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Par for the Corps:

Black Diplomats and Race in U.S. Foreign Policy

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Naakoshie Awurama Mills

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Par for the Corps:

Black Diplomats and Race in U.S. Foreign Policy

by

Naakoshie Awurama Mills

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Laurie K. Hart, Chair

Black Americans hold a long tradition of civil activism in domestic politics and social change in the United States, while also sustaining a strong presence in international affairs. Throughout the 20th century, many African Americans joined the Department of State's diplomatic corps, the U.S. Foreign Service, amidst racial injustice and discrimination at home. Black Americans, belonging to a historically marginalized group, can assert Black, American, or a combination of identities in diplomacy and global cooperative efforts. They deploy foundational expectations of diplomatic statecraft, but also, a *Black Diplomacy,* the legacy of representation and the unique tactics and approaches to foreign policy informed by racial identity and subjectivity. This thesis frames the concept of Black Diplomacy in a continuum of racialization and global governance and opens dialogue on the tensions, opportunities, or limitations that arise in identifying as both Black and American. I argue for a larger exploration on the diverse experiences of African American diplomats and whether their identities and perceptions may encourage a new departure for U.S. foreign policy formation and implementation.

The thesis of Naakoshie Awurama Mills is approved.

Andrew Apter

Sobukwe Okpara Odinga

Laurie K. Hart, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

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I. Introduction

In U.S. foreign policy formulation towards Africa, Black Americans have been seen as a bridge for positive diplomatic relations based on a presumed shared heritage of African descent and racial solidarities of Pan-Africanism. There is a rich tradition of African Americans in foreign policy within the Department of State (DOS), the Military, and other government agencies. Black Americans' historical marginalization in the United States places them in a distinct position to form and circulate foreign policymaking differently than their White counterparts and diplomats share a sense of patriotism as well as racial consciousness when working abroad. In this way, their racial identity, not just nationality, can inform the way they conceive, interpret, and imagine the United States in global affairs. Black diplomacy refers to African Americans' longstanding participation in U.S. government initiatives abroad as well as their unique tactics and approaches to foreign policy, informed by racial identity and difference.

U.S. racism has not only limited African Americans' full participation in society, but also perpetuated violence and oppression. The extent of police brutality and systemic racism towards African Americans has long been documented and ignored; but recently, more vocal movements like Black Lives Matter have succeeded in drawing political attention to these abuses. Despite domestic challenges, Black Americans still represent U.S. interests overseas. This study seeks to open dialogue on the experiences of Black Americans in public service, specifically DOS, and how racial identity informs foreign policy approaches and builds transnational intragroup networks.

Building on existing scholarship (Heywood, et al. 2015) this project will delve into the duality of identities, tensions, possibilities, and/or restrictions, which may arise in the course of diplomatic practice, stemming from a dual Black American consciousness. An ethnography of

African Americans at the Department of State opens conversation on the nature of Black diplomacy and their experiences within the U.S. government. Are there tensions that arise from expressing complex identities, Black and American, when implementing and representing U.S. foreign policy abroad? I argue for a larger exploration on the diverse experiences of U.S. diplomats and whether their identities and perceptions may encourage a new departure for foreign policy formation and implementation. The research will illustrate professional networks of Black diplomats, their overseas assignments, as well as work in the Department of State in Washington, D.C. Building on theories of identity, transnationalism, and global governance, this project will broaden perspectives on African American political engagement in African studies and offer greater insight into the processes of racialization and White supremacy inherent in U.S. foreign policymaking.

This paper will offer background on the landscape of African American career members within the Department of State diplomatic corps. I will delve into some aspects of representation and diversity in the field and describe Black diplomats' approaches to foreign policy formulation. This paper will also provide life histories and perspectives of two career African American diplomats and their experience in policy work at the Department, based on data collected through semi-structured interviews. This introductory study will be the backdrop of a wider dissertation project, which will examine U.S. foreign policy approaches to Africa, with particular attention to Black American officers.

II. Embodying Double Consciousness

For nearly two years I worked as a consular officer at the American consulate in Johannesburg, primarily processing non-immigrant visas for South Africans and third-country

nationals. U.S. visa applicants ranged from new hires to U.S. companies, au pairs, and families on vacations. Any given day, I may process 100-150 visa applications, and I had grown fatigued with the repetitious work. The volume of applications, speaking to nearly 100 people a day, took a toll on my mental and emotional disposition. Having to routinely reject worthy applicants was heartbreaking.

I was vaguely familiar with immigration policies through the news, and sensitized to the difficulties that foreigners, especially Africans, have in trying to obtain visas to the U.S. It turned out to be much worse than I imagined. Most Europeans could apply for ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization), a visa waiver program that only involved completing a questionnaire online, for a $15 fee. Unfortunately, no African country is eligible for this waiver program, and nationals are required to pay $160 for a visa *interview,* with no guarantee of approval. After payment, if the consular officer felt that the applicant would "overstay" their allotted time in the U.S., they were denied, and the record was kept in a centralized internal system. In the future, if the interviewee tried again, new consular officers would see their prior rejection, possibly contributing to an additional bias in adjudicating their application.

One morning, I had an interview with a disabled refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As they approached my window, and I saw their passport, which indicated their refugee status, I instantly felt remorse. In consular training, we were told to assess the applicant's ties to their home country, and the likelihood that they would overstay or work illegally on a tourist visa. A third-country national, in this case, a Congolese resident in South Africa, drew extra scrutiny because they had already left their home. Their status as refugee, moreover, would make it nearly impossible to prove sufficient ties to the homeland. In denying his application, I quickly excused myself and broke out into tears in the bathroom. Through my university training

and affinity for international development, I had always wanted to *help* Black diasporans, like this applicant. Instead, I was positioned to limit the mobility, access, and livelihood of a person in need. Subsequently, to minimize my emotional breakdowns, I became cold and intently focused on detaching myself from the individual applicants.

