RALPH BUNCHE: DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR, INTERNATIONAL STATESMAN AND EQUAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ralph J. Bunche was a remarkable American whose legacy is becoming all too distant to our collective memory. During the mid-20th century, he had an illustrious career working to better the conditions of life for the oppressed in America and throughout the world. He was a distinguished scholar, activist and statesman, evidenced by a list of highlights of his achievements. In 1949, he received the Spingarn Medal presented by the NAACP, an award given annually to an African-American for noble achievement.† Credited with many accomplishments in diplomacy and political science, he reached a pinna-

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The Ralph Bunche Collection consists of over 400 items comprised of books, journals, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, news clippings and miscellaneous documents dating from the 1930s through the 1960s. These items were in Dr. Bunche’s personal library upon his death. The collection was purchased from booksellers by the law library and is a special collection in development. Subsequently acquired from private booksellers are four miscellaneous pieces. One is a framed photograph and note written and signed by Ralph Bunche, United Nations Under-Secretary, and initialed by Dag Hammarskjold, United Nations Secretary-General from 1953 to 1961. Another is a scribbled note signed by Ralph Bunche submitting an informal report to the Secretary-General as requested. A third consists of a brief note from Ralph Bunche attached to a draft of a UN resolution from Dag Hammarskjold. The fourth is an inter-office penciled note from Hammarskjold to Bunche.

† BRIAN URQUHART, RALPH BUNCHE: AN AMERICAN LIFE 226 (1993).
cle in his career in 1950 when he won the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the armistice between Israel and four separate Arab nations: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In the 1960s, Dr. Bunche received the Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon Baines Johnson, participated in Dr. Martin Luther King’s protest march on Washington, and marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma, Alabama. Dr. Bunche dedicated his life and career to the achievement of the noble goals he believed in: a “peaceful and just world,” and a “fully democratic America.”

Though his career was marked with internationally recognized achievements, Dr. Bunche was an unpretentious man who did not seek accolades or desire to be cast into the limelight. His close friend, Sir Brian Urquhart, recalled that when Dr. Bunche was told he was to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, he wrote to the committee explaining that he would not be able to accept the award. In Bunche’s view, he did not work in the United Nations Secretariat to win personal honors, and he only accepted the award after he was convinced it would be beneficial to the United Nations. He sought recognition, not for himself, but for the injustice that exists in the world. Although Dr. Bunche did not seek praise, he is a man deserving of it.

The accomplishments of Dr. Bunche’s life and career as a scholar, activist and statesman are the result of a fluid integration throughout his life of intellectual development and practical determination. His triumphs in these various areas cannot be divided on a timeline into categorical periods of allegiance. He saw each as intertwined, and remained dedicated to each throughout his life. This essay highlights the major achievements in his remarkable career by focusing on three ma-

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2 Id. at 199-231.
3 RALPH BUNCHE: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES xxiv (Benjamin Rivlin ed., 1990) [hereinafter THE MAN AND HIS TIMES].
4 URQUHART, supra note 1, at 367.
6 See Dr. Ralph Bunche, The Alternatives: Peace or Ruin; Justice or Degen-
ereacy, Address accepting the 34th Spingarn Medal at NAACP 40th Annual Conven-
tion, Los Angeles, California (July 17, 1949), partially reprinted in Benjamin Rivlin, The Legacy of Ralph Bunche, in 3 THE MAN AND HIS TIMES, supra note 3, at 3.
7 Interview by Harry Kriesler with Sir Brian Urquhart, former Undersecretary General of the United Nations, at the Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, Cal. (Mar 19, 1996), available at http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/UN/
Urquhart/urquhart0.html (last visited March 24, 2005).
8 Id. Dr. Bunche later accepted the award after Secretary-General Trygve Lie suggested that accepting would be for the good of the United Nations. Id.
jor categories, solely as an organizational tool for the reader: academics, international statesmanship, and racial equality activism.

II. The Scholar

Ralph Johnson Bunche was born on August 7, 1903\(^9\) in Detroit, Michigan. At the age of thirteen, his mother died from complications with tuberculosis.\(^10\) Dr. Bunche and his sister were raised by his maternal grandmother, Lucy Taylor Johnson.\(^11\) She instilled in him a strong sense of pride for his black heritage and a deep regard for the importance of education.\(^12\) This early training from his grandmother produced the result of Bunche accomplishing scholastic excellence his entire life. In 1922, he graduated first in his class from Jefferson High School in Los Angeles.\(^13\) In 1927, he once again achieved the distinguished status of class valedictorian upon graduation from UCLA.\(^14\)

