultant for the Reagan administration – for example, on the transition team of the Equal Education Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Information Agency – to “disseminate a more accurate image of America to the rest of the world.”<sup>117</sup> Parker leveraged his political connections to provide the South African Embassy access to the halls of power and conservative opinion-makers. The most controversial of these meetings was a reception held for the South African ambassador that included the young African American Chairman of the Equal Education Opportunity Commission, Clarence Thomas.<sup>118</sup> The reception was also attended by other Black conservatives linked to the Reagan administration including Assistant Secretary of State Alan Keyes and Minority Business Development Agency Deputy Director Theron Bell.<sup>119</sup>

Keyes’ and Parker’s work for the South African Embassy was widely condemned by anti-apartheid activists in the Black community. As one critic wrote to *The New Republic* the work of IPAC was “nauseating” and “distressing.”<sup>120</sup> To this segment of the Black community, Keyes and Parker were Black faces on white power – opportunistic and traitorous individuals whose work for the South African Embassy was seen akin to “a pact with the devil.”<sup>121</sup> The work of Parker and Keyes has been the subject of some attention for scholars and critics of Black conservatism. Critics in particular have used the lobbying as an easy target to point to as they disparage all Black conservatives.<sup>122</sup> It was Parker who was accused of being “an extreme

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<sup>117</sup> Edwards, “The Founding Father of the Black Conservative Movement.”

<sup>118</sup> Herb Boyd, “Clarence Thomas and His Right-Wing Bedfellows,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 31, 1991, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Timothy M. Phelps, “Thomas Attended S. Africa Dinner,” *Newsday*, Jul. 16, 1991, 7.

<sup>120</sup> J.W., “Washington Diarist: Hard Times,” *New Republic*, Dec. 23, 1985, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Boyd, “Clarence Thomas and His Right-Wing Bedfellows,” 4.

<sup>122</sup> See for example, Ron Nixon, *Selling Apartheid* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Toler, “Black Conservatives,” 1-30; Jim Naureckas and Janine Jackson, *The Fair Reader: An Extra! Review of Press and Politics in the ‘90s* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 6-7.

element” during the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court.<sup>123</sup> This kind of far-right lobbying work, however, was at the opposite end of the spectrum to Reverend Leon Sullivan and his work to undermine the apartheid regime.

### **A ‘Respectable’ Black Conservative Internationalism?**

By the mid-1980s the “economic humanitarianism” of Reverend Leon Sullivan was closely tied to the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement.<sup>124</sup> President Reagan embraced the Sullivan Principles and linked the Principles’ goal of gradual reform to Constructive Engagement.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the Principles had the support of both Republicans and some liberal politicians like Stephen Solarz (D-NY), and labour unions like the United Auto Workers and AFL-CIO.<sup>126</sup> For moderates, the Sullivan Principles offered a compromise to full disinvestment or business as usual. However, by the mid-1980s Sullivan had become disenchanted with the impact of his approach, which was increasingly used by conservatives to dismiss the anti-apartheid movement and the call for economic sanctions. Indeed, by 1985, as calls for corporate disinvestment and economic sanctions gained support, the Sullivan Principles became even more important for the Reagan administration.<sup>127</sup> The Reagan administration hoped that Sullivan, a person respected in the Black community, could neutralise these criticisms and quell the bipartisan support for sanctions in Congress.

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<sup>123</sup> Russ Bellant, “The Thomas Connection has White South African Angle,” *National Catholic Review*, Aug. 2, 1991.

<sup>124</sup> Gwen McKinney, “Sullivan’s Plan Alternative to War,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Sept. 30, 1980, 4.

<sup>125</sup> President Reagan mandated that companies operating in South Africa adhere to the Sullivan Principles with Executive Order in 1985. See for example, Ronald Reagan, “Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters on Signing the Executive Order Prohibiting Trade and Certain Other Transactions Involving South Africa, September 9, 1985,” *NARA*, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/90985a>; and Ronald Reagan, “Letter to the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader on the Economic Sanctions Against South Africa, September 29, 1986,” *NARA*, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/092986a>.

<sup>126</sup> “Solarz: U.S. Must Act in S. Africa Unrest,” *The Boston Globe*, Jul. 13, 1980.

<sup>127</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Executive Order 12532—Prohibiting Trade and Certain other Transactions involving South Africa,” <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12532.html>.

At the same time, corporate signatories to the Principles were concerned with diminishing returns on their South African holdings; many of these signatories had become targets of anti-apartheid protests and media campaigns at the time of an economic downturn in South Africa. From 1985, US corporations began to succumb to anti-apartheid pressures, removing themselves from South Africa and anti-apartheid debate. As the Free South Africa Movement spread throughout the United States and conservatives had to increasingly rely on the moral authority of the Principles, Sullivan expanded his conditions.

Supporters of the Sullivan Principles could point to significant outcomes achieved. The signatory companies provided about 66,000 jobs in South Africa. Signatories also funded five thousand scholarships, ten thousand non-white workers in skilled jobs and training programs, and 150 local schools had also been funded.<sup>128</sup> These efforts provided 84 percent of the social welfare funds in South Africa outside of government.<sup>129</sup> Malek K. Lashgari and David Grant, in their study of signatory companies, found that companies that were active participants and supporters of the Principles “had, on average, [economically] outperformed the non-compliers.”<sup>130</sup> Facing anti-apartheid pressure and witnessing these gains, companies continued to sign up to the Principles throughout early 1985. Sullivan hoped to use this momentum to expand the Principles and encourage corporate activism against the apartheid state.

The same month that the Free South Africa Movement began protesting outside of the South African Embassy, Sullivan called for a meeting of signatories in New York City. To counter the increasing pressure and “changing dynamics” 120 signatory companies agreed to “amplify” and expand the Principles.<sup>131</sup> The amendments to the Principles moved beyond the

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<sup>128</sup> Ethel Payne, “Constructive Engagement and Sullivan Principles,” *Afro-American*, Dec. 15, 1984, 5.

<sup>129</sup> Michiel Levin quoted in Roger Thurow, “U.S. Exodus Touches Many South Africans,” *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 6, 1986, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Malek K. Lashgari and David R. Grant, “Social Investing: The Sullivan Principles,” *Review of Social Economy* 47, no. 1 (1989), 80.

<sup>131</sup> “Sullivan Principles Fourth Amplification November 1984,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

workplace to include “all the customs that stood in the way of social and political justice.”<sup>132</sup> This included the support of unrestricted rights of Black businesses to be located in urban areas, support for freedom of mobility of Black workers to seek employment where they wished, adequate housing for families of employees, and advocacy for the end of apartheid laws.<sup>133</sup> As Sullivan explained, “it was time to challenge companies to a direct confrontation with the South African government.”<sup>134</sup> Most radically, Sullivan advised the signatories that “companies are obliged to address these issues both by legal and illegal means.”<sup>135</sup>

This ‘amplification’ also added an imperative for the signatories to “work to eliminate laws and customs which impeded social justice.”<sup>136</sup> Hence, this second phase of the Sullivan Principles essentially demanded signatories become more “strident” and even “activist” in their businesses in South Africa.<sup>137</sup> The expansion of the Principles moved beyond making changes within the workplace, to include more direct pressure on the South African government to repeal apartheid laws. Carl Noffke, Director of the Rand Afrikaans University American Studies Institute in Johannesburg, noted at the time that direct confrontation with the South African government had become part of the corporate agenda.<sup>138</sup> Critical of this corporate civil disobedience, Nofke concluded that these companies were “political captives” of Sullivan.<sup>139</sup>

Some of those companies that remained loyal to the Sullivan Principles increased their corporate philanthropy. Firestone, for example, donated 1 million South African Rand each year for African education.<sup>140</sup> IBM, likewise, announced a five-year program to enhance

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<sup>132</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 74.

<sup>133</sup> Betty Pleasant, “U.S. Businesses Agree to Fight Apartheid,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Dec. 20, 1984, A2.

<sup>134</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 74.

<sup>135</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in Pleasant, “U.S. Businesses Agree to Fight Apartheid,” A2.

<sup>136</sup> “Sullivan Principles Fourth Amplification November 1984.”

<sup>137</sup> “A Conversation with the Rev. Sullivan; Going All Out Against Apartheid,” *NYT*, Jul. 27, 1986, F1.

<sup>138</sup> Carl Noffke quoted in Michael Parks, “U.S. Firms, S. Africa Butting Heads: Antiapartheid Bid Called ‘Corporate Civil Disobedience,’” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1987.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 578.

literacy among African children.<sup>141</sup> The company promised to provide computer programs to 250 South African schools, with an estimated 37 000 children each year. Signatory companies also advocated for change with their South African contacts. David Bolen of DuPont, for example, met with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town to encourage “South African universities to go beyond integration of their institutions and exercise greater influence to effect fundamental change in the apartheid system.”<sup>142</sup> Ironically, companies like IBM that increased their aid to Black South Africans attracted greater publicity and were targeted by disinvestment activists. Unsurprisingly, the experience of IBM gave other signatory companies reason for pause and further disincentivised corporate activism in South Africa.

While many companies had signed onto the Principles in the early 1980s to guard against the “mounting pressure” from anti-apartheid activists, by 1985 the moral impetus behind the Sullivan Principles proved too costly for some. As the divestment measures spread across the US, there was a downturn in the South African economy. In July 1986, U.S. banks, beginning with Chase Manhattan, refused to roll over the short-term loans of the South African government. The result of this refusal was swift and deep. The South African stock market was closed as the value of the Rand plummeted and repayments of foreign loans and currency transactions were frozen.<sup>143</sup> The weakened South African economy, together with the increased demands of the Sullivan Principles and continued anti-apartheid pressure, resulted in a waning commitment of major companies to the Sullivan Principles and increased the attractiveness of divestment.

Shareholder activism in religious organisations and universities was also building. In July 1985, for example, the United Church of Christ voted to divest all church money—more

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> David Bolen, “Memo: South Africa: Sullivan Principles and Social Responsibility, May 2, 1986,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 31, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>143</sup> Lawrence Harris, “South Africa’s External Debt Crisis,” *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1986): 793-817.

than half a billion dollars—from companies doing business in South Africa whether they were signatories or not.<sup>144</sup> By the following month dozens of universities, religious denominations, and other organisations had begun the process of divesting. Florida’s Senate Governmental Operations Committee, for example, voted to divest USD\$1.8 billion in state investments. Unsurprisingly, the loss of their domestic customer base and the risk of major organisations divesting from their stock led many former signatory companies to remove themselves from controversy by withdrawing from South Africa, at least ‘officially.’<sup>145</sup>

The threat of being targeted by anti-apartheid activists made remaining in South Africa, even as a signatory to the Sullivan Principles, increasingly problematic for many companies. For example, Sullivan Principles supporter David Bolen had to fight to maintain a DuPont International presence in South Africa. While Bolen became the chairman of the Sullivan Task Group dealing with the new corporate activism in South Africa, some in his company began advocating withdrawal. J.R. Malloy, Senior Vice President of Finance, in particular, questioned DuPont’s continued presence in South Africa. Clearly affected by the domestic atmosphere, he sent a memo to E.G. Jefferson, Chief Executive Officer, in which he “seriously question[ed] why we [chose] to do business there.”<sup>146</sup> Instead of the increased philanthropy and activism advocated by Bolen, Malloy argued that this method was “increasingly causing us to be a focal point for activists.”<sup>147</sup> To avoid this attention Malloy argued that DuPont should close its South African office and continue to sell through distributors. This tactic was in line with many other US companies that had ‘divested’ themselves from South Africa.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> James L. Franklin, “Synod Vote Puts Economic Pressure on S. Africa,” *Boston Globe*, Jul. 7, 1985, 16.

<sup>145</sup> Companies sold of their holdings in South Africa or merged with a South African business. See for example, the Ford Motor Company in Mzamo P. Mangaliso, “The Corporate Social Challenge for the Multinational Corporation,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 11, no. 7 (1992), 496.

<sup>146</sup> J.R. Malloy, “External Affairs Department Response to Proposed Paper on South Africa,” Jan. 21, 1987, *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 31, Folder 4], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> William H. Kaempfer, James A. Lehman, and Anton D. Lowenberg, “Divestment, Investment Sanctions, and Disinvestment: An Evaluation of Anti-Apartheid Policy Instruments,” *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1987), 467.

By 1986 even dedicated signatories like General Motors and IBM announced their intention to disinvest in South Africa. The divestment debates evolved in a counter-intuitive way. Where one might have expected US companies to be behind the economic arguments put forward for continued investment in South Africa, instead they argued in moral terms for Black workers' rights. A 1987 report from Mitchell Investment Company, Inc., a Boston firm specialising in business divestment from South Africa, showed that of the 64 US companies that had announced their withdrawal in 1986, over half had sold their subsidiary to South African buyers, with nearly all maintaining third-party economic links.<sup>149</sup> Bolen pointed to the report's conclusion that:

Disinvestment overwhelmingly benefitted other South African...businesses rather than non-white South African workers. Furthermore, rather than contributing to economic reform, the strategies adopted have generally resulted in business-as-worse-than-usual because they create the illusion of disinvestment.<sup>150</sup>

Meanwhile, many anti-apartheid activists calling for divestment used economic reasoning in support of their case. As Massie explained, "as the debate became more turbulent, the language used by corporations became more confusing."<sup>151</sup> Both the pro-Sullivan and the pro-withdrawal camps not only used the other's reasoning against each other, but their reasoning shared the same internal contradictions. The activists pushing for corporate disinvestment argued that if American companies remained in South Africa, they would have little influence to change the apartheid system, but if they left it would be a major blow. Sullivan supporters argued the opposite; firms had the influence to change apartheid if they remained, but their departure would be insignificant.

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<sup>149</sup> Mitchell Investment Corporation, "Report on US Companies in South Africa, 1986," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 31, Folder 5], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>150</sup> David Bolen, "Memo," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 31, Folder 5], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

<sup>151</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 578.



The Principles, and indeed Sullivan himself, were frequently attacked on the grounds that they did not directly challenge the foundations of apartheid, and that the desegregation of workplaces was not enough. A *New York Amsterdam News* editorial put it thus:

That burning idea in the heart and mind of the Black South African-- that zeal to be free, is burning with a light so bright that it cannot be extinguished by 'constructive engagement', 'the Sullivan Principles', and moderation.<sup>152</sup>

Manning Marable went as far as to say that the Sullivan Principles "ma[de] as much sense as trying to convince Hitler passively to give up fascism."<sup>153</sup> While Marable insisted that the Sullivan Principles would not force Afrikaners to 'give up' apartheid, this was never Sullivan's goal. Yet the loud and constant criticism of the Principles by anti-apartheid activists and the continuing violent suppression within South Africa led Sullivan to question the efficacy of his own Principles.

While Sullivan at first tried to reason with his critics, explaining that the Principles were never intended to overturn apartheid, but were a "a pick and hammer to put cracks in the wall of apartheid," the accusations eventually wore on him.<sup>154</sup> The practical improvements for individual Black South African beneficiaries of the Sullivan Principles were drowned out and lost in the clamor of arguments regarding the big-picture concerns. In May 1985 Sullivan revealed his belief in a moratorium on economic expansion by U.S. corporations in South Africa. By late 1985 an ailing Sullivan appeared to further qualify his endorsement of his own Principles. In a move some say he later regretted, Sullivan gave the South African government a two-year deadline to end apartheid.<sup>155</sup> If the Black majority were not given voting rights by 1987, Sullivan would "drop the Principles and call for total U.S. divestment and an embargo

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<sup>152</sup> "Editorial: S. Africa: The Shame of America," *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 3, 1985, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Manning Marable, "Along the Color Line: Who Profits From Apartheid?" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Feb. 28, 1985, A6.

<sup>154</sup> Leon Sullivan quoted in, "The Sullivan Principles," *Black Enterprise*, Jan. 1986, 23.

<sup>155</sup> Stewart, "Amandla!," 82.

of all contact with South Africa.”<sup>156</sup> Further, Sullivan promised to resign his position as President of the Sullivan Organization and remove himself from all of the organisation’s activities in South Africa.

Despite being closely tied to the Reagan administration and its policy of Constructive Engagement, Sullivan himself “nestled” his Principles within the anti-apartheid movement.<sup>157</sup> Just as the goals and tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr. were seen as more acceptable when compared to the radicalism of Malcolm X, the Sullivan Principles were leveraged as an acceptable compromise to the dissident anti-apartheid protestors.<sup>158</sup> Sullivan defended the Principles as the best method for achievable and realistic outcomes in reforming the apartheid system while benefitting Black African workers. Demonstrating commitment to the Sullivan Principles provided corporations a righteous retort to any criticism leveled by anti-apartheid protestors. Yet, Sullivan closely monitored the signatory companies and threatened the removal of the ‘moral cloak of the Principles’ from any company that did not meet his conditions.

As the previous chapters pointed out, Sullivan and his Principles were an extension of his Afrocentric conservative activism into the international sphere. Legal scholar Henry J. Richardson noted in a speech on ‘The Black International Tradition and African American Business in Africa’ that Sullivan’s impact on Africa had been “profound.”<sup>159</sup> Richardson went on to say that Sullivan extended the non-violent principles of Martin Luther King, Jr. into the international community, establishing new global norms and international law.<sup>160</sup> Despite the anti-apartheid activist criticism that he and his supporters faced, Sullivan’s activism achieved

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<sup>156</sup> Leon Sullivan, “A Deadline for Ending Apartheid,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 1985, reprinted in *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>157</sup> Henry J. Richardson III, “Reverend Leon Sullivan's Principles, Race, and International Law: A Comment,” *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (2001): 55-80.

<sup>158</sup> August H. Nimtz, “Violence and/or Nonviolence in the Success of the Civil Rights Movement: The Malcolm X –Martin Luther King, Jr. Nexus,” *New Political Science* 38, no. 1 (2016): 1-22.

<sup>159</sup> Henry J. Richardson III, “The Black International Tradition and African American Business in Africa,” *North Carolina Central Law Review* 34, no. 2 (2012), 183.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

concrete gains for Black African workers in South Africa and their communities. By 1986 214 companies, representing more than ninety percent of U.S. businesses in South Africa, had become signatories.<sup>161</sup> For those looking for a ‘respectable’ alternative to the Free South Africa Movement and the extreme conservatism of the *Lincoln Review*, Sullivan and his Principles offered a compromise.

As journalist Chuck Stone wrote, “From a man whose legendary civil rights record renders puny our feeble forays, the Sullivan Principles appeared like a shining star of hope in the dark night of oppression.”<sup>162</sup> The impact of the Sullivan Principles went even further, however. The success of Sullivan in influencing corporations on issues of morality and ethics inspired other corporate responsibility initiatives. By the late 1980s over 75 percent of U.S. corporations had adopted a social responsibility code of conduct, with the Sullivan Principles held up as the model.<sup>163</sup> As Phillip H. Rudolph argued in *Corporate Social Responsibility: The Corporate Governance of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,

by providing an early example of the effectiveness of leveraging voluntary public commitments by private actors, the Sullivan Principles have helped provide the foundation for many recent initiatives, ranging from the US-based Apparel Industry Partnership... to the UN Global Compact.<sup>164</sup>

Even vocal critic Desmond Tutu recognised the utility of the Principles as a possible tool of change, developing his own “Tutu Principles.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> David Bolen, “Memo to F.E. Zumelzu and D.E. Azagury on South Africa: Sullivan Principles,” *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 4]; Statistics from Kenneth R. Gray and Robert E. Karp, “An Experiment in Exporting U.S. Values Abroad: the Sullivan Principles and South Africa,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 13, no. 7 (1993), 5.

<sup>162</sup> Chuck Stone, “Suspend the Sullivan Principles,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, Dec. 7, 1984, 53.

<sup>163</sup> Christina Keinert, *Corporate Social Responsibility as an International Strategy* (Vienna: Heidelberg, 2008), 17; S. Prakesh Sethi and Oliver Williams, “Creating and Implementing Global Codes of Conduct—An Assessment of the Sullivan Principles as a Role Model for Developing International Codes of Conduct—Lessons Learned and Unlearned,” *Business and Society Review* 105, no. 2 (2000): 169-200.

<sup>164</sup> Phillip H. Rudolph, “The Global Sullivan Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility,” in *Corporate Social Responsibility: The Corporate Governance of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Ramon Mullerat (Frederick, MD: Kluwer Law International, 2011), 464.

<sup>165</sup> Larson, “The Sullivan Principles: South Africa, Apartheid, and Globalization,” 501.

Leon Sullivan's controversial Principles continued to inform corporate social responsibility initiatives in South Africa in the late 1980s and beyond. Sullivan retired from the Zion Baptist Church in 1988 in order to concentrate on his new organisation, the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH). In partnership with the World Bank, the World Health Organisation, and the United Nations Development Program, IFESH established vocational training and economic development programs across the African continent.<sup>166</sup> In 1991, Sullivan established the Leon H. Sullivan Summit, an event that brought together African governments and corporate executives, to enable positive change. After twenty years of these Summits, Sullivan could point to numerous ways in which he had made an impact in Africa, including a \$60 billion USD debt restructuring program that emerged from discussions at the Summit, the donation of \$30 million USD worth of books and other educational supplies, and increased investments of U.S. companies in African nations.<sup>167</sup>

In addition, in 1999 Sullivan unveiled the Global Sullivan Principles at the United Nations, a program for corporations to "support economic, social, and political justice... where they do business."<sup>168</sup> These initiatives were successful for their impact on corporate ethics, US-Africa relations, and Black economic development internationally, and reinforced Sullivan's status as an influential African American at home and abroad. As James B. Stewart argued, "in many ways the promulgation of the Sullivan Principles represented the internationalization of the goals and objectives of the U.S. Civil Rights and Black Power movements."<sup>169</sup> Indeed, as this chapter has shown, Sullivan's work was an internationalisation of civil rights aims and

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<sup>166</sup> International Foundation for Education and Self-Help, "Annual Report 1995," *US Agency for International Development*, [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdabr974.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdabr974.pdf).

<sup>167</sup> Leon Sullivan Foundation, "Leon H. Sullivan Summit IX Partnership Brochure, Oct. 14-22, 2011," 3. [https://issuu.com/leonh.sullivanfoundation/docs/one\\_africa\\_partnership\\_brochure\\_4](https://issuu.com/leonh.sullivanfoundation/docs/one_africa_partnership_brochure_4)

<sup>168</sup> Leon Sullivan, "Preamble: The Global Sullivan Principles," <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/links/sullivanprinciples.html> (accessed Feb. 5, 2022).

<sup>169</sup> Stewart, "Amandla!," 84.

tactics, but not in a way that many critics of the time could accept or envisage, still less historians since.

This chapter has traced the attempts by leading Black conservatives to engage with, and challenge, the US anti-apartheid movement at its height of influence. In doing so, the chapter complicates the history of the African American involvement in the anti-apartheid movement. At the height of the anti-apartheid movement there were a cadre of Black Americans who opposed the goals and tactics of the movement but remained committed to ending the system of apartheid in South Africa. Those like Deroy Murdock dedicated their time to engage in the anti-apartheid discussions in protest hotspots like college campuses, attempting to redirect the movement towards what they believed to be more sustainable change. Others, like Williams and Sowell, not only dedicated their attention to the issue within the halls of academe but also used their significant media presence to explain their positions to a wider audience.

Moreover, the representation of South Africa as a clear-cut moral issue by civil rights leaders in the United States was a source of ire for these Black conservatives. As Keith Richburg argued, these liberal African American leaders “faced the fire hoses to challenge a system they deemed unequal and racist,” but “go through a strange metamorphosis” when it comes to the politics of “their ancestral homeland.”<sup>170</sup> Many African dictators had been welcomed by these African American leaders, their violence and corruption overlooked, ignored, or dismissed. Black conservatives like Sowell, Williams, and particularly Parker, were quick to point out the logical inconsistencies of some anti-apartheid activists. Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated that the thought and praxis of these Black conservatives during this period was about more than aligning themselves with the Reagan administration and the conservative movement.

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<sup>170</sup> Keith Richburg, “Eyeless in Africa: Why Don’t American Black Leaders Stand Up For Democracy?” *Washington Post*, May 30, 1993, C02.

As the work of J.A. Parker and Williams Keyes (and Max Yergan before them) shows, there were Black conservatives who believed that, in the circumstances, the apartheid regime was the best possible option for government for South Africa. Looking at the violent communist dictatorships that ruled other African nations, these Black conservatives expressed concern that South Africa would be the same. Their concerns were perhaps not completely unfounded; they could point to Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique as depressing cases in southern Africa alone. While this was a concern for many Black conservatives, the far-right conspiracism of Parker and Keyes that alleged the presence of Soviet-influenced revolutionaries in the United States anti-apartheid movement was a step too far for most. Nonetheless, the belief in a Soviet plot arguably goes some way to explain why these African American individuals were willing to work for the apartheid government, whom they saw as the lesser of two evils. Their lobbying work for the apartheid government made them easy targets for accusations of selling out and racial betrayal. But as the title of Parker's biography suggests, these men expressed pride in having the "courage to put country above color" in order to protect US interests in the Cold War.<sup>171</sup>

While the work of Reverend Leon Sullivan was far removed from the lobbying efforts of Parker and Keyes, he too shared the concerns around a possible revolution in South Africa. Sullivan, like Murdock, however, saw his work within the anti-apartheid movement rather than against it. The increasing animosity of the anti-apartheid movement towards the Sullivan Principles, combined with the violence and unrest in South Africa, led Sullivan to question the utility of his own work – so much so that he publicly announced his separation from the Principles and joined calls for economic disinvestment in 1987. His corporate allies and signatory companies also struggled to maintain their commitment to remain in South Africa.

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<sup>171</sup> David W. Tyson, *Courage to Put Country Above Color: The J.A. Parker Story* (Philadelphia: Self-Published, 2009).

The strategy of anti-apartheid activists to target Sullivan signatories and the continuing economic recession in South Africa made withdrawal a more attractive option. Despite this outcome, business scholars have commended the central role Sullivan played in the establishment of corporate social responsibility programs.

In examining these alternative perspectives, this chapter has considered the ways in which Black conservatives attempted to join, influence, and adapt to the US anti-apartheid movement at its peak between 1985 and 1986. Further, the chapter has drawn out some of the complexities and divisions within the Black community and within Black conservatism. Black conservatives were engaged with the problem of South Africa and engage in the public debates on economic sanctions. While their perspectives were at odds with the liberal activists within the anti-apartheid movement, they were consistent with their conservative worldview. Black conservative support for Constructive Engagement became increasingly important for the Reagan administration as the anti-apartheid movement found some support within the Republican Party and increased the likelihood of economic sanctions.

## Chapter Four

### **“Quiet, Low-Key, and Dignified”: Black conservatives in the Reagan Administration and the Attack on Constructive Engagement, 1985-1987**

In December 1986, a ‘giant of a man’ exited a dark limousine and climbed the courthouse steps in the small farming town of Delmas, South Africa. All eyes turned to stare as he walked into the courtroom; the only Black man wearing a suit took a seat. As the inhabitants of the room were distracted by the recent entrance, the defendant on the stand, Mosiuoa ‘Terror’ Lekota, quietly raised his fist into the air in the Black Power salute. The man in the suit was the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to South Africa. His presence at the proceedings of the infamous Delmas Treason Trial was his first public appearance in the apartheid state and sent a strong signal to the apartheid regime that the Reagan administration was taking a new and more proactive direction in its relations with South Africa. As Ambassador Edward Perkins later wrote in his memoir,

That December day in Delmas was the first time an American ambassador to South Africa had ever set foot in a courtroom to attend a political trial. The very fact that I had travelled to this remote area was a message to the South African government and everybody else that, unlike my predecessors, I was going to be an activist. Delmas was my first platform for showing the governmental officials what my administration was going to be. I was in South Africa to deal with the governmental policy of apartheid and to communicate to Black South Africa that the United States identified with their plight.<sup>1</sup>

The dramatic entrance of an African American ambassador into the murky waters of US-South Africa relations in late 1986 marked the realisation of the Reagan administration’s attempt to “giv[e] greater visibility to Black Americans in the framing of” Constructive Engagement.<sup>2</sup>

The support for Constructive Engagement by African Americans in the Reagan administration and their efforts to promote the policy to fellow Black Americans continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Perkins and Connie Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace* (Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Buchanan, “Memorandum for Donald T. Regan and John M. Poindexter, July 25, 1986,” ID#401177, Box 169, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.



be controversial. As the previous chapter highlighted, support for the anti-apartheid movement was growing, even within the Republican Party. At first Republican Congressmen encouraged President Reagan to be more forceful in his condemnation of apartheid. In November 1984, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Africa Nancy Kassebaum (R-Ka.) wrote to the President urging him to take a personal interest in the problems of South Africa and adopt a stronger policy against the apartheid regime.<sup>3</sup> As 1985 wore on and violence in South Africa continued with no change to U.S. policy, the tension between the Reagan administration and Senators Lugar and Kassebaum deepened. As political scientist Pauline H. Baker argued, Constructive Engagement “split the Republican Party down the middle.”<sup>4</sup> By April of 1985 there were twenty separate sanctions bills pending in the U.S. Congress, many with Republican support.<sup>5</sup> As Baker explained, “liberal and conservative views were beginning to converge” in opposition to the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, it was imperative that the Administration assert greater control over U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa. A key part of this campaign was to promote Black voices in support of Constructive Engagement. As a memorandum from White House Communications Director Pat Buchanan outlined, the Reagan administration intended to search for a Black conservative to counteract the anti-apartheid sentiment in Congress.<sup>7</sup> Buchanan’s strategy was a cynical attempt to utilise racial identity in the battle for control of the Republican Party and its support of Constructive Engagement. Like Buchanan, historians have perceived Black conservatives as “mere apologists” and “proxies for white hegemony,”

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Wilentz, Sam Allis, and William Stewart, “Not a Black and White Issue: Congress is Caught in the Tide for South African Sanctions,” *Time*, Jun. 17, 1985, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline H. Baker, “The United States and South Africa,” in *Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Richard N. Haass, Mehan L. O’Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “Congress Turns its Eye on Race in South Africa,” *New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1985, A20.

