

---

Article

## “We Charge Genocide”: Revisiting black radicals’ appeals to the world community<sup>1</sup>

David Helps

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA; helps@umich.edu

**How to Cite:** Helps, D. “We Charge Genocide”: Revisiting black radicals’ appeals to the world community. *Radical Americas* 3, 1 (2018): 9.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2018.v3.1.009>.

Acceptance date: 26 June 2018; Publication date: 10 August 2018

---

### Peer review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal’s standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

### Copyright:

© 2018, David Helps. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2018.v3.1.009>.

### Open access:

*Radical Americas* is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

### Abstract

In 1951, black radical William Patterson presented the United Nations with a petition, emblazoned with the title *We Charge Genocide*. The document charged the US government with snuffing out tens of thousands of black lives each year, through police violence and the systemic neglect of black citizens’ well-being. While historians have tended to discuss *We Charge Genocide* as a remarkable but brief episode, the petition built on prior attempts to invoke international law on behalf of African Americans and resonated with later generations of black activists whose political activism transcended more limited and domestic notions of civil rights. These later invocations of the genocide charge spanned the black left, including the Black Panther Party, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, James Baldwin and black feminists. This essay explores how the historical memory of racial violence, including settler colonialism and the slave trade, inspired an ideologically diverse array of organizations to each connect their experience to global histories of racial oppression. It stresses the internationalist and anticolonial perspective of the genocide charge and its proponents’ economic and transnational critique, thereby contributing to the historiographies of the long civil rights movement and black radicalism. By invoking international law, these black radicals connected the civil rights movement in the US to the struggle for human rights worldwide. Finally, the essay considers how integrating the local, national and global scales of racialized violence and its response enables historians to transnationalize the long civil rights movement paradigm.

**Keywords:** black internationalism; long civil rights movement; genocide; anticolonialism; violence; African Americans; transnationalism; Paul Robeson; William Patterson; We Charge Genocide

*The American soil is full of the corpses of my ancestors.*

-James Baldwin<sup>2</sup>

*Three hundred years is a long time to wait.*

-William Patterson<sup>3</sup>

On 17 December 1951, black radical activist William L. Patterson presented the Paris General Assembly of the United Nations, then meeting at the Palais de Chaillot, with a petition, emblazoned with the title *We Charge Genocide*. The powerfully written and impressively researched document – which unfolded across 250 pages of statistics and chronology – charged the United States government with committing genocide against its black citizens. Under the auspices of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), led by Patterson and fellow Communist Paul Robeson, the CRC detailed the impact of lynchings, discrimination in the criminal justice system and the systematic neglect of the dire socioeconomic situation of black communities across the country. The CRC contended that between 1946 and 1951, 32,000 African Americans died each year because they did not receive the quality of health care, jobs, education and housing afforded to white Americans.<sup>4</sup> The petition ended with a ‘Summary and Prayer’, in which its authors lamented that even such a tremendous catalogue of crimes could never capture what it was like to have black skin in America: ‘the crime [of genocide] is everywhere in American life. And yet words and statistics are but poor things to convey the long agony of the Negro people.’<sup>5</sup>

The activity around the *We Charge Genocide* (WCG) petition was not a short burst of creative action, easily swept to the sidelines by the Second Red Scare alliance of the Truman administration and liberal civil rights groups, as some historians have suggested.<sup>6</sup> It echoed prior attempts to invoke international law on behalf of the oppressed black population and it also resonated for new generations of radical black activists. As such, this essay approaches WCG as an episode within overlapping and intersecting struggles waged by African Americans on the world stage. By highlighting the continuities between interwar internationalism, postwar civil rights activism and Cold War anticolonialism, it attempts to thicken the continuities and multiplicities that Jacquelyn Dowd Hall more than a decade ago recognized as making up the long civil rights movement. In a 2005 essay, Hall critiqued the conventional periodization of civil rights, which takes *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil and Voting Rights Acts (1964 and 1965) as its bookends, for celebrating legal top-down change and a version of Martin Luther King, Jr. indifferent to economic injustice and colonial exploitation.<sup>7</sup> Recuperating more far-reaching and often earlier demands for black freedom is, for Hall and others, a way of debunking co-optations of King which are used to scold contemporary anti-racist activists for betraying King’s ‘dream’, which in these conservative retellings amounted only to a post-racial America rather than a transformation of what King called ‘the whole structure of our society’.<sup>8</sup>

Hall’s longer periodization is not without its detractors. Criticism has tended to coalesce around Eric Arnesen’s charge that this paradigm ‘tends to reduce very different approaches and agendas to a too simple common denominator, minimizing the importance of chronology, precise periodization and even conflicting agendas and demands.’<sup>9</sup> “‘Long movement’ scholarship,” Arnesen writes, ‘runs the risk of substituting a romantic and overly celebratory narrative for a much messier and more complicated civil rights past.’<sup>10</sup> More specifically, he suggests proponents share a misty-eyed view of the Communist Party (CP) that downplays the undemocratic nature of Stalinism and overstates the influence of a handful of Communists.