In 1928, Bunche was awarded a tuition fellowship for graduate study in political science at Harvard University.\(^15\) While pursuing the graduate program he was serious about his studies, but also allowed time for personal relationships.\(^16\) He made two lifelong friends in William Hastie, who later became the first black federal judge, and Robert Weaver, who later served as the head of the Housing and Home Finance Corporation in the Kennedy administration and as Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Johnson.\(^17\)

Soon after earning his Masters degree in Political Science at Harvard University, Bunche received an appointment as an Instructor at Howard University, in Washington D.C.\(^18\) In this position, he under-

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\(^9\) There is some discrepancy in the actual year of Dr. Bunche's birth. Some historians date the birth year as 1904 even though his school records show his birth date as 1903. A possible explanation for the discrepancy is offered by Sir Brian Urquhart, who explains that Dr. Bunche's birth certificate was lost. When his aunt took the family Bible to a notary to get a new birth verification, the date listed in the Bible was 1904. Urquhart also notes that Dr. Bunche's sister's birth date was listed one year late also. URQUHART, supra note 1, at 25-26.

\(^10\) Id. at 29.

\(^11\) Id. at 31.

\(^12\) Id. at 33.

\(^13\) Id. at 35.

\(^14\) Id. at 41.

\(^15\) Id. at 42.

\(^16\) Id. at 43.

\(^17\) Id.

\(^18\) Id. at 44.
took the project of organizing and heading Howard's first political science department. Bunche was soon promoted to full professor, and was an active member of the Howard faculty for six years. He took a leave of absence from teaching at Howard University to pursue government service, fully intending to return to teaching. In 1950, Bunche gave up his position as professor of political science when he finally realized he would never be able to return to academic life.

In 1932, Bunche was awarded a fellowship for research of the French and British colonization in West Africa for his doctoral dissertation. The next year he spent several months in Dahomey and Togoland and observed what he considered to be the exploitation of the African people by the French and German Administrations. He wrote more than a mere scholarly dissertation on the subject, and acquired "a deep interest in the development of the subject peoples and the hopes which the future holds for them." His dissertation received the Toppan Prize for the year's best essay in Political Science, and earned him the Ph.D. in Government and International relations from Harvard University, making him the first black American to receive a Ph.D. in that discipline. Dr. Ralph Bunche was now considered the primary American authority on colonialism in Africa.

In 1936, Dr. Bunche published his first book, *A World View of Race*, which set forth his views on colonization and imperialism as a product of greed and a means of exploitation and oppression. The book describes how the institutions of colonialism and racism support each other. He declared that the enslavement of blacks in the Amer-
can South was caused by considerations of economics, not race; however, race was soon cited as the justification for the inhumane institution. 30 Racism, he explained, stems from the much greater problem of class war. 31

One year later, Dr. Bunche was awarded a Social Science Research Council Fellowship to pursue postdoctoral studies in anthropology and colonial policy at The London School of Economics and the University of Cape Town, and for field research in South, East and West Africa. 32 On his trips to Africa, Dr. Bunche made many notes detailing cultural life and political activities there. 33 His studies would not lead to significant publication of his findings, but did prepare him for his future government service and his United Nations’ work of developing trusteeship concepts. 34

Dr. Bunche’s scholastic work on the status of the non-European African peoples was preempted due, at least in part, to his participation in the Carnegie Corporation-funded study of race in the United States, the first major study of its kind. 35 As the main assistant to Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal, Bunche contributed four monographs, one of which was 1,660 pages, to the study. His reports were based on field research conducted throughout the South. 36 This study would later lead to the 1944 publication by Gunnar Myrdal of An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. The book would prove to be very influential in the equal rights movement. It has been cited in some thirty judicial decisions, 37 including

30 Id. at 29-30.
31 Id. at 36.
32 THE MAN AND HIS TIMES, supra note 3, at xxii.
33 Huggins, supra note 25, at 79.
35 “Trusteeship” is the principle of cooperating with colonies to help them become an individual nation, in contrast to imperialism. Id.
36 Id.
37 See United States v. Barber, 80 F.3d 964, 971 (4th Cir. 1996); Ortiz v. City of Phila. Office of the City Comm’rs Voter Registration Div., 28 F.3d 306, 326 (3rd Cir. 1994); Dawson v. Milwaukee Hous. Auth., 930 F.2d 1283, 1286 (7th Cir. 1991); Frazier v. Hebbe, 788 F.2d 1049, 1058, n.5 (5th Cir. 1986); Shaare Tefila Congregation v. Cobb, 785 F.2d 523, 530 (4th Cir. 1986); United States v. Am. Future Sys., Inc., 743 F.2d 169, 181, n.8 (3rd Cir. 1984); United States v. Smith, 519 F.2d 516, 521 (9th Cir. 1975); Stevens v. Dobs, Inc., 483 F.2d 82, 84, n.2 (4th Cir. 1973); Esslinger v. Thomas, 476 F.2d 225, 231, n.8 (4th Cir. 1973); United Packinghouse, Food & Allied Workers Int’l Union v. Nat’l Labor Relations Bd., 416 F.2d 1126, 1136 (D.C. Cir. 1968); Hurd v. Hodge, 162 F.2d 233, 244, n.36 (D.C. Cir. 1947);
five United States Supreme Court opinions,\textsuperscript{38} and was one of the key documents on which the Court based its landmark decision holding segregation in public schools unconstitutional in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}.\textsuperscript{39}