As a diplomat, I had frequently reflected on both the dichotomy and congruence of being Black and American overseas. I felt that I could exercise strong diplomacy in foreign contexts because of my experience as a racial minority and having to navigate and show flexibility/adaptability in racially charged scenarios domestically. On the other hand, I also sensed an inner conflict in advocating American policies, which may not serve the interests of individuals in African host countries. Is there an inner conflict in advocating American interests, which may not align with individuals in the African diaspora? Du Bois' double consciousness theory enveloped my experience as a Black American diplomat.

A notable sociologist, civil rights activist, and Pan-Africanist, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, wrote several works, which offered salient critiques of racial inequality and marginalization at the turn of the century. His books, among them, the *Souls of Black Folk, Black Reconstruction,* and *The Philadelphia Negro* are groundbreaking canonical pieces in American history and critical race theory. In *Souls,* Du Bois asserts that the most pressing social problem is that of the color line, "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia, African, and in America" (Du Bois 1903, 5). On a more intimate level, Du Bois describes a dynamic of 'double consciousness' for African Americans. He writes, "

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. 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. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this

> longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self…he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American…without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (Du Bois 1903, 5).

A twoness of identities represents the unreconciled legacy of global racism and an aspiration for the future of Black Americans. Du Bois' commentary correlates with ongoing research on the anthropology of race. Scholars recognize the ways that racial classifications have informed processes of globalization, international politics, and transnational movements (Robinson 2020; K. M. Clarke 2019; Pierre 2018; Grovogui 2001; Mills 1994; A. Smith 1994; Hall 1992; Young 1988; Rodney 1972). As globalization compresses time and space amongst people, racialization continues to shape the international order. Kamari Clarke and Deborah Thomas write that global studies require "integrated analysis of the historical precedents of current circulations, of how imperialism and racial ordering have shaped global movements, and of the ways conceptualizations of belonging, membership, and citizenship have been both imagined and institutionalized in racial terms" (Clarke and Thomas, Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness 2006, 8). Their argument, instead of essentializing race to a singular meaning, advances studies that seriously engage with racialization and its historical and contemporary impacts transnationally.

As I revisit this theme, I consider the implications of two identities for African Americans in the structure of the U.S. government, and more importantly in foreign policymaking. Are African Americans infusing their experience of racial discrimination into policy work? Is this process more consequential in majority Black countries? How do global Pan-African movements of solidarity and sovereignty, in the context of global White supremacy influence Black American's articulation and implementation of American foreign policy?

In the summer of 2021, I spoke to ten African American diplomats on this topic and their career trajectory more broadly. As a former diplomat, I relied on my prior relationships and networks to build a participant list. I chose to focus on African American foreign service officers who served in U.S. embassies in Africa or in the Bureau of African Affairs at the Department of State in Washington, DC. I had the opportunity to speak with a former Ambassador, whom I refer to by a pseudonym, Grayson. In our discussion, Grayson shared their personal career history and gave perspectives on U.S. foreign policy and domestic race issues.

Growing up in the southern United States, Ambassador Grayson knew firsthand the experience and impact of Jim Crow segregation laws and socio-economic disparities in Black communities. In the progression of civil rights movements, Grayson acknowledged inflection points, which signified greater liberation and Black self-determination. Grayson comments, “I was born a negro and then we were Afro American for a hot second and then we were Black and then now we're African American”. Grayson refers to this progress as a “mental liberation,” slowly peeling back the layers of eurocentrism and anti-Black rhetoric, to affirm the African American experience. Their worldview was further cemented during their undergraduate study at a Historically Black College in the South. For Grayson, college was a period of intellectual growth and a cultivation of an activist spirit, participating in marches for civil rights and anti-Vietnam war protests.

Along with their political engagement, Grayson developed a fascination with international affairs and completed graduate study at an elite university in the Northeast. The academic program offered critical scholarship and allowed Grayson to cultivate new friendships with students from across the globe. From their graduate study and experience living abroad, Grayson felt that diplomacy was a good fit for their interests. Given their engagement with

domestic politics, Grayson appreciated the opportunity to work in Washington, in addition to U.S. embassies abroad.

Ambassador Grayson's foreign policy career spanned over four decades and throughout that time, they maintained awareness of racial, social, and political issues. The context, mid-century, that Grayson describes, was heightened because of ongoing structural and systemic racisms, and the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. In the context of their activism, I chose to ask about their self-recognition, how do they identify racially or ethnically? Grayson replied "to me that's a very 21st century kind of question um… I know, [I] identify as Black yeah… And fiercely Black". Amid their private political engagement, they also advocated U.S. interests in economic and trade policies across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Is it possible that one's personal politics, and in this case racial identity, informs their articulation of foreign policy? If not, how does the diplomat build that separation? American nationality may encompass an African American racial identity, so why does Grayson use the phrase "fiercely Black"? Furthermore, does one's racial identity matter when they are representing U.S. interests abroad?