<sup>6</sup> Baker, “The United States and South Africa,” 105.

<sup>7</sup> Buchanan, “Memorandum for Donald T. Regan and John M. Poindexter, July 25, 1986.”

especially in realm of foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> However, the reality was more than Buchanan bargained for.

From mid-1986 the Reagan administration actively sought to bring more Black conservatives into the public relations campaign for Constructive Engagement. As this chapter will demonstrate, they were only partially successful in this endeavour. Not only did the Reagan administration fail to capitalise on the work that Black conservatives were already doing; a number of respected Black Republicans refused to be a part of this campaign. This chapter will open with two such examples. First, the chapter will trace the attempt by the White House to enlist the support of LeGree Daniels, and by association, the National Black Republican Council which she chaired. Second, the chapter will examine the work of J. Stephen Rhodes, Black conservative and assistant to Vice-President Bush. Rhodes spent the period 1984-1986 seeking endorsements of Constructive Engagement from ‘distinguished’ Black Americans. The White House largely ignored his attempts to develop a Black conservative voice for Constructive Engagement. Ultimately Rhodes resigned from his position in protest at the White House’s continual decision to ignore and undermine his work.

Unlike the White House, the State Department was more successful in finding Black conservative perspectives. Secretary of State George Shultz created an advisory committee that was tasked with evaluating Constructive Engagement. Four of the twelve committee members were Black conservatives, or at least African Americans amenable to a conservative approach to apartheid. The advisory committee included Reverend Leon Sullivan, Franklin Thomas, Vernon Jordan, and William T. Coleman. They spent twelve months meeting with experts in both the United States and South Africa to discuss U.S. policy toward the apartheid state and

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<sup>8</sup> Corey D. Fields, *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African American Republicans* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 61; Cornel West, “Assessing Black Neo-Conservatism,” in *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids and Trenton: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co. and Africa World Press, 1988), 58.

develop policy recommendations. By the time the findings were released in February 1987, Congress had already enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act over the President's veto. This rendered the work of the committee all but obsolete. Once the battle over economic sanctions was lost, the White House focused exclusively on the search for an African American ambassador to serve in South Africa.

Finally, the chapter traces the White House's search, as they considered businessman Robert Brown and then career diplomat Terrance A. Todman, before finally settling on Ambassador Edward Perkins. Perkins was a relatively unknown diplomat at the time, having served less than a year as ambassador to Liberia. Criticised by some in the Black community as a token appointment, he endeavoured to outline his perspective before he left for South Africa. Like the other Black conservatives considered in this thesis, Perkins believed in the sanctity of the American system, self-help as the best method of progress, and the importance of economic development. Perkins has been largely overlooked in the literature on both Constructive Engagement and Black Internationalism. Yet, as fellow diplomat Princeton Lyman argued, he restored credibility to U.S. policy at a time when Crocker's peace initiatives for the region finally began to bear fruit.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it was Perkins' own experience as a member of a racial minority group that, he claimed, gave him insight into the concerns of white South Africans.

### **The Search for a Black Republican Champion**

The search for an African American spokesperson had already begun by the time Pat Buchanan outlined this priority in the July 1986 memorandum. Two weeks after Reagan's

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<sup>9</sup> Princeton Lyman, *Partner to History: The U.S. Role in South Africa's Transition to Democracy* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2002), 42.

second Inauguration in January 1985, Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker and South African Ambassador Bernard Fourie met with leading Black Republicans, trade association executives, and community leaders at the White House. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the “Administration’s commitment to ‘Constructive Engagement’ in South Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Among those in attendance at the meeting were LeGree Daniels, the first woman to be Chair of the National Black Republican Council (NBRC) and Clarence V. McKee Vice Chairman of the Critical Issues Task Force for the NBRC.

Both were leading figures within the Black Republican community. Daniels, “the grand lady of Black politics,” was held in particularly high esteem having served in countless local Republican committees, including heading ‘Blacks for Reagan-Bush’ during the 1984 election, as well as Black organisations like the NAACP and the National Urban League.<sup>11</sup> Clarence V. McKee, though perhaps not possessing the same standing in the Black community, was well established in Republican circles. McKee served on the first Transition Team for President Reagan in 1981 and as Chairman of the District of Columbia Delegation to the Republican National Convention.<sup>12</sup> McKee had also recently visited the apartheid state on a ‘fact-finding’ trip.<sup>13</sup> Since 1983, he had served as Daniel’s’ vice-chairman for the NBRC. In this role, McKee was tasked with assisting Daniel in the development of policies and statements for the Reagan administration.<sup>14</sup> Having Daniels and McKee attend this meeting it seemed that the Reagan administration hoped that Constructive Engagement would become one of the critical issues for the NBRC task force.

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<sup>10</sup> “Robinson Vows S. Africa Protests to Persist: GOP Heads Meet State Envoy,” *Jet*, Jan. 21, 1985, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Simeon Booker, “Ticker Tape USA” *Jet*, Feb. 16, 1987, 8.

<sup>12</sup> “Meet the President: Clarence V. McKee, ESQ,” *McKee Communications*, accessed Dec. 10, 2020. <https://mckeecomunications.com/about/>

<sup>13</sup> Clarence McKee, “A Black American Visits South Africa,” *Lincoln Review* 3, no. 2 (1982), 43-50.

<sup>14</sup> Clarence McKee, “Clarence M. Profile,” *LinkedIn*, accessed Dec. 10, 2020. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/clarence-m-7956081a>

Following the meeting, Daniels and McKee addressed the Black community in a press release. They advised that the White House meeting was “frank and constructive” and concluded that “meaningful dialogue with the South African government and particularly Black South African leaders” was needed.<sup>15</sup> Daniels and McKee urged Black Americans to be the ones to initiate this “greater communication” with Black South Africans.<sup>16</sup> Further, they also indicated that meetings between Black Republicans and the White House on South Africa would continue. For a brief moment, it seemed that the Reagan administration had found the spokespeople they were looking for. However, the meeting on Constructive Engagement and the subsequent press conference held by Daniels and McKee did not inspire significant public awareness or debate. Daniels’ involvement was limited to the one meeting and did not facilitate further engagement with the NBRC. Like Daniels, the Administration did not include McKee in any further meetings on its increasingly controversial policy toward South Africa. Unlike Daniels, however, McKee continued to engage in debates on southern Africa. In December 1985, McKee became a founding member of Black Americans for A Free Angola and a lobbyist for UNITA and its leader Jonas Savimbi.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the White House meeting’s failure to provide a vocal Black Republican spokesperson for Constructive Engagement in LeGree Daniels or Clarence McKee, the Administration continued its search. J. Stephen Rhodes, a Black conservative and Chief Domestic Policy Advisor to Vice President George H. Bush, in particular remained committed to using Black conservatives to create “greater public awareness” of the benefits of Constructive Engagement.<sup>18</sup> Rhodes, an ambitious young political staffer and the Vice

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<sup>15</sup> “Robinson Vows S. Africa Protests to Persist: GOP Heads Meet State Envoy,” 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> UNITA, Portuguese acronym for the National Union for Total Independence of Angola, was a ‘freedom fighter’ organization that was embroiled in a civil war in the southern African country Angola. The leaders group was Jonas Savimbi, who received military aid from South Africa and the US to fight against the communist-ruled People’s Republic of Angola. This will be covered in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>18</sup> Juan Williams, “Three Administration Blacks Oppose South African Protests,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 7, 1984, A43.

President's liaison to the Black community, organised a post-inaugural dinner for thirty Black Republicans, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Bush.<sup>19</sup> It was neither the content of the policy of Constructive Engagement nor the existence of apartheid that inspired Rhodes to become involved.

Rhodes, expressing his 'America first' philosophy, was a vocal critic of the Free South Africa Movement because he believed that African American activists should refocus their energies on domestic problems and on issues "of direct importance to Black Americans."<sup>20</sup> He hoped that public endorsements of Constructive Engagement from 'distinguished' Black Republicans would remove this international distraction. Rhodes approached former Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman and former Senator Edward Brooke, but both refused. Coleman and Brooke, both moderate Republicans, were supportive of the anti-apartheid movement and the use of corporate disinvestment and economic sanctions.<sup>21</sup> Rhodes should not have been wholly surprised; Brooke had been calling for an end to U.S. trade with the apartheid state since his first term as Senator in the late 1960s.<sup>22</sup>

Rhodes was again unsuccessful in his attempts to secure greater Black Republican involvement in U.S. policy toward South Africa when Bush overlooked his recommendations for the Vice-President's official tour of Africa in April 1985. Rhodes advocated for Black Republicans to join the delegation to tour drought affected West Africa and "study firsthand the dimensions of the famine problem."<sup>23</sup> He particularly campaigned for Leonard Robinson, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and President of the U.S. African

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<sup>19</sup> Rhodes was also VP Bush's primary liaison to the business community. "Rhodes' White House Job as Bush Aide in Jeopardy," *Jet*, Apr. 1, 1985, 6.

<sup>20</sup> J. Stephen Rhodes quoted in Williams, "Three Administration Blacks Oppose South Africa Protests," A43.

<sup>21</sup> William T. Coleman, *Counsel for the Situation: Shaping the Law to Realize America's Promise* (Malden: Brookings Institution, 2010), 346; and Edward Brooke, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2007), 171.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Edward Brooke, "Excerpts from Senator Brooke's Speech on African Policy," *NYT*, Apr. 30, 1968, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Statement in Signing the African Famine Relief Bill, April 5, 1985,"

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-signing-the-african-famine-relief-bill>

Development Foundation (USADF), and William Pickard, Chairman of the Board for the USADF, to join the tour.<sup>24</sup> Their membership of the USADF made both Robinson and Pickard eminently qualified to join Vice President Bush's delegation to Africa. It was a surprise to Rhodes when, instead of choosing these two Black Republicans who had spent years establishing self-help projects in dozens of African countries, Afri-Care's C. Payne Lucas, a Democrat, was selected as the lone Black member in the delegation to bear witness to the vast amounts of US food donations being received by the region. Appalled by this decision, Rhodes resigned his position.<sup>25</sup>

While White House staff like Pat Buchanan considered it essential to have African Americans at the forefront of the Reagan administration's 'framing' of Constructive Engagement to the public, the Black conservatives best placed to assume these roles were often ignored. J. Stephen Rhodes was one example of this political disconnect. Just like the Republican Party in general, the policy of Constructive Engagement divided Black Republicans. Many like Coleman and Brooke supported the economic sanctions bills in Congress, while others like Daniels saw South Africa as a distraction and continued to focus on domestic matters. For Rhodes to find two Black Republicans with expertise in African development was singular. For Vice President Bush to decline to work with them and instead undertake his tour of Africa with a Black Democrat was an illustration of the broader problems the Administration had in developing a coherent strategy to encourage and elevate Black conservative supporters.

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<sup>24</sup> "Rhodes' White House Job As Bush Aide in Jeopardy," *Jet*, Apr. 1, 1985, 6.

<sup>25</sup> "National Headliners," *Jet*, Apr. 29, 1985, 11. He would briefly return to public service in 1989 as the first Black Ambassador to Zimbabwe.

## **Black Republicans and the U.S. African Development Foundation**

Despite their exclusion from Bush's Africa delegation, Leonard Robinson and William Pickard continued to be active in African affairs. Robinson was appointed by the Reagan administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in 1983 and was responsible for economic and commercial policy in Africa. As Robinson explained in an interview in 2003, his role was to "encourage[] the development of good business practices, good business policies, and various incentives designed to attract Americans to Africa."<sup>26</sup> In this role Robinson made official trips to the continent, visiting Somalia, Cameroon and Congo. While his work at the State Department did not include southern Africa, Robinson warned the Department against underestimating the power of the Free South Africa Movement in mobilising American public opinion.<sup>27</sup>

Only days after the first demonstration outside of the South African Embassy, the U.S. Ambassadors to African nations were in Washington, D.C. to attend a Chiefs of Mission Conference. Robinson took the opportunity to warn the delegates that "the policy of Constructive Engagement has not been clearly articulated, or clearly understood by the American people."<sup>28</sup> Attempting to address these problems himself, Robinson sought to facilitate a meeting between Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker and the leader of the Free South Africa Movement and President of TransAfrica Randall Robinson.<sup>29</sup> Randall Robinson did not attend.<sup>30</sup>

However, Leonard Robinson impressed the Secretary of State for African Affairs while serving as his Deputy. In April 1985, Robinson resigned his position at the behest of Crocker,

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<sup>26</sup> Leonard H Robinson, "Interview with Charles Stuart Kennedy," Library of Congress Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001442/.71>.

<sup>27</sup> "Special Issue: Progressive Africa Action for a New Century," *Association of Concerned Africa Scholars*, Spring/Summer 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, "Interview," 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



to serve as President of the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF).<sup>31</sup> The USADF was a new government agency that was created to provide grants to small businesses and community organisations in sub-Saharan Africa, with the goal of investing in local economic development. The organisation had a controversial and debilitating start. When Robinson took over in April 1985, the USADF was close to collapse—in the one month it was operational it had lost both its president, who was fired for incompetence, and its vice president who resigned.<sup>32</sup> The organisation also faced some criticism over the appointment of the board of directors, when five of the seven were Black Republicans.<sup>33</sup> However, others quickly pointed out that the “ADF is one of the few Black-run agencies of our federal government and one of the few Black-run agencies that deal with Africa.”<sup>34</sup>

In the four years after Robinson became President, the USADF established more than one hundred projects in nineteen African countries, including the southern African nations of Lesotho, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.<sup>35</sup> One of the USADF’s first projects was the investment of \$US42,804 into the Morija Vocational School in Lesotho, to enable the school to provide training for women.<sup>36</sup> That same year in Botswana, the USADF funded the Tswelelopele Poultry project, a \$3,400 injection to facilitate an egg-production enterprise.<sup>37</sup> As Leonard Robinson explained in an interview for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Project in 2003, the

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<sup>31</sup> Initially he took on the role of president for 30 days, while remaining as deputy Assistant Secretary, to keep USADF from collapsing. Robinson officially resigned and became the permanent president of USADF in April 1985.

<sup>32</sup> The first president was Connie Hilliard (who had a PhD in Africa studies but had never been to Africa nor held a similar position), she was appointed after Senator Tower insisted to the White House that his staffer be appointed. In retaliation the board hired Reginal Petty as vice president, without Hilliard’s approval (or even consultation). Within the first month Petty had resigned, and Hilliard fired by the board. General Accounting Office, *Report to the Chairman Subcommittee on Foreign Operations Committee on Appropriations United States Senate: Issues Affecting Appropriations for the African Development Foundation, May 7, 1985* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), 4.

<sup>33</sup> The organisation was made up of a seven-member board of directors, five from the private sector and two from government, appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate.

<sup>34</sup> Congressional source quoted in Molly Sinclair, “Conflict-ridden Agency had Provided No Funds for Grass-Roots Africa,” *Washington Post*, May 4, 1984, A19.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview of this progress see: ADF, *Advance: The Journal for the African Development Foundation* 1, no. 1 (1986-1987): 1-56. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951002935704r;view=1up;seq=1>

<sup>36</sup> GAO, *Report to the Chairman*, Appendix I, 13.

<sup>37</sup> GAO, *Report to the Chairman*, appendix I, 14.

“flexibility” of the African Development Foundation “encouraged the Foundation to take risks, to insure that the projects were designed and managed by Africans themselves, to put money directly into the hands of Africans.”<sup>38</sup> While the funding and projects were relatively small in scale, they presented vital opportunities for local communities to sever their economic dependence on apartheid South Africa.

It was not unreasonable, then, for Rhodes to expect that Vice President Bush would invite at least one USADF member on his tour of Africa—this was a Black-run agency focused on small business development in Africa with Republican governance. The USADF had a significant impact on southern Africa, not because of the support of the Reagan administration, but arguably in spite of it. Yet historians, like the Reagan administration, have continued to overlook the USADF. While in theory the Reagan administration supported “giving greater visibility” to Black conservatives who displayed a willingness to champion Constructive Engagement, in practice this was not always the case. The chaos and constant power-plays between factions inside the Reagan administration were probably contributing causes to this outcome.<sup>39</sup> As a result, early in the second Reagan administration Black Republicans were consulted but ultimately excluded from any meaningful public role or influence in relation to Constructive Engagement.

### **The Losing Battle Against Economic Sanctions**

While Bush toured drought-stricken Africa in June and July of 1985, the Reagan administration was once more forced to reckon with the power of anti-apartheid sentiment at home. Demonstrations continued across America and local and state governments, including

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<sup>38</sup> Robinson, “Interview,” 85.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Preston, “A Foreign Policy Divided Against Itself: George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger,” in *A Companion to Ronald Reagan*, ed. Andrew L. Johns (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2015), 546-564.

New Jersey, New York and California and the cities of Miami, Pittsburgh, Richmond, and Seattle divested in South Africa. By mid-June, Congressional economic sanctions “appear[ed] inevitable.”<sup>40</sup> Most worrying for advocates of Constructive Engagement was H.R. 1460, a bill that passed with bipartisan support. H.R. 1460 prohibited new corporate investment in South Africa, ended bank loans and computer sales to the apartheid government, and banned the import of the Krugerrand.<sup>41</sup> Republicans in Congress introduced and supported a less stringent version of the bill. No longer content with sharing their concerns about Constructive Engagement with the President, these Republicans publicly split with the Administration. It was clear that President Reagan no longer had total Republican support in Congress for Constructive Engagement and was at risk of losing executive control of U.S. relations with South Africa.

To forestall the passage of the Anti-Apartheid Bill in the Senate, Reagan issued Executive Order 12532—Prohibiting Trade and Certain Other Transactions Involving South Africa, and Executive Order 12535—Prohibition of the Importation of the South African Krugerrand.<sup>42</sup> These orders designated the “policies and actions” of the South African government as “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy and economy of the United States.”<sup>43</sup> Further, the two orders banned the sale of computers to government agencies, prohibited nuclear cooperation, banned imports of the Krugerrand, increased the aid budget, and encouraged US businesses operating in South Africa to become signatories to the Sullivan

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<sup>40</sup> American Committee on Africa, “U.S. Companies are Pulling Out—But Apartheid is Likely to Stay, June 24, 1985.” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-2425](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-2425).

<sup>41</sup> House of Representatives, “H.R. 1460 – Anti-Apartheid Act of 1985.” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/1460>

<sup>42</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Executive Order 12532 – Prohibiting Trade and Certain Other Transactions Involving South Africa.” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39074> and Ronald Reagan, “Executive Order 12535 – Prohibition of the Importation of the South Africa Krugerrand.” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=37829>

<sup>43</sup> Reagan, “Executive Order 12532.”

Principles. The Administration and its supporters considered these actions a new “active” policy direction.

Critically, the Executive Orders gave Secretary of State George Shultz the authority to establish a twelve-member nonpartisan advisory committee on South Africa. Constantine Kontos, a Foreign Service Officer and Executive Director of the advisory committee, explained that by establishing the committee “in effect, the [State] Department was saying that it would welcome new ideas and approaches to this highly volatile and sensitive issue which was of particular concern to the 15% of Black American citizens.”<sup>44</sup> William T. Coleman, a Black Republican with an impressive civil rights record, who served as President Gerald Ford’s Secretary of Transportation (1975-1977) was appointed Co-Chair. Although he was a Black Republican, Coleman had previously challenged the Reagan administration on a number of issues; most notably he opposed the Administration in the Supreme Court, challenging its decision to give tax-exempt status to private schools that practiced racial discrimination. Of course, Coleman had also refused to endorse the policy of Constructive Engagement despite being approached to do so by J. Stephen Rhodes. Yet, as Coleman later wrote in his memoir, “To its credit, the Reagan administration wanted a diversity of views and out-of-the-box thinking.”<sup>45</sup>

Of the twelve members of the committee, four were African American. As well as Coleman the committee included Rev. Leon Sullivan; Franklin Thomas, President of the Ford Foundation and chairman of the 1980 *South Africa: Time Running Out* study; and Vernon Jordan, former President of the civil rights organisation, the National Urban League. All four were known to be amenable to conservative views and not prone to what Kimberly Jade

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<sup>44</sup> Constantine Kontos, “Interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training,” *South Africa Country Reader*. <https://www.adst.org/Readers/South%20Africa.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Coleman, *Counsel for the Situation*, 345.

Norwood provocatively called *Blackthink*.<sup>46</sup> It was important that the committee be seen as non-partisan in order to maintain credibility and dampen the growing anti-apartheid sentiment among Republicans in Congress. As government official Constantine Kontos wrote at the time, the committee's purpose "was to diffuse a domestic political problem," yet in the process it "might [also] shed some new light and... the attendant publicity might be helpful in the education of that sector of the public that was interested in the issue."<sup>47</sup>

Under its mandate the Committee was given free rein to investigate all aspects of US relations with South Africa and develop policy recommendations. During the year of its study, the Advisory Committee held fourteen meetings with a wide range of individuals and government officials in Washington, D.C. In a seven-hour meeting that took place on 2 June 1986, the committee heard the testimony of, and questioned, over fifteen experts.<sup>48</sup> The committee members also travelled to South Africa where they met with a broad spectrum of South Africans. The Committee's report, released in February 1987, concluded that the "Administration's policy of Constructive Engagement has failed to achieve its objectives."<sup>49</sup>

A memo to White House Communications Director Patrick Buchanan about the Committee noted that "nobody should be surprised at the Commission's verdict," after collating a list of anti-Reagan quotes by many of the members.<sup>50</sup> According to Committee member Constantine Kontos, however, it was not a dislike of Reagan that explained the committee's negative assessment of Constructive Engagement, but rather Secretary of State for African Affairs and architect of Constructive Engagement Chester Crocker. Crocker

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<sup>46</sup> Kimberly Jade Norwood, "The Virulence of *Blackthink* and How Its Threat of Ostracism Shackles Those Deemed Not Black Enough," *Kentucky Law Journal* 93 (2005): 143-198.

<sup>47</sup> Kontos, "Interview."

<sup>48</sup> This meeting was televised on C-Span. "Secretary of State's Advisory Commission on South Africa, June 2, 1986," *C-Span*. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?126381-1/secretary-states-advisory-commission-south-africa>.

<sup>49</sup> South Africa Advisory Committee, *A. U.S. Policy Toward South Africa Report* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of State, 1987), 3.

<sup>50</sup> "Memo to Pat Buchanan regarding Shultz's South Africa Commission 9 September 1987," ID#464623, Box 171, WHORM: CO 141 South Africa, Ronald Reagan Library.

“antagonized” the members of the committee, in particular the two co-chairs Coleman and Frank Carey, who believed Crocker was “condescending” and “supercilious.”<sup>51</sup> Regardless of the reason, by the end of the study the majority of the committee members were in agreement with Congress and supported international sanctions against South Africa.

Channelling the new ‘active’ direction of Constructive Engagement, Secretary of State George Shultz established a non-partisan advisory committee. Unlike Buchanan who had sought an African American for largely symbolic reasons, Shultz selected the members of his committee not because of their unwavering support of the Reagan administration, but because of their diverse experiences and independence of thought. Coleman, Sullivan, Thomas, and Jordan had all proven themselves willing to work with the Administration, but also to criticise policy directions with which they disagreed. Their willingness to work with the Administration and the State Department on Constructive Engagement gave them unparalleled access to policymakers in both the US and South Africa. It is hard to argue that these strong and independent African Americans were ‘mere apologists’ for the Reagan administration.

As the Advisory Committee conducted its research and sanctions continued to gain support in Congress, the Reagan administration tried to win broader public support for Constructive Engagement. Key members of the Administration were drafted into a public relations campaign. Vice President Bush gave a speech to the NAACP and told the audience that “apartheid must end.”<sup>52</sup> UN Ambassador Alan Keyes was also enlisted in the campaign, speaking at the Lions Club International Convention in New Orleans and the National Urban League in San Francisco.<sup>53</sup> In these speeches Keyes emphasised the importance of preventing civil war in South Africa.<sup>54</sup> Other Reagan officials met and spoke with churches, civil rights

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<sup>51</sup> Kontos, “Interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.”

<sup>52</sup> George Bush quoted in Lena Williams, “Bush, At NAACP, Attacks,” *NYT*, Jul. 4, 1986, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Platt, “Memo for John Poindexter on Public Affairs Activities on South Africa,” ID#424458, Box 170, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Perkins, “Urban League Emphasises an Agenda of Self-Help,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 6, 1986, 1.

groups, and media outlets across the country.<sup>55</sup> Secretary of State Shultz and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker both made numerous media appearances and were vocal advocates for Constructive Engagement in Congress. The “effort” was ostensibly to “moderate where necessary opinion of the Black majority in South Africa.”<sup>56</sup> One strategy to do this was to “enlist” the support of African Americans, key among them Dr. T.J. Jemison, president of the National Baptist Convention, Mayor John Ford of Tuskegee, Alabama, and businessman Robert Brown.<sup>57</sup>

The Reagan administration also increasingly pressured P.W. Botha to initiate substantial reforms to end apartheid in South Africa.<sup>58</sup> After months of discussions with South African Foreign Minister Botha, the Administration was confident that South African President P.W. Botha publicly announced such reforms and thus deliver a much-needed win for Constructive Engagement. Instead, in his Rubicon Speech on 15 August 1985, President Botha stated that “I am not prepared to lead white South Africans and other minority groups on the road to abdication and suicide.”<sup>59</sup> Broadcast by the world’s media, the speech, which prompted U.S. National Security Advisor Robert MacFarlane to compare Botha to the notorious U.S. segregationist Bull Connor, was a public relations disaster for the increasingly embattled Reagan administration.<sup>60</sup>

Congressional economic sanctions now seemed all but inevitable. Not prepared to admit defeat, however, the Reagan administration strategically announced that Reagan was

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<sup>55</sup> Speaking platforms and related media activities on South Africa in Platt, “Memo for John Poindexter on Public Affairs Activities on South Africa.”

<sup>56</sup> J. Douglas Holladay, “Memo for Alan Keyes, Strategy Paper for the Office of Public Diplomacy for South Africa, Dec. 10, 1985,” ID# 440874, Box 171, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks to Reporters on the Signing of Executive Order 12532, Sept. 9, 1985.”

[http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/dtSearch/dtisapi6.dll?cmd=getdoc&DocId=5359&Index=\\*efd0fee5343905cffa0f0158ab4a751e&HitCount=5&hits=44c+5b5+6e2+8bc+8ca+&SearchForm=F%3a\Reagan\\_Public\\_Web\search\speches\speech\\_srch\\_form.html](http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/dtSearch/dtisapi6.dll?cmd=getdoc&DocId=5359&Index=*efd0fee5343905cffa0f0158ab4a751e&HitCount=5&hits=44c+5b5+6e2+8bc+8ca+&SearchForm=F%3a\Reagan_Public_Web\search\speches\speech_srch_form.html).

<sup>59</sup> P.W. Botha, “Rubicon Speech, Aug. 15, 1985.”

<http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01600/05lv01638/06lv01639.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 587.

considering appointing an African American as US ambassador to South Africa on the eve of Congressional voting on the anti-apartheid bills. While Shultz's advisory committee evaluated Constructive Engagement in a manner that exerted its independence from the Reagan administration, this became the object of considerable criticism. Tied to the idea of showcasing African American support for Constructive Engagement, opponents of the Shultz committee remained focused on the appointment of the ambassador. The memorandum from Pat Buchanan that outlined the plan to give "greater visibility" to African Americans in administering the policy of Constructive Engagement also recommended Alan Keyes or Walter Williams for the role. As Buchanan explained, "both choices would give us men, who would be *loyal* to whatever policy the Administration chose to pursue—and who would have the capability to articulate that policy as well."<sup>61</sup> Black Republican William H. Peace III was another possible candidate, putting his own name forward to White House Chief of Staff, Donald Regan – not once, but twice. Peace argued that "sending a Black American will send a shot around the world... that the Reagan administration is now for real."<sup>62</sup> The Administration agreed, but the first candidate it considered was 51-year-old Robert J. Brown.

### **The Search for an African American Ambassador**

Brown, a long-time Republican, was a businessman from North Carolina with experience in Africa. After Nixon's first election victory in 1968 Brown was appointed Special Assistant to the Administration, a position he used to try to "mend relations" between the President and Black Americans, working as an advocate for affirmative action and 'Black

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<sup>61</sup> Pat Buchanan, "Memorandum for Donald T. Regan and John M. Poindexter, July 25, 1986," ID#401177, Box 168, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>62</sup> William H. Peace, "Telegram to Secretary Donald Regan, White House Chief of Staff, July 20, 1986," ID#431003, Box 170, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.



capitalism’.<sup>63</sup> During the 1980s, Brown made several trips to South Africa, even arranging a tour of the region for fifteen Black college presidents. This latter trip led to the creation of a teacher-training program for Black South African. He came to the Reagan administration’s notice when he took part in the State Department’s ‘Working Group’ charged with promoting Constructive Engagement and strengthening ties between American and South African interests.<sup>64</sup> In July 1986, Brown participated in a series of further meetings on U.S. policy toward South Africa during the Administration’s vetting process. Speaking to the press about his view of the apartheid problem in South Africa, he declared, “My goal would be to bring the people together, to start talking in South Africa, just as we did in the South during the Civil Rights movement.”<sup>65</sup>

Brown’s ambassadorial potential was recognised by many African Americans and conservatives, including civil rights hero Andrew Young, who was at the time Mayor of Atlanta, having served as US Ambassador to the United Nations during the Carter administration. Young explained to the press that Brown was “the only person in the nation both I and Jesse Helms could support. I can’t think of anybody more qualified to represent this country in a difficult situation.”<sup>66</sup> Benjamin Hooks, Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and a strong anti-apartheid activist, also endorsed Brown, indicating that such an appointment would be “a positive step in the right direction.”<sup>67</sup> Conservatives also supported Brown, who was known for his Black-

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<sup>63</sup> Robert J. Brown, *You Can’t Do Wrong By Doing Right: How a Child of Poverty Rose to the White House and Help Change the World* (New York: Convergent, 2019), 149.