III. THE INTERNATIONAL STATESMAN

In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Office of the Coordinator of Information (OCI) to gather information and intelligence in anticipation of the United States' involvement in World War II.\textsuperscript{40} From this came the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).\textsuperscript{41} Dr. Bunche was appointed Head of the Africa Section of the Research and Analysis Branch.\textsuperscript{42} During his service in the OSS he wrote a handbook providing economic, geographic and sociological background on North and West Africa to the troops headed there to fight.\textsuperscript{43}

Despite the OSS's resistance to his departure, Dr. Bunche left at the end of 1943 to begin work at the State Department.\textsuperscript{44} He was sworn in on January 4, 1944.\textsuperscript{45} Bunche had held a position in the Near Eastern and African Section of the State Department only briefly, when the Director of the International Security Organization section, a

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\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Brown}, 347 U.S. at 495, n.11.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{URQUHART}, supra note 1, at 101.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Id.} The OSS was the institutional predecessor to what later became the Central Intelligence Agency. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Id.} at 103.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Id.} at 109-110.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Id.} at 110.
postwar planning unit working on the future of colonial territories, requested that Bunche be transferred to his department to assist in the work on trusteeship. While there, Dr. Bunche worked on developing the American position on colonialism in preparation for the Dunbarton Oaks and San Francisco conferences concerning the structure and principles of the United Nations.

In 1945, Dr. Bunche was a part of the United States delegation to the San Francisco Conference and the ensuing Preparatory Commission in London. The following year he served as a member of the United States delegation at the first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in London and was the principal drafter of Chapters XI and XII on trusteeship and the future of the non-self-governing territories of the United Nations Charter. He then joined the newly formed United Nations Secretariat as Director of the Trusteeship Division.

Dr. Bunche would soon become involved in the role that would eventually lead to his Nobel Peace Prize. In 1947, while serving as a member of the Secretariat staff assigned to the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, Bunche was designated to act as Chief Representative of the Secretary-General in Palestine. He was to serve in a subordinate staff role to aid the Mediator of the Arab-Israeli War, Count Folke Bernadotte. Upon the assassination of Bernadotte, Dr. Bunche, as second in command, was thrust into the position of acting mediator. In 1949, he negotiated a cease-fire and armistice agreement between the Arab states and Israel. Those who participated in the peace negotiations attributed their success largely to Dr. Bunche's personality, patience, perseverance, and fairness in dealing with the needs of all parties. In 1950 Dr. Bunche became the first black American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.
Bunche returned to his position at the United Nations and was eventually appointed Under Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1954. In this role, he organized and directed several United Nations peacekeeping operations. Among them were the peacekeeping missions in the Middle East after the Suez Crisis in 1956, in the Congo in 1960, and in Cyprus in 1962. Dr. Bunche was also instrumental in implementing a United Nations Observation Mission in Yemen following the war between Yemen and South Yemen. He went on to supervise the cease fire following the Indo-Pakistan War, and negotiated a dispute settlement among Britain, Iran and Bahrain.

In 1963, Dr. Bunche was designated by President John F. Kennedy to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award for service in peacetime. The award recognizes individuals who have made an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, or to world peace, or cultural, or other significant public or private endeavors. It was presented to him by President Lyndon Baines Johnson following Kennedy's assassination.