Yet, arguing for the utility of the long movement chronology does not mean the CP was the only game in town. Historians of the long civil rights movement understand that the black freedom struggle was never a monolith, a chugging locomotive: the point is not to swap Martin Luther King, Jr. as an engineer for, say, W.E.B. DuBois. Rather, the long movement way of thinking is well-equipped to narrate difference. Its characterization of a protracted struggle with deep roots in economic justice highlights continuities and complex interactions – a jumble of organizations and individuals that selected usable ideas, tactics and strategies from a variegated heritage of black politics. Rather than a flattened story, it is one in which tendencies overlap, collide and compete with one another. The trajectory of civil rights presented in this essay is indeed messy and complicated, as Arnesen understands it must be.

Another line of criticism adds credence to the concern about temporality. Scholars like Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang argue that long movement practitioners stretch chronology to the point of breaking. By speaking too capaciously of ‘civil rights’, these scholars produce an ‘ahistorical and placeless chronicle’ that is blind to factors of political economy and obscures more than it reveals.<sup>11</sup> By emphasizing how internationalist critiques of colonialism, capitalist economy and violence were vital to an earlier phase of civil rights, however, historians can produce a clearly defined understanding of civil rights that also sees space and economy as vital. The different scales at which racialized violence operated – as part of global racial capitalism, under colonial and regional domination or local instances of ‘police lynching’ – connected different organizations and individuals. As recent scholarship has emphasized, demands for domestic civil rights and anticolonialism fed into each other and spilled out beyond the borders of the nation-state.<sup>12</sup> Studying African Americans who, in different historical contexts, charged the United States with genocide is one way of globalizing this long civil rights movement literature in order to move beyond ‘nation-centred accounts of internationalist practices’ that retain the nation-state as the default analytic.<sup>13</sup>

Stressing the international and anticolonial perspective of these actors, the economic-mindedness of their critique, as well as their transnational activities, is one way of emphasizing that the nascent civil rights struggle was broad-minded and international.<sup>14</sup> In the early postwar period, ‘civil rights’ activists concerned themselves not just with African Americans’ status as second-class citizens, but with their exclusion from the protections of human rights. In the words of the authors of *WCG*, black Americans were necessarily ‘world citizens’: descendants of the Atlantic slave trade and intimately connected to other racialized peoples through related histories of oppression.<sup>15</sup> My point is not to deny changes between the interwar and postwar years or between historical contemporaries, both of which critics suggest the long movement thesis inevitably does.<sup>16</sup> While bearing these temptations in mind, I call for scholars to further investigate how historical memory and imagination connected such variegated struggles for black survival as a global anti-racist project. What does it mean that appeals to a world community, which by the 1950s congealed in the language of genocide, served agendas as divergent as those of the NAACP, Communists, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers and black feminists?

This essay therefore also revisits the theme of violence in US political history. Any study that places the non-violent methods practiced by many of the most prominent civil rights activists against a foil of organizations and activists unwilling to rule out armed resistance risks forgetting the role violence played as something other than a tactical debate. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that the material traces of racialized violence are a haunting presence, making the afterlives of the past visible in our present.<sup>17</sup> For Saidiya Hartman, similarly, the history of black death is ‘the history that hurts’, then as now.<sup>18</sup> Violence (or the threat of violence) was a fact of life for black Americans, regardless of how they chose to respond. It was therefore a useful analytical lens for world-minded black activists. Thus, with Ned Blackhawk’s call to foreground quotidian violence in the story of the United States in mind, this essay aims to explore how the historical memory of racial violence inspired black activists to situate their experience within larger histories of colonization, decolonization and the advent of human rights.<sup>19</sup> The pain racialized bodies endured was a common experience that connected the oppression of colonized and formerly enslaved peoples in vastly different environments. By invoking international law, these black radicals connected the civil rights movement in the US to the struggle for human rights worldwide.