<sup>64</sup> Rodney B. McDaniel, “Memo for John M. Poindexter, Conversation with Bob Brown, Jul. 19, 1986,” ID#426106, Box 170, WHORM: Co 141, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>65</sup> Robert J. Brown quoted in Robert Pear, “Envoy Choice Details Role in Nigeria,” *NYT*, Jul. 19, 1986, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Young quoted in Lena Williams, “Potential Envoy: Bipartisan Respect,” *NYT*, Jul. 15, 1986, A8; Norman Kempster, “Jackson Calls on Brown to Reject S. Africa Envoy Post,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 17, 1986, C12.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin Hooks quoted in Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Presses Plan for Black Envoy,” *NYT*, Jul. 17, 1986, A6.

focused fundraising for the Republican Party. As recently as 17 October 1985, Brown had organised and chaired a USD\$300-a-plate dinner honouring President Nixon.

However, Brown was not without his critics. Some opposed Brown's nomination as Ambassador because they objected in principle to there being any U.S. ambassador to South Africa; others opposed the appointment of an *African American* ambassador. Anti-apartheid leader Randall Robinson was among the critics in the second group. Robinson told reporters, "I don't think it serves any useful purpose to put a Black face on what is perceived globally and particularly in South Africa to be an anti-Black policy."<sup>68</sup> Jesse Jackson used even stronger language, likening a Black US Ambassador to South Africa to "a Jew carrying messages between a reactionary administration and Hitler."<sup>69</sup> The Black political moderate Juan Williams expressed similar concerns, arguing that the Administration's sudden move might read as a mere "ploy to temper congressional anger and the threat of added sanctions."<sup>70</sup>

Opponents questioned the Administration's motivations. US Ambassador to Rwanda Margaret K. McMillion suggested that, "to announce [a Black ambassador] at the eleventh hour might have appeared insincere and done the administration more harm than good."<sup>71</sup> The Congressional Black Caucus representative William Gray III (D-Pen.), an anti-apartheid activist and Chairman of the House Budget Committee, was among those who expressed cynicism towards the Administration's motives and its timing, giving voice to his suspicion that, "Mr. Brown's appointment may be the Reagan Administration's cosmetic attempt to cling to its failed policy toward South Africa."<sup>72</sup> Others were critical of the "hypocrisy" of the

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<sup>68</sup> Randall Robinson quoted in Williams, "Potential Envoy: Bipartisan Respect," A8.

<sup>69</sup> Jesse Jackson quoted in Juan Williams, "Man in a Trap," *Washington Post Magazine*, Mar. 1, 1987, 38.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, "Man in a Trap," 48.

<sup>71</sup> Margaret K. McMillion, "Morality and Grand Strategy: The Executive Branch and the Anti-Apartheid Act," *Domestic Context Course*, December 15, 1989, 9.

[http://lawsdoctbox.com/US\\_Government\\_Resources/77729601-D-u-d-ja-d-morality-and-grand-strategy-the-executive-branch-and-the-anti-apartheid-margaret-k-mcmillion-domestic-context-course.html](http://lawsdoctbox.com/US_Government_Resources/77729601-D-u-d-ja-d-morality-and-grand-strategy-the-executive-branch-and-the-anti-apartheid-margaret-k-mcmillion-domestic-context-course.html)

<sup>72</sup> Representative William Gray III (D-Pen.) quoted in Bernard Gwertzman, "Buying Time on Sanctions," *NYT* Jul. 16, 1986.

Reagan administration's use of affirmative action "to deflect criticism." As the *New Republic* argued, a Brown nomination would show "that the President thinks it's fine to skip overqualified white candidates in order to give a Black of dubious qualifications a top government job."<sup>73</sup>

Others objected to the choice of Brown specifically. Secretary of State George Shultz expressed concern that Brown was insufficiently qualified for the post, advocating instead for a career diplomat with experience in diplomacy and African political affairs. Brown's integrity was also called into question when his past encounters with corrupt Nigerian officials and accusations of business misconduct brought to public attention.<sup>74</sup> Soon after his name was mentioned by White House officials, the media began reporting on Brown's involvement in hearings held by Senator Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.) in 1977 on affirmative action. The media, in particular the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, were concerned that witnesses had testified that Brown's business, which had received a government contract as a minority business, had white shareholders who shared in the profit.<sup>75</sup> After further investigation, Nigerian officials and the media registered their concerns that Brown, a registered agent for the Nigerian government between 1980 and 1982, had a close connection to Umaru Dikko, who absconded from Nigeria with millions of dollars.<sup>76</sup> The media onslaught raised serious questions regarding Brown's credibility and he withdrew his name from consideration.

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<sup>73</sup> "South Africa Set-Aside," *New Republic* 195, no. 6 (1986), 7.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Pear, "Envoy Choice Details Role in Nigeria," *NYT*, Jul. 19, 1986, 4.

<sup>75</sup> John Goshko, "SBA Benefits to Minorities Aid Well-Off," *Washington Post*, Jul. 3, 1977; John Goshko, "SBA Halts Minorities' Aid Program," *Washington Post*, Jul. 9, 1977.

<sup>76</sup> Pear, "Envoy Choice Details Role in Nigeria," 4.

## The End of the Fight Against Economic Sanctions

Despite the creation of a non-partisan research committee, a public relations campaign, and the announcement of a Black Ambassador to South Africa, the fight against economic sanctions was lost. The day before the vote on sanctions in Congress, Reagan was to give a speech announcing the new initiatives associated with ‘active’ Constructive Engagement, with the symbolic announcement of Robert Brown’s appointment as Ambassador to be a particular highlight. However, as there was no alternative to Brown at this time, the speech fell flat. Further, the original speech which had been carefully developed by Schultz and Crocker, was rewritten by ultra-conservatives Pat Buchanan (White House Director of Communications), William Casey (Director CIA), and John Poindexter (NSC Advisor). Like Botha’s speech the year before, rather than outlining a “fresh and forward-thinking” agenda, Reagan delivered a speech concerned with the security of white South Africans “in this country that they love and have sacrificed so much to build.”<sup>77</sup> As Shultz later wrote in his memoir, missing from the President’s speech was concern and empathy for “the desperation and fear of Blacks.”<sup>78</sup> Expressions of public and Congressional outrage were immediate. Senator Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., a Connecticut Republican, told the *New York Times* in no uncertain terms that “the President will be repudiated.”<sup>79</sup>

Weicker’s prediction turned out to be correct. After Reagan’s speech, many Republicans in the House of Representatives crossed the floor to pass a bill—H.R.4868—calling for a full trade embargo and immediate disinvestment in South Africa.<sup>80</sup> In the Senate, Richard Lugar led a call for economic sanctions. Lugar’s bill (S2701), passed by a margin of

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<sup>77</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Transcript of Speech on South Africa and Apartheid,” *NYT* Jul. 23, 1986, 12.

<sup>78</sup> George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2010), 1122.

<sup>79</sup> Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. quoted in Steven V. Rogers, “Reaction in Congress to Speech is Mostly Negative,” *NYT*, Jul. 23, 1986, A13.

<sup>80</sup> William Gray, “H.R. 4868: Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.” <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d099:15:./temp/~bdR0Uj:@@L&summ2=m&/home/LegislativeData.php?n=BSS;c=99>.

84-14, with thirty-seven Republicans voting against their President.<sup>81</sup> With the House also endorsing Lugar's bill, Reagan's only option for salvaging Constructive Engagement was presidential veto. When Reagan exercised this veto on 29 September 1986, Lugar again led the Congress to override the presidential veto, declaring that, "We are against tyranny, and tyranny is in South Africa."<sup>82</sup> On 2 October 1986 Reagan's veto was overridden in Congress, with 81 Republicans in the House and 31 Republicans in the Senate crossing the floor against the President.

The resulting Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 imposed economic sanctions against South Africa and outlined five preconditions before the sanctions could be lifted – the release of Nelson Mandela and all other persons persecuted for their political beliefs; the repeal of the State of Emergency; the formation of democratic political parties and full participation of all races in the political process; repeal of all laws that limit where non-whites may live and work; and agreement by the South Africa government to enter into good faith negotiations with representatives of the Black majority in South Africa. In the wake of the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, the Reagan administration resumed its search for an African American ambassador for South Africa.

### **The Search for a Black Ambassador Resumes**

The media also continued to speculate on potential candidates. Terrance A. Todman, U.S. Ambassador to Denmark, initially floated by a State Department Official, became the

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Lugar, "S. 2701: Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986." <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d099:40:./temp/~bdZYyR:@@L&summ2=m&>.

<sup>82</sup> Senator Richard Lugar quoted in Edward Walsh, "Sanctions Imposed on S. Africa as Senate Overrides Veto, 78-21: U.S. Imposes Sanctions as Hill Overrides Veto," *Washington Post*, Oct. 3, 1986, A16.

focus of the press.<sup>83</sup> Todman stood out as only one of five Black American envoys abroad. A former Army Lieutenant, Todman had also previously served as Ambassador to Chad, Guinea, Costa Rica, and Spain, as well as the head of the State Department's East Africa desk in the late 1960s and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in the late 1970s. At first glance he seemed to be a "safe" option for the Reagan administration. Not only was Todman the highest-ranking African American in the State Department, but he had also spent his career advocating for Black advancement and civil rights diplomatically.

It was somewhat ironic, then, that some liberals and progressives in the United States opposed his candidacy on the grounds that he was "an ultraconservative" with "a deplorable record of total insensitivity to human rights" who "will be far more sympathetic to the oppressors in Pretoria."<sup>84</sup> This criticism undoubtedly stemmed from his time as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, when he disagreed with the Carter administration's emphasis on human rights in relations with Latin America. As the *New York Times* reported, Todman "was often embroiled in controversies with the State Department's human rights section."<sup>85</sup> In 1978, for example, he gave a speech supporting a 'soft' approach to Latin American nations in their uneven human rights efforts, criticising cuts to foreign aid over human rights violations.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, when Todman was transferred to the Ambassadorship of Spain only a few months after his controversial speech, many speculated that he was essentially "eased out" of the Assistant Secretary of State role.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> George de Lama, "Reagan Picks Safer Black As Envoy to South Africa," *Chicago Tribune*, Jul. 26, 1986, 3; "Reagan Reportedly Picks Black Envoy for S. Africa: Todman, 60, a Career Diplomat," *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 25, 1986, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Press release by The Council on Hemispheric Affairs quoted in "Two Black Diplomats Considered for Post of Envoy to South Africa," *NYT*, Jul. 26, 1986, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "Top Candidate for Pretoria Post Faces Criticism on Human Rights," *NYT*, Jul. 27, 1986, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Southerland, "Rights Policy Speech Highlights State Department Split: Criticism Voiced Long-Time Disputes," *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 2, 1978, 3.

<sup>87</sup> John M. Goshko, "Todman Asks Out of State Post," *Washington Post*, Apr. 8, 1978, A12; James Nelson Goodsell, "Reflections on U.S. Latin America Policy," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Jun. 12, 1978, 7; Stanley Meisler, "Spanish in Flap Over Prospect of Todman as U.S. Envoy," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1978, A20.

Todman's propensity for controversial speeches was apparent during the nomination process in August 1986. At a news conference held at the Danish Embassy, he told the press that he would only accept the ambassadorship if Constructive Engagement "finds credibility with the South Africans, with the people of Southern Africa and with the rest of the world."<sup>88</sup> As one White House official responded, Todman's strong language was "an extraordinary measure to take" for a career diplomat.<sup>89</sup> The media were quick to label the speech as being critical of US policy. A headline in the *Washington Post* read, "U.S. Diplomat Hits Policy on S. Africa: Critic Was Candidate for Ambassador's Job."<sup>90</sup> Yet, as a career diplomat, Todman's speech was strategically worded.

As White House spokesperson Dan Howard told the press after the Ambassador's speech, "Todman's statements were designed to remove himself from contention without any sign of disloyalty."<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Todman was removed from consideration for the position, remaining Ambassador to Denmark until 1989. In 1989, during his confirmation for his subsequent appointment to the post of Ambassador to Argentina, Todman was more specific about his lack of enthusiasm for the South African role. When asked by Senator Jesse Helms why he did not take the assignment, Todman replied "Senator, that was a racist farce, and I had no intention of participating in that kind of thing."<sup>92</sup> Like moderate Black Republicans William Coleman and Edward Brooke, Todman refused to endorse the Reagan administration's policy of Constructive Engagement.

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<sup>88</sup> Terrence A. Todman quoted in "Envoy to Denmark Calls U.S. Policy on Apartheid Not Yet Credible," *NYT* Aug. 8, 1986, A2.

<sup>89</sup> Unnamed official quoted in Eleanor Clift, "U.S. Encounters New Snag in Naming S. Africa Envoy," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 8, 1986, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Don Oberdorfer, "U.S. Diplomat Hits Policy on S. Africa: Critic Was Candidate for Ambassador's Job," *Washington Post*, Aug. 8, 1986, A25.

<sup>91</sup> Dan Howard quoted in "Black Envoy Shuns Post in Pretoria," *The New York Daily News*, Aug. 8, 1986, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Terrance Todman, "Interview with Michael Krenn, June 13, 1995," *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress*.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004tod01/2004tod01.pdf>

After Todman had effectively rejected the position, Shultz pursued U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Edward J. Perkins, for the Ambassador position in South Africa. Perkins was relatively unknown at the time. He had been Ambassador to Liberia for less than a year, his first senior role. In fact, Shultz himself had not even met Perkins before submitting his name to President Reagan for consideration.<sup>93</sup> While the press was caught up in the Todman controversy, Perkins told Shultz that he was willing “to go where needed.”<sup>94</sup> The Louisiana native had served in Korea and Japan with the Marine Corps before joining the State Department in 1978 as a Foreign Service Officer in Ghana. His ability as a management specialist, as well as his “quiet, low-key, and dignified” manner, resulted in a rapid rise through the ranks.<sup>95</sup> After serving as Deputy Chief of Mission in Liberia during the period 1981-1983, Perkins headed the West African Affairs Office at the State Department briefly, before returning to Liberia as Ambassador in July 1985.

After meeting with Shultz, Assistant Secretary of State Crocker, and President Reagan himself, in early August 1986, Perkins was offered the job. Having struggled for some time to find a Black American willing to represent the Reagan administration in South Africa, Perkins was rushed through the confirmation process. Senate hearings came a week after the White House announced his nomination, a process that usually took up to six months. In a report for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Perkins was described by the State Department as a professional with “a calm demeanor, a penchant for sound decision-making and a great strength in interpersonal relations.”<sup>96</sup> During his testimony in the Senate, Perkins told senators that he would enforce the Congress-supported economic sanctions, as “it is the law of the

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<sup>93</sup> Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 251.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1123.

<sup>96</sup> “Report for the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate: Ambassadorial Nomination: Certificate of Demonstrated Competence—Foreign Service Act, Section 304 (a) (4): Post: South Africa.” <https://foia.state.gov/Search/results.aspx?searchText=%22Edward+J.+perkins%22&beginDate=&endDate=&publishedBeginDate=&publishedEndDate=&caseNumber=>.



land.”<sup>97</sup> When asked about his view on Constructive Engagement, Perkins replied that, “Constructive Engagement is a term that means many things to many people. I don’t intend to use it.”<sup>98</sup>

The nomination of Perkins to the Ambassadorship in South Africa marked the end of the use of the term ‘Constructive Engagement’ in US policy toward South Africa; the anti-apartheid movement had effectively ‘won’ the battle for the hearts and minds of both the American public and Congress. For Perkins the term was too loaded, both in the US and South Africa, to be useful when discussing apartheid and South Africa’s future. Instead, Perkins told the Senate Confirmation hearings that he would follow the letter and the spirit of the law, encompassing both the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 and the Administration’s policy.<sup>99</sup> For Perkins, these approaches to the apartheid state were not at odds. His role, as he saw it, was to work towards the end of apartheid by opening the US embassy to the full diversity of South African society. Perkins was unanimously approved, although, significantly, conservatives Orrin Hatch and Jesse Helms were absent for the vote.

Unanimous or not, many on the left, and in the Black community, were critical of Perkins’ appointment. Juan Williams, then a reporter for the *Washington Post*, wrote, “Ed Perkins is a Black emissary to a white racist regime; he represents a president whom many of his fellow Black Americans dislike and a policy many find morally bankrupt.”<sup>100</sup> While his experience and professionalism were never questioned, as with earlier candidates for the post, anti-apartheid activists held concerns that “he’s a Black person carrying Reagan’s message.”<sup>101</sup> Many critics continued to question whether a Black ambassador to South Africa could be

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<sup>97</sup> Perkins quoted in Robert L. Jackson, “Nominee Backs Sanctions as ‘Law of land’,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 7, 1986, 6.

<sup>98</sup> Perkins quoted in John M. Goshko, “Senators Quiz Perkins About S. Africa Post,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 7, 1986, A6.

<sup>99</sup> Perkins quoted in Jackson, “Nominee Backs Sanctions as ‘Law of land’,” 6.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, “Man in a Trap,” 38.

<sup>101</sup> Representative Mickey Leland (D-Tex.), former Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus quoted in Williams “Man In A Trap,” 38.

anything but a “diversionary, symbolic gesture.”<sup>102</sup> Even former Black diplomats raised doubts. Richard K. Fox, former Ambassador to Spain and Trinidad and Tobago, told the *New York Times* that Perkins was in “a no-win situation.”<sup>103</sup> While acknowledging that Perkins was “superbly equipped” for the role, Fox told reporter Lena Williams that “the problem is implementing a policy that has some faults and deficiencies.”<sup>104</sup>

At the behest of President Reagan, Perkins met with African American leaders before leaving for South Africa to garner support. While he met with some that were unwavering in their criticism of the President’s approach, namely Jesse Jackson, a recent Democratic presidential candidate, many more offered their support, including Vernon Jordan, Rev. Leon Sullivan, and Coretta Scott King.<sup>105</sup> Perkins did not limit his meetings to these traditional Black leaders. In early 1987, Perkins spoke at the second annual conference of the National Political Congress of Black Women in New York. The non-partisan organisation’s conference was led by Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X’s widow, Representative Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), the first Black woman to be elected to Congress and the first Black candidate to nominate for president from one of the major parties, and Gloria Toote, Republican lawyer and former advisor to President Reagan. In the weeks following his confirmation, Perkins also held private meetings with the Council of 100 Black Republicans, a Washington-based organisation, as well as other Black Republicans at the Capitol Hill Club, in order to introduce himself and garner support. According to Juan Williams, who was present at both of these meetings, Perkins simultaneously “appealed to them as Blacks” and “as Republican opponents of communism.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Goshko, “Senators Quiz Perkins About S. Africa Post,” A6.

<sup>103</sup> Richard K. Fox, quoted in Lena Williams, “Senate Unit Backs Envoy to Pretoria,” *NYT*, Oct. 9, 1986, A15.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> “Jackson Assails Pick of Envoy,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 5, 1986, 18; Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 262.

<sup>106</sup> Williams, “Man in a Trap,” 50.

The appointment of Perkins has not been examined in any depth—whether in the literature on the Reagan administration’s South Africa policy or in the literature of African American diplomats.<sup>107</sup> Yet, as Princeton Lyman, U.S. Ambassador to South Africa 1992-1995, wrote in *Partner to History: The U.S. Role in South Africa’s Transition to Democracy*, Perkins “did much to restore a sense of dignity and credibility to the U.S. position.”<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Alex Thomson has argued in *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, that Perkins, through his targeted confrontations with the apartheid regime, made the U.S. Embassy “an agent for change.”<sup>109</sup> The fact that Perkins has been largely overlooked in the literature on Black internationalism and African American anti-apartheid advocacy, is another example of the problematic way in which Black conservative contributions in African American history have been sidelined by scholars.

### **Ambassador Perkins and Black Conservatism**

While Perkins was a registered Independent, many of his positions fit comfortably within the tradition of Black conservatism. As Lee H. Walker has argued in *Rediscovering Black Conservatism*, conservatism should be used as an adjective to describe a worldview; it represents an attitude rather than a political affiliation.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Leah Wright Rigueur has argued that a “pragmatic definition of Black conservatism” should be “broad and elastic enough to encompass citizens from across the political spectrum.”<sup>111</sup> Like other conservative Black Americans such as Leon Sullivan, David Bolen and William Coleman, Ambassador Perkins

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<sup>107</sup> There has been a PhD dissertation on the reasons why the Reagan administration chose Perkins for the role, see: Mary Jo Wills, “Analysis of the Appointment of the First African American Ambassador to Apartheid-Era South Africa,” (PhD Diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 2014).

<sup>108</sup> Lyman, *Partner to History*, 42.

<sup>109</sup> Alex Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, (Palgrave MacMillan 2008), 156.

<sup>110</sup> Lee H. Walker, *Rediscovering Black Conservatism* (Chicago: Heartland Institute, 2009), 3.

<sup>111</sup> Rigueur, *Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 9.

embraced traditional conservative precepts, including anti-communism, belief in free-market enterprise, self-help and personal responsibility, and voiced respect for American institutions and optimism about the possibility of Black racial uplift.

For Perkins, his work in the Foreign Service was closely tied to his respect for the U.S. Constitution and his belief in the goodness of American society. In his testimony before the Senate, for example, Perkins explained that,

I believe we are strong because of our respect for the dignity and worth of the individual, our encouragement of individual excellence, and our insistence that each person can enjoy the right to achieve the highest of which he or she is capable.....So I look on my appearance here today and the assignment I hope shortly to take up as an example to South Africa of how a nation's strength may rest on its diversity.<sup>112</sup>

Perkins, like other Black conservatives, believed that “racism is fundamentally incompatible with the best of the American tradition of freedom, equality, and democracy.”<sup>113</sup> His “abiding faith in the benevolence of the American social order” was again evident at his swearing-in ceremony as Ambassador to South Africa, where he explained that “America’s hopes for South Africa are based solidly on our national experience, which teaches us that the seemingly impossible, may in time, be achieved by men and women of good will.”<sup>114</sup>

In that speech, Perkins also made clear that he was not “a representative of any special group of people,” but rather, “a representative of the American people and the administration.”<sup>115</sup> When asked what the assignment meant to him as a Black person, Perkins elaborated even further:

I believe President Reagan chose me for this challenging assignment on this basis: that I am a Foreign Service officer who by training and experience can help him pursue American objectives in South Africa, and that as a Black American, as a member of a minority that was long

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<sup>112</sup> Edward Perkins quoted in Williams, “Man in a Trap,” 50.

<sup>113</sup> Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts*xxx.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid; Edward Perkins quoted in Williams, “Man in a Trap,” 50.

<sup>115</sup> Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, 271.

oppressed, I might have a special empathy for both the minority and the majority in South Africa.<sup>116</sup>

The ‘special empathy’ he expressed for both sides in South Africa not only demonstrated his diplomatic skills; it also recast the problem of apartheid as more complex than a Black versus white issue. Indeed, where the anti-apartheid movement had focused on the struggles of Black South Africans to end their oppression, for Perkins “understanding the Afrikaners was key” in any negotiations to end the system of apartheid. Perkins elaborated in his memoir,

I wanted to see them not as an enemy to be crushed, but as a unique sociological-political-religious force that could be diffused. By understanding them, I reasoned, I could find an opening to slip inside, and from that place, I could begin a discussion.<sup>117</sup>

Like his anti-apartheid opponents, however, Perkins drew on civil rights connections in his work in South Africa. One of the tools Perkins regularly used in South Africa was a copy of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s *Letter From Birmingham Jail*. The famous letter written in 1963 outlined King’s philosophy of moral responsibility and nonviolent resistance for clergymen who considered nonviolent civil rights demonstrations to be ‘extreme’. When dealing with moderate white South Africans, Perkins admits he was particularly drawn to King’s entreaty that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”<sup>118</sup>

Perkins’ philosophy can, in part, be understood with reference to his upbringing. Born in 1928 in rural Louisiana, he spent his early childhood living with his grandparents and spinster aunts on a cotton farm. His parents were divorced, and he did not know his father. The effects of racism and segregation could be observed in virtually all aspects of Perkins’ early life. His grandparents “could neither read nor write,” yet had “made the miraculous

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter From a Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963,” *University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center*, [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html); Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 2.

transformation from slave to landowner.”<sup>119</sup> For Perkins and his family, education was held as a panacea for the inequities in the Jim Crow South. Yet, obtaining an education was not easy. Not only was Louisiana ranked among the worst states for literacy, there was no local Black high school for Perkins to attend.<sup>120</sup> As Perkins wrote in his memoir, “The institutionalized system of segregation existed until the 1960s, too late to help me. I knew only a childhood of segregation.”<sup>121</sup> To reduce the impact of a particularly oppressive Jim Crow education, Perkins moved first to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and later to Portland, Oregon.

Writing on his experience of racism in 1940s Portland, Perkins explained, “All minorities, especially Blacks and American Indians, suffered from racism but.... I was determined to not let it get in my way.”<sup>122</sup> This philosophy held true throughout his life. Whenever racism threatened to be an obstacle to his aspirations, Perkins found another way to lift himself up. In other words, he lived the Black conservative maxim that true Black empowerment comes from Black people themselves, through hard work and education.<sup>123</sup> While attending high school, Perkins held part-time jobs to contribute to the family and pay for his education, stuffing envelopes and distributing literature for the National Urban League. To finance his college education, he joined the US Army.

After leaving the Marines Perkins continued to strive for roles from which African Americans were traditionally excluded. Like other successful Black diplomats before him, he got his start in diplomacy in 1967 as an intern for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>124</sup> At that time the US State Department was largely closed to Black

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<sup>119</sup> Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 14-15.

<sup>120</sup> James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 236.

<sup>121</sup> Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community*, 29.

<sup>124</sup> Other Black diplomats that started in USAID include Bernard Coleman, John Reinhardt, Beverly Carter, Horace Dawson, Kenton Keith and Arthur Lewis. Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-69* (London: Routledge, 2015), 129.

Americans and dominated by white Ivy League men.<sup>125</sup> After several failed attempts, Perkins started his career in the Foreign Service in 1972, at age forty-four. He was assigned to the Office of Equal Employment (EEO), where he and another Black junior officer, John Gravely, successfully petitioned Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to elevate the status and influence of the EEO within the State Department.

Instead of approaching the problem as a question of civil rights or morality, Perkins and Gravely argued that incorporating more diversity into the State Department was beneficial to the efficiency of resources and resulted in better management of foreign policy.<sup>126</sup> Indeed it was because of this petition to Kissinger that Terrence Todman was considered for a role outside of Africa.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, courtesy of the meeting with Kissinger, the Office of Equal Employment and the Office of Women's Affairs were merged into the Equal Employment Opportunity Office under Deputy Assistant Secretary Samuel M. Pinckney.<sup>128</sup>

In June 1975, Assistant Secretary of State Kissinger announced the establishment of the Priorities Policy Group (PPG), a radical centralization of decision-making and resource allocation in the Department of State. Headed by Deputy Under Secretary for Management Lawrence Eagleburger, the PPG controlled the budget of the regional bureaus and allowed the Secretary of State to take funds from one and give to another at a moment's notice.<sup>129</sup> Perkins joined the staff of the PPG and, with Kissinger's approval, wrote his PhD dissertation in Public

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>126</sup> National Archives, RG 59, General Administrative Correspondence Files of the Deputy Under Secretary for Management, 1968–75: Lot 78 D 295, 1973–74 EEO. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XXXVIII, PART 2, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY; PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, 1973–1976.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Deputy Under Secretary of State for Management (Brown), "Footnote on Memorandum to Secretary of State Kissinger, January 31, 1974," *Department of State*. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p2/d124>.

<sup>129</sup> Briefing Paper in the Department of State National Archives, RG 59, Transition Records of the Executive Secretariat, 1959–1977, Entry 5338, Box 1, Transition Material to S/CL—Mr. Lake from Bureaus. No classification marking. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XXXVIII, PART 2, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY; PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, 1973–1976. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p2/d223>.

Administration at the University of Southern California on the new initiative. Perkins' thesis, "The Priorities Policy Group: A Case Study of the Institutionalization of a Policy Linkage and Resource Allocation Mechanism in the Department of State," became an unofficial handbook for the management of the office, and, according to Perkins, was still being used to brief new officers on public administration for decades after his work with Kissinger ended.<sup>130</sup>

After completing his PhD in 1978, and at fifty years of age, Perkins took up his first overseas assignment as Foreign Service Officer in Accra, Ghana. There, he was tasked with developing a broad range of contacts within Ghanaian society to gather information and report and analyse political events. In the late 1950s, Ghana held special meaning for many African Americans. When Black Americans were struggling for civil rights in the United States, Ghana became the first country in Africa to gain independence from colonial rule. As James Meriwether argued in *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*, "Ghana provided roots to a people torn from their ancestral culture.... Ghana offered inspiration and redemption for African Americans....The pride of Ghana would be the pride of African Americans."<sup>131</sup>

Although Perkins noted in his memoir that African independence "helped push open the doors of American segregation," when he arrived in Ghana twenty years after the end of colonial rule, the country found itself under corrupt military rule and bankrupt.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, during Perkins' service in Ghana, two bloody coup d'états took place led by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. Ghana taught Perkins that "the idea of socialism was a total disaster."<sup>133</sup> His experience in Africa dissuaded him from unquestioning faith in independence movements and challenged the view that there was an inherent morality in Black-led

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<sup>130</sup> Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 158.

<sup>131</sup> Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*), 162.

<sup>132</sup> Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, 194.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 192.



government. Put differently, Perkins' experience challenged many of the key assumptions of US anti-apartheid activists.

In 1981, Perkins left Ghana and made his way to another African country with strong ties to African Americans, Liberia. The Republic of Liberia had been established as a settlement of the American Colonization Society in 1847 for the resettlement of more than 15,000 freed or escaped slaves. As Meriwether wrote, "into the twentieth century, Liberia would continue as a key reference point for African Americans engaging in Africa."<sup>134</sup> In 1848, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a free-born African American from Virginia was elected as Liberia's first president, and 'Americo-Liberians' continued to rule over the Indigenous African population until 1980. In 1980, a revolutionary coup resulted in Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe assuming power. Perkins, named Deputy Chief of Mission, second-in-command at the U.S. Embassy, was tasked with the safety of Americans in Liberia.