Ambassador Grayson has retired, but I also spoke to diplomats who resigned mid-level. Another participant, Addison worked at the State Department for seven years and prior to their diplomatic career they were a practicing attorney. After resigning, Addison started their own firm for immigration law and stayed professionally and politically engaged in presidential campaigns and foreign policy civil society organizations throughout the Washington, D.C. area. In our discussion, I noticed Addison's firm attachment to their national identity, despite structural and systemic racism. Addison comments, "

> American, you know, I think that a lot of White Americans probably think of it as themselves—about America being synonymous with being a White American.

> But…I've always rejected that because my family has been in this country, longer than most of these damn people in this country, right? Like my great-great-great-great grandfather fought the Civil War. My folks built this country" (2021).

As Du Bois notes, racial injustice complicates full integration in American society, but there is hope to reclaim the Black American experience. Addison reflects on what they perceive Whites understand about citizenship and emphatically argues that their family "built this country". Even though Whites may have perpetuated a narrative of exclusion, Black Americans can declare and should affirm their rights to a national identity. Their right to citizenship is historically supported by their continuous engagement and investment in the country's institutions, culture, ideologies, and people.

I also sought to uncover their racial self-identification, and, in their perspective, what it means to be Black. When asked what comes to mind when they hear the term Black, Addison answered, "well I think about us as a people, I think about the Black experience in America for both good and bad. I think about all the struggles that Black folks have been through…we're very—we're all obviously individuals in our own way, but we have a certain oneness that comes with being Black, that—that combines us and unites us" (2021). The interviewee in this case not only identifies as Black but believes that this racialized experience is shared with other Black Americans. Clarke and Thomas avoid arguments that characterize one definition for Blackness transnationally, but also demonstrate that the experience of racial difference continues to inform our interactions. Can we theorize shared global identities of Blackness without disregarding individual agency and local articulations of racial hegemony? As African Americans traverse multiple regions and interact with other Black communities, does their racial identification intensify?

Along with double consciousness, I believe Clarke and Thomas' work lends a framework to understand these dynamics in the context of domestic racism and global White supremacy. I use the term global White supremacy based on the historical and international matrix of racial oppressions supranationally. Race is socially constructed but holds strong implications for social relationships, institutions, and ideologies globally. Processes of racialization create and reinforce separations and the socio-political and economic marginalization of non-White communities worldwide. Jemima Pierre describes race as a product of modernity and European interactions with the rest of the world. Pierre adds, "processes of racialization inform relations in every modern society…the various distinct and localized articulations of race are all interconnected by the integument of global White supremacy" (2018, 12). European racialization enshrines demarcations based on Black inferiority and is foundational to global White supremacy. Furthermore, while racialization is experienced differently transnationally, it remains composite of a larger pattern of racism towards non-White groupings on the international stage.

To capture the full picture of double consciousness and racial determination for African American diplomats, I place these discussions as a part of a continuum of White supremacy enmeshed in global governance. Therefore, Black diplomats negotiate racial and self-determination domestically and interpersonally, but also through policymaking on a world stage.

III. Global Governance and Racialization

When foreign communities emigrate from Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, they are conscripted to American processes of racialization and become Black based on their phenotypical characteristics, like the descendants of enslaved Africans. Race remains a master category of difference in the U.S., and it is articulated and experienced differently within subgroups of different regions, ages, genders, and class backgrounds. These varied groups do not

offer a single definition of the term (Clarke and Thomas, Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness 2006), and Blackness is better understood in the various discourses, which “structure lives in time and space” (Pierre, The Predicament of Blackness: Post Colonial Ghana and the Politics of Race 2013).

To better understand the genealogies of global racial hierarchies, it is useful to examine the notions of the “West” as both a geographical region and a collection of ‘civilized’ societies that hold a set of industrial, political, and capitalist forms of development. Stuart Hall describes the “West” as a concept that perpetuates racial classifications, serves as a representation of modernity, categorizes good systems from bad, and formalizes differences (Hall 1992). In this case, the “West,” certainly refers to Western Europe, but has grown to include the United States and create the “Other,” communities in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. The origins and crystallization of this concept was embedded in pre-colonial Europe but gained traction during the period of Enlightenment (Grovogui 1996, Hall 1992). Linda Smith argues that the Enlightenment introduced forms of ideological imperialism, rooted in European and White superiority of thought, culture, science, and the fully formed human. She states, “views about the Other had already existed for centuries in Europe, but during the Enlightenment these views became more formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism, into explicit systems of classification and 'regimes of truth'” (L. T. Smith 2012, 29). This period inculcated earlier European societies’ structures as exceptional and projected them to the world stage.

The impact of pre-colonial European societies on current global race relations and power dynamics is well documented amongst anthropologists and scholars in international relations (Robinson 2020; Clarke, Affective Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Pan-African Pushback 2019; L. T. Smith 2012; Grovogui, Come to Africa: A Hermeneutics of Race in

International Theory 2001; A. Smith 1994; Hall 1992). In movements of colonial expansion, the West adopted political economies that were predicated on racialization. Racial designations, Cedric Robinson argues, were generated in the internal ordering of Europeans, and subsequently spread through capitalist and economic relations. Robinson's concept of "racial capitalism" acknowledges the co-mingling of racism and economic development in feudal Europe and later in imperial and colonial systems. Racial, tribal, and regional distinctions in Europe's formation were reproduced in capitalist modes of production and industrial development. Elites in European societies, prior to the advent of their exploitation of the rest, built their own internal structures for inter-group domination and marginalization. In advocating their own modes of economic organization as "objective and rational", they obscured their own experiences with social inequality and recycled these practices within the world system (Robinson 2020).