### **Internationalizing the African American Struggle**

This trajectory of internationalizing the black freedom struggle through appeals to international bodies began earlier than historians have generally considered. To be sure, historians discuss attempts to petition the United Nations in the years immediately prior to the completion of *WCG*, focusing on the NAACP’s *Appeal to the World* (1947) and a less-studied document by the National Negro Congress (1946).<sup>20</sup> While there was some truth to William Patterson’s assertion that in the early postwar period ‘[m]ost Black leaders did not critically examine the world scene,’ the primary author of *WCG* doubtlessly downplayed the degree to which his petition was part of a history of black internationalist activism.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the late 1940s and early 1950s marked a breakthrough for black internationalist politics and

analysis.<sup>22</sup> The aftermath of World War II and the world's 'second chance' at peace through the vehicle of the United Nations were essential to this.<sup>23</sup> 'The fact is,' Robin D.G. Kelley writes, 'no one could afford to ignore international politics during the decade of the 1950s.'<sup>24</sup> Besides the formation of the United Nations, decolonization struggles were waged in Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon and Southeast Asia, while the Bandung conference charted a new, Non-Aligned path for the 'Third World'.

An earlier and less-studied precedent to the black internationalist appeals after 1945 can be seen amid the years of heightened internationalism surrounding the Treaty of Versailles and Paris Peace Conference.<sup>25</sup> International visions of the world found official endorsement in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and his promise to 'make the world safe for democracy'. While Wilson campaigned feverishly for US entry into the newfangled League of Nations, Pan-Africanism made its own internationalist stance from well outside the spaces of official policy and rhetoric. Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association put forward their own vision of global interdependence built on racial solidarity and a diasporic African identity. According to Adam Ewing, Marcus Garvey expected little from the Peace Conference – an 'exercise in high diplomatic theater'.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the events in Paris brought together anti-lynching, anti-discrimination and anticolonial programs, represented by Garvey, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, A. Philip Randolph, Eliezer Cadet and publisher William Monroe Trotter. It was this environment, this upsurge in 'organic mass politics' and 'diasporic identity building' in the 'age of Garvey', that made black internationalist lobbying closer to power possible.<sup>27</sup>

Within this context, William Monroe Trotter sought out the ear of Woodrow Wilson at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, hoping for the federal government to intervene to end racial segregation. A petition by the National Liberty Congress, the Washington outpost of Trotter's National Equal Rights League, reached the US Congress in 1918, demanding federal intervention to end anti-black mob violence.<sup>28</sup> With his petition at home and a trip to Paris, 'Trotter broadened the idea of Wilsonian internationalism, reworking the concept of self-determination to include peoples beyond the frontiers of Europe's ancient states.'<sup>29</sup> Trotter was bitterly disappointed that Wilson refused to prioritize protecting African Americans from the violence of 'the rope and the faggot'.<sup>30</sup> At Versailles, a Japanese-sponsored but Fourteen Points-inspired clause declaring the equality of all the world's peoples was killed by Wilson himself.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the State Department was anxious about incipient global Bolshevism and the geopolitical implications of decolonization and so denied passports to many of the Americans seeking to participate in the 1919 Pan-African Congress.<sup>32</sup>

Trotter was no Marxist and this can help explain why historians have not connected his cajoling in France to Communist firebrand William Patterson's recrimination of liberal civil rights more than thirty years later. Yet, more than ideology separated the two activists. Trotter's decision to appeal to Wilson behind the scenes rather than confront American policy publically and scathingly indicates the limits of his political capital, the lack of Great Power commitment for racial equality, the relative strength of the US' image on the world stage compared to the early Cold War and the lack of an international legal framework for opposing violence.<sup>33</sup> Despite his efforts, Trotter was unable to secure an anti-racist commitment from Wilson. That the president's plan for a new world order languished in the US Senate in 1920 gave Trotter some sense of vindication: 'Your League of Nations Covenant,' he wrote to Wilson, 'void of measures or of declarations against these undemocratic conditions. . . deserved its fate.'<sup>34</sup>