As the situation in the country continued to deteriorate, Perkins returned to Washington, D.C., assuming the role of Director of West African Affairs, and managing US relations with sixteen countries in West Africa, including Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria. He wrote of his experience: "I worked with the private sector...trying to persuade companies to invest in these countries, to create jobs, and market opportunities, and to help the countries produce what they did best and sell it."<sup>135</sup> Perkins was in this position for less than two years before he returned to Liberia, this time as Ambassador. Shortly after his arrival there was a failed coup followed by an election. In their wake Perkins directed his efforts to freeing political prisoners and uncovering corruption. After he left to become Ambassador to South Africa, civil war broke out. After seven years of fighting and ethnic cleansing, an estimated 700,000 people had been killed and over a million more had fled the country.

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<sup>134</sup> Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, 229.

While the U.S. Embassy under Perkins proved powerless to prevent the violence and war in Liberia, in South Africa Perkins was much more successful. When he arrived in the apartheid state in late 1986, his first port-of-call was to present his credentials to the South African president, P.W. Botha. As he drove from the US Embassy into Pretoria, Perkins rode with the windows down so that all could see him, and as he arrived he noticed a crowd of Black South Africans that had gathered to watch the proceedings.<sup>136</sup> Widely referred to as die Groot Krokodil (Afrikaans for ‘The Great Crocodile’) President Botha was renowned for his overbearing personality.<sup>137</sup> During Perkins’ tenure it was quite common for their meetings to descend into angry Botha rants and monologues. However, as Senator David Boren later wrote, Perkins had “incredible self-restraint and personal dignity in the face of racial insults hurled at him.”<sup>138</sup> Instead of returning the vitriol, Perkins attempted to “understand the Afrikaners in all of their manifestations” and studied Afrikaans in order to speak to white South Africans in their own tongue.<sup>139</sup> His objective was to send a clear message to all South Africans that he, as a representative of the United States government, intended to be a ‘change-agent,’ and that he was not afraid to use his own racial identity to do so.

Under Perkins, the Embassy became a truly activist institution.<sup>140</sup> Perkins developed relationships with as many Black South Africans as he could and visited nearly every Black township and homeland. The new Ambassador also used the Embassy to focus on “those issues that were particularly offensive” – the disappearance of Black children, the assassination and persecution of Black (and white) activists, and the violent targeting of Black townships by South African military forces.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 273.

<sup>137</sup> F.A. Mouton, “P.W. Botha –Reformer or ‘Groot Krokodil’?” *African Historical Review* 28, no. 1 (1996): 189-201.

<sup>138</sup> Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, xvi.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>140</sup> Alex Thomson argued that Perkins was confrontational in his diplomacy with the apartheid state. Thomson, *U.S. Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994*, 156.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Perkins, “Review of U.S.-South Africa Relations,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Sept. 1989, 61.

Whenever the Embassy learned of a forced removal of Black South Africans, Perkins dispatched an Embassy officer to bear witness. Forced removal of Black South Africans from shanty towns on the outskirts of white cities was a common practice since the Group Areas Act of 1950 which determined where one was able to live according to race. Surplus People Project, a South African-based NGO, estimated that the apartheid regime forcefully relocated around 3.5 million Black South Africans to their ethnic Bantustan between 1960 and 1980.<sup>142</sup> As Laura Evans argued in her study of resettlements in Ciskei Bantustan, “violent and traumatic forced removals and the widespread suffering caused by homeland resettlement provided stark evidence of apartheid’s injustices.”<sup>143</sup> As Perkins explained in his memoir, “often that presence alone was enough to stall the removal, but inevitably the authorities returned when nobody from the Embassy was there.”<sup>144</sup>

On one occasion, Perkins even attended a protest at St. George’s Cathedral against child imprisonment. It was after this church service that he gave his first interview to the South African press; he generally preferred to work quietly – and diplomatically – outside of the public eye. During the interview, when asked why he had attended the protest, Perkins drew the reporter’s attention to Martin Luther King’s *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, stating “I am here to represent the United States because injustice is being done.... The United States cannot be party to that.”<sup>145</sup> To this end, beyond simply meeting with Black South Africans, Perkins made a concerted effort to employ them at the Embassy, and actively challenged racial segregation. Indeed, Perkins hired a Black South African researcher, and when the researcher was refused admission to the Pretoria Library the Ambassador intervened on his behalf.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa: The SPP Reports, Volume 1* (Cape Town: SPP, 1983), 6.

<sup>143</sup> Laura Evans, “Resettlement and the Making of Ciskei Bantustan, South Africa, c.1960-1976,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 1 (2014), 21.

<sup>144</sup> Perkins, *Mr. Ambassador*, 295.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 341.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 292.

Perkins also prohibited Embassy staff from using any segregated establishments and supported the multiracial staff's efforts to purchase homes in white neighbourhoods. All Embassy functions were racially-inclusive affairs, with white South African attendees coming face-to-face with Black South Africans. The US State Department supported Perkins in his endeavours.<sup>147</sup>

Despite his best efforts, Perkins was not always able to influence the Reagan administration's decisions. For example, when one of the Consul General roles became available, Perkins campaigned for Aurelia Brazeal to be appointed. At the time, Brazeal was Deputy Director for Economics in the State Department, and a Black, female career Foreign Service officer. Perkins explained that he "had wanted a minority and a woman. To appoint Brazeal to the senior post in the financial centre of South Africa would have driven the Afrikaners nuts."<sup>148</sup> The Consul General role in Cape Town had been left vacant by John A. Burroughs, the first Black envoy to be sent to South Africa. Instead, Crocker sent white career diplomat Jim Montgomery.

Perkins was also not wholly successful endearing himself to Black South African activists. Archbishop and Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu refused to meet with the Ambassador. As Tutu explained to the media, his refusal to engage with Perkins was "my own personal little protest against the Reagan administration."<sup>149</sup> While some anti-apartheid leaders in South Africa welcomed Perkins' willingness to meet with them, Tutu was part of another group that saw Perkins' nomination and appointment as merely a symbolic gesture to continue a flawed policy.

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<sup>147</sup> John D. Battersby, "Retreat is Seen by South Africa on Protest Ban," *NYT*, Apr. 14, 1987, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, 347.

<sup>149</sup> Desmond Tutu quoted in John D. Battersby, "Tutu and White Rule: 'Deep Sadness and Pain,'" *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1987, 26.

By the end of the second Reagan administration, Perkins' work as US Ambassador to South Africa was largely considered to have been a success. As a *New York Times* article declared, "It's finally possible... for Americans to take pride in some Reagan administration conduct in South Africa."<sup>150</sup> In addition, Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, David Boren, wrote that, "In my opinion, no person, who was not a South African citizen, played a greater role in the dismantling of apartheid and the transition to full democracy than Edward Perkins."<sup>151</sup> Norma Riccucci, a leading scholar of public management and leadership, hailed Ambassador Perkins as "the vanguard for change in South Africa."<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, as Ambassador, Perkins enjoyed the confidence of various key figures involved in South Africa, including Charles Taylor, Executive and Lobbyist for IBM in South Africa, as well as Senator Boren, Chester Crocker, George Shultz, and Albertina Sisulu, Co-President of the UDF. In an interview with Norma Riccucci, Sisulu described the role of Perkins on US-Black South African relations thus,

[Perkins] came here when there was much ill feeling. But he came to Black South Africans first, and not the white South African government, to learn about the situation in South Africa, and he accepted our position. We were very impressed by this and his openness and were very willing to work with him. In fact, we eventually took him as one of us.... Ambassador Perkins was a very influential man. He opened doors between South Africa and America better than anyone before him...he was a person for the Black people of South Africa.<sup>153</sup>

Many have pointed to Perkins' ability to "reach out and get along with" all South Africans as the most significant feature of his Ambassadorship.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> "Ambassador Perkins's Prayer," *NYT*, Apr. 15, 1987, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Senator Boren, "Preface," in Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, ix.

<sup>152</sup> Norma Riccucci, *Unsung Heroes: Federal Execucrats Making A Difference* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 128.

<sup>153</sup> Interview of Albertina Sisulu by Norma Riccucci and quoted in Riccucci, *Unsung Heroes*, 123-4.

<sup>154</sup> Chester Crocker quoted in Riccucci, *Unsung Heroes*, 130.

While he had been considered for the role because of his “classic West African features,” it was not only his racial identity that enabled him to have a positive impact on relations between the US and South Africa. As Shultz explained, “The fact that he is Black *and* first-class, and did a great job, was part of our way of sending a message.”<sup>155</sup> For Perkins, the colour of his skin meant being able to bring a “special empathy” to both Blacks and whites in his work as Ambassador. However, more important to Perkins was his ‘Americanness’ and his belief in the power of American exceptionalism. As his close friend Senator Bolen explained,

If I were asked to describe the core values that have made the United States a great nation, I would illustrate them by citing the life and career of Edward J. Perkins. His guiding principles and personal integrity represent the best of American values.<sup>156</sup>

In appointing Perkins to the ambassadorship, the Reagan administration found the credibility with Black South Africans and Black Americans that it sought and “did much to restore a sense of dignity...to the U.S. position.”<sup>157</sup> Perkins was not the unquestioning African American partisan loyalist that Buchanan had hoped for. Buchanan’s cynical attempt to exploit the racial identity of the ambassador to maintain control of US relations with South Africa was unsuccessful.

While Perkins eventually filled the role of Black advocate for US policy toward South Africa, by the time he arrived as Ambassador Congress had already introduced economic sanctions. Perkins was not the savior of Constructive Engagement, as some in the Administration hoped he would be. Rather, his appointment, and subsequently his work, heralded the end of the policy. Perkins became a key player in regard to US relations with South Africa. He successfully balanced the goals of the Reagan administration with the expectations of Congress, creating a pro-active approach focused on developing diplomatic ties

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<sup>155</sup> Shultz quoted in Riccucci, *Unsung Heroes*, 146.

<sup>156</sup> Senator Boren in Perkins, *Mr Ambassador*, xi.

<sup>157</sup> Lyman, *Partner to History*, 42.

with as many South Africans as possible while demonstrating the United States' opposition to apartheid. As journalist Dan Savage wrote,

Reagan's appointment of Edward Perkins as our ambassador to South Africa... was gutsy and bold. It made the South Africans—the ruling white South Africans—apoplectic, which was great, but it also made an important statement about American values.<sup>158</sup>

To suggest that Perkins was a Black face on white power misses the mark. His nomination as Ambassador to South Africa cannot be dismissed simply as 'tokenism', and it is certainly unfair to depict him as a 'mere apologist.' While some scholars have concluded that the US anti-apartheid movement was the first time African Americans influenced American foreign policy, it was arguably Perkins who created an activist policy on the ground in South Africa.

Not only did Perkins embody the Black conservative maxims of self-help through education, hard-work, and respectability politics, the Ambassador incorporated these into his approach to South Africa. Indeed, Perkins implemented his own vision of conservative Black internationalism as Ambassador to the apartheid state. Consistent with the conservative Black internationalist view of development in Africa, Perkins focused on pragmatic and incremental gains, diplomacy through respectability politics, and relationship building. Perkins understood his role in South Africa as both a representative of the US government, but also as an African American, situating his own work within the history of civil rights morality.

This chapter has demonstrated that, as the anti-apartheid movement gained traction in the US and anti-apartheid sentiment hardened in Congress, members of the Reagan administration looked to Black Republicans and Black public officials to become dutiful spokespeople for the policy of Constructive Engagement. Yet, the inconsistent attempts to attract and retain such spokespeople meant the Administration failed to achieve strong

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<sup>158</sup> Dan Savage, "A President's Brave—And Meaningful—Ambassadorial Appointment," *The Stranger*, Oct. 8, 2009. <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/archives/2009/10/07/a-presidents-braveand-meaningfulambassadorial-appointment>.

endorsement from these Black conservatives. Some traditional Black Republicans, like William T. Coleman and Edward Brooke, were critical of the policy. Others, like LeGree Daniels, did not maintain an interest in or a commitment to anti-apartheid debates, focusing instead on domestic matters. Others still, like Leonard Robinson and Robert Brown, who were interested in Constructive Engagement and US relations with South Africa were overlooked or faced harsh public rebuke.

It was not until the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 that the Reagan administration found an authentic Black voice for US policy toward South Africa. Ambassador Edward Perkins successfully balanced the goals of the Reagan administration with the expectations of Congress. While his Ambassadorship marked the end of the term Constructive Engagement, in this role within the Administration, Perkins not only breathed new life into the policy's imagined aims but shaped and commanded a new policy direction. However, until now this work has been overlooked by historians, who like Buchanan, have dismissed Black conservatives as instruments of the Reagan administration. While Perkins was in South Africa, anti-apartheid activists in the US redirected their protests away from the Reagan administration and increasingly targeted corporations with business interests in the apartheid state. For their part, Black conservatives largely redirected their attention to US foreign policy toward southern Africa more broadly, most notably the Cold War battle for Angola.

While the protest movement demanding economic sanctions dissipated with the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986, the debates over US policy toward the region continued. Indeed, Alex Thomson argues that the Reagan administration's policy "was at its most 'constructive'" after 1986.<sup>159</sup> But the debate and the policies became more

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<sup>159</sup> Alex Thomson, "A More Effective Constructive Engagement: US Policy Towards South Africa after the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986," *Politikon* 39, no. 3 (2012), 374.



regionally framed. US political attention moved to the future of neighbouring states such as Namibia and Angola. The Tripartite Accord signed by Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, in New York on 22 December 1989, symbolised the end of the Cold War in southern Africa. Considered the “holy grail” by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, Namibian independence and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola marked the ultimate success of Constructive Engagement.<sup>160</sup> Angola in particular became the focus of Black conservatives in the final years of the Reagan administration, reflecting internationalist and developmentalist ties that went back to early twentieth century missions. Because of this, the next chapter then moves from a focus on South Africa alone to encompass southern Africa more broadly—focussing particularly on Black conservative interest in U.S. relations with Angola, then racked by civil war, in the late 1980s.

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<sup>160</sup> John M. Goshko, “For Crocker, Accord Was Long Time Coming; Embattled Assistant Secretary, Known for ‘Constructive Engagement,’ Begins to Hear Praise,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 1988, A28.

## Chapter Five

### **“I hate Communism More Than I Hate Apartheid”: Black conservatives and the Final Years of Constructive Engagement, 1987-1989**

On Tuesday 21 April 1987, three civil rights activists were arrested outside the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. In many ways, the arrest of these activists resembled the events from November 1984, when four prominent African Americans were arrested for staging a sit-in at the same location. While the spectacle of the 1984 arrests had sparked a mass protest movement, by 1987 such an event was barely newsworthy. Indeed, comedian Dick Gregory, Reverend Hosea Williams, and Reverend Maurice Dawkins were not there to protest. Instead, they planned to deliver a letter to the South African Ambassador Herbert Beukes outlining their plans for a “Prayers for Peace Pilgrimage in support for peace in southern Africa.” As Dawkins explained, “The purpose of the prayer pilgrimage” was “to call upon world leaders to make every effort to seek peace in Angola and South Africa.”<sup>1</sup> In particular, the three men hoped that their ‘pilgrimage’ would increase awareness of, and build support for, the international peace initiatives in the southern African nation of Angola, where a civil war had turned into a Cold War proxy conflict.<sup>2</sup>

This endeavour was a public relations attempt to enhance the legitimacy of the guerrilla forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and its leader Jonas Savimbi. Since the 1975 withdrawal of the Portuguese from their Angolan colony, a civil war had raged and attracted involvement by outsiders. The Marxist government of Angola had the support of the Soviet Union and a deployment of thousands of Cuban troops. UNITA relied

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Dawkins quoted in “Dick Gregory, 3 Others Arrested,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 22, 1987, B4.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Cold War proxy wars see: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: Harper, 2018).

on the financial and military support of South Africa and, from 1986, the United States. Savimbi was considered a 'freedom fighter' by many conservatives in the U.S. and viewed as one of the remaining barriers to Soviet encroachment in the region.<sup>3</sup> Support for UNITA was a central component of the Reagan doctrine in the late 1980s, as the U.S. attempted to "roll back" communism in the Third World.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, U.S. support for a guerrilla force aligned with the apartheid regime was controversial. According to one US anti-apartheid activist, "before the ink was dry" on the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, "the Administration was back on its old policy track."<sup>5</sup> UNITA's alliance with the apartheid regime meant that any US aid to Savimbi was "aid to South Africa" and the continuation of its racist system.

For African Americans the Angolan civil war proved a more complicated issue than that of apartheid. In October 1988, the *New York Times* reported that support for opposing sides in the Angolan civil war was "the most hotly contested African issue" for Black Americans.<sup>6</sup> African American leaders of the anti-apartheid movement, like TransAfrica, NAACP, SCLC, and "much of Black America's political establishment" were vocal critics of Savimbi and U.S. aid to UNITA.<sup>7</sup> Instead, they called for formal recognition and support of the MPLA government, even organising a visit to the US for President Jose Eduardo dos Santos to meet with members of Congress.<sup>8</sup> Despite the opposition of these major Black leaders, Savimbi attracted the endorsement of Black conservatives, including former civil rights leaders Reverend Ralph Abernathy and Roy Innis. A Black nationalist who had long aspired to

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see: Michael Ledeen, "Fighting Back," *Commentary* 80, no. 2 (1985): 28-31.

<sup>4</sup> Michael McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (1989), 104.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Davis, "Aid to Unita is Aid to South Africa," *American Committee on Africa*, Nov. 12, 1985. *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10229](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10229).

<sup>6</sup> James Brooke, "Blacks in U.S. Are Lobbied by Angolans," *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1988, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Chavis, Jr. and Randall Robinson, "Opposition to U.S. Aid to UNITA," *C-Span*, Oct. 2, 1990. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?14310-1/opposition-us-aid-unita>; James Brooke, "Blacks in U.S. Are Lobbied by Angolans," *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1988, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Lewis, "Abroad at Home; The Savimbi Smear," *NYT*, Oct. 5, 1989, 31.

developing ties to Black America, Savimbi also spent his time in the United States talking to ‘regular’ African Americans and building grassroots support.<sup>9</sup> The Prayers for Peace pilgrimage, as this chapter will show, was just one example of Black conservative activism and engagement with the problems of southern Africa in the final years of the Reagan administration.

These regional concerns not only dominated the Reagan administration’s approach to southern Africa from 1987 but were also an area of debate in African American communities. As Benjamin Talton argued in his 2019 study of the Congressional Black Caucus, there were “small, but well-connected groups of politically conservative” African Americans who “expressed a strong interest in battling communism in Africa” in the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup> This chapter examines these debates, focusing on the oft-marginalised perspectives of religious conservative African Americans from the South. Southern churches became the hotbed for debates on the Angolan civil war due to the long history of African American missionary connection to the region and Savimbi’s own ties to this tradition. Many of these individuals maintained a commitment to civil rights but found themselves at the centre of a foreign policy debate that pitted anti-communism against racial solidarity.

The first section of the chapter will examine the work of Black conservatives on the Angolan civil war – starting with the Prayers for Peace Pilgrimage, as the participants travelled the world and attempted to bring the Angolan war to global attention. The chapter will then trace the other forms of activism of Reverend Dawkins on the issue of Angola in the late 1980s, including the formation of the lobbying organisation Black Americans for A Free Angola. In doing so, the chapter examines the attempts of Jonas Savimbi to build grassroots support in

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Wheeler, “Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: UNITA in Angola,” *Reason*, Apr. 1984.

<https://reason.com/1984/04/01/fighting-the-soviet-imperialis-4/>.

<sup>10</sup> Talton, *In This Land of Plenty*, 123.

African American communities, particularly among religious Black conservatives. Savimbi's public relations tour focused on Southern Black churches where his brand of African nationalism had particular resonance.

The second section of the chapter will refocus on Black conservatives and South Africa examining the work of the Coalition on Southern Africa and Robert Brown. The Coalition emerged in 1987 as a conservative anti-apartheid organisation made up of African American religious and business leaders. While situating themselves within the anti-apartheid movement, this organisation focused their attention on preparing Black South Africans for a post-apartheid South Africa. Echoing the arguments of other Black conservatives, the Coalition believed the best method for Black South African advancement and the preparation for a post-apartheid South Africa was through economic and educational empowerment. One of the key leaders of this organisation was Robert Brown, the Black Republican businessman who had been the Reagan administration's first choice in their search for an African American to serve as U.S. ambassador to South Africa in 1986. The personable and highly-respected Brown cultivated relationships with people across the political spectrum in the United States and South Africa, including Coretta Scott King, Oprah Winfrey, and Winnie Mandela. Of course, Brown was the first American permitted to meet Nelson Mandela in prison, where he agreed to act as guardian for Mandela's daughter while she studied at Boston University.

Much of the work of Black conservatives considered in this chapter has not received adequate scholarly attention. The only sustained consideration of these Black conservatives has been by anti-apartheid activists like academic Prexy Nesbitt and strident critics like journalist Ron Nixon. It is unsurprising that Nesbitt, one of the leading scholars of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, was aware and critical of the work of those African Americans who disagreed with

the strategies and goals of the movement.<sup>11</sup> As Nesbitt explained in a podcast in June 2020, conservatives in the United States and the South African government supported Black conservative activists in order to “sow confusion” in African American communities and “drive wedges within the solidarity [of] anti-apartheid organisations.”<sup>12</sup>

In his work, Nesbitt pointed out that the situation in Angola was not as simple as what he saw as the Black and white issue of apartheid in South Africa. On one side was the Soviet-supported socialist government of the MPLA, which “committed some documentable human rights violations” and whose “rigid economic policies usually made matters worse.”<sup>13</sup> On the other side was Savimbi, an ally of the apartheid regime with a reputation for brutal and bloody leadership. Yet, as Nesbitt argued in 1988, “fighting for the hearts and minds of Black Americans on the terrain of support for southern African struggles” continued to be “one of the hottest battlegrounds” between liberal and conservative voices in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most sustained consideration of Black conservatives and Constructive Engagement to date is Ron Nixon’s work. Like many others, Nixon focused on the “persuasive power of the white purse” to entice African American support for UNITA and the apartheid regime.<sup>15</sup> His *Operation Blackwash: Apartheid South Africa’s 46-Year Propaganda War on Black America*, labelled Black conservatives with alternate views to the anti-apartheid

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<sup>11</sup> Nesbitt was a member of the board of directors of TransAfrica and active in the Chicago anti-apartheid movement. Nesbitt has donated his collection of anti-apartheid materials to Columbia College Chicago and made much of his research available online. See: “Rozell ‘Prexy’ Nesbitt Anti-Apartheid Collection,” *Columbia College, Chicago*, <https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/nesbitt/>.

<sup>12</sup> Prexy Nesbitt, “The US and Anti-Colonial Resistance in Angola: Interview with Prexy Nesbitt and Marissa Moorman,” *Shadowproof with Kevin Gosztola* (podcast), Jun. 22, 2020.

<https://shadowproof.com/2020/06/22/interview-prexy-nesbitt-marissa-moorman-angola-resistance-united-states/>

<sup>13</sup> Prexy Nesbitt, “US Foreign Policy: Lessons from the Angolan Conflict,” *Africa Today* 39, no. ½ (1992), 66.

<sup>14</sup> Prexy Nesbitt, “Briefings: Terminators, Crusaders, and Gladiators: Western (Private & Public) Support for Renamo & Unita,” *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 43 (1988), 116.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Vale, “Book Review: Selling Apartheid—South Africa’s Global Propaganda War,” *The Conversation*, Oct. 21, 2015. <https://theconversation.com/book-review-selling-apartheid-south-africas-global-propaganda-war-49380>.

movement as mouthpieces of the apartheid regime.<sup>16</sup> The essay on Savimbi in the United States, like many of the other sections, lacked a depth of analysis and focused on reinforcing the aberration narrative of Black conservatives who supported the Angolan. His treatment of Ralph Abernathy's support for Savimbi reinforces this point. As Nixon wrote,

Abernathy's appearance with Savimbi was a shock.... Abernathy was one of the most well-known and respected civil rights leaders in the US.... Abernathy argued that Savimbi deserved support from 'the Black people of America and the world, and white people of goodwill and all mankind' for his efforts to bring peace to Angola. *It is unclear how UNITA was able to enlist the aid of the civil rights leader.*<sup>17</sup>

Instead of seeking to answer this question by examining the perspectives of Abernathy in the context of Black conservative thought, and his own political evolution since the 1970s, Nixon treated any support of Savimbi – or opposition to sanctions for that matter – as evidence of an unholy alliance with the apartheid regime to deliberately undermine Black interests.

This chapter will address the limitations of such work. It will both examine the activities of Black conservatives in relation to the Angolan civil war and the final years of Constructive Engagement and seek to situate these activities within broader political and social contexts. The chapter will explore and clarify the seeming contradiction of civil rights leaders supporting the white racist regime in South Africa and its controversial allies in neighbouring states. In doing so, it will complicate and challenge the narrative that assumes conservative African Americans were, because of their different perspectives, supportive of the apartheid regime and its strategy to foster regional division and dysfunction.

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<sup>16</sup> Ron Nixon, *Operation Blackwash: Apartheid South Africa's 46-Year Propaganda War on Black America* (Johannesburg: Mampoer, 2013). This was later expanded into a book that covered both the U.S. and Britain. Ron Nixon, *Selling Apartheid: South Africa's Global Propaganda War* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 184 (emphasis added).

## Prayers for Peace in Southern Africa Pilgrimage

Like those arrested in 1984, those arrested outside the South African Embassy in April 1987 had indisputable ties to the civil rights movement. Dick Gregory was not only a famous comedian but also a well-known political activist who had participated in many liberal causes since the 1960s. In addition to his advocacy for civil rights, Gregory participated in Vietnam War protests, Native American rights, and women's rights.<sup>18</sup> Only a few months before their attempt to deliver the letter at the South African Embassy, Gregory and Hosea Williams had participated in the largest civil rights march of the 1980s in Forsyth, Georgia. This march had gained national attention in January 1987 when the approximately 75 marchers were met with violence from hundreds of white supremacists. Williams was struck by a rock in the ensuing melee, and the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan was arrested, along with 54 others.<sup>19</sup>

Williams had been a chief organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and a trusted member of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s inner circle. Known as King's "Field General," Williams was often tasked with "getting out among Black people...and get them jumping up, marching around, and filling up the jails."<sup>20</sup> He was himself arrested over one hundred times in civil rights demonstrations.<sup>21</sup> By the 1980s Williams found himself at odds with liberal civil rights organizations and joined with other increasingly conservative former civil rights leaders like Vernon Jordan, Ralph Abernathy, and Charles Evers to endorse the presidency of Ronald Reagan. He then spent the decade working with the Reagan

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Paul Rossing, "Dick Gregory and Activist Style: Identifying Attributes of Humor Necessary for Activist Advocacy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 50, no. 2 (2013): 59-71.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this see: Michael P. Boyle, "Protesting White Supremacy: Race and the Status Quo in News Coverage of Anti-Segregation Rallies in Forsyth County, Georgia," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1-16.

<sup>20</sup> Hosea Williams quoted in Donald L. Grant, *The Way it Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 416-418.

<sup>21</sup> "Williams, Hosea, 1926- Biography," *Civil Rights Digital History*, [http://crdl.usg.edu/people/w/williams\\_hosea\\_1926/](http://crdl.usg.edu/people/w/williams_hosea_1926/).



administration to encourage the economic development of African Americans, including a mission to Japan to establish business ties with Black America in 1982.<sup>22</sup>

Dawkins was the least known of the group, though he too had civil rights credentials. In the 1960s, Dawkins served as president of the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP and as the West Coast Coordinator for the March on Washington. By the 1970s, Dawkins became disenchanted with the direction of Black protest and redirected his energies toward the work of Leon Sullivan and his conservative brand of Black power. Dawkins served as chairman for Opportunities Industrialization Centers, the job-training organisation established by Sullivan.<sup>23</sup> As the principal organiser for the “Prayers for Peace Pilgrimage,” Dawkins considered it a natural and legitimate extension of the traditional civil rights movement. As he told the media,

I have always believed in the power of prayer to achieve a victory for non-violence over violence. That was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. and it is my dream as well to use the power of prayer to bring down the temples of injustice and end the escalating level of bloodshed in Africa’s southern region.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Dawkins’ pilgrimage was no doubt inspired by the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom that had been organised by Bayard Rustin, and that had arguably elevated Martin Luther King, Jr. to the status of national civil rights leader.<sup>25</sup>

The South African Embassy was only one stop on the Prayers for Peace in southern Africa pilgrimage. Channelling the participants’ connection to the civil rights movement, the pilgrimage began days earlier with an all-night vigil at the grave of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta.<sup>26</sup> Following the vigil and the failed attempt to deliver their letter to the South African

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<sup>22</sup> Luix Oberbea, “Civil Rights Activists: Blacks Ought to Support Reagan Administration,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 8, 1982.

<sup>23</sup> Dawkins’ role for the OIC was “interpreting” the organisation to the government. Sullivan, *Alternatives to Despair*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Maurice Dawkins quoted in “Rev. Maurice Dawkins Initiates Three-Week Prayer Pilgrimage,” *New Journal and Guide*, May 20, 1987, 10.

<sup>25</sup> “Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, May 17, 1957,” *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute Stanford University*. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/prayer-pilgrimage-freedom>.

<sup>26</sup> “Prayer Pilgrimage Concludes at U.N.,” *Washington Informer*, Aug. 12, 1987, 24.