Through Robinson's explanatory framework in racial capitalism, we can understand how systems that enforced Black inferiority, moved in concert with economic exploitation. Robinson says, "the end result was capital accumulation for the advance of productive forces" in Europe and the simultaneous erosion of African indigenous forms of social organization (2020, 120). The insistence on unpaid labor, forced on non-White groups, continued even after the legal abolishment of slavery, Robinson argues. Labor exploitation, serfdom, sharecropping, and disenfranchisement are constantly reproduced to further capitalist development globally.

European colonialism concentrated power and global governance, making Western modes of organization synonymous with international norms. Colonialism grounds European state formation, inflicts violence, and produces racist ideologies as central to global interaction (Robinson 2020; A. Smith 1994; Rodney 1972). Furthermore, unlimited access to raw materials and control in emerging markets positioned the West for enrichment, increased development, and

industrialization. Racialized identities and relationships whether produced or upheld during the colonial period are recreated constantly in social and political levels in Africa and elsewhere (Rodney 1972; Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 1963).

The current international system rests on power dynamics that uphold Western economic domination and political influence. These asymmetrical relationships are embedded in how we collectively imagine Europe, the West and the Other. Crawford Young analyzes the role of race as a global arbiter for hierarchy and hegemony. He writes, "

> The [colonial] creation of the African state coincided with the historical zenith of virulent racism. The colonial construction of the African as savage other permeated all spheres of policy thought. Racism was always present in colonial encounters, to be sure; imperialism is the parent of race as an ideology of human difference. But the arrogance of race was never stronger than at the moment of colonial onslaught on Africa" (Young 1988).

European control was also driven by a perception that African communities were 'traditional' or 'backward'. Mahmood Mamdani asks rhetorically, "was not racism the general aspect of the African experience—its colonial and external aspect…?" (Mamdani 1996).

In theorizing the role of race in international relations, and Africa more specifically, one can refer to the divisions on the continent as vestiges and ongoing processes of racialization. In the Department of State, for example, the Bureau of African Affairs only engages with countries south of the Sahara (State 2021). Bilateral relations with North Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt, are administered in the Bureau of Near East Affairs. Why do so many characterize Sub-Saharan Africa as 'Black Africa?' In this term, scholars and practitioners imply a peculiar way of policy formation akin to someone's racial subjectivity. It is strongly argued that the notion of Black may not be an indigenous term to Africa, nor is it necessarily how pre-colonial African societies have chosen to identify differences (Young, The Colonial State and its

Political Legacy, 1988). It begs the question—is this a racialized delineation to expound some type of innate difference?

Considering this global context, scholars have argued that notions of modernity complicate African nations' internal development and negotiation of sovereignty in global governance (Clarke, Affective Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Pan-African Pushback 2019, Grovogui 1996). In his examination of copper mining in Zambia, James Ferguson challenges the expectations and beliefs surrounding modernity and its role in developing post-colonial Africa. Because of urbanization and industrialization—tied to its growing Copper Belt, Ferguson cites that Zambia was considered "modern". However, as global demand for copper declined and external debt increased, Zambia became more intertwined in international financial institutions, the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These international organizations introduced strict structural adjustment policies that advocated limited government and "free market" political economies. This dynamic, Ferguson says, forms part of the "modernization myth", a metanarrative of development, urbanism, and industrialization for African states. He writes, "just as the end of one mode of organizing and legitimating a global hierarchy (colonialism) did not end inequality but reconfigured it, so does the…disintegration of another (development) inaugurate not a new reign of freedom…but a new modality of global inequality" (Ferguson 1999). In this sense, new forms of 'globalization,' or 'democratization', have their foundation in a linear narrative of modernity, closely associated with Africa's underdevelopment. These processes of modernization, Clarke and Thomas add, reinforce unequal power relationships, predicated on racial hierarchies (2006).

Common understanding of international law, Siba Grovogui argues, assumes it to be a neutral, rational space in which every country is held to the same standards. Grovogui analyzes

the history and nature of world organizations and law with ongoing processes of racialization, as he engages in deeper inquiry into post-Enlightenment nation-state development and the modern international order. In *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self Determination in International Law,* he writes, "the structure of the modern authoritative discourse regarding political authority in the international order…has since been essentially Eurocentric" (Grovogui 1996, 41). As Africans advocate for sovereignty on the world stage, they are subject to the waves of racialized international laws, institutions of justice, and foreign intervention (Grovogui 1996). Like Robinson, Grovogui questions the inherent 'rationality' of the European experience and asserts that this perspective is prevalent in international law and institutions.

According to Grovogui, international law and the rules of the game were preset on Western conceptions of itself, subsequently stymying political development, and sovereignty. Former colonies do not have a permanent seat on the United Nations' Security Council, which limits their advocacy in international law. Additionally, Grovogui recounts that post-independence Third World reform proposals in the UN were dismissed because they introduced fair exchanges that limited Western institutional power. Western leaders and their intellectual elite, Grovogui claims, "begin their analysis of the present crisis with an outright indictment of the performance of Third World leaders…this condemnation has been central to…any principled criticisms of either Western policies or the international system" (Grovogui 1996, 200). In controlling the governance apparatus in the UN and other organizations, Western powers influence the criticism and legal cases brought against African leaders. Like the UN, Grovogui and Clarke draw attention to the International Criminal Court, IMF and WB, to show the breadth of Western hegemony in shaping our perceptions of Africa as corrupt and underdeveloped, while also legitimating continued direct intervention (2019, 1996).