Ultimately, it was poor health that finally forced Dr. Bunche's retirement from the United Nations in 1971, the year of his death. As a tribute, the United Nations General Assembly stood for a moment of silence. In 1980, a steel monolith, entitled "Peace Form On," was erected in the Ralph Bunche Park across the street from the United Nations.
IV. THE EQUAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

In the early 1930s, during his time as an educator at Howard University, Dr. Bunche supported student involvement in civil rights demonstrations, despite the University's unfavorable view on such activity.71 When the faculty disciplinary committee threatened to discipline a student who had been arrested for picketing a segregated restaurant, Dr. Bunche persuasively argued that the student should be rewarded, not punished.72 He was also actively involved in organizing protests and demonstrations. In 1931, he organized a protest of the segregated presentation of Porgy and Bess at the National Theatre in Washington.73 In 1935, he helped organize a conference assessing the role of the New Deal on the economic crisis facing blacks in the United States, and subsequently presented a critique of New Deal Social Planning.74

Unhappy with the marginal impact that Roosevelt's New Deal approach would have on improving the position of blacks in the existing social structure, Dr. Bunche, along with John P. Davis, co-founded the National Negro Congress in 1936.75 He saw the congress as a means to join black and white progressives together to bring about social and economic change through political action.76 Shortly after the inception of the congress, Dr. Bunche chaired a campaign against the segregation policies of the Hecht's Department store.77 Dr. Bunche's affiliation with the congress was short-lived. By the end of the 1930s the congress had diverged from its founding views, and Dr. Bunche broke his affiliation with it.78 Bunche felt that the congress had become dominated by the Communist party.79 He gave scathing commentaries on the congress' development, including a statement that it had "dug its own grave" and would "now be reduced to a Communist cell."80

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71 Henry, supra note 5, at 54.
72 Kenneth B. Clark, Postscript: Ralph Bunche, the Human Being and the International Statesman, in 211 THE MAN AND HIS TIMES, supra note 3, at 212-13. Kenneth B. Clark was the student that Dr. Bunche defended. Mr. Clark maintained a lasting relationship with Dr. Bunche until his death. Id. at 213.
73 Henry, supra note 5, at 59; URQUHART, supra note 1, at 99.
74 John B. Kirby, Race, Class, and Politics: Ralph Bunche and Black Protest, in 28 THE MAN AND HIS TIMES, supra note 3, at 35-46.
75 Id. at 36.
76 Id. at 36-37.
77 Henry, supra note 5, at 59.
78 Kirby, supra note 75, at 37.
79 Id. at 38.
80 Id.
Bunche’s affiliation with groups the government listed as Communist Fronts, like the National Negro Congress and the International Committee on African Affairs, was the subject of an investigation by the FBI in 1942. Dr. Bunche responded to FBI accusations that he supported communist ideals by citing anti-communist articles he had written and showing that he had resigned his affiliation with these groups when Max Yerman, a well-known communist spokesman, assumed leadership. Dr. Bunche was completely exonerated in the 1942 investigation. In 1953, the FBI conducted a more prolonged investigation into Dr. Bunche’s past after an Executive Order mandated an investigation of certain United Nations employees’ loyalty. Dr. Bunche’s role in the co-founding of the National Negro Congress was yet again the major focus of the inquiry. This investigation proved to be more intense, and culminated in a hearing before the International Organizations Employee Loyalty Board that lasted for over ten hours. Dr. Bunche was once again exonerated and given a “favorable loyalty determination” by federal officials.

Ralph Bunche believed the nation’s security was dependent on its citizens’ civil rights, and, in the same way, international peace was dependent on human rights. Though he spent most of the next twenty years devoted to his work with the United Nations and the worldwide struggle for racial justice, he remained involved in the struggle for equality at home. As stated earlier, Dr. Bunche was awarded the Spingarn Medal by the NAACP, its highest honor, in 1949. He also assumed the position of director of the NAACP, which he held until his death.

V. Conclusion

Dr. Bunche’s entire life demonstrated his tireless commitment to realizing the dream of a world that recognizes the equality of humans. This is evident in the countless speeches he wrote and delivered in
support of integration and renouncing racism of all kinds. Further examples are his participation in the 1963 March on Washington and in the Selma to Montgomery March for voting rights in 1965, alongside Dr. King. When the March reached the state capitol, Dr. Bunche walked on aching legs up the steps and declared "I am here as an American, an American with a conscience, a sense of justice, and a deep concern for all of the people and problems of our country." His work in brokering international peace during a time of Mideast crisis also shows that this deep concern extended to all citizens around the world. His remarkable life and career served to shape law both domestically and internationally at a time when the civil and human rights of individuals hung in the balance. Our world would be quite different today without the life of Dr. Bunche. He is truly worthy of our remembrance.

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91 URQUHART, supra note 1, at 233.
92 Id. at 367.
93 Henry, supra note 5, at 62.
94 Id. (citing March on Montgomery from Selma, 25 March 1964, Ralph Bunche Papers, UCLA, Box 57). Henry explains that Dr. Bunche's sore legs were due to the fact that he suffered from diabetes and phlebitis. Id.