Ambassador, the pilgrims continued with a three-month tour through Europe and southern Africa, stopping to deliver letters for peace to the mayor of London, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope John Paul II, and the Soviet delegation to the arms talks in Geneva.<sup>27</sup> Each letter urged the recipient to support a new peace initiative and mediation for the civil war in Angola.<sup>28</sup> Dawkins returned to this tactic in 1988, when he sent a copy of the letter to each of the Republican presidential candidates. This time using the letterhead of Chairman of the Black Republican Civil Rights Task Force, Dawkins urged the recipients to commit to the push for an end to the Angolan civil war.<sup>29</sup> After their pilgrimage around the world the activists returned to the United States, concluding their Prayers for Peace campaign at the United Nations in New York. There, they delivered more letters to world leaders, including the United Nations Ambassadors of Angola, Cuba, the Soviet Union, the United States, and South Africa.<sup>30</sup>

There was more to the Prayers for Peace campaign than simply delivering letters. The pilgrims were professional activists who utilised their previous strategies. As Dawkins explained to the press, their campaign employed “the power of prayer.”<sup>31</sup> With this focus, the pilgrims again adopted a civil rights strategy—what historian Tobin Miller Shearer has called “Performative prayer.”<sup>32</sup> Performative prayer is not simply a focus on praying as a “tool of personal salvation,” but rather “prayer becomes the means through which political action is taken.”<sup>33</sup> That is not to say that the prayer can be reduced to its politically instrumental usage; rather, such prayer taps into the tradition of prophetic Black theological protest in which prayer

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<sup>27</sup> “Civil Rights Activists Arrested Outside S. African Embassy,” *UPI*, Apr. 21, 1987.

<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/04/21/Civil-rights-activists-arrested-outside-S-African-embassy/4527545976000/>.

<sup>28</sup> Kimberleigh Smith, “Pastors Seek Peace in Africa Through Prayer,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 1, 1987, 12.

<sup>29</sup> “Republican Leader Wires Candidates on Ceasefire,” *New Journal and Guide*, Jan. 27, 1988, 8.

<sup>30</sup> “Prayer Pilgrimage Concludes at U.N.,” *Washington Informer*, Aug. 12, 1987, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Maurice Dawkins quoted in “Rev. Maurice Dawkins Initiates Three-Week Prayer Pilgrimage,” *New Journal and Guide*, May 20, 1987, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Tobin Miller Shearer, “Invoking Crisis: Performative Christian Prayer and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2015): 490-512.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

faces power with a kind of powerlessness that is actually yielded powerful by its faith in divine action. In his examination of performative prayer, Shearer noted hundreds of examples of the use of this strategy in the civil rights movement.<sup>34</sup> This was not only because of the religiosity of the activists, but because it was particularly successful in gaining press attention. The 1987 pilgrimage continued this tradition of political religiosity and performative prayer, situating it within the moral legacy of the civil rights movement. Prayer marked the beginning of the pilgrimage with the all-night vigil at the grave of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The act of prayer likewise marked the pilgrimage's end. After they had returned to the United States and successfully delivered their letters to Ambassadors at the United Nations, the pilgrims "joined hands in a special prayer service" with Reverend Milton Galamison at the Ralph Bunche Memorial Park.<sup>35</sup> Both the Reverend and the location were chosen specifically to mark the pilgrimage's end. Galamison, leader of New York City's school integration movement in the 1960s, maintained the campaign's connection to the civil rights movement. The park was chosen because of its proximity to the United Nations and because of its namesake Ralph Bunche, the first African American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. The park, with its ties to both African American history and international peacemaking, was the perfect setting for the final act of performative prayer. Positioning themselves in front of the Isaiah Wall—in which the famous quotation from Isaiah 2:4 is engraved, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore"—the pilgrims concluded their 'Prayer for Peace in southern Africa' pilgrimage in a "stylized pious pose."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, "Pastors Seek Peace in Africa Through Prayer," 12.

<sup>36</sup> Tobin Miller Shearer, "Striking at the Sacred: The Violence of Prayer, 1960-1969," *Open Theology* 1 (2015), 128.

The image of three men holding hands in front of the Isiah Wall with heads bowed in prayer could have been a memorable moment. Yet despite the civil rights credentials of the three activists and the previous success of the Free South Africa Movement in garnering public support, the prayers for peace pilgrimage did not inspire much more than some initial media interest. There are several potential reasons why this event failed to receive the attention of other campaigns. One of the reasons could be the conservatism of the individuals involved. As this thesis has demonstrated, the activism of Black conservatives has been largely overlooked or ignored, particularly in relation to South Africa. In this instance the conservatism of Hosea Williams and Maurice Dawkins may have been a factor.

Dick Gregory was a lifelong social justice advocate in the liberal African American tradition. For Gregory, the Prayers for Peace pilgrimage was one of many campaigns that he participated in. A deeply 'spiritual' man, Gregory saw "activism as sacred work."<sup>37</sup> For his role in the Prayers for Peace pilgrimage, however, anti-apartheid activist and scholar Prexy Nesbitt criticised Gregory's association with "conservative Black organisations" in their attempts "to saturate the Black community" with pro-UNITA propaganda.<sup>38</sup> Nesbitt's criticism was directed at Dawkins, organiser of the Prayers for Peace campaign, and self-identified "conservative Republican who happen[ed] to be Black."<sup>39</sup> The Pilgrimage would be only one campaign developed by Dawkins, chairman (and founder) of an advocacy organisation called Black Americans for a Free Angola. Unsurprisingly, liberal and radical African American anti-apartheid activists were critical of this work. As Nesbitt argued, pro-UNITA organisations like those run by Dawkins "provided vehicles for the most reactionary elements in the Black

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<sup>37</sup> Vaughn A. Booker, "'Deplorable Exegesis': Dick Gregory's Irreverent Scriptural Authority in the 1960s and 1970s," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 30, no. 2 (2020), 194.

<sup>38</sup> Nesbitt, "Terminators, Crusaders and Gladiators," 114.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Dawkins, "Telegram to Patrick Buchanan, Feb. 8, 1985," WHORM ALPHA FILE- Dabbs-Dawkins, Box 20, Ronald Reagan Library.

American community (many of which are renowned former civil rights leaders) to lead the ill-informed astray.”<sup>40</sup>

Dawkins’ conservative credentials were well-established by the time of the pilgrimage, having campaigned for Republican presidential candidates from Eisenhower to Reagan. Writing in 1976, he publicly decried the “knee-jerk liberalism” of Black Democrats and appealed to them to “rise up in righteous indignation and teach the Democratic machine a lesson” that it can no longer rely on unquestioning African American support.<sup>41</sup> He was also active in Virginia politics, campaigning for Republican candidates as the chairman of the state outreach committee of the Virginia Republican Party and even running for Lieutenant Governor in 1985.<sup>42</sup> Dawkins echoed the sentiments of many other religious Black conservatives in his political platform including support for school prayer, opposition to abortion, and being tough on crime. As Dawkins told the press in 1985, “the need today is for God-guided men and women in political office who know government, but also put moral standards and values as a priority on the public agenda.”<sup>43</sup> Dawkins continued his involvement in Party politics following the completion of the pilgrimage, winning the primary and running for the Senate in 1988—the first African American to do so in Virginia since Reconstruction.<sup>44</sup>

By the time of the pilgrimage in 1987, Williams too was a controversial figure. By the 1980s he had been ousted from the ranks of civil rights leadership because of his reputation as a maverick. Joining the ranks of other disillusioned civil rights activists, Williams endorsed Ronald Reagan for president in 1980 and encouraged African Americans to join the Republican

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<sup>40</sup> Nesbitt, “Terminators, Crusaders and Gladiators,” 114.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Dawkins quoted in “Dr. Maurice Dawkins to Campaign Against Moynihan,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 16, 1976, A3.

<sup>42</sup> Randolph Payton, “Minister Vows to Woo Blacks from Dems,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 2, 1985, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Dawkins quoted in Randolph Payton, “Minister Vows to Woo Blacks from Dems,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 2, 1985, 15.

<sup>44</sup> “Virginia GOP Chooses Black,” *NYT*, Jun. 12, 1988, 28.

Party.<sup>45</sup> Reiterating the arguments of other Black conservatives, Williams had chastised the Black community to:

Drop the welfare philosophy; stop begging. Social programs have outlived their usefulness. The war on poverty was lost because by the time it trickled down to the poor, all they received was advice.<sup>46</sup>

As Williams explained in a 1981 speech, many African Americans had a “slave mentality” that meant that “[they] fight for others to do more for them” and that “the biggest enemy of Black people today is Black people themselves.”<sup>47</sup> Williams emphasised the importance of the “economic struggle for equality” and the importance of Black enterprise and economic empowerment.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps most controversially, Williams also spoke out in support of Reagan’s position on State’s Rights—largely considered by African Americans to be coded language for racism.<sup>49</sup> For Williams though, State’s rights meant “keeping government close to the people.”<sup>50</sup>

Williams was largely alienated from the liberal civil rights leadership throughout the 1980s. Indeed, by the time of the Prayers for Peace campaign he was “considered an embarrassment” by many of his peers.<sup>51</sup> A portion of this embarrassment could be attributed to Williams’ frequent driving infractions, which included a four-month prison sentence in 1982.<sup>52</sup> However, his ostracisation from the ranks of the civil rights leadership began in 1979

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<sup>45</sup> Deric Gilliard, “Hosea Williams Says ‘Patriotism’ Led to Reagan Endorsement,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct. 21, 1980, 1 & 6.

<sup>46</sup> Hosea Williams quoted in Luix Overbea, “Civil Rights Activists: Blacks Ought to Support Reagan Administration,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 8, 1982. <https://www.csmonitor.com/1982/0208/020832.html>

<sup>47</sup> Hosea Williams quoted in Vincent McCraw, “‘Move Into the Economic Struggle for Equality’: Williams Urges,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Dec. 18, 1981, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> “Black Republicans to Begin Work on Agenda: Rev. Hosea Williams Sets Meeting Here; Cummings in Chicago,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Nov. 14, 1981, 1. For more information on African American’s interpretations of Reagan’s use of State’s Rights see: Michael Fauntroy, *Republicans and the Black Vote* (Lynne: Rienner Publishers, 2008), 132.

<sup>50</sup> “Black Republicans to Begin Work on Agenda,” 1.

<sup>51</sup> Grant, *The Way it Was in the South*, 416-418.

<sup>52</sup> “Hosea Williams To Be Released From Jail,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct. 15, 1982, 2; “Supreme Court Denies Appeal by Hosea Williams,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Dec. 6, 1984, 1 & 4. Indeed, Williams was once again in prison on driving-charges and needed a four-day release to attend President Reagan’s inauguration in January 1985, see: “Civil Rights Leader Can Leave Jail to Attend Reagan’s Inauguration,” *Afro-American*, Jan. 19, 1985, 6.

when he was ousted from the organisation he helped to build—the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>53</sup> Williams’ antagonistic relationship with the civil rights establishment worsened as he criticised the commercialisation of Martin Luther King’s memory, labelling the King Holiday “the most exploited day in America other than the birthday of Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> Williams was just as likely to invoke ire and disdain from Black leaders as he was to have their support. Without this endorsement (and the resulting publicity) many of Williams’ campaigns, including the Prayers for Peace, remained on the fringe of African American activism. Hosea Williams and Maurice Dawkins, then, while sharing in Gregory’s religious commitment, were increasingly outside the liberal confines expected of African American leadership.

As Randall Kennedy has argued, African Americans have long feared the “corrupting power of whites” and racial betrayal.<sup>55</sup> African American commitment to the civil rights leadership’s convictions, including support for the anti-apartheid movement, was used as a measurement of racial loyalty and Black identity. As philosopher Tommie Shelby explained in *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, while African American solidarity has historically been an effective resource for collective action, it also necessitates normative constraints on community members.<sup>56</sup> These constraints must be monitored and policed in order to exact loyalty to the Black community. Any African American who veered from these ‘normative constraints’ faced stigmatisation and the label of sellout. For critics, their activism for a UNITA-led peace in Angola crossed the boundary of acceptable attitudes and became evidence of Williams’ and Dawkins’ betrayal.

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<sup>53</sup> J. Zamgba Browne, “Hosea Williams Ousted from SCLC,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Apr. 21, 1979, 6; “SCLC Board Backs Lowery In Hosea Williams Firing,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Apr. 12, 1979, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Hosea Williams quoted in Dahleen Glanton, “Outspoken Ex-King Aide Fights For His Own Dream,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Randall Kennedy, *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 68.

## The End of a Mass Movement in the United States

The conservatism of the activists may have played a role in the lack of popular interest in their Prayer for Peace pilgrimage. On this occasion, however, it was just as likely that the lack of interest was part of a broader shift away from enthusiasm for the anti-apartheid movement. The goal that had united activists into a national anti-apartheid movement in 1984—economic sanctions against South Africa—had been achieved. Republican moderates in Congress, who had been key to the successful passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, were more interested in monitoring the impact of sanctions than passing any further legislation. As Alex Thomson argued in his evaluation of Constructive Engagement, “It was as if, satisfied that it had ‘done something’ about apartheid, this country’s political establishment now moved on to other concerns.”<sup>57</sup> Further, with sanctions no longer operating as a unifying goal the anti-apartheid movement splintered into local disinvestment campaigns.<sup>58</sup>

The fracturing of the anti-apartheid coalition in the United States also corresponded with increased censorship in South Africa and a crack-down on anti-apartheid activists in the apartheid state. On 12 June 1986, the South African government extended the State of Emergency to include the entire country, not just the ‘hot spots’ as had previously been the case. These new regulations resulted in the imprisonment without trial of around 25,000 South Africans, twenty percent of whom were children.<sup>59</sup> The expanded State of Emergency also imposed unprecedented restrictions on journalism, barring the publication of ‘subversive

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<sup>57</sup> Thomson, “A More Effective Constructive Engagement,” 372. For an examination of the congressional coalition and why it split after CAAA see: Michael Clough, “Southern Africa: Challenges and Choices,” *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 5 (1988), 1071-1073.

<sup>58</sup> Larson, “The Transnational and Local Dimensions of the U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement,” 237.

<sup>59</sup> Stan West, “War Against Kids in Southern Africa,” *Black Scholar* 18, no. 6 (1987): 26-33.



statements,' pictures of security forces, and the identification of anyone detained.<sup>60</sup> The strict limitations on the press within South Africa also had the effect of curtailing American coverage, as journalists were expelled from South Africa and sources outside of the apartheid government were silenced.<sup>61</sup> As Thomson explained, "This starved the United States of the television pictures that had done so much to fuel the policy debate of the mid-1980s."<sup>62</sup> Noting that this increased censorship came with the election cycle in South Africa, the *New York Times* reported that President Botha intended to "keep the good news flowing, like champagne at the captain's table on an unsinkable Titanic."<sup>63</sup> By 1987 it seemed that the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa had once more been quashed by apartheid forces.

According to Anthony Lemon, an expert in South African elections, the 1987 election also "ruthlessly reasserted" the "realities of white political, economic and military power."<sup>64</sup> Undermining the 1984 constitution that created the Tricameral system with a parliament for whites, coloured, and Indian populations, the 1987 election was white only. As Lemon explained, "the calling of a white election in isolation seemed calculated to highlight the irrelevance of Indian and coloured Houses by suggesting that the only mandate which really mattered was that of white electors."<sup>65</sup> Further, the election result demonstrated a clear reprisal of anti-apartheid activism with 82% of the vote going to pro-apartheid parties.<sup>66</sup> Even the Reagan administration appeared pessimistic, recognising the end of any possibility of white-led reform. As Secretary of State Shultz observed, "the determination of the white minority to

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<sup>60</sup> Amanda Armstrong, "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil: Media Restrictions and the State of Emergency," in *Southern Africa Research Service: South African Review* 4, eds. Glenn Moss and Ingrid Obey (Braamfontein: Johannesburg, 1987), 199-214.

<sup>61</sup> Newsweek correspondent Richard Manning was the first American to be expelled from South Africa. "Newsweek Reporter is Second Journalist Expelled Under Emergency Decrees," *AP News*, Jun. 24, 1986. <https://apnews.com/article/64966952f4934048b707be53c664a1d8>.

<sup>62</sup> Thomson, *U.S. Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa*, 150.

<sup>63</sup> "Unsinkable South Africa," *NYT*, Jan. 18, 1987, 28.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Lemon, "What Price Security? South Africa's White Election of 1987 and Its Aftermath," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 27, no. 1 (1989), 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> "Africa Notes: Observations on the South African Elections—June 1987," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Jun. 4, 1987.

retain its monopoly on political power appears to have grown apace.”<sup>67</sup> The anti-apartheid crackdown and election results demonstrated continued white intransigence and that an imminent end to the apartheid system was as unlikely as ever.

Back in the United States, popular interest in the problems in southern Africa, already facing the challenges listed above, continued to lose currency as the Iran-Contra affair embroiled senior officials in the Reagan administration “in one of the most controversial foreign policy scandals of the postwar era.”<sup>68</sup> This scandal dominated the news cycle as investigators for the Tower Commission, the House and Senate, and the Office of the Special Prosecutor uncovered widespread deception and subsequent cover up within the National Security Council, Department of Defense, Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>69</sup> This controversy also had an unintended consequence as Caspar Weinberger (DoD) and John Poindexter (NSC) were replaced with Frank Carlucci and Colin Powell, men more sympathetic to Crocker’s approach. As Crocker later described in an interview, the Iran Contra affair was “the beginning of sunshine returning.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Powell emerged as a key supporter of Constructive Engagement from 1987.

Committed anti-apartheid activists, like those within the Free South Africa Movement, continued to call for increased economic sanctions and stronger US condemnation of South Africa. However, from 1987, the focus of anti-apartheid activism in the United States was largely redirected toward corporate disinvestment. College students, for example, who had since 1985 protested their university’s investments in companies that traded or operated in the

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<sup>67</sup> George Shultz quoted in Robert Pear, “Movement is Seen in Southern African Talks,” *NYT*, Oct. 5, 1988, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Robert A. Strong, *Decisions and Dilemmas: Case Studies in Presidential Foreign Policy Making Since 1945* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 143.

<sup>69</sup> For more information see: *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair: With Supplemental, Minority, and Additional Views* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987).  
<https://archive.org/details/reportofcongress87unit/page/n111/mode/2up>.

<sup>70</sup> Chester A. Crocker, “Interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Jun. 5, 2006,” *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*.  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2011/2011cro01/2011cro01.pdf>.

apartheid state were finally making headway. As legal scholar Andrew Novak explained, “despite early hostility to divestment from university administrators,” the enactment of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in October 1986 “caused universities to soften.”<sup>71</sup> According to research by the Africa Fund, in 1987 the number of US universities that fully or partially divested from South Africa was 128, with another 155 to join in 1988.<sup>72</sup> The pressure for universities to remove millions of dollars of investments from companies with ties to South Africa also corresponded with targeted economic boycotts.<sup>73</sup>

As the Reagan administration announced increased covert military aid to UNITA, anti-apartheid activists began to show more interest in the Angolan civil war. This was in no small part due to the increased lobbying of the Angolan government, which hoped that Black American activism would serve in much the same way it had for the anti-apartheid movement. In July 1988, for example, an Angolan delegation attended (as observers) the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, met with the Congressional Black Caucus, and attended a memorial reception for Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>74</sup> The Angolan government also became “skilled in the arts of political tourism,” offering tours for African Americans in the hopes of “courting” their support.<sup>75</sup>

These tours of Angola included an orphanage and a hospital to showcase the destruction of UNITA’s forces and an audience with President Jose Eduardo dos Santos himself.<sup>76</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup> Andrew Novak, “The *Apartheid* Divestment Movement at George Washington University: The Legacy of Student Activism and GW Voices for a Free South Africa,” *Safundi* 22, no. 1 (2021), 30.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Knight, “Sanctions, Disinvestment, and U.S. Corporations in South Africa,” in *Sanctioning Apartheid*, ed. Robert E. Edgar (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 69.

<sup>73</sup> See for example the boycott against Shell Oil. Washington Office on Africa, “Action Alert, Jun. 11, 1987 (Pamphlet),” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-6210](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-6210).

<sup>74</sup> James Brooke, “Blacks in the U.S. are Lobbied By Angolans,” *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1988.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Prexy Nesbitt, “Angola is All of Us,” *Nesbitt Writing and Speeches* (1980). <https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=nesbittwritings>; Washington Office on Africa, “Press Release: Concludes Month Long Southern Africa Tour, Jun. 17, 1987,” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-7084](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-7084).

August 1988, a group of Black religious leaders made a fact-finding “pilgrimage” to investigate the “atrocities and terrorist acts against Angola by the racist apartheid regime of South Africa and its surrogate, the U.S.-backed UNITA rebels.”<sup>77</sup> These “church and civil rights leaders” returned to the US as vocal critics of the Reagan administration’s policy and Jonas Savimbi.<sup>78</sup> They even formed an advocacy organisation, The Coalition for Peace in Angola, to build “friendship and solidarity.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Black Americans for a Free Angola**

Resembling the experience of the pilgrims above, the Prayers for Peace in southern Africa pilgrimage was initiated by Maurice Dawkins on his return from a fact-finding trip to Angola in 1986. Dawkins, along with Clarence V. McKee, chairman of the Republican Lawyers Association, and John Smith, Alabama’s only Black Republican mayor and secretary-general of the World Conference of Mayors, however, were invited to the Democratic People’s Republic of Angola as guests of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. While in Jamba, the ‘liberated’ headquarters of UNITA, the travellers “heard direct testimony and eyewitness accounts” of the violence and persecution suffered by Angolans at the hands of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government and Cuban forces.<sup>80</sup> This was in comparison to the

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<sup>77</sup> Rev. John Mendez, “Letter to the Editor: Angola Must Be Free,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Sept. 16, 1988, 6A.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Chavis, Jr., “Civil Rights Journal: Mission to Angola,” *New Journal and Guide*, Sept. 7, 1988, 6; Benjamin Chavis, Jr., “Civil Rights Journal: Stop Reagan’s War on Angola,” *New Journal and Guide*, Sept. 14, 1988, 6; Benjamin Chavis, Jr., “Civil Rights Journal: An African Race in Angola,” *New Journal and Guide*, Jul. 19, 1989, 6; “Statement of Angola,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Oct. 14, 1988, 8C.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Baillou, “Harlem Honors Angola Envoys,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 14, 1989, 2 & 38.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in “Black Conservatives Group Urges More Support for Angolan Rebels,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, Sept. 13, 1986, 16.

Angola’s civil war had begun in 1975 when Portugal granted the southern African colony independence and opposing nationalist groups fought for control. The People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), with the help of other Communist states including the Soviet Union and Cuba, retained control of the capital Luanda and the country’s oil industry. For a history of the civil war see: W. Martin James III, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola, 1974-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

“determination, hope, and the practice of democratic principles... in UNITA.”<sup>81</sup> According to Dawkins the group were given tours of UNITA-controlled facilities for education, health, and manufacturing, as well as military briefings.<sup>82</sup>

Like the South Africa Foundation sponsored trips to South Africa, this tour of Angola was offered to Black conservative ‘opinion makers’ to facilitate interest in the Angolan civil war. Indeed, these fact-finding trips were a key part of Savimbi’s strategy to establish himself as an ‘authentic’ African leader with African American support. As Nesbitt charged, UNITA had spent over US\$1.5 million between 1985 and 1987 “to inflame Black opinion in America” through “bribes to many Black American notables to make trips to...Angola.”<sup>83</sup> This project was developed by Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly, a public relations firm hired by UNITA in 1986. According to the firm’s foreign agent filing, it was tasked with the “development and implementation of a strategy to aid in the procurement of foreign assistance” and “generating increased favourable coverage of UNITA.”<sup>84</sup> Most of this lobbying work was directed at the Republican Party connections of Charles R. Black and Paul Manafort—both of whom were GOP consultants.<sup>85</sup> However, as Nesbitt discovered, there was also a strategy to develop ties between Savimbi and African Americans. In doing so, it was hoped that these African American ‘notables’ would participate in a public campaign to pressure Congress to increase funding to UNITA and challenge the image of Savimbi as a puppet of the apartheid regime.

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<sup>81</sup> Dawkins quoted in “Black Conservatives Group Urges More Support for Angolan Rebels,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, Sept. 13, 1986, 16.

<sup>82</sup> “Dawkins Returns From Angola Trip,” *Afro-American*, Sept. 16, 1986, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Nesbitt, “Terminators, Crusaders, and Gladiators,” 111-124.

<sup>84</sup> Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly foreign agent filing quoted in Pamela Brogan, *The Torturers’ Lobby: How Human Rights-Abusing Nations Are Represented in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Public Integrity, 1992), 55.

<sup>85</sup> Manafort served as an advisor to the presidential campaigns for Gerald, Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Donald Trump. Manafort was arrested in 2017 after the Mueller investigation revealed his connection to Russian intelligence while working as Trump’s campaign manager. For more details on their work lobbying Republicans for Savimbi see: Patrick E. Tyler and David B. Ottoway, “The Selling of Jonas Savimbi: Success and a \$600,000 Tab,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 9, 1986; Brogan, *The Torturers’ Lobby*.

Savimbi's investment in this strategy appeared to pay off. On their return to the United States Dawkins, McKee, and Smith formed Black Americans for a Free Angola (BAFFA).<sup>86</sup> The goal of this organisation, according Nesbitt, was to work with the Congressional Black Caucus and create a Black voting bloc for Savimbi.<sup>87</sup> The emphasis on pressuring Congress came after the Clark Amendment to the State Department Authorization bill which, since 1976, had prohibited military assistance to UNITA, until its repeal in July 1985.<sup>88</sup> From 1985, it became possible for Savimbi to solicit funds and other forms of assistance from the United States. The members of BAFFA faced a difficult challenge, as the Congressional Black Caucus had already made its position known in a 1985 open letter to President Reagan. As the letter explained, the Caucus considered "any assistance to UNITA, whether termed military or 'humanitarian'...would unequivocally ally the United States with the apartheid regime of South Africa"; a position they would not support.<sup>89</sup>

A priority of BAFFA, unsurprisingly, was a public relations campaign to challenge this association between Savimbi and apartheid. On their way back to the United States, Dawkins and Smith spoke to the press in London telling them that the 'South African connection' was "a big lie designed to exploit the emotional feelings of U.S. Blacks about apartheid in South Africa."<sup>90</sup> Writing to the *Afro-American* in July 1986, Dawkins expanded on this, chastising the "Black political and press elite" for their failure to critically engage with, and present a balanced account of, the civil war in Angola.<sup>91</sup> As Dawkins wrote, "If Savimbi...were fighting

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<sup>86</sup> The name was changed at the vigil at MLK grave for the Prayer for Peace to Black Americans for Peace and Democracy in Angola but will be referred to as Black Americans for a Free Angola in this paper for clarity.

<sup>87</sup> Nesbitt, "Terminators, Crusaders, and Gladiators," 115.

<sup>88</sup> Robert David Johnson, "The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform: The Clark and Tunney Amendments and U.S. Policy Toward Angola," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 215-243.

<sup>89</sup> Congressional Black Caucus open letter quoted in "Black Caucus, Other Groups Oppose Aid to Angola," *AP*, Nov. 15, 1985. <https://apnews.com/article/2b9e45f7ac31c259ab080f4d506f7d8b>.

<sup>90</sup> Dawkins and Smith quoted in "No South Africa Link, Rebel Supporters Say," *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 28, 1986, A2.

<sup>91</sup> Maurice Dawkins, "Savimbi: Africa's Cornerstone for Democracy," *Afro-American*, Jul. 5, 1986, 4.

a white oppressive regime, the Black press and Black politicians would be cheering him on!”<sup>92</sup> Yet Savimbi is “cast... as the villain merely because he accepted economic assistance from South Africa when the U.S. did not” support him in his battle against communist forces.<sup>93</sup>

Dawkins, in particular, criticised the coverage of UNITA by ‘the first lady of the Black press,’ Ethel Payne. Payne wrote two articles for the *Afro-American* in early 1986, “Supping with the Devil,” and “Misselling of Savimbi,” in which she not only connected Savimbi to the apartheid regime, but also accused him of being “the darling of the ultraconservatives” in the U.S.<sup>94</sup> It seemed particularly riling for Dawkins that Payne “convince[d] her Black readers that it is bad to” support Savimbi “as do conservatives” because of her “sympathy for left wing political strategies.”<sup>95</sup> Dawkins’ article, in contrast, would “say: ‘Listen Black Americans, there is another point of view’.”<sup>96</sup> For Dawkins, Savimbi was “an authentic Black leader who fought successfully against the white Portuguese for freedom,” and a “skilled and brilliant strategist and tactician who can beat the Communists at their own game.”<sup>97</sup>

Further, supporting Savimbi “is a good bet” because he “knows how to work with other Black nations in Africa” who “don’t like whites dominating and controlling their destiny.”<sup>98</sup> Dawkins argued that Savimbi was not ‘a stooge of South Africa’ like Payne and others had depicted him, but rather “an independent, pragmatic nationalist who will find mutuality on the basis of self-interest and survival of his people.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, Dawkins supported Savimbi

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ethel Payne, “Savimbi’s U.S. Dance—Supping with the Devil,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 22, 1986, 5; Ethel Payne, “Misselling of Savimbi—Bad Bet for U.S.,” *Afro-American*, Mar. 1, 1986, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Maurice Dawkins, “Savimbi: Africa’s Cornerstone for Democracy,” *Afro-American*, Jul. 5, 1986, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

because, “I prefer democracy as a way of life because it is more consistent with my Christian philosophy and the theology of Jesus.”<sup>100</sup>

Writing impassioned op-eds and prayer pilgrimages were not the only activities undertaken by the members of BAFFA. Dawkins returned to southern Africa as a guide of his own fact-finding tour for ‘big names,’ including Albert J. Dunmore, famed journalist of the Black press and executive of Chrysler.<sup>101</sup> BAFFA’s campaign also resulted in a UNITA delegation attending the National Conference of Black Mayors in 1986.<sup>102</sup> The following year, while Dawkins was hosting UNITA’s foreign secretary on a diplomatic trip to Washington, BAFFA ran a workshop titled ‘A Black American Action Agenda for a Free Angola.’ This workshop was ostensibly an event to create a network of African Americans to work towards peace in Angola.<sup>103</sup> The workshop included addresses by the foreign secretary of UNITA, BAFFA member Clarence McKee, as well as Congressman Claude Pepper (D.-Fl.), Herman Cohen from the National Security Council, and William Robertson, deputy assistant of state for African affairs.<sup>104</sup> Robertson, a Black American, was also a key figure in the Administration’s public relations campaign to prevent the passage of sanctions legislation against South Africa.<sup>105</sup> While the events convened by BAFFA were not widely reported or successful in capturing the imagination of the Black community like the anti-apartheid protests, there was some indication of interest.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> “Social Tidbits; A Wonderful Time of Year,” *Washington Informer*, May 27, 1987, 22.