Pan-Africanist anthropologists and adjacent theorists provide a framework for conceptualizing White supremacy, particularly in the ways that the rest of the world is racialized as the Other. Their work also draws attention to the different forms of White supremacy throughout the world, including enslavement, legal racial segregation, as well as settler colonialism. By mapping the trajectory and histories of European conquest, one can identify the political and economic systems of White privilege. There are unique localized experiences of anti-Black policies and social structures to any nation or region, yet the primacy of Western leadership on the global stage implicitly accepts and condones Whiteness and dictates the Black self and the world. Therefore, racial capitalism and global governance construct and impose a narrative and understanding of Black subjects and spaces (Africa). The historical inculcation of racial difference has residual effects and negotiates the ascension of Whites and the subjugation of the rest. As this dynamic is the foundation for the international order, the non-Western world continues to advocate for self-determination and sovereignty (K. M. Clarke 2019; Mills 1994; Grovogui 1996; Fanon 1963).

IV. African American Mediations in U.S. Diplomacy

To understand U.S. influence in the global system, particularly its approach to Africa, it is beneficial to examine the foreign policymaking apparatus domestically. While Presidential administrations may vary in their policy approaches, a robust and entrenched civil service grounds U.S. government and bureaucratic processes. U.S. foreign policymaking is dynamic, yet there are longstanding institutions, legal frameworks, and publics that maintain operations. U.S. agencies, such as the Departments of State, Defense, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Agriculture, Commerce, Treasury, and Justice, to name a few, each have their internal frameworks to formulate foreign policy. Along with the executive branch, Congress plays a

significant role in advancing legislation and dictating U.S. engagement in world events. Finally, civil society institutions, academia, non-profits, lobbyists, think tanks, build American conceptions and expectations of foreign policy outcomes.

Foreign policy work is intergovernmental; it incorporates a wide array of publics and interests, holding critical implications for other international actors. Policymakers also develop strategic plans to advance American political, economic, and socio-cultural interests globally. These policy agendas are then deployed in a range of diplomatic endeavors bilaterally, with other countries, or in multilateral forums, such as the UN. A diplomat, therefore, is one the represents U.S. interests and implements American policy to foreign audiences worldwide.

a. The U.S. Diplomatic Corps

U.S. diplomats are one component of the intergovernmental and societal web of foreign policymaking. Diplomats, or Foreign Service Officers (FSO), may work at any of these government agencies and hold strong professional engagements within the foreign affairs network. American FSOs are a part of one of the largest diplomatic corps in the world, with a wealth of resources and international political influence. Since the nation's inception, foreign relations, and appointed diplomats, have played pivotal roles in Independence, expansion within the continent, the advancement of American ideals globally, and its subsequent status in the 21st century as a 'superpower'.

Diplomats served in a variety of capacities, mostly as political appointees and informal citizens living abroad, yet the Foreign Service, the career diplomacy workforce in the State Department, was not established until Congress passed the Rogers Act in 1924, post-World War I. The Rogers Act formalized the hiring and selection of Americans to overseas posts (missions, embassies, and consulates) and led to the creation of the Foreign Service School (now Foreign

Service Institute) in 1925. Hoping to attract and cultivate a community of superbly qualified public servants the Rogers Act emphasized State "competitive examination and merit promotion" (Office of the Historian 2018). Throughout the 20th century, Congress continued to pass legislation, which aimed to expand personnel management for the nation's diplomatic corps, but also the Department's representation and statecraft concerning consular services, American cultural expropriation abroad, trade and economic bilateral relations, as well as security partnerships and military intervention. The Foreign Service, as a central arm of the Department intensified its operations with the Foreign Service Act in 1980 (preceded by legislation of the same title in 1946).

As Congress appropriated additional funds and resources, the Department's personnel management grew to accommodate a senior foreign service, career ambassadorships (as opposed to those appointed by Presidential administrations), spousal employment and support for families abroad, promotion, tenure, and pay schedules, like the U.S. military. By 2016, the United States had 275 overseas posts worldwide, including permanent bilateral missions, multilateral missions (posts assigned to intergovernmental organizations), consulates, and American presence posts (Gill and Collins-Chase 2019, Bureau of Human Resources 2021). In addition to the Department of State, there is a Foreign Service corps at USAID, the Departments of Agriculture, and Commerce, however, nearly every U.S. agency has some level of representation abroad, including Defense (Defense Attaché) and Justice (Legal Attaché).

The Department's Foreign Service staff members are considered 'generalists,' in that they are available to serve in a variety of functions in diverse regions. At the same time, FSOs choose career tracks: consular, political, economic, management, or public diplomacy; and can also prioritize world regions and languages. In posts abroad, diplomatic statecraft includes

representation, educating foreign audiences on American culture, customs, and history; managing and implementing programs, such as administering economic and health development projects for local populations; and negotiating and building sustainable relationships with foreign leaders, in the hopes of advancing U.S. national security and strategic interests. In 2020, the State Department had over 23,000 employees, with 13,516 persons in the diplomatic corps (Gill, State Department Personnel: Background and Selected Issues for the 117th Congress 2021). Overseas, FSOs can also serve a reporting officers, describing in detail, on secure diplomatic channels, ongoing social, economic, and political crises for the purpose of informed U.S. policymaking.