<sup>102</sup> This presence did not garner any increased media attention or African American interest. However, it was reported in *Kwacha News*, the newsletter published in Washington by the Free Angola Information Service (‘educational’ arm of UNITA). See: Elaine Windrich, *The Cold War Guerrilla: Jonas Savimbi, the U.S. Media, and the Angolan War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 58.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Though Pepper was a liberal Democrat he was a staunch anti-communist with a large exiled Cuban constituency.

<sup>105</sup> Robertson, for example, gave an address to the International Conference Against Apartheid in March 1986. He spoke at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr. had been the minister, to a mostly Black audience. See: William B. Robertson, *Department of State: U.S. Wants an End to Apartheid* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Public Affairs, 1986).



In a November 1987 press conference, the membership of BAFFA had grown to include Hosea Williams, Dick Gregory, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Mayor Charles Evers (Fayette, Mississippi), and Mayor Johnny Ford (Tuskegee, Alabama). McKee's involvement was more than personal dedication to UNITA's cause. The former chairman of the Reagan-Bush Committee was a registered lobbyist for UNITA with a reported annual income of \$171,000.<sup>106</sup> His role was as a media and political relations advisor—training UNITA representatives how to bring their message to Black communities in the United States.<sup>107</sup> His work for UNITA also included a role as director of the Angola Freedom Foundation, an organisation based in Washington, D.C. that was established to educate Americans on “the need for free elections and democratic institutions in Angola” and the “negative consequences of totalitarian and anti-democratic Soviet/Cuban forces... to the national security interests of the United States.”<sup>108</sup> The Foundation held seminars and workshops, as well as arranging for ‘charitable contributions’ and assistance to UNITA. Dawkins too received financial recompense for his work. Dawkins’ firm, Government Relations International, was paid about \$200,000 a year by UNITA to arrange for Savimbi to speak in Black churches around the U.S.

The members of Black Americans for a Free Angola were not the only African Americans to undertake a fact-finding trip to Jamba. Charles Evers, brother of murdered civil rights legend Medgar Evers, also accepted the offer to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Angola in September 1987.<sup>109</sup> Evers, mayor of Fayette, was the first African American mayor elected in Mississippi since Reconstruction.<sup>110</sup> His tour of Jamba, with “two Alabama preachers,” included meeting “numerous religious leaders, political spokesmen, and military

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Leonard, “Apartheid's Whitewash: South Africa's Propaganda in the United States,” *Africa Fund Pamphlet* (1989), *Aluka Digital Archive*.

[https://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.af000257\\_final.pdf](https://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.af000257_final.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Windrich, *The Cold War Guerrilla*, 58.

<sup>109</sup> “Evers to Seek Angolan Peace,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 3, 1987, 2. Evers was Savimbi's guest in Angola three more times between 1987 and 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Evers was elected in 1969 after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

personnel,” as well as Savimbi himself.<sup>111</sup> Noting his “weakness for strong Black leaders,” Evers recalled in his memoir that “Savimbi impressed me so much.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, Evers was so inspired by his visit to Angola, he pledged to send African American physicians and missionaries to the UNITA-controlled territory.<sup>113</sup> Resembling the failed attempt of Roy Innis to send African American veteran ‘medics’ to fight with UNITA in Angola in the 1970s, there is little evidence that Evers fulfilled his promise of physicians and missionaries.<sup>114</sup>

On Evers’ arrival back in the United States, he testified before Congress on the impact of South Africa’s regional destabilisation on food deficits in Mozambique and Angola.<sup>115</sup> Mickey Leland (D-T), chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Committee on Hunger, convened the Hearing on “man-made famines” caused by insurgency forces supported by the apartheid regime.<sup>116</sup> There was testimony from a number of experts who outlined the complicated nature of U.S. assistance to combat hunger in Angola. Those participants in the Hearing who had spent time in MPLA-controlled Angola, including Leland himself, attributed the problem to UNITA.<sup>117</sup> As one such testimony explained:

My intention, in telling you what I saw in Angola is to relate the hunger and devastation to the war...that UNITA is waging against the government of the MPLA... From the conscious policy of attacking

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<sup>111</sup> Charles Evers, “Crisis in Southern Africa: The Price of Destabilization,” *Hearing Before the Select Committee on Hunger, House of Representatives, Oct. 7, 1987* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 73.

<sup>112</sup> Charles Evers, *Have No Fear* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1997), chapter 27 page 8.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid; “Evers to Seek Angolan Peace,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 3, 1987, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Roy Innis, director of civil rights organisation CORE, had attempted to send one thousand Black Americans to serve in Angola. This plan resulted in a feud between CORE leadership, with founder James Farmer ultimately leaving the organisation in protest. Innis’ attempts had significant press coverage, see for example, Thomas A. Johnson, “CORE Says Blacks Sign for Angola,” *NYT*, Feb. 11, 1976, 7; Thomas Johnson, “Blacks Assail CORE on Angola Recruits,” *NYT*, Feb. 14, 1976, 3. Jennifer Montooth has researched the role of Innis’ conservatism on the internationalism of CORE in her Masters dissertation. Jennifer Montooth, “‘Bridges to Human Dignity’: Roy Innis, Conservative Black Power, and the Transformation of CORE, 1968-1998,” Masters diss., University of Maryland, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Evers, “Prepared Statement for “Crisis in Southern Africa: The Price of Destabilization,” 73-76.

<sup>116</sup> Mickey Leland, “Opening Statement, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas,” *Hearing Before the Select Committee on Hunger, House of Representatives, Oct. 7, 1987*, 1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

peasants, raiding villages, destroying crops and planting mines in access roads to agricultural areas.<sup>118</sup>

According to these testimonies, UNITA had devastated the population and made the fields and farmlands unusable because of the volume of landmines buried.<sup>119</sup> The concern for the impact of landmines was warranted, as approximately 80,000 people were maimed by these devices during the civil war.<sup>120</sup> In 2022, Angola remains one of the most mined countries in the world.<sup>121</sup>

While agreeing that the overarching cause of the famine was civil war, those like Evers who had spent time in UNITA-controlled Angola, attributed the blame to the communist government. As vice Chair of the committee, Bill Emerson (R-Mo.) voiced his concern that:

The people of Southern Africa will not be helped if we blame South Africa for all the problems in the region, while ignoring the policies and mistakes of other regimes that have brought such misery to their own people...A most significant example of selective criticism can be found in some statements regarding the civil war in Angola.<sup>122</sup>

Critics of the Marxist government, like Emerson and Evers, pointed to the corruption, human rights violations, and agricultural policies of the MPLA. A study by the State Department seemed to agree, finding that:

while oil revenues and purchasing power are up, commercial imports by Angola have been cut... we, therefore, do not believe that all food shortages in Angola can be blamed on warfare... it is clear to us that the Angolan government has the wherewithal to assume greater responsibility for Angola's at-risk populations.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Peggy Dulany, "Prepared Statement for "Crisis in Southern Africa: The Price of Destabilization," *Hearing Before the Select Committee on Hunger, House of Representatives, Oct. 7, 1987*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> Dulany, "Prepared Statement," 69-70.

<sup>120</sup> Jon D. Unruh, "The Interaction Between Landmine Clearance and Land Rights in Angola: A Volatile Outcome of Non-Integrated Peacebuilding," *Habitat International* 30 (2012): 117-125.

<sup>121</sup> A 1997 study by Human Rights Watch found that there had been over 250,000 victims of mines in southern Africa since 1961, with approximately twenty million more mines buried (15 million of these in Angola). The report also found that of the 67 types landmines found had been manufactured in 27 different countries including Cuba, Soviet Union, Israel, South Africa and the United States. See: Human Rights Watch, "Angola: Events of 2019," <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/angola#ef7a9b>.

<sup>122</sup> Bill Emerson, "Crisis in Southern Africa: The Price of Destabilization," 2.

<sup>123</sup> Roy Stacy, "Testament of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Accompanied by Julia Taft, Director, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, USAID, and William J. Garvelink, Deputy Director, office of African Relief, Bureau for Refugee Programs," *Crisis in Southern Africa: The Price of Destabilization,* *Hearing Before the Select Committee on Hunger, House of Representatives, Oct. 7, 1987*, 7.

According to this perspective, Angola's oil wealth was siphoned away from feeding its population in order to fund the mercenary forces of Cuba and the Soviet Union.

For Evers this was reason enough to support Savimbi; as he explained simply, "I can tell you first-hand there is no hunger in areas controlled by UNITA."<sup>124</sup> Like many other Black conservatives, Evers also highlighted and denounced the double standards of liberals and anti-apartheid activists that continued to vilify the oppression of the apartheid regime while remaining silent on the brutality of Black rulers. As Evers exclaimed, "Angola's Black population deserves its human rights just as Blacks do in South Africa."<sup>125</sup> According to Evers, to recognise Angolan human rights is to rebuke the brutality of the MPLA regime and its famine-causing warmongering and greed. Evers' testimony to Congress was a part of his new mission to "challenge" the government, presidential candidates, and Black organisations to "support efforts to bring peace, reconciliation and free elections" to Angola.<sup>126</sup> For Evers, like BAFFA and other conservatives, this meant U.S. assistance to UNITA in their fight to overcome communist tyranny.

As the US anti-apartheid movement lost steam in the late 1980s a new debate in the Black community emerged. From 1987 both sides of the Angolan civil war increasingly invested in lobbying efforts directed at African Americans. The Angolan government found supporters in liberal African Americans like Randall Robinson, Jesse Jackson, and Benjamin Hooks.<sup>127</sup> It was not long before anti-apartheid activists and the defenders of the Angolan government were concerned about the impact of Savimbi's supporters on the Black community, particularly in the South. The Washington Office on Africa believed BAFFA was

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<sup>124</sup> Evers, "Prepared Statement," 74.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>126</sup> "Evers to Seek Angolan Peace," *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 3, 1987, 2.

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin Chavis, Jr. and Randall Robinson, "Opposition to U.S. Aid to UNITA, Oct. 2, 1990," *C-Span*.  
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?14310-1/opposition-us-aid-unita>.

too “successful in its attempt to mobilize African-American opinion” in support of UNITA.<sup>128</sup> It was so concerned it “mobilize[d] public opinion” against these efforts.<sup>129</sup> While there is no way to measure the impact Savimbi’s supporters had on influencing African American opinion on the civil war in Angola, their success demonstrates a strong conservatism that exists within the Black church. Indeed, as Gayraud Wilmore has argued, while the Black church has been a “radical institution” enabling collective consciousness and collective activism during the Civil Rights Movement, it is simultaneously the “most reactionary.”<sup>130</sup>

### **Jonas Savimbi’s Tour of the Deep South**

The kindred sentiments of Black Americans for a Free Angola and Charles Evers coalesced in June 1988 when Dawkins and Evers accompanied Jonas Savimbi to the White House. Savimbi was in the United States on a ten-day goodwill tour, timed to coincide with the New York peace negotiations between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa.<sup>131</sup> Much of the tour was dedicated to bolstering Savimbi’s support with conservatives, both in organisations like the Heritage Foundation and within the Administration. In Washington, D.C. Savimbi met President Reagan at the White House, as well as the Vice President George Bush, the newly formed Senate Angola Task Force (a bi-partisan group that backed aid to UNITA), the secretary of state George Shultz, and assistant secretary of state Chester Crocker. According to Savimbi, his goal was not to ask for additional financial or military assistance, but rather to outline his

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<sup>128</sup> Afritec, Inc., “Black American Action Agenda for Angola,” *Africa Insider*, Aug. 18, 1987, 5.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (New York: Orbis, 1983), x.

<sup>131</sup> By the summer of 1988 these nations had come to a basic agreement and released a statement of principles for the ceasefire after the New York meeting. For more information see: Chas W. Freeman, “The Angola/Namibia Accords,” *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 3 (1989): 126-141.

four-point peace plan which placed the United States at the centre of negotiations as ‘mediator.’<sup>132</sup>

While the goal of the tour was ostensibly to raise his peace plan, it was also clear that a key feature of this goodwill tour included developing Savimbi’s connection to African American communities and bolstering his reputation as an authentic Black leader for his American audience. The importance Savimbi placed on his connection to Black America is demonstrated by his decision to be accompanied to the White House by Maurice Dawkins and Clarence McKee of BAFFA, Mayor Charles Evers, and civil rights legend Ralph Abernathy. Even more interestingly, though, in the days before these Black conservatives accompanied the UNITA leader to the White House, Savimbi travelled on a two-day sojourn in the Deep South to speak at Black churches. At the National Press Club in the final days of his goodwill tour, Savimbi quickly pointed out that he had just come from the South where he had been “to meet with some of my brothers.”<sup>133</sup> When asked why he had included the South this in his itinerary Savimbi replied:

Why to Mississippi? Why to Alabama? Since 1981 I have been waiting for a meeting with the Black caucus here in this country. It has been long, seven years. Then I have decided to go to other leaders, like mayor Evers, who is sitting in this room, other leaders like Reverend Doctor Abernathy and others. In order to explain this problem of UNITA, in order [for] the people to know, to listen, and to judge. I think those are the fundamentals of democracy.<sup>134</sup>

Savimbi’s interest in developing ties with Southern African Americans was not a new strategy. It was largely African Americans from the South who were invited to, and undertook,

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<sup>132</sup> Jonas Savimbi, “Answers Questions at National Press Club, Jul. 1, 1988,” *C-Span*, 9:00. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?3229-1/jonas-savimbi-unita-answers-questions>.

The four points were: U.S. should maintain contact with all parties involved, U.S. assistance to UNITA should not be stopped as long as the Soviets and Cubans continued to support the MPLA, U.S. mediate peace and work with independent African states to organise free and fair elections in Angola and organise a date of elections after the cease of hostilities.

<sup>133</sup> Savimbi, “Answers Questions at National Press Club,” 7:42.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 12:00.

the tours of UNITA-controlled Angola. The focus on the South was understandable; Savimbi's father Lote, himself a successful Protestant minister, had been educated in the schools established by American missionaries. Further, Lote Savimbi had been a close friend of Reverend Curtis McDowell, an African American missionary from Alabama who had established the Galangue mission station in Angola in 1919.<sup>135</sup> Galangue not only represented an historical connection between Angola and Southern Black churches, it also extended Booker T. Washington-style industrial education and other components of Black conservative developmentalism to Black Angolans. Galangue explicitly drew on the agricultural and technical pedagogies of the Tuskegee Institute and other similar conservative educational institutions in the South in doing so. Indeed, Savimbi initially used these historical church networks to establish support for UNITA in Angola and to mobilise followers to fight in the civil war. And by the late 1980s Savimbi was also drawing on these church and missionary networks to seek support among rural Black churches in the United States.

There was even a precedent for touring Black churches in the South previously established. The year before Savimbi's trip, Foreign Secretary of UNITA Pedro 'Tito' Chingunji spent five days in Alabama with Reverend Dawkins.<sup>136</sup> Like Savimbi, Chingunji was focused on cultivating ties with the Black community through the Black church. The UNITA representative spoke at Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham on "the Dream for Religious Freedom in Angola."<sup>137</sup> This speech was followed by a meet-and-greet with seven hundred parishioners at Sardis Baptist Church on the other side of town.<sup>138</sup> Reverend Samuel Pettagrue, pastor of Sardis Baptist Church, had joined the tour of Angola. Chingunji also met

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<sup>135</sup> Kate Burlingham, "'Into the Thick of the Fray': Black Missionaries, American Adaptive Education, and the Foundations of United States Foreign Relations with Angola," *Social Sciences and Missions* 28, vol. 3-4 (2015), 275.

<sup>136</sup> Windrich, *The Cold War Guerrilla*, 58.

<sup>137</sup> "UNITA's Quest for Peace Tour Begins in Alabama," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 24, 1987, 5.

<sup>138</sup> "UNITA's Peace Tour Begins in Alabama," *Afro-American*, May 30, 1987, 8.

with Concerned Black Clergy, an advocacy organisation for low-income residents of Atlanta, Georgia. Chingunji attended one of the organisation's breakfast meetings where he spoke to over fifty Black religious leaders on UNITA's fight "to bring democracy and freedom to the people of Angola."<sup>139</sup> Thus, when Savimbi began his tour of the South in 1988 many local connections, particularly with Black religious leaders, were already established.

Savimbi's tour began in Jackson, Mississippi where he met with self-described 'conservative Baptists' to discuss the Angolan civil war and appeal for African American support for UNITA.<sup>140</sup> Savimbi, well familiarised with the style of communication, couched his political message in a way that resonated with the Baptists of the South.<sup>141</sup> First, Savimbi presented himself as an anti-communist freedom fighter, fighting against the dictatorship of a racial minority. In doing so, Savimbi tied his conflict in Angola with the struggle against Jim Crow. As historian of the Black church in Alabama William Fallin explained, Baptists had long "eschew[ed] communism" because of its atheism.<sup>142</sup> Further tapping into the religiosity of his audience, Savimbi explained his mission as one from God, telling his audience a story "about my time fighting the Portuguese."<sup>143</sup> In this story a man fired three bullets at Savimbi at short range; all of the bullets missed and Savimbi was unharmed. For Savimbi this demonstrated that "there was a power that saved me. And I think, so long as I do good for my people that power will save me."<sup>144</sup> His engagement with Baptists in Jackson had the desired effect. As Rev. C.A. McKinney, one of the conservative Baptists, explained to journalist Laurie Grossman, "If you're pro-American and anti-communist, I don't see why people wouldn't be for Savimbi."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> "Black Clergy Preparing for 1000 Tomorrow Night," *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun. 18, 1987, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Laurie M. Grossman, "Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy," *Washington Post*, Jun. 26, 1988.

<sup>141</sup> Victoria Brittain, "Jonas Savimbi, 1934-2002," *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 91 (2002): 128-130.

<sup>142</sup> William Fallin, *Uplifting the People: Three Centuries of Black Baptists in Alabama* (University of Alabama Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>143</sup> Savimbi, "Answers Questions at National Press Club," 9:00.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Rev. C.A. McKinney quoted in Laurie M. Grossman, "Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy," *Washington Post*, Jun. 26, 1988.



McKinney travelled over 150 miles from his home in Ocean Springs, Mississippi to meet with Savimbi.

Savimbi's tour of the South was not without controversy, however. Protesters confronted Savimbi at each of his stops chanting "Down with South Africa."<sup>146</sup> Critics, like *New York Times* correspondent James Brooke, considered the tour a desperate ploy for authenticity. As he argued, "Lacking endorsements from major Black leaders, Mr. Savimbi travelled to small towns in Mississippi and Alabama where television crews were invited to record him as he addressed Black American audiences."<sup>147</sup> Nesbitt too argued that Savimbi toured the South in order to capitalise on the 'ignorance' of his audience on African realities and play on their "racial chauvinism."<sup>148</sup> For the protesters "the issue in Africa [was] clearly apartheid" and Savimbi's ties to the apartheid regime.<sup>149</sup> Yet much of their derision was directed at the conservatives Savimbi was meeting with, deriding them as "Bible-toting," unenlightened Southerners.<sup>150</sup>

Savimbi himself shrugged off the protesters, telling the National Press Club that disagreement is a part of the political process and that it was only "six highly organised protesters" who arrived at each location before he had.<sup>151</sup> The Black conservative Baptists Savimbi met in Jackson also responded to these protesters, walking alongside their opponents and offering the counter chant of "we are against communism."<sup>152</sup> In his interview with the *Washington Post* journalist after the confrontation, Reverend McKinney explained that despite the presence of protesters and the criticism of African American leaders, he continued to

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<sup>146</sup> Laurie M. Grossman, "Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy," *Washington Post*, Jun. 26, 1988.

<sup>147</sup> James Brooke, "Blacks in U.S. Are Lobbied by Angolans," *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1988, A3.

<sup>148</sup> Nesbitt, "Terminators, Crusaders and Gladiators," 114

<sup>149</sup> Mike Alexander quoted in Grossman, "Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy"; "Aid to UNITA is Aid to Apartheid—Protest Savimbi's Visit to the U.S." *The Africa Fund* (June 1988) *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10844](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-10844).

<sup>150</sup> "Savimbi Gets Evers Award; Booed," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Jun. 30, 1988, A14.

<sup>151</sup> Savimbi, "Answers Questions at National Press Club."

<sup>152</sup> Rev. C.A. McKinney quoted in Grossman, "Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy."

support Savimbi because “I hate communism more than I do apartheid.”<sup>153</sup> These types of showdowns between African American conservatives, who openly supported Savimbi, and his critics, continued throughout the tour.

The most controversial stop on Savimbi’s two-day tour was Fayette, Mississippi—the home of Charles Evers. Many liberal African Americans expressed outrage when Evers presented Savimbi with the Medgar Evers Humanitarian Award in a ceremony marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the civil rights leader’s death. Standing on the stage inside City Hall Evers presented the award to Savimbi “on behalf of all of us freedom loving people in Mississippi and Fayette, whether they like it or not.”<sup>154</sup> The ceremony, originally scheduled to occur on the steps of City Hall, had been moved inside to avoid protesters. Evers asserted that Savimbi was the rightful recipient of the award because he “has done the same thing Medgar Evers did. We fought to free Mississippi, He’s fighting to free Angola”<sup>155</sup> The African leader and Mayor Evers then joined hands and sang the civil rights anthem, “We Shall Overcome.”<sup>156</sup>

Myrlie Evers, widow of Medgar, had publicly disassociated with the occasion telling the press that she “could not sit quietly by and see Medgar’s life and memory prostituted for money and politics.”<sup>157</sup> Civil rights leaders including the NAACP’s Benjamin Hooks, SCLC’s Joseph Lowery, and TransAfrica’s Randall Robinson were also among those “incensed” by the efforts of Charles Evers to connect Savimbi with the civil rights legacy of his brother.<sup>158</sup> As Chester A. Higgins, a staff photographer for the *New York Times* and regular feature writer for the Black press wrote, Evers’ attempts to “equate the bloody conflict in Angola with the civil

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Evers quoted in “Savimbi Gets Evers Award; Is Booed,” A14.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Evers quoted in Grossman, “Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy.”

<sup>156</sup> Mary Dixon, “Angolan Guerrilla Leader Gets Medgar Evans Award,” *Clarion-Ledger Jackson Daily News*, Jun. 26, 1988, 1A.

<sup>157</sup> Myrlie Evers quoted in Chester Higgins, “Wife Says Husband’s Name is Prostituted,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1988, 4A.

<sup>158</sup> Chester A. Higgins, “On the Hill,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jul. 12, 1988, 10A; “National Demonstrations Confront Savimbi,” *United States Anti-Apartheid Newsletter*, Spring-Summer 1988, 1.

rights movement of the '60s...is standing the issues on their heads.”<sup>159</sup> However, it was only when Mrylie Evers voiced her criticism of her brother-in-law that the debates on Savimbi within the Black community received mainstream media attention. Until then, the debates were largely confined to the Black community and the Black press. Responding to the negative reaction of his sister-in-law and the outlets that broadcast her criticism, Evers told the press, “I could care less. I feel Savimbi deserved it and that’s all that matters. I paid for it, he’s my brother.”<sup>160</sup>

With the Medgar Evers Humanitarian Award ceremony over, Evers joined Savimbi on the final leg of the tour to Washington, D.C. Savimbi met with President Reagan to discuss his plan for peace in Angola. As this chapter shows, Savimbi solicited the support of Black conservatives in the United States for his war against ‘communism.’ Savimbi hoped his relationship with Black conservatives would demonstrate his ‘authenticity’ as an African leader and he sought to leverage this for greater US financial and military assistance. Anti-apartheid activists, however, were critical of Savimbi’s ties to the apartheid government, a close military ally of UNITA. As a TransAfrica newsletter explained, Savimbi’s lobbying efforts in the US were nothing but an attempt to “beautify apartheid” under a Black conservative mask.<sup>161</sup>

### **Coalition for Southern Africa**

While the focus of debate in the late 1980s may have shifted to Angola and UNITA’s relationship with the apartheid regime, South Africa itself did not disappear from consideration. From 1987 US anti-apartheid leaders and organisations increasingly concentrated on making

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<sup>159</sup> Chester A. Higgins, “Evers and Savimbi,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1988, 6A.

<sup>160</sup> Evers quoted in Grossman, “Savimbi Visit Generates Controversy.”

<sup>161</sup> TransAfrica, “New Apartheid Tactic in U.S. Alarms Black, White Leaders: Attempts to Beautify Apartheid’s Terrorists, UNITA and Renamo,” *TransAfrica Forum* 6, no. 2 (1987): 1-8.

the problem of apartheid South Africa a key issue for the presidential election season. TransAfrica, for example, targeted presidential candidates on their level of commitment to increased sanctions, and argued this was a ‘litmus test’ on their “sensitivity on race relations.”<sup>162</sup> This campaign included newspaper and radio ads that singled out Republican contenders as “the faces behind apartheid.”<sup>163</sup> As Randall Robinson, director of TransAfrica, explained, “if a candidate does not see the importance” of increased sanctions on South Africa “then that candidate does not understand Black America.”<sup>164</sup>

However, a new voice of opposition to TransAfrica’s approach emerged in September 1987. The Coalition for Southern Africa was a newly-formed organisation made up of respected African American ministers, businessmen, and educators who believed that US corporate investment in South Africa was central to Black South African economic empowerment. Despite their opposition to the economic sanctions and disinvestments demanded by anti-apartheid activists, the Coalition positioned itself within the anti-apartheid movement—acknowledging that the protests, and the imposition of sanctions, significantly impacted the apartheid government. As Bishop Richard L. Fisher, president of the Coalition, explained, they did “not seek to lead the anti-apartheid struggle,” but did “support the efforts of those organizations and politicians in the U.S. and South Africa that are working to dismantle apartheid.”<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, the Coalition believed that it was time to move beyond punitive policies in order to concentrate on the development and preparation of Black South Africans for a post-apartheid state.

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<sup>162</sup> Gary Thatcher, “Activists Make US Policy Toward South Africa a Campaign Issue. Candidate Positions on Apartheid Made ‘Litmus Tests’ in Full-Page Ads,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Apr. 20, 1987.

<sup>163</sup> Randall Robinson, “Memo to Free South Africa Movement: Faces Behind Apartheid Ad Campaign, Nov-Dec. 1986,” *African Activist Archive*. [https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document\\_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-7029](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=210-808-7029).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*; A more detailed examination of this campaign by TransAfrica is provided by Francis Nesbitt in his study on African American anti-apartheid activism. See: Nesbitt, *Race For Sanctions*, 145-147.

<sup>165</sup> Bishop Richard L. Fisher, “Black American Church Struggles For Freedom,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Mar. 3, 1988, A6.

Also echoing the arguments of other contemporary Black conservatives, the members of the Coalition were particularly concerned that the strategy of disinvestment was misdirected and focused on weakening the white regime at the expense of the empowerment of the Black community. Instead, the Coalition advocated to ensure “compassion” was as important as “the cause,” emphasising that any “action to eradicate apartheid should be coupled with efforts to address the personal hardships and devastation endured” by Black South Africans. W. Clyde Williams, general secretary of the Coalition, explained their position to the *Washington Post* as:

we agree that something should be happening to abolish apartheid. We join that effort. But at the same time, there is another component that has to be dealt with, as it was following the civil rights movement and during Reconstruction in this country. A lot of people were freed, but they weren't able to exercise their freedom because of their lack of education.<sup>166</sup>

This reflection was consistent with the long-held philosophical positions of Black conservatives and was notably reminiscent of arguments made by Booker T. Washington during Reconstruction. Indeed, it was central to Black conservatives' worldview that they saw the “lessons” of Reconstruction as directly applicable to development in Africa. As such, the members of the Coalition intended to recenter compassion in US relations with South Africa through programs that focused on the “developmental needs” of Black South Africans in order to “prepar[e] them for the post-apartheid period.”<sup>167</sup>

The vehicle of these programs was intended to be the Black church, which would push for social change in South Africa as it had done for African Americans not only during the civil rights movement, but also for much of the twentieth century. As an open letter to the Black press by President Fisher explained,

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<sup>166</sup> General secretary of COSA W. Clyde Williams quoted in William Raspberry, “Apartheid: Some Help For the Victims,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 18, 1987, A27.