American diplomacy is powered and affected by the African American interventions in domestic government agencies, and the Foreign Service. As they advocate for civil rights at home, African Americans also sustain a formidable presence in the U.S. diplomatic corps. For this study, I focus on the Black American inroads to foreign policy through career membership in the Foreign Service. Black diplomacy is defined as the unique tactics, approaches, and perspectives to U.S. foreign policymaking, informed by both an American national and Black racial identity. African Americans deploy foundational expectations of diplomatic statecraft, but their work is continuously informed by their racial identity and subjectivity.

b. Black Approaches to Foreign Policy

One of the earliest examinations of Black diplomacy was the research and work of Elliott P. Skinner, a former Ambassador to Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) and professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. Skinners books include *The Mossi of the Upper Volta: An Analysis of the Political Development of a Sudanese People*, *African Urban Life: The Transformation of Ouagadougou*, and *The Mossi of Burkina Faso: Chiefs, Politicians, and Soldiers*. His last book, *African Americans and U.S. Policy Toward Africa 1850-1924: In*

Defense of Black Nationality, traces a lineage of African American representation in foreign policy. Skinner documents the ways in which early African Americans advanced U.S. policy overseas, particularly in Africa. His research further delineates and defines Black diplomacy as a separate entity of U.S. policymaking.

For Skinner, double consciousness emerges as an essential explanatory framework for conceiving Black diplomacy. He writes, "some of the [African American] envoys had to use all the skills they had to perform their tasks honorably. Their efforts were affected by the structural equivalence of what Du Bois once described in psychological terms as a 'double consciousness'. They were both insiders and outsiders" (Skinner 1992, 12). African American diplomats were insiders because they had an intimate knowledge and socio-cultural investment in American society. At the same time, their subjectivity as racial minorities and victims of structural and systemic discrimination, allows them to be 'outsiders'. As their citizenship is limited and contested in the domestic arena, Black foreign policymakers are positioned to view U.S. policy differently than their White counterparts.

Many scholars recognize the impact of domestic social movements and racial sensitivities that produce a level of double consciousness in Black foreign policymaking. In addition to Skinner, Alvin Tillery says, that diplomatic "engagement by the Black elite with issues in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa conforms to this same two-level logic" (2011, 6). A "two-level logic" correlates with double consciousness; Tillery argues that African Americans adopt a type of policymaking, which serves American national interests and the Black American community in the domestic arena. His analysis takes theory into practice, taking a certain psychology of consciousness, articulated by Du Bois, to advocacy as policy implementers. One finds that African Americans' deployment of U.S. foreign policies are in conversation with their

experiences as minorities and domestic patterns of racial and social justice (Tillery 2011, Krenn 2015). While Tillery explicitly references Africa, his work details the foundational approaches to Black diplomacy that can apply globally, regardless of region.

In line with these arguments, I return to my conversation with Addison, who describes the insider/outsider dynamic in relation to non-Black colleagues. They say, "

> I think that African Americans would actually be the best diplomats in this country. Because my entire existence has been an ambassador to White fragility…every Black person in the State Department, anyone who gets this far, [has to] navigate the world. So, I think that what makes [us], I think, good diplomats, is because all of our lives have been about diplomacy" (Addison 2021).

African American's domestic realities does change their approaches to diplomacy. Navigating racial exclusion at home, allows Black diplomats to adapt to foreign contexts more easily, according to Addison. This perspective was echoed by other participants in this study. Interlocutors, in reflecting on their own experiences, asserted that they can articulate U.S. foreign policy differently than their White colleagues. This alternative approach, Addison argues, makes Black Americans the "best diplomats".

Rooting Black diplomacy in double consciousness, we see that their alternative approaches also relate to policymaking in Africa. Through participation and activism in global affairs, are African Americans in a unique position to wield U.S. diplomacy for the advancement of the African diaspora worldwide? Is there a deeper sensitivity to Black populations in Africa when Black diplomats formulate and implement U.S. political interests? It is clear that the patterns of White supremacy have led to global racial hierarchies and hegemony. In this context, African Americans have historically led and participated in anti-slavery, colonial, apartheid movements—global initiatives that have advanced liberation and sovereignty for African states (Heywood, et al. 2015; Krenn 2015; Tillery 2011; Von Eschen 1997; Skinner 1992). Through

continued political advocacy with the continent, African Americans have formally and informally shaped U.S. policy toward Africa.

In the spirit of Pan-African emancipation, Black diplomacy endeavors to counter anti-Black rhetoric globally. An intimate knowledge of domestic White supremacy influences and helps to sustain African American's advocacy for African sovereignty. This manifests in long-term efforts by African Americans to push decolonial measures and Africa's strategic significance to U.S. interests. Many scholars document the extensive Pan-African engagement by Black individuals and organizations: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Council on African Affairs, and TransAfrica. In the case of South Africa, for example, African Americans, within Congress and the diplomatic corps, lobbied for U.S. divestment and support of UN economic sanctions on the apartheid government (Heywood, et al. 2015, Tillery 2011). Their civil agitation was in response to state violence towards the Black majority, Colored, and Indian minorities, predicated on racism and the imagery of a murdered Black child in Soweto, a township outside Johannesburg, mobilized global outrage. In foreign policy, U.S. representatives to the UN, Andrew Young and Donald McHenry, both exhibited a strong knowledge of southern Africa and pushed President Jimmy Carter to support UN resolutions (Morris 2015). On the heels of civil rights, Black Americans recognized and shared the experience of racial marginality and discrimination.

Civil society pushes inform Black diplomatic efforts and leads to policies toward Africa, which are attuned to racial disparities in global governance. Their actions are constitutive of a continuum of Black diplomatic statecraft towards Africa. As insiders/outsiders, Black diplomats use American platforms on the global stage to advocate Pan-African interests. In southern Africa, one sees how Black Americans sensitize American foreign policy discussions towards

Africa and reveal the impacts of race in colonialism and international affairs. South Africa is one of many examples and scholars have investigated similar events in American history which illustrate the intensity of Black activism. While I do not offer a historiographical engagement of these movements, they are well documented in adjacent literature concerning African Americans in policy (Heywood, et al. 2015; Krenn 2015; Tillery 2011; Von Eschen 1997; Skinner 1992).

Wider Pan-African movements have pushed more progressive U.S. foreign policy in Africa, but outcomes may not be as visible for career diplomats. Over time, career Blacks learn the intricacies of the Department and realize that to stay in diplomacy, one needs to exercise tact and strategic positioning. Returning to my conversation with Ambassador Grayson, I am reminded of the two-level logic or double consciousness Black diplomats may experience. Grayson purposely situated most of their Foreign Service tours in Washington, the headquarter offices of DOS known as Main State, to stay engaged in domestic movements for racial justice. Serving under seven Presidential administrations, Grayson did have disdain for some policy measures. Personal politics surrounding race relations impacted their perceptions of government leaders and they cite the Reagan Administration as a particularly difficult time to work in diplomacy, describing his policies as "backward". They add, "I thought he was an evil person and because of where he—he set off his campaign, which was down in Mississippi…so I mean the dog—what they call a dog whistles were…you can see that progression…of people moving to strike back against the progress of the civil rights, the voting rights bill and other things" (Grayson 2021). Dog whistles, as Grayson describes, were coded phrases, which perpetrated racial stereotypes and incited anti-Black sentiments among the American public.

Diplomats serve at the pleasure of the President, and career FSOs do not have the professional leeway to openly dismiss American foreign policy. In this case, Grayson's

discomfort with the Reagan Administration, however, was not so problematic that they would choose to leave the Foreign Service. They note some colleagues resigning over the war in Vietnam, for example, but argue that there is a "personal continuum and [you] constantly gauge where you want to go" (Grayson 2021). Through the Ambassador's characterization of a personal continuum, I wonder if this is more consequential for Black Americans, given the domestic climate? Because of Reagans "backward" approaches to communities of color, Grayson chose to take their following assignments overseas, in countries that were less divisive for U.S. politics. There are ways to navigate unsavory political environments in DOS, and at times this may be critical for a Black American who wishes to stay a diplomat.

In one assignment, Ambassador Grayson describes the turmoil they experienced working in consular affairs, and the racialization of U.S. immigration laws. Working within a consular section attuned them to policies, which exclude certain foreigners. This exclusion, Grayson purported, was steeped in an ascription to global racial hierarchies. From the 1970s onward, Grayson argues, there was a change in the quotas of immigrants from certain parts of the world and they found such policies to be racist. The process of proving one would not overstay their visa, Grayson adds, is difficult to prove, especially for some cultures (Grayson 2021). To what extent does the United States advance global racial hierarchies in its articulation and formation of foreign policy? Does the Ambassador's discomfort with U.S. immigration laws stem from their subjectivity as a Black American? Are they in a position, because of their identity, to identify racism in foreign policy more accurately than their White counterparts?

Based on the interviews, Black diplomats experience ongoing internal negotiations on the politics of their racial identity and the advancement of American interests. Affirming the importance of Black voices in diplomatic statecraft, Ambassador Grayson also highlights the

ambiguous nature of policy recommendations. They say, "at some point, I decided I would never know if I didn't get my way or my policy suggestion adopted or my guidance accepted, I would never know if it was because I was Black" (Grayson 2021). It can be difficult to measure the ways that bureaucratic leadership may privilege Black perspectives over other races and on which issues. Pan-African movements demonstrate how a Black civil society can pressure the U.S. government in the international arena, but a career diplomat's influence is more obscure. This concept becomes more interesting as the American public advocates for more diversity in U.S. government. Does the State Department include African Americans for diversity's sake, or is it a concerted strategy for stronger policy formulation and implementation?

c. Representation

Central to the legacy of Black diplomacy are the politics of representation. As a historically White institution, the Department has struggled in recruiting and retaining minority officers, throughout the 20th century and in our current moment. Formulating policy requires "a seat at the table," and institutional barriers create additional challenges for Black Americans. While there are several African Americans who have participated in foreign affairs, it does not accurately reflect the depth of exclusion within the Department of State's own diplomatic corps. Michael Krenn notes that the African American public began to pressure diversity measures in DOS as early as the 1940s.

> "The Department of State and Foreign Service were both nearly all-White institutions, and neither had demonstrated much interest in hiring or appointing African-Americans to positions of power or authority. African-Americans attacked the segregation existing in America's diplomatic corps as unrepresentative, undemocratic, and, ultimately, damaging to the nation's prestige in the world and its ability to function effectively when dealing with underdeveloped nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. To the question of 'Can Negroes Make Diplomats?,' African-Americans had answered resoundingly in the

> affirmative. The problem now remained to convince the Department of State" (Krenn 2015, 27).

African American civil society played a significant role in international politics, but one cannot overlook the lack of diversity in the U.S. government. Even though multiple initiatives, both legal and managerial programs, emphasized the development of a Foreign Service based on merit and impartial selection, the Department's hiring processes mirrored racial and sex discrimination in wider American society.

Working as a diplomat and becoming a FSO are two separate, but interlinked activities. A Presidential administration can appoint any U.S. citizen to an Ambassadorial post and thus become a diplomat. Similarly, we may consider various cultural and political leaders that promote American public diplomacy and interests abroad. In both examples, individuals are diplomats, but not career members of the Foreign Service. A thorough analysis of the Department's diversity issues requires a distinction between these categories. I seek to focus primarily on career members of the Foreign Service to explicate the forms of Black diplomacy, which are bounded by processes, structures, and limitations internal to DOS.