<sup>167</sup> “Group to Fight Hated Apartheid,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Sept. 19, 1987, 2; Williams quoted in Raspberry, “Apartheid: Some Help For the Victims,” A27.

since its inception, the African American church has been at the forefront of the struggle for racial equality.... Church-run institutions helped ease African Americans transition from slavery to freedom and prepared a new generation of African Americans to assume leadership positions in our society.<sup>168</sup>

With this history in mind, the Coalition's "identification with Black South Africans compel[ed]" them to "build on" what they (accurately) saw as "the church's tradition of global concern."<sup>169</sup> According to the Coalition, its members represented more than seven million African American congregants.<sup>170</sup> The Coalition also included religious leaders from South Africa, including Bishop Harold Senatle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District of the African Methodist Church in South Africa, on the board of directors. "This is the first time someone has asked us, the people who suffer under apartheid, what it is WE would like institutions, such as churches... to DO in South Africa."<sup>171</sup>

The Coalition seemed to agree with the positions of Walter Williams and Thomas Sowell, emphasising the importance of economic and educational circumstances and opportunities for Black South Africans. Also, like Sowell and Williams, the Coalition believed their role in South Africa was to encourage a culture of individual freedom and democratic commitment through corporate social responsibility and increased US investment. Moreover, this strategy was aligned with the long traditions developed during the African American freedom struggles. As Bishop Fisher explained,

America's civil rights struggle has taught us that political and social equality must be accompanied by economic and educational empowerment...freedom will be little more than a farce, unless Black South Africans are equipped to lead their nation. It is certain that the anti-apartheid struggle will be won. The question is: Will South

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<sup>168</sup> Bishop Richard L. Fisher, "Black American Church Struggles For Freedom," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Mar. 3, 1988, A6.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> "S. Africa Focus of Coalition," *New Journal and Guide*, Sept. 23, 1987, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Emphasis original Coalition on Southern Africa, "Press Release on Formation," *COSA News*, Sept. 10, 1987. In Reagan Library CO141 Box 174

Africans be prepared to exercise power when they gain their rightful share of it?<sup>172</sup>

For the Coalition, this meant addressing the ‘developmental needs’ of Black South Africans through scholarship programs, training educators, and ‘co-ventures’ that saw African American businessmen invest in Black-owned businesses in South Africa.<sup>173</sup> The Coalition proposed to empower the victims of apartheid with education and job training programs in South Africa funded by U.S. corporations and managed by Black colleges.<sup>174</sup>

The Coalition quickly became an active force in the debates on US relations with South Africa. The organisation marked their founding with a letter to President Reagan in September 1987, which outlined their belief that corporate withdrawal was “a failed tactic and practical disaster.”<sup>175</sup> One month later, the Coalition’s opposition to further economic sanctions was considered by Congress as it evaluated the impact of the sanctions imposed in October 1986. Anti-apartheid activists in Congress hoped to leverage the evaluation into further sanctions and enforced disinvestment. Ron Dellums (D-CA), for example, introduced H.R. 1580—Anti-Apartheid Act Amendments, a bill which mandated complete disinvestment of all U.S. corporations from South Africa.<sup>176</sup> Responding to this renewed push for economic sanctions, the Coalition sent a letter to individual members of Congress calling on them to re-examine the approach to South Africa. In the letter, Bishop Fisher reasoned that “while some sanctions may be necessary in the short term, a far more enlightened approach would be for Congress to build better bridges to South Africa’s Black community.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Bishop Richard L. Fisher, “Black American Church Struggles For Freedom,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Mar. 3, 1988, A6.

<sup>173</sup> Rasperry, “Apartheid: Some Help For the Victims,” A27.

<sup>174</sup> Herman J. Cohen, “Memo to Deputy National Security Advisor Colin Powell: South Africa: New Black Anti-Apartheid Group Established, Sept. 18, 1987,” ID#554631, Reagan Library CO-141 South Africa Box 174.

<sup>175</sup> COSA, “Letter to Reagan.”

<sup>176</sup> Ron Dellums, “Bill H.R. 1580 –Anti-Apartheid Act Amendments of 1988,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/1580>.

<sup>177</sup> Bishop Richard L. Fisher letter to Members of Congress quoted in “An Appeal to Congress,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Nov. 6, 1987, 2B.

Channelling the arguments made by many Black conservatives, the Coalition emphasised the importance of “programs which enhance Black economic opportunity, educational improvement and managerial development.”<sup>178</sup> The Coalition’s letter argued that not only is economic empowerment the most sustainable way to improve Black lives, but as a strategy it is also “morally preferable to some punitive strategies which leave damaged lives in their wake.”<sup>179</sup> The letter concluded in no uncertain terms that, “the Coalition would reject as counterproductive any attempt by Congress to require disinvestment by American corporations.”<sup>180</sup> Unsurprisingly, opponents of sanctions in Congress accused of aiding the apartheid government expressed support for the Coalition and hoped to capitalise on its moral prestige. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) was one such figure who drew attention to the Coalition and their opposition to sanctions and disinvestment. Helms included the letter from the Coalition in the record of the 1987 hearing of the Committee on Foreign Relations on United States policy toward South Africa in order to challenge the efforts of the Congressional Black Caucus to impose further sanctions.<sup>181</sup>

The Coalition’s opposition to the imposition of further economic sanctions against South Africa became a brief flashpoint in the broader debates on the utility of sanctions. Conservatives like Walter Williams and Jesse Helms maintained that economic sanctions were unnecessary, anti-free trade and hurt the most vulnerable. Others like Ambassador Edward Perkins and the Coalition believed sanctions had worked, sending the message that the US was against the system of apartheid, but argued that the focus moving forward should be on building capability and opportunity for a post-apartheid South Africa. Liberal anti-apartheid activists

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Bishop Richard L. Fisher, “Letter to Sen. Helms Oct. 14, 1987,” in Senator Jesse Helms, *United States Policy Toward South Africa: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, Oct. 1987* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 289-290.

<sup>181</sup> Helms, *United States Policy Toward South Africa*, 289-290.



like TransAfrica, in contrast, continued to push for more punitive measures, including tougher sanctions and corporate disinvestment.

The intensification of debates on the utility of sanctions coincided with an uptick in their use in international affairs from the late 1980s and spurred their own body of scholarship which continues to today.<sup>182</sup> Despite their contested history, economic sanctions are now a relatively common feature of US foreign policy, including the Obama administration's sanctions against Iran to the Trump administration's sanctions against countries including Cuba, Venezuela and China and, most recently, the Biden administration's sanctions against Russia.<sup>183</sup>

### **Coalition for Southern Africa in South Africa**

The Coalition practiced what it preached with its emphasis on compassion to the victims of apartheid. In January 1988, for example, the Coalition provided aid to a Black South African student at Norfolk State University. The student, Dylan Grewan, approached the Coalition for support after he lost access to a grant from Citibank South Africa. Citibank, one of the original sponsors of the Sullivan Principles, created education grants for employees and their families as a part of their corporate social responsibility. However, after pressure from anti-apartheid activists in the US, the company decided to withdraw from South Africa, leaving Grewan's father unemployed and the student without financial support in the US.<sup>184</sup> Bishop Fisher later told the press that, "Mr. Grewan is only one example of the hardships imposed on Black South Africans by the disinvestment of US companies in South Africa" and accused "those who have

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<sup>182</sup> For example, see: Ed. Peter A.G. van Bergeijk, *Research Handbook on Economic Sanctions* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021); Bryan R. Early, *Busted Sanctions: Explaining Why Economic Sanctions Fail* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2105); Ed. Nate C. Crawford and Audie Klotz, *How Sanctions Work: Lessons from South Africa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); David Cortright, *Economic Sanctions: Panacea or Peacebuilding in a Post-Cold War World?* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>183</sup> D.W. Drezner, "The United States of Sanctions: The Use and Abuse of Economic Coercion," *Foreign Affairs* 100 (2021).

<sup>184</sup> Barnaby J. Feder, "Citibank is Leaving South Africa: Foes of Apartheid See Major Gain," *NYT*, Jun. 17, 1987, A1; "Coalition Awards Grant to S. Africa Student," *New Journal and Guide*, Feb. 17, 1988, 3.

advocated and encouraged US companies to leave South Africa” of “fail[ing] to take into account the tremendous human suffering that has resulted.”<sup>185</sup>

Perhaps the highlight of the Coalition’s work was in September 1988 with an event held in Alexandra Township in South Africa. After only one year of existence, the organisation led a group of African Americans to one of the most impoverished areas of South Africa and delivered a collection of donated blankets, books, and clothes.<sup>186</sup> As Robert Brown, one of the founders of the Coalition, told the media, “We wanted to focus attention on the plight of Alexandra. This is one of the poorest and most ignored parts of the country.”<sup>187</sup> Talk show host Oprah Winfrey, one of the key participants in the program, and its sponsor, donated over \$7,000 to provide food for the community for the day.<sup>188</sup> This event launched Winfrey’s \$50,000-a-year food program that provided lunch for elderly Black South Africans. The event also had the endorsement of Winnie Mandela, though she did not attend.<sup>189</sup> The Coalition also donated funds to help rebuild Mandela’s medical clinic that was firebombed in 1985.<sup>190</sup> Controversially, the apartheid government appeared willing to aid the event with the South African Bureau of Information sharing the details with the media.<sup>191</sup>

Much of this access was due to the connections of Robert Brown. Brown, who of course had been briefly considered by the Reagan administration for the role of African American ambassador to South Africa, cultivated relationships with people across the political spectrum in South Africa and the United States. It can be argued that it was Brown’s mentorship of Stedman Graham, Winfrey’s long-term partner, that led to her involvement with the

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<sup>185</sup> “Coalition on Southern Africa Awards \$3,200,” *Afro-American*, Jan. 23, 1988, 8.

<sup>186</sup> “Winfrey, Others to Give Goods to Township,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Sept. 15, 1988, A17.

<sup>187</sup> Robert Brown quoted in “Winfrey, Others to Give Goods to Township,” A17.

<sup>188</sup> “Winfrey Helps Township in South Africa,” *St. Petersburg Times*, Jul. 23, 1988, 3A.

<sup>189</sup> “Oprah Winfrey Foundation Expands South African Feeding Program,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Oct. 19, 1989, A12.

<sup>190</sup> Jack Anderson and Dale van Atta, “Firms Back Group’s Lobbying on S. Africa,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 7, 1989.

<sup>191</sup> Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 160.

Coalition.<sup>192</sup> Winnie Mandela's support of the event in Alexandra Township was also attributable to her relationship with Brown. Two months before the Coalition event in Alexandra Township Brown escorted Mandela-Dlamini to visit her father in prison.<sup>193</sup>

Armstrong Williams, Brown's 26-year-old aide, organised and managed the events in South. In July 1988, Williams travelled to South Africa with Brown and Stedman Graham when Brown met with Mandela for a second time. While in South Africa, the three attended a party hosted by Winnie Mandela that was threatened by security police and later fire-bombed. Williams voiced concern that he "was not so sure Winnie isn't using us as pawns in some game we don't understand."<sup>194</sup> Despite Williams' concerns about Winnie Mandela, he stayed behind in South Africa to organise the Coalition event, as well as the construction of a 'mansion' for the Mandelas in Soweto which had been financed through Brown's corporate fundraising.<sup>195</sup> The mansion project was widely condemned with many finding the erection of such a grand structure distasteful in a township dominated by poverty.<sup>196</sup> By the late 1980s, Winnie Mandela was also a controversial figure who had been condemned by anti-apartheid activists and the ANC because of her "reign of terror" in Soweto.<sup>197</sup> Not only was her security detail accused of committing kidnapping, torture, and murder, Mandela had endorsed the practice of necklacing, a form of lynching in which a rubber tire filled with petrol was forced over a victim's chest and arms and set on fire.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Stedman Graham, "Foreword," in Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong*, xi.

<sup>193</sup> Robert Brown first met Nelson Mandela in 1987 and met him again in July 1988. Juan Williams, "Daddy Stayed in Jail. That Was His Job," *Washington Post*, Nov. 8, 1987.

<sup>194</sup> Armstrong Williams quoted in Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong*, 211.

<sup>195</sup> This house caused controversy in both South Africa and the US, see: Jack Anderson and Dale van Atta, "Winnie Mandela's U.S. Promoter," *Washington Post*, Mar. 8, 1989.

<sup>196</sup> Mehita Iqani, "'The Consummate Material Girl?' The Contested Consumption of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in Early Post-Apartheid Media Representations," *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 5 (2015), 787-8.

<sup>197</sup> Shireen Hassim, "Not Just Nelson's Wife: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Violence and Radicalism in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 5 (2018): 895-912.

<sup>198</sup> Hassim, "Not Just Nelson's Wife," 906.

Despite Williams' reservations and the continued controversies, he became a defender of Winnie Mandela. Working in the international division of Brown's B&C Associates, Williams spent months at a time in the apartheid state, gaining intimate knowledge of its workings. Reflecting on his experience there, Williams later wrote:

Never in America, before or since, had I felt and seen such racism, raw and ugly, as was laid bare in South Africa, where Blacks were treated as chattel and subhuman. I was treated that way myself until they heard my accent or saw my passport. Suddenly, I was OK to the racist throngs and treated with respect. Only my U.S. passport differentiated me from other Blacks, but apparently that was enough. Very quickly, this exposure started to harden me and for the first time, hate began to seep within my heart.<sup>199</sup>

This experience led Williams to consider Winnie Mandela "a hero in the spirit of George Washington, who fought British oppression, risking his life and fortune to forge a new path for America."<sup>200</sup> Indeed, Williams went as far as to say that "by making an example of infiltrators and by employing tactics such as public 'necklacing,' Winnie Mandela ultimately saved lives."<sup>201</sup>

While Brown was one of the founders of the Coalition and drew on his personal networks and employees for Coalition-related work, he did not hold a leadership position within the organisation. The work of the Coalition was largely undertaken by the members from religious denominations. These members included Bishop F.C. James of the AME Church who had worked as the director of social action during the civil rights movement, and Dr. Yvonne Kennedy, president of Bishop State College and vice president of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority.<sup>202</sup> Founding member Reverend Gilbert Caldwell, minister of the United

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<sup>199</sup> Armstrong Williams, "My Season with Mandela," *Washington Times*, Dec. 8, 2013.

<sup>200</sup> Armstrong Williams, "Winnie Mandela's Unyielding Stand for Independence and Freedom," *Creators Syndicate*, Apr. 12, 2018. <https://www.creators.com/read/armstrong-williams/04/18/winnie-mandelas-unyielding-stand-for-independence-and-freedom>

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> "In Honor of Dr. Yvonne Kennedy," *Congressional Record Statement of Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (D-GA)*. <https://bishop.house.gov/media-center/congressional-record-statements/in-honor-of-dr-yvonne-kennedy>; "Bishop Frederick Calhoun James," *South Carolina African American History Calendar*. <https://scafricanamerican.com/honorees/bishop-frederick-calhoun-james/>

Methodist Church, was also an anti-apartheid activist. Caldwell considered himself a “foot soldier” of the civil rights movement, having participated in landmark events like the March on Washington, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, and the Poor People’s Campaign.<sup>203</sup> Like Dick Gregory, Caldwell was a life-long social justice advocate with a history of supporting liberal causes; he later became a vocal advocate for gay marriage and LGBT rights.<sup>204</sup> Caldwell also established himself as an anti-apartheid activist in the 1980s, after being arrested outside the South African Embassy in 1985 participating in a Free South Africa Movement protest.<sup>205</sup> For Caldwell, the work of the Coalition—as an extension of the Black church’s civil rights struggle—was consistent with his beliefs and African American traditions, despite its conservative strategies and goals.

Much of the activity of the Coalition was supported by the efforts of its secretary, Dr. W. Clyde Williams, former president of Miles College in Birmingham, Alabama. Williams was perhaps best known for his work reconnecting the historically Black college with the business community in Birmingham, a relationship that was fractured during the civil rights movement.<sup>206</sup> It was in 1986, after Williams had visited South Africa as part of a 15-member delegation of African American college presidents, that he was galvanised into action on the issue of apartheid. As Williams explained in a press release for the Coalition:

after extensive meetings and discussions with Black South Africans, we committed ourselves to seeing that we would not be just one more fact-finding group which went to South Africa and returned to the U.S. to deliver rhetoric. We committed ourselves to take action, and this coalition is a result of that commitment.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Heather Hahn, “Rev. Gil Caldwell, Civil Rights Pioneer, Dies,” *United Methodist News*, Sept. 8, 2020. <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/rev-gil-caldwell-civil-rights-pioneer-dies>

<sup>204</sup> “Prominent United Methodist Minister Elected to National Board of Directors of PFLAG,” *PR Newswire*, Oct. 26, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> “Church Official is Jailed in Protest,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jan. 22, 1985, 13.

<sup>206</sup> Dr. W. Clyde Williams interviewed by Dr. Barbara R. Hatton, “Documenting the Perspectives of Past HBCU Presidents, An Oral History Project, Aug. 27, 2012,” *Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library*.

<sup>207</sup> Williams, “Letter to Sen. Helms Oct. 14, 1987,” in Helms, *United States Policy Toward South Africa*, 291.

Williams was raised by cotton pickers in rural Georgia and was only able to attend college through church donations and corporate scholarships. His own experience allowed him to understand the constraints of students, both at Miles and in South Africa. Indeed, many of the strategies that the Coalition sought to implement in South Africa drew on traditions within the Black community and were used by Williams to great success.

Despite the respectability of the members and the proactive engagement in South Africa, the Coalition faced intense criticism and backlash. Only weeks after the Coalition had announced its formation the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, a New York-based advocacy organisation, had received and published a document that indicated that the Coalition on Southern Africa was a front for Shell Oil.<sup>208</sup> The 265-page document published by the Interfaith Center outlined the ‘Neptune Strategy’ developed by Pagan International, a public relations firm hired by Shell to counteract the disinvestment campaigns in the U.S. and Europe.<sup>209</sup> It outlined the potentially effective strategy of developing a ‘task force’ of African American and South African anti-apartheid activists, as well as identifying church and business leaders who were concerned with preparing Black South Africans for post-apartheid responsibilities.<sup>210</sup> According to Pagan International, this task force could then emphasise the important role that Shell Oil (and other U.S. corporations) could play in such preparation and uplift of Black leaders. This strategy, the report concluded, “will ensure the continuation and growth of the Shell companies in the United States and South Africa.”<sup>211</sup>

While there was little evidence that Shell Oil was involved in the Coalition’s formation, the Interfaith Center, investigative journalists, and anti-apartheid activists accused the

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<sup>208</sup> Diane Bratcher, “The Neptune Strategy: SHELL Battles Its Antiapartheid Critics,” *ICCR Brief* 16, no. 7 (1987): 3A-3D.

<sup>209</sup> For more information on the Neptune Strategy’s European component see: Eveline Lubbers, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark: Corporate and Police Spying on Activists* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 45-81.

<sup>210</sup> Leonard, “Apartheid Whitewash,” 23.

<sup>211</sup> “The Coalition for Southern Africa,” *Source Watch*, accessed Jan. 31, 2022. [https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Coalition\\_for\\_Southern\\_Africa](https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Coalition_for_Southern_Africa)

Coalition on Southern Africa of being the product of this strategy. Shell Oil and Pagan International claimed that the strategies outlined in the document had not, in actuality, been implemented. However, most of the African American religious leaders identified in the Pagan report were later associated with the Coalition. Even without Shell Oil's explicit involvement, the Coalition received support from other U.S. companies that were likewise battling disinvestment campaigns. Mobil Oil, for example, fundraised \$765,000 start-up capital for the organisation.<sup>212</sup>

Pagan International's connection to the Coalition, however, was impossible to deny. Pagan International admitted to providing the Coalition free office space, phones, and funds.<sup>213</sup> Most controversially, it became clear that Pagan International had recruited Rev. Gilbert Caldwell to the Coalition while he was working as a consultant for the firm. Caldwell was hired by Pagan International to be a liaison with civil rights leaders and organisations, although it is unclear who he met with or what they discussed.<sup>214</sup> However, Caldwell did admit that he travelled several times to South Africa at Pagan International's expense, including to Desmond Tutu's Bishop enthronement ceremony.<sup>215</sup>

Unsurprisingly, anti-apartheid activists were quick to condemn the Coalition as a corporate front. As journalists Jack Anderson and Dale van Atta asserted, "the group was formed with money and moral support from corporate giants that have big investments in South Africa and want to stay there" which made the Coalition "a puppet in a massive lobbying campaign against sanctions."<sup>216</sup> Indeed, these critics not only condemned the Coalition on

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<sup>212</sup> Emma Gilby, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), 177.

<sup>213</sup> Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 153.

<sup>214</sup> Rev. Gilbert Caldwell quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 154.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Jack Anderson and Dale van Atta, "Firms Back Group's Lobbying on S. Africa," *Washington Post*, Mar. 7, 1989.

Southern Africa as a front for business interests, but ultimately for the South African government. As Timothy Smith, executive director of the Interfaith Center, explained:

By taking money from these companies and allowing themselves to be used by them, the ministers were, in essence, helping the South African regime tighten its system of institutionalised racism and discrimination. However, they want to justify what they did, they helped support apartheid.<sup>217</sup>

The condemnation of the Coalition significantly impacted its leadership. Once it was clear that the public considered their work as shielding the apartheid regime, many members of the Coalition resigned.

Those who resigned included Reverend Gilbert Caldwell and Dr. W. Clyde Williams, two of the most active members. Williams returned to his position as executive secretary of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and Caldwell moved on to other social justice issues.<sup>218</sup> In an interview with Ron Nixon, Caldwell explained his involvement with the Coalition, stating, “I was trying to change things from the inside...I was trying to do the right thing.”<sup>219</sup> Despite his good intentions, Caldwell admitted that Pagan International used him and his work for social justice to promote the interests of their client. As Caldwell concluded, “I guess they needed someone like me, with my background and history, to make it seem legitimate.”<sup>220</sup> The members of the Coalition, despite their connections to the civil rights movement and the Black church, faced the same pressures to conform as other Black conservatives. Like many Black conservatives considered in this thesis, African American critics pointed to the source of financial support of the Coalition as evidence it was being used as a puppet for white political gain.

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<sup>217</sup> Timothy Smith quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 154.

<sup>218</sup> ICCR, “COSA Hit with Resignations By Staff and Directors,” *The Corporate Examiner* 16, no. 7 (1988), 5.

<sup>219</sup> Caldwell quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 154-5.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.



The Coalition collapsed under the weight of this criticism almost as quickly as it began. Many members of the organisation, horrified by accusations that they were ‘sellouts’, resigned and redirected their energies to less controversial problems. These criticisms continued to follow the members, however, with Ron Nixon questioning their motives in interviews for his book *Selling Apartheid*. Dismissing the Coalition as a front for corporate greed and the apartheid government, Nixon simply repeated the accusations levelled by contemporary critics at the time. There was no analysis, or even consideration, of the work and philosophies of those involved. Despite this, the focus on preparing Black people for a post-apartheid South Africa was nothing new. The same concerns were expressed in the writings of Sowell and Williams, the corporate social responsibility initiatives of Rev. Leon Sullivan, and the policy position of the Reagan administration.

### **Robert Brown and Nelson Mandela**

Unlike other members of the Coalition for Southern Africa, Robert Brown offered “no apologies” for his work.<sup>221</sup> While Brown also resigned from the group because it was “perceived as pro-apartheid,” he continued to believe in its cause.<sup>222</sup> As he told a journalist at the time, “no one was trying to hide anything. We were trying to find a solution that would hasten the end of apartheid but didn’t leave Blacks worse off.”<sup>223</sup> Brown continued to be actively involved in the problem of apartheid throughout the late 1980s and indeed, continued to court controversy with his ties to the Mandela family. Yet, Brown was able to be successful throughout his career—from entrepreneur to civil rights activist, to Nixon advisor and anti-apartheid advocate—because of his ability to garner support from people across the political

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<sup>221</sup> Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 157.

<sup>222</sup> Robert Brown quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 161.

<sup>223</sup> Brown, *You Can’t Go Wrong By Doing Right*, 190.

spectrum. As Brown explained, “It is not always a fight between Republicans and Democrats, it’s a fight for Black folks and the needs of our communities.”<sup>224</sup> His ability to find common ground also led to Brown to work with the Reagan administration, the apartheid government, and members of the anti-apartheid movement in the US and South Africa.

Brown’s interest in apartheid South Africa emerged in the 1970s. Until that time he had focused on the domestic civil rights movement and the development of economic ties between his corporate clients and African American communities.<sup>225</sup> Brown first travelled to Africa while serving as an advisor to President Nixon in 1971, when he was tasked with repatriating the remains of civil rights leader Whitney Young.<sup>226</sup> Brown returned to the African nation in 1979 and spent extended periods of time there assisting in the creation of a new constitution, as Nigeria recovered from a devastating civil war.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, it was this work in Nigeria, and his ties to corrupt officials, that ended Brown’s chances of becoming US ambassador to South Africa. While Brown did not represent the United States government in South Africa, he remained heavily involved in development of programs for the Black community there. At the end of 1984, Brown was horrified during his first visit to the apartheid state. Yet, as he later recalled in his memoir, “the old rage welled up in me again, but I reminded myself that I was there on business, not as an activist.”<sup>228</sup>

However, this experience marked the beginning of a lifetime of work for the economic and educational development of Black South Africans. Similar to the arguments made by

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<sup>224</sup> Robert Brown quoted in Zenitha Prince, “Republican Robert J. Brown Known as Maverick in Politics and Business,” *Afro-American*, Sept. 25, 2013. <https://afro.com/republican-robert-j-brown-known-as-maverick-in-politics-and-business/>.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Brown, “Interview with Eboni T. Thomas, Dr. Robert J. Brown, Global Influencer,” *Savoy Network*, Nov. 5, 2019. <http://savoynetwork.com/dr-robert-j-brown-global-influencer/>.

<sup>226</sup> Richard Nixon, “Statement on the Death of Whitney M. Young, Jr., Mar. 11, 1971,” *The American Presidency Project, University of California*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-death-whitney-m-young-jr>.

<sup>227</sup> For more on African American involvement in the Nigerian civil war see: James Farquharson, *African Americans and the Nigerian Civil War: ‘Black America Cares’* (New York: Routledge, yet to be published).

<sup>228</sup> Brown, *You Can’t Go Wrong By Doing Right*, 189.

Reverend Leon Sullivan almost ten years earlier, Brown advised his clients to implement corporate social responsibility programs or risk a violent revolution. His own experience during the civil rights movement, as well as conversations with the Black workers at the factories, convinced Brown that the most effective assistance to the oppressed in South Africa was by protecting the opportunities for them to improve their lives. As Brown explained,

They sensed that change was coming and that apartheid would eventually give way to pressure from around the world. They were worried, however, about losing what they had managed to gain. Talking to them fortified me. The human drive to create a better life, even under the most adverse circumstances, is a powerful force. I vowed to help them in any way I could.<sup>229</sup>

Like many, Brown believed that the only way to avoid a violent uprising was to free Nelson Mandela from prison and hold free and democratic elections. However, like other Black conservatives, Brown was concerned that punitive sanctions and disinvestment hurt Black South Africans and took away the best employment opportunities.

Returning to the United States as the anti-apartheid movement transformed into a mass protest movement, Brown served in a State Department working group on South Africa. The group was tasked with developing a public relations strategy to explain the policy of Constructive Engagement to the American public.<sup>230</sup> Believing that economic development was best way to improve the lives of Black South Africans, Brown led delegations of businessmen to establish ties between Black entrepreneurs in both countries.<sup>231</sup> Brown also established a not-for-profit organisation, the International Concern Foundation, to provide clothes, food, financial assistance, and scholarships to Black South Africans. His most notable work, however, arose from his relationship with the Mandela family.

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<sup>229</sup> Brown, *You Can't Go Wrong By Doing Right*, 191.

<sup>230</sup> Nicholas Platt, "National Security Decisions Directive 187: Southern African Public Diplomacy, Nov. 20, 1985," *Ronald Reagan Library*, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-187.htm>.

<sup>231</sup> "Ambassadorial Dropout Plans to Lead Black Businessmen to South Africa," *AP News*, Aug. 7, 1986.

Despite Ron Nixon's accusation that Brown only sought a meeting with Winnie Mandela for personal gain, he was in fact there at the behest of Coretta Scott King, an anti-apartheid activist and the widow of Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>232</sup> King initially approached Brown for assistance in the South African visa process. Anti-apartheid activists in the United States often struggled to gain visas for entry into South Africa. However, Brown had met the South African Ambassador to the United States Piet Koornhof at a Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. and developed a friendship with the apartheid representative.<sup>233</sup> Brown used this connection to ensure that King and her entourage were granted visas. King's trip to South Africa was mired in controversy when she cancelled a meeting with President P.W. Botha 15 minutes after the meeting was due to start. She faced criticism from Black leaders in South Africa for this, including Winnie Mandela, and decided at the last minute to meet only with select Black leaders. Brown was tasked with delivering the news to an angry Botha.<sup>234</sup>

However, King's decision not to meet with Botha led to an invitation to meet Winnie Mandela. It was at this meeting that Brown agreed to organise for Mandela's daughter and her husband to attend university in the US.<sup>235</sup> It was for this reason that Brown was allowed to meet Nelson Mandela in prison in a historic two-hour meeting. Brown left the meeting not only with Mandela's approval to act as a surrogate parent, but also as a witness to the anti-apartheid leader's willingness to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the apartheid government.<sup>236</sup> In July 1988, Brown met with Mandela at Pollsmoor Prison for the second time. This meeting proved more controversial. Mandela, who had just turned seventy after 26 years in prison, was ill with tuberculosis when Winnie Mandela and Brown informed him of an arson attack on the

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<sup>232</sup> William Raspberry, "Coretta King: Right Instinct, Wrong Turn," *Washington Post*, Sept. 12, 1968.

<sup>233</sup> Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong by Doing Right*, 197.

<sup>234</sup> Erik van Ees, "Coretta King Snubs Botha After Talk," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1986.

<sup>235</sup> "A Moderate Mandela?" *Washington Post Magazine*, Aug. 11, 1987.

<sup>236</sup> Brown would write a seven-page memo outlining his meeting with Nelson Mandela and send it to both the apartheid government and the Reagan administration. "Robert Brown Oversees the Enrolment of Mandela's Daughter at Boston Univ.," *Jet*, Jun. 8, 1987, 28.

family home.<sup>237</sup> Winnie Mandela was also concerned with the release of HBO film *Mandela*. The director and producers of the film, starring Danny Glover and Alfre Woodard, had not consulted or appropriately compensated the Mandela family.<sup>238</sup>

Winnie Mandela announced to the press waiting outside the prison that Brown had been given power of attorney to represent the Mandela family's interests.<sup>239</sup> Theoretically this meant that Brown controlled the proceeds from concerts, t-shirt sales, and other paraphernalia that used Nelson Mandela's name. Understandably, the ANC disputed the authority of Brown to have such control and Mandela himself repudiated the claim.<sup>240</sup> As one biographer of Nelson Mandela argued, this scandal was evidence that Brown was interested in "a fortune to be made from the Mandela family."<sup>241</sup> Brown, in contrast, denied that he ever mentioned a licence agreement or the profits of using the Mandela name.<sup>242</sup> Brown's history of providing financial support for social justice causes like the civil rights and anti-apartheid movements suggested that his motives included the concern for the welfare of the Mandela family. After all, he was already financing Zenani Mandela and her family in the United States and had just witnessed Winnie Mandela's house burn down in an arson attack. This incident led Brown into the middle of a much larger dispute between the ANC and Winnie Mandela over who had authority to speak on Mandela's behalf.<sup>243</sup>

In October 1988 Brown was again in South Africa, where he was invited to a private meeting with President Botha.<sup>244</sup> During this meeting, Brown told the president that he believed that a civil war would result if he did not release Mandela and end the system of apartheid.