In addition to staffing levels and promotion rates, Black FSOs also question the types of assignments they receive. U.S. Diplomats are generalists and meant to have worldwide availability, however, career African American officers were primarily sent to posts in Africa and the Caribbean, with a few working in Eastern/Central Europe, and small islands in Asia. From 1960-2014, 54% of career Black Ambassadorial appointments were in Sub-Saharan Africa, with only 12% and 5% in Europe and Southeast Asia respectively (BlackPast.org, Office of the Historian 2018). Allison Blakely says, "both official and private correspondence related to the subject of assignment of posts makes it abundantly clear that certain regions were designated as

‘Negro posts’” (Blakely 2015, 14). The label of ‘Negro Posts’, also referred to as the ‘Negro Circuit,’ reveals the Department of State’s conception of Africa as well as the esteem they held for African American diplomats. Grayson themselves acknowledged that their ambassadorship followed the “Negro Circuit” trend (2021). Why does this hiring trend exist? The meaning may be twofold—they are Negro posts because those countries are racialized, and they have been designated for Black Americans.

The assignment trends towards Africa could be a form of racial segregation in policymaking, a policy strategy, or both. After extensive effort to break into an elite and competitive institution, African Americans also realized that diplomatic practice and foreign policymaking was highly racialized. Even as the Department encourages diversity in the initial application, there are far less African American Ambassadors assigned to Europe and in policy formulation in Washington. Postings abroad often correspond to the bureau and office assignments FSOs receive. If there is an officer, for instance, that has had multiple tours in East Asia, they most likely will work in the Bureau for East Asian affairs at Main State, for at least one assignment. As a result, continued Africa posts, leads to more African Americans working in the Bureau of African Affairs. The segregation embedded in the Department skews diplomatic representation, e.g., less Black American officers in Europe, and limits diverse perspectives in policymaking.

Given African Americans’ sustained political interest in Africa, one can view these appointments as strategic, for both diplomats and the Department. Does DOS presume stronger diplomatic relations with an African nation when there is an African American Ambassador? As a foreign policy strategy, assigning an African American to an African country may symbolize an overture of compassion or virtue signaling. DOS leaders may assume that the perceived racial

similarities between an ambassador and a foreign population may strengthen bilateral relationships. Building on familiarity is a tactic in diplomacy to gain information and access to exclusive areas in the host nation. Alternatively, based on the historical patterns, these posts could be opportunities for Black diplomats to advocate Pan-African interests as agents of a Western 'superpower'. Despite DOS ongoing challenges with internal marginalization, African Americans hold agency, and their Africanist perspectives help to form their unique approaches to diplomacy.

The number of Black Ambassadors has increased over the last few decades, with some individuals having served multiple appointments. This trend also coincides with the additional legislation targeted at diversity. In 1992, Congress passed the Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship and, in 2002, the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Program, aimed at diversifying the Department of State's Foreign Service. The fellowships explicitly welcome applications from historically underrepresented minorities, women, and persons from lower income backgrounds. From 1988 to 2018, the Congressional Research Service reports the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Asian FSOs growing by 1.3%, 1.75%, and 4%, respectively, in addition to a 1.24% increase of women employees (Gill, Diversity in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Service: Background and Issues for Congress 2020). While the fellowships have played a significant role in expanding diversity, the Department has also acknowledged internal barriers, which stall promotion rates for women and minorities.

Tackling institutionalized racial and gender discrimination in the Department of State requires more than diverse recruitment efforts; internal structures and personnel must embody progressive notions of inclusion and anti-racism. While representing U.S. interests abroad, African Americans negotiate self-determination amongst their White colleagues and in overtly

White-centric work environments. In the face of continuing microaggressions and barriers to promotion, Black officers have created community amongst each other through informal networks of belonging as well as formal affinity groups and organizations, including the Thursday Luncheon Group, and the Pickering and Rangel Fellowships Organization. Embodying aspects of double consciousness, racial identity can impact Black officers' experiences overseas, but also influence their approaches to foreign policymaking and diplomatic statecraft.

V. Conclusion

African Americans have made several inroads into diplomatic service and foreign policymaking in the Department of State. Their progressive representation and policy acumen continues even as they experience structural racism and violence domestically and global White supremacy. Double consciousness provides a framework to explore the individual negotiations with two identities and how that may initiate a new departure in U.S. foreign policy studies. This study seeks to foreground the individual lives of diplomats and explore realm of *Black Diplomacy*, the unique tactics, approaches, and increased representation in policymaking informed by one's racial identity and subjectivity. As both insiders and outsiders simultaneously, African Americans exercise degrees of prudence and diplomacy while racially identifying as Black, but as stewards of American democracy domestically and abroad.

Their articulation of diplomacy has the potential to disrupt American foreign policy approaches, particularly towards Africa. Having an intimate knowledge with racism at home, can Black Americans more accurately identify patterns of global White supremacy and racialization? Given their dual identities, African American diplomats may be able to dismantle outdated racialized conceptions of policy and introduce changes for U.S. engagement in world affairs.

There is still a wealth of material to analyze on the lived experiences of Black diplomats and impact on U.S. foreign policy. Moving forward, this research will explore additional themes on identity and policymaking that African Americans negotiate and navigate daily at the Department of State. An ethnography of Black diplomacy presents new opportunities for envisioning the potentialities of foreign policy and the politics of racial identity and subjectivity in the United States.

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