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<sup>237</sup> Martin Meredith, *Nelson Mandela: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 378.

<sup>238</sup> Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong by Doing Right*, 208.

<sup>239</sup> John D. Battersby, "Who Speaks for Nelson Mandela?" *NYT*, Jul. 20, 1988, 1.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Meredith, *Nelson Mandela*, 378.

<sup>242</sup> Robert Brown, "Letter to the Editor: Winnie Mandela Still Strong and Dedicated," *NYT*, Mar. 20, 1989, 18.

<sup>243</sup> Christopher S. Wren, "Anti-Apartheid Groups Cast Out Winnie Mandela, Citing Terror," *NYT*, Feb. 17, 1989; For more information see: Shireen Hassim, "The Impossible Contract: The Political and Private Marriage of Nelson and Winnie Mandela," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45, no. 6 (2019): 1151-1171.

<sup>244</sup> Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong by Doing Right*, 217.

Botha reportedly responded with his usual temper but admitted the apartheid government had begun discussions with Mandela.<sup>245</sup> It is impossible to know what level of influence Brown had on Botha, but, whatever the case, the meeting was followed by rapid changes in South African politics. Two months after the meeting Mandela was moved from his prison cell to a health clinic. By July 1989, President Botha and Mandela were meeting officially. One of the last acts of Botha's presidency –he suffered a stroke and was forced to retire at the next election—was to normalise meeting with Mandela.<sup>246</sup> This sent a clear message that the South African government recognised Mandela as a legitimate leader to negotiate with. By February the next year, the new president of South Africa F.W. de Klerk, had released Nelson Mandela from prison after over 27 years. Brown's representatives, Stedman Graham and Armstrong Williams, were there with the Mandela family to welcome Mandela home.

Brown, a Black conservative entrepreneur, emerged in the late 1980s as a key power broker in South African relations. Not only was he able to work with the Reagan administration in the implementation of Constructive Engagement, he also worked with the apartheid government, members of the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, and critically, the Mandela family. Yet, Brown was also often criticised by the media and anti-apartheid activists (in South Africa and the US) as a sellout who prioritised corporate interests, including the continuation of the apartheid regime, over helping Black South Africans. As Randall Robinson told a *New York Times Reporter*, "I find a Mandela-Brown arrangement strange and difficult to believe."<sup>247</sup> Yet, Brown continued to challenge these critics to "put their work up against" his and compare the impact on Black South African lives.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Brown, *You Can't Do Wrong by Doing Right*, 218.

<sup>246</sup> "Editorial: Just Free Nelson Mandela," *NYT*, Jul. 11, 1989.

<sup>247</sup> Randall Robinson quoted in John D. Battersby, "Who Speaks for Nelson Mandela?" *NYT*, Jul. 20, 1988, 1.

<sup>248</sup> Robert Brown quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 161.

Brown remained committed to Black South African development, even after Mandela was released from prison and the apartheid regime came to an end. Forming the African Booksmart Foundation in 1993 (an organisation that continues today), Brown ensured that millions of books were provided to impoverished South African children.<sup>249</sup> Brown's story is simultaneously exceptional and representative. His relationship with the Mandela family and access to the upper echelons of US and South African society was arguably unparalleled, yet Brown's story in many ways epitomises the experiences of many others examined in this thesis. Like Franklin A. Thomas, Reverend Leon Sullivan, David Bolen, and Edward Perkins, Brown was a bridge builder. These men worked behind the scenes and built relationships within and across powerful institutions in order to enact the practical changes they wanted to see.

Like Black conservative intellectuals Sowell and Williams, Brown emphasised the power of economic development and education as the best solution to discrimination and poverty. All three agreed that the economic sanctions and disinvestment demanded by anti-apartheid activists in the United States hurt poor Black South Africans, enriched white business-owners, and further entrenched the apartheid government's siege mentality. Finally, they all recognised that preparing for a post-apartheid South Africa was as important as ending the racist regime. They advocated for the development of a culture of democratic norms and free market capitalism over revolution and socialism.

The debates on the efficacy of economic sanctions between African American activists in the 1980s is ... in sanctions scholarship.

Like the Black churchgoers who supported Savimbi, it was Brown's religious beliefs that informed his life's work and philosophy. Like many others considered in this thesis, Brown was an active participant in the civil rights movement, and based his anti-apartheid work on his

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<sup>249</sup> B and C International, "Our Founder," <https://www.bandcinternational.com/who-we-are/our-founder/> (accessed Feb. 2, 2022).

own experience of race and racism. His story, alongside some of the others that have been told here, undermines the argument that Black conservatives were silent on the policy of Constructive Engagement and were only willing to support the apartheid government for personal gain. The history of African American anti-apartheid activism has, until now, focused exclusively on the activities of liberal and radicals, most notably the fight for economic sanctions. Yet, as Brown later stated, economic sanctions played a role in the end of apartheid; but “I think my way worked too.”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Robert Brown quoted in Nixon, *Selling Apartheid*, 161.



## Conclusion

On 21 January 1988 Colin Powell, the newly appointed National Security Advisor to President Reagan, delivered the keynote address at the annual award ceremony for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, an African American research institution. Powell's address outlined his commitment to the Reagan administration's foreign policy in front of a large audience of Black Americans. In introducing Powell, the Mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, admitted—unusually and somewhat awkwardly—that he had not heard of him but that his success would serve as a model for the Black community.<sup>1</sup> In closing with consideration of Powell, the conclusion draws together the threads of the previous chapters to place this now familiar figure in new light. Powell's rise to prominence and his politics make most sense when set within the context of a nuanced and vibrant Black conservative internationalism and developmentalism that was engaged with US foreign relations throughout much of the twentieth century. The end of the Reagan administration marked the rise of Powell to the upper echelons of foreign policymaking and his position as a popular public figure. As a Black conservative possessing significant powers in international affairs, Powell's influence over US foreign policy into the early 2000s made noticeable the long-developing contours of Black conservative commitment to international relations. In order to examine how Powell drew consciously on the tradition of Black conservative developmentalism and internationalism, it is important to first consider the wider issue of where Powell and other Black conservatives “fit” in the larger historical narrative.

In both media and scholarship, the well-worn association between African American political thought and South African apartheid has simply assumed a focus on liberal and radical Black activists becoming central organisers of the anti-apartheid movement that swept across

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Bradley, “A Salute to Black Elected Officials,” *C-Span*, Jan. 21, 1988, 17:30.

the United States from 1984. This outpouring of Black political activism was a response to the continual violence of the racist apartheid regime in South Africa on the one hand, and an expression of frustration at the re-election of Ronald Reagan and the continuation of his conservative agenda, on the other. The use of civil disobedience in these demonstrations was intentionally reminiscent of the civil rights movement and its unambiguous morality. Ultimately, these activists framed opposition to the Reagan administration's policy of Constructive Engagement as a measure of commitment to domestic civil rights and racial equality.

It should come as no surprise that Black conservatives waded into the debates on US policy toward South Africa, nor that they offered alternatives to the strategies and goals promoted by the progressive African American-led anti-apartheid movement. Yet, histories of both Black conservatism and the African American anti-apartheid movement have to-date neglected to consider Black conservative engagement and with the problem of apartheid and US policy toward the racist state. For Black conservatives like Jamil Jivani, this is consistent with a broader tendency for Black conservatism to be "written out of the discourse."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this erasure of black conservative actors from the historical record has been justified by some, arguing that Black conservatism was essentially a minority position in Black America that was bolstered and amplified by white conservatives.<sup>3</sup> The tension between these perspectives was expressed by Leah Wright Rigueur in her description of Black conservatism as both "invisible and hypervisible."<sup>4</sup>

It remains that scholars of Black conservatism have focused almost exclusively on their critiques of domestic civil rights politics like affirmative action. At the same time, histories of

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<sup>2</sup> Jamil Jivani, "Silencing of Black Conservatives," *National Post*, Apr. 22, 2021, A1.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Toler, "Black Conservatives," in ed. Chip Berlet, *Eyes Right! Challenging the Right Wing Backlash*, (Boston: South End Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Leah Wright Rigueur, *Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

African American engagement with South Africa have continued to concentrate on those who fit the mould of a civil rights or Black radical activist. The accusation by renowned scholar Cornel West that Black conservatives were “mere apologists” for the Reagan administration and displayed a “relative silence” on US policy toward South Africa remained unchallenged and unexamined.<sup>5</sup>

As this thesis demonstrates, Black conservatives from across the conservative spectrum were highly engaged with the problem of apartheid and the condition of Black South Africans. In many ways Black conservatives were successful in influencing the direction and impact of US relations with South Africa. Most notably, perhaps, is the work of Leon Sullivan and the Sullivan Principles, which was the prevailing approach of both the Reagan administration’s Black empowerment strategy and the private sector’s corporate social responsibility programs. Likewise, Franklin A. Thomas’ consistent dismissal of calls to withdraw from South Africa and his focus on sustainable local self-help initiatives and legal challenges while at the Ford Foundation had a lasting impact on the philanthropic sector. An expert in finding common ground, Thomas also acted as an important mediator in tense negotiations between various political actors in South Africa during its transition away from apartheid. As the diplomatic activism of Ambassador Edward Perkins and the sponsorship of Black businesses in the US African Development Fund show, Black conservatives also worked within the US government and utilised their power to enact and direct US policy toward South Africa as they saw fit.

Other Black conservatives outlined their philosophy and dedicated time and resources to the problem of Southern Africa too. Maurice Dawkins and Black Americans for a Free Angola attempted to build a popular movement in African American communities in support of Jonas Savimbi in Angola, in line with the Reagan administration’s renewed commitment to

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<sup>5</sup> Cornel West, “Unmasking the Black Conservatives,” *The Christian Century*, Jul. 16, 1986, 645.

providing aid to anti-communist forces. The Coalition for Southern Africa initially hoped to redirect African American activists into focusing on building a post-apartheid society in South Africa before it collapsed under the pressure of *Blackthink* and anti-apartheid activist criticism. J.A. Parker and Williams Keyes attempted to frame the African American anti-apartheid movement as a communist front and advocated for greater US support of the apartheid regime in its own battle against communist incursion allegedly disguised as an anti-apartheid freedom movement.

For Black conservative intellectuals like Thomas Sowell and Walter E. Williams, US policy toward South Africa and the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa and the United States became a regular topic in their syndicated columns and academic work. These iconoclasts both outlined their perspectives on South Africa, but also criticised African American anti-apartheid activists. In many ways, just as the anti-apartheid cause was considered a civil rights issue worthy of activism by liberal African Americans, for Sowell and Williams, this interpretation of South Africa became another reason to push back against the traditional civil rights style of Black politics. Deroy Murdock, whilst not having the same media reach, also tried to challenge the civil rights framework of anti-apartheid activism and advocated for African American support of the Reagan administration's policy of Constructive Engagement. Indeed, Murdock spent much of 1985 traveling across the United States to speak on college campuses and debate leading figures in the anti-apartheid movement, including Congressman Walter Fauntroy, and Congressman Mickey Leland.

One problem with the existing literature that focusses on Black conservatism as a domestic political movement is the fact that Black conservatives travelled to and engaged with Southern Africa extensively; indeed, they had been doing so in different ways for over 80 years. Many like Franklin A. Thomas, Leon Sullivan, David Bolen, Walter E. Williams, Robert Brown, and Alan Keyes, had personal and professional experience in the region and perhaps

an even greater knowledge of the complicated political realities than some of the anti-apartheid activists in the United States. For some, like Williams and Brown, their personal connections to conservative powerbrokers in South Africa enabled them to receive visas and travel more freely than African Americans who had criticised the apartheid regime. For others, travel to South Africa was a part of their professional work, whether commercial, philanthropic, or diplomatic. All were struck by the immorality of the apartheid system and associated the plight of Black South Africans with their own experiences of segregation in the United States.

Indeed, this sense of a shared experience was one of the few areas on which Black conservatives and progressive African American anti-apartheid activists agreed. In this way Black conservatism overlapped with Black internationalism in ways scarcely recognised in existing scholarship. The thesis has demonstrated that the ethos and developmentalist visions of Black conservatives toward South Africa in the 1980s were both consistent with their broader approach to racial advancement and a continuation of longer historical traditions within African American history. In doing so, the thesis illustrates Black conservative internationalism as a legitimate expression of Pan-African identity and subverts the aberration narrative that has dismissed these individuals as anomalous exceptions.

### **Black Conservatives and the Policy of Constructive Engagement**

It was over the best strategies to bring about the end of the apartheid system that Black conservatives and progressive Black activists diverged. The approaches of Black conservatives were more closely in line with the Reagan administration and Constructive Engagement, the policy established by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker. Crocker rejected the ‘ethnic diplomacy’ that had determined policy during the Carter administration and arguably contributed to the expansion of Soviet influence around the globe. Channelling

Reagan's commitment to a conservative form of internationalism, Crocker combined realist political calculations about strategic interests in southern Africa with the liberal goal of expanding freedom and democracy.<sup>6</sup> The policy of Constructive Engagement was a framework in which to improve relations with South Africa, a traditional anti-communist ally, and bring about regional peace by reversing communist gains in southern Africa. Crocker argued that building diplomatic, economic, and cultural links to South Africa enabled the US to leverage increased influence with the South African government and encourage reform away from apartheid.

Black conservatives on the whole agreed with Crocker's premise. Importantly, Black conservatives believed that the strategy to deepen economic ties between the two nations was a sustainable and effective approach to Black South African advancement. This was in contrast to the complete withdrawal advocated by the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, members of Congress, and the United Nations. Consistent with a traditional conservative Black internationalist view of development in Africa, however, Black conservatives advocated for solutions based in the private sector and in market-based approaches. If there was a new element in the way the tradition was being applied, it was the salience of the multi-national corporation over the traditional missionary-based development program. Black conservatives argued that economic investment in Black advancement not only reduced poverty and had a measurable impact on the lives of Black South Africans, but that it also undermined the apartheid government's regulation of the South African economy and therefore weakened the racist system. The Black conservatives examined in this thesis all believed that U.S. corporations could operate as a centre of reform and development. Black conservatives and the

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Nau, "Conservative Internationalism," *Policy Review*, Jul. 30, 2008. <https://www.hoover.org/research/conservative-internationalism>.

Reagan administration alike, became vocal advocates for the Sullivan Principles as the best approach to Black empowerment in South Africa.

Black conservatives, like the Reagan administration, also emphasised the importance of education. A central component of the 'Black empowerment' strategy of Constructive Engagement was the funding of scholarships for Black South Africans. This aid program started with USD\$40,000 in 1981 and reached a peak of \$25 million in 1988.<sup>7</sup> For Black conservatives, education and vocational training were the best tools for individual self-help and collective uplift. This was deeply reminiscent of the tradition of conservative Black internationalism. Education was a definitive aspect of African American strategies of uplift in the early twentieth century missionary work. Resembling this work, David Bolen focused his attention - and DuPont resources - on Black education in South Africa. After only a year, Bolen had convinced DuPont to fund five scholarships to a school established through capital by the Sullivan signatories, as well as supply buildings and materials for two other local schools and participate in the US-South Africa Educational Exchange Program.<sup>8</sup> For Black conservatives, one of the biggest impacts of withdrawal would be the end of educational ties and financial support for Black South Africans attempting to create a more prosperous future for themselves.

At its core, however, Constructive Engagement was a Cold War policy. Of central importance was the containment and reversal of Soviet gains in the region and the reassertion of American power. For Crocker and the Reagan administration, the white government in South Africa was the biggest anti-communist ally in the region. This strategic alliance with the apartheid regime, as well as the ANC's communist ties, made it an unsavoury proposition to pressure for a radical change of governance. Black conservatives agreed. As many argued

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<sup>7</sup> Pauline Baker, *South Africa: Time Running Out: Update* (New York: Ford Foundation Foreign Policy Association, 1989), 23.

<sup>8</sup> David Bolen, "Letter to Norman Jaskol of Public Employees' Retirement Association of Colorado, Sept. 13, 1983," *David Benjamin Bolen Papers* [Box 29, Folder 1], Hoover Institution Library & Archives.

throughout the 1980s, the end of apartheid was only the first step; more important was the type of regime that replaced it. Sowell and Williams were particularly vocal proponents of this view, arguing that simply replacing a white oppressor with a Black one would not improve the lives of Black South Africans.

In a related way, Black conservatives were critical of the approach of African American anti-apartheid activists because they believed that the strategies of disinvestment and economic sanctions would further radicalise Black South Africans, particularly as their situation worsened with economic downturn. These events, they feared, would push South Africa towards dysfunction, revolution, and communism. This scenario was why Alan Keyes accused anti-apartheid activists in the US, South Africa, and the United Nations of taking a “violent approach.”<sup>9</sup> The Black conservatives considered within this thesis shared an anti-communist view that rejected revolutionary strategies, including political unrest and radical change. More than simply anti-communism, however, this view embodied a conservative realism that focused on pragmatic and incremental gains over large-scale emancipatory visions that ran the risk of unintended consequences. This realist gradualism was a key feature of Black conservatism that explains why these individuals favoured economic development and legal challenges, as well as personal improvement through respectability politics and education.

### **The Rise of Colin Powell**

Arguably, Powell’s appointment to chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff in 1989 heralded a new commitment by the incoming Bush administration to utilise Black conservative talent, paving the way for the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court in 1991

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Keyes, “We Will Not Abandon the People of South Africa, Black or White,” in *American Foreign Policy Current Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1986).



and the rise of a new generation of Black conservatives. Powell was appointed to National Security Advisor in December 1987, the position making him the highest-ranking African American in the Reagan administration and of one the leading figures in US foreign policy. On 21 January 1988, barely a month after his appointment, Powell delivered the keynote address to the annual award ceremony for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, an African American research institution. Recognising the significance of the event, both the White House and African American leaders took great interest in Powell's performance before the Black crowd.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the "most controversial" moment of Powell's keynote address, according to journalist Ethel Payne, was the point at which he referred to the issue of Southern Africa.<sup>11</sup>

As the new National Security Advisor told the audience,

I cannot close without taking a few minutes to talk about South Africa, because all of us here are concerned about that situation. And rarely has our country been so unanimous about a foreign policy goal and that is the end of the hated apartheid system and its replacement with a democratic and progressive South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

Echoing the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., Powell explained, "The issue" was "where do we go from here?"<sup>13</sup> Repeating well-known Black conservative positions, Powell pointed to the positive role of US corporations in improving the economic conditions, education, and equality of Black South Africans. As he stated, "We should not come to think our most effective tools in South Africa are negative acts such as sanctions...American firms operating in South Africa are at the forefront of promoting Black empowerment."<sup>14</sup> As for African Americans in the United States, Powell argued, economic empowerment for Black South Africans provided

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Powell, "A Salute to Black Elected Officials," *C-Span*, Jan. 21, 1988, 20:00. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?1116-1/salute-black-elected-officials>.

<sup>11</sup> Ethel Payne, "Point Man for Reagan," *Afro-American*, Feb. 6, 1988, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Powell, "A Salute to Black Elected Officials," 49:10.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Powell, "A Salute to Black Elected Officials," 50:30.

opportunities for education, training, and promotion, which enabled people to “lead good lives.”<sup>15</sup>

Powell’s position was condemned by many in the 1,600 strong audience. As Payne reported, Powell’s examination of South Africa “brought an audible groan to the audience.”<sup>16</sup> In a now familiar pattern, Payne went on to denounce the speech and suggested that it was evidence that Powell had become the latest “Reagan spokesperson for appeasement of the apartheid regime.”<sup>17</sup> As the “point man” for the Reagan administration’s policy toward South Africa, Powell was, in Payne’s view, the “chief apologist, whose major responsibility...is to sell a failed policy that can only add to the grief and misery of the majority in South Africa.”<sup>18</sup> Fellow African American journalist Alfreda Madison concluded that in “lobbying” for the Administration’s approach to a Black audience, Powell had shown himself to be “Reagan’s puppet.”<sup>19</sup> As Madison argued, “why didn’t he advise Mr. Reagan that to speak of continued investments in South Africa” at the award ceremony was “political suicide.”<sup>20</sup> Responding to the criticism Powell appeared unmoved, explaining, “This is the fourth speech I’ve given today, and the three other groups didn’t want to hear it either.”<sup>21</sup>

Powell’s successful career following the speech also disproved Madison’s theory of political suicide. For his service in the final years of the Reagan administration, Powell was promoted to four-star General and served as chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff for President George H.W. Bush. In this role, the highest military position in the United States, Powell oversaw many foreign policy crises and developed the Powell Doctrine, a formula for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ethel Payne, “Point Man for Reagan,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 6, 1988, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Alfreda Madison, “From Capitol Hill: Black Elected Officials Chart Future Course,” *Washington Informer*, Feb. 10, 1988, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Colin Powell quoted in Reginald Stuart, “Top Reagan Advisor Defends Aid to Contras,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, Jan. 22, 1988, 20.

determining military action based on national interest, well-defined goals, and exit strategy.<sup>22</sup> Powell emerged from this role in 1993 as a national hero. Popular with Republicans, Democrats, and large sections of the Black community, it seemed possible for a time that Powell could become the first African American president of the United States.<sup>23</sup> While Powell did not seek public office in the 1990s as some had predicted, he continued to serve in the upper echelons of US foreign policy, as Secretary of State for George W. Bush. As Secretary of State, Powell dealt with the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and the first phase of the War on Terror.<sup>24</sup> Not only was Powell the first African American to serve as National Security Advisor, chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, and Secretary of State, he is currently the only American to have served as all three.

In contrast to the views of Payne and Madison, Powell's articulation of the Reagan administration's controversial approach to southern Africa to a Black audience can be understood as a genuine commitment to a conservative Black internationalist and developmentalist tradition. That he was able to do this while representing the Reagan administration and build a solid reputation with African American communities at the same time was quite remarkable. Yet, as African American journalist William Raspberry once noted Powell had "true Black power" because,

The nation has seen civil rights leaders become national figures for speaking out on racism, hunger, and poverty. But America has never seen a Black man's experience, talent, skills, and loyalty rewarded with high office to the nation's performance as a world leader.<sup>25</sup>

Powell's daily access to the President gave him unprecedented and unparalleled access and influence over US foreign policy. As Clarence Lusane argued, the appointment of Powell and

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<sup>22</sup> Colin Powell, "U.S. Forces and the Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 5 (1992), 36-40.

<sup>23</sup> Donald R. Kinder and Corrine M. McConaughy, "Military Triumph, Racial Transcendence, and Colin Powell," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2006), 140.

<sup>24</sup> By the end of 2004 Powell's reputation would be irreparably damaged because of his leadership in the Iraq War. See: Walter LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009): 71-93.

<sup>25</sup> Juan Williams, "True Black Power-Colin Powell," *Washington Post*, Jan. 15, 1989.

Condoleezza Rice to the highest echelons of foreign policy construction “represented a significant breakthrough in terms of participation of Black Americans in US foreign policy.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite recognising his importance, scholars remain divided over Powell’s legacy and the legitimacy of his conservatism. Some, like political scientist Michael C. Dawson, argue that Powell should be considered within the ‘conservative Black’ tradition.<sup>27</sup> This view considers Powell’s conservatism moderate and significantly different from most other highly visible Black conservatives (largely because of his support of affirmative action and abortion). Christopher Alan Bracey, in contrast, places Powell firmly within the tradition of Black conservatism and the likes of Sowell and Thomas because “his fiscal conservativeness cannot be overstated.”<sup>28</sup> Angela K. Lewis got to the heart of this division when she argued that Powell was “an intriguing element to contemporary Black conservatism” only because of “the respect he received by many in the Black community.”<sup>29</sup> The reality is that Powell did not fit neatly within either of the Black conservative or conservative Black categories. Indeed, Powell demonstrates the limitations of the assumption that all Black conservatives had an antagonistic relationship with African American communities and were removed from Black political traditions.

Just as many of the other Black conservatives considered in this thesis, the impulse to categorise Powell into one of two types of African American conservatism obscures his ideology more than it illuminates. By breaking down this division and examining Black conservatism as a cohesive but nonetheless broad spectrum, this thesis has examined the philosophies of significant individual black conservatives in their own right. As for Powell, he

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<sup>26</sup> Clarence Lusane, “What Color is Hegemony? Powell, Rice and the New Global Strategies,” *New Political Science* 27, no. 1 (2005), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 301-2.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Bracey, *Saviors or Sellouts: The Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism, From Booker T. Washington to Condoleezza Rice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 160-168.

<sup>29</sup> Angela K. Lewis, *Conservatism in the Black Community: To the Right and Misunderstood* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 46.

described himself as a “fiscal conservative with a social conscience.”<sup>30</sup> Powell’s position on southern Africa was informed by his racial identity. Reflecting on the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela in his commencement address at Howard University in 1994, Powell told the audience,

Together, we saw what can happen when people stop hating and begin reconciling.... Twenty-seven years of imprisonment did not embitter Nelson Mandela. He invited three jail keepers to the ceremony. He used his liberation to work with his former tormentors to create a new South Africa and to eliminate the curse of apartheid once and for all from the face of the earth. What a glorious example he is to us.... African-Americans have come too far and we have too far yet to go to take a detour into the swamp of hatred.<sup>31</sup>

Like many African Americans, Powell supported civil rights, valued his racial heritage, and felt an emotional connection to Africa.

At the same time, Powell’s position on Southern Africa was consistent with his Black conservative worldview. Powell embraced a conservative philosophy that included anti-communism, belief in free market enterprise and its role in democratic state-building, and a faith in American exceptionalism in line with the Republican administrations he served. In the case of South Africa, this meant that Powell was philosophically opposed to the strategies that had defined African American anti-apartheid activism. Powell agreed with the fundamental themes of conservative Black internationalism, particularly the scepticism towards revolutionary politics and grand emancipatory visions. Notably, Powell’s understanding Black internationalism have remained largely outside of scholarly analysis.

As with the other Black conservatives considered, Powell’s philosophy does not fit within the left-progressive model of Black internationalism. The appointment of Powell to National Security Advisor marked the beginning of an era in which Black conservatives were

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<sup>30</sup> Colin Powell with Joseph E. Perisco, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1995), 608.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Powell, “Commencement Address at Howard University, Washington, D.C., May 14, 1994.” <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/cpowell.html>

an influential force in US foreign policy. Powell's work tapped into a long and deep tradition of Black conservative internationalism. Powell once again demonstrated that Black conservative attitudes and activities regarding Constructive Engagement, previously marginalised or ignored, deserve to be investigated and understood in proper historical context. Black conservatism was both varied and coherent, a set of dynamic, related and historically responsive efforts to apply the longer tradition of conservative Black developmentalism and internationalism to apartheid South Africa and the international sphere more broadly.

### **Blackface on White Power?**

The legacy of the work of Black conservatives before Powell remains mixed. As the experience of the Coalition for Southern Africa demonstrated, the criticism and pressure that they received from members of African American communities ended their engagement with South Africa. The association of US anti-apartheid activism with the African American struggle for racial justice meant that Black conservative perspectives and critiques were often seen –and criticised— as subversive and ‘selling out’. While facing derision by many in the African American community, Black conservatives were also largely excluded from the implementation of Constructive Engagement. Despite the Reagan administration making a concerted effort to utilise Black conservatives in the campaign against the anti-apartheid movement, the Administration overwhelmingly failed to capitalise on and publicise the work of these individuals.

Critics generally considered the views of Black conservatives on South Africa as marginal and inauthentic. The focus of some Black conservatives, like J.A. Parker, on criticising the activism of Black South Africans and African Americans much more than the apartheid regime provides some insight into why this was the case. On the few occasions that scholars have considered Black conservatives and South Africa, they largely reproduced this

picture of the Black conservative as ‘sellout’ and Black conservative internationalism as ‘aberrant’ without further interrogation. However, as Leah Wright Rigueur argued, this treatment of Black conservatism not only “fails to attend to the past,” but also overlooks a “very real and significant Black political tradition.”<sup>32</sup> In concord with Rigueur’s argument, this thesis has explored Black conservative engagement with South Africa within the context of a longer tradition of conservative Black internationalism. In doing so, it has recovered the way this tradition informed Black conservative views and their impact on the anti-apartheid crisis. By widening Black internationalism to include conservative expressions and approaches, the thesis has mapped, explained, and linked so-called outliers, and reintegrated them into a longer historical narrative of African American engagement with South Africa.

In demonstrating Black conservative engagement with the problem of apartheid, this thesis joins a small but growing body of work that goes beyond the simplistic narrative of white manipulation and Black betrayal when it comes to Black conservatism and considers the phenomenon as a legitimate expression of African American thought. Further, the thesis has shown that the Black conservatives in the 1980s whose values aligned with the Reagan administration’s policy of Constructive Engagement can be understood within a longer conservative tradition in African American history generally, and Black engagement with South Africa specifically. The economic empowerment strategies of Booker T. Washington, respectability politics of Madie Hall Xuma, and the anti-communism of Max Yergan demonstrate that Black conservative support of Constructive Engagement was an expression of a long-term strand of African American internationalism with deep roots in both US and international history.

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<sup>32</sup> Leah Wright Rigueur, *Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

Engaging with multiple fields of specialisation, this thesis has drawn on, challenged, and expanded a number of key areas of African American history. The thesis contributes to the emerging literature on African Americans within conservative movements in the United States, situating the Black conservatives within key schools of conservative thought. Whether it was Sowell's position within the Chicago School of Economics, Alan Keyes and the religious right, or Walter E. Williams and libertarianism, these Black conservatives were influenced by and participants in a variety of multiethnic conservative spaces. In outlining Black conservative engagement with a key foreign policy, the thesis also expands the literature on Black conservatism beyond domestic politics to include Black internationalist thought seriously for the first time. Finally, the thesis seeks directly to refute the prevailing "aberration" model used to explain away Black conservatives. Far from imaging Black conservatives as "ideological orphans" in their engagement with the world, the thesis has shown that contemporary Black conservatives no longer appear as surprising or aberrant when seen in their own self-consciously realised tradition of Black developmentalist internationalism.



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