*We Charge Genocide* built upon earlier civil rights petitions to the UN in the 1940s. The National Negro Congress (NNC), which had formed in the mid-1930s and declined in clout during the war, used the idea of petitioning the UN on American race relations to re-establish itself in mainstream black political activity. On 6 June 1946, president Max Yergan and other NNC representatives presented a copy of this pamphlet-length document to the secretary of the Human Rights Commission, titled, *A Petition to the United Nations on Behalf of 13 Million Oppressed Negro Citizens of the United States*. The petition's demand to the UN was modest: commission studies into the economic and social inequality of blacks in America. The NNC distributed 100,000 copies of the document, which included a seven-page appendix compiled by Herbert Aptheker, a white historian and Communist.<sup>35</sup> Aptheker contended that 70 percent of black Americans lived in homes without indoor plumbing or electricity and forty percent of households lived on \$200 a year or less. The UN responded that their hands were tied. During the drafting of its

Charter, the US delegation had forced through a ‘domestic jurisdiction’ clause to prevent ‘intervention’ in affairs deemed (capaciously) to be internal matters. After the document failed to generate attention outside the black press, the CRC absorbed the struggling NNC the following year.<sup>36</sup>

When the NNC collapsed, the gauntlet fell to the NAACP – whose member rolls had grown nine-fold between 1940 and 1946.<sup>37</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois hatched the idea that the organization should follow the NNC with a petition of their own of a more substantial length. The result, *Appeal to the World* (1947), consisted of essays by Du Bois and his contemporaries. However, the tactic of shaming US racism on the world stage – a logical strategy for the Communist and socialist internationalists in the NNC – divided the liberal NAACP’s leadership. Du Bois called upon Eleanor Roosevelt, an NAACP board member, to bring the document before the UN, but she rejected the idea as potentially embarrassing to the United States and ultimately unhelpful to the civil rights campaign. Unmoved by Roosevelt’s reticence, Du Bois presented the *Appeal* to two UN officials in October 1947 in New York. A ninety-four-page book version followed, copies of which the NAACP gifted to each UN ambassador.<sup>38</sup> The mainstream US press response demonstrated a profound discomfort at the prospect of the UN intervening in what was considered a domestic affair. Indeed, this would have fulfilled the nightmare shared by opponents of the League of Nations in 1919. In his syndicated column for the *Birmingham Post*, John Temple Graves II, who was among the most prominent defenders of Jim Crow in the Southern press, resorted to schoolyard taunting when he attacked the NAACP’s Walter White for ‘tattling on his country to the United Nations’.<sup>39</sup>

If John Temple Graves saw Walter White as subversive and un-American, one can only imagine the insults he would have hurled at the authors of *WCG*. In this period of rapid transition from internationalist hopefulness to Cold War constraint, the NAACP struggled to navigate the shifting ground beneath its feet. A methodological and ideological gulf emerged within the leadership.<sup>40</sup> Unhappy with what he saw as White’s and Truman’s parochialism, Du Bois joined Paul Robeson in supporting Progressive Party candidate George Wallace in the 1948 presidential election and soon after made a bitter exit from the NAACP altogether.<sup>41</sup> Du Bois continued to push the UN on its home turf, but now did so from within Robeson’s orbit. In the fall of 1949, he penned a petition to the UN for the CRC and the Women’s Committee for Equal Justice on behalf of Rosa Lee Ingram, a black widow sharecropper on trial for killing a white man in self-defense.<sup>42</sup> With Du Bois out of the picture, Walter White further embraced liberal anticommunism and doubled-down on the organization’s support for the Truman administration, seeing this as the best strategy for securing anti-lynching legislation.<sup>43</sup>

Recent scholarship has challenged the view that the NAACP carried out an internal witch hunt of leftists and retreated from the anticolonial struggle with Du Bois’ acrimonious departure. This scholarship argues that while the NAACP endorsed anticommunism, this was not a new position in the history of its national leadership, was in line with most African Americans’ politics at the time and stopped short of full-blown McCarthyism.<sup>44</sup> Carol Anderson, whose history of African Americans and the UN helped produce this consensus view in the first place, has recently offered a major revision to what she calls a ‘forty-year orthodoxy’.<sup>45</sup> She argues for ‘de-centering Du Bois’ in order to place liberal calls for national self-determination on par with Communism’s anticolonial credentials. The NAACP waged campaigns for self-determination from South West Africa to Indonesia and managed to survive ‘in a political environment that had toppled other anticolonial activists’.<sup>46</sup> In Anderson’s calculus, fostering a relationship with the Truman White House was a wise maneuver, not a Faustian handshake. Furthermore, she argues, it was because the Eisenhower administration that followed Truman had little use for civil rights organizations – not the grip of the Second Red Scare – that liberal anticolonialism waned.<sup>47</sup> While Anderson makes an important revision in drawing attention to how the NAACP sustained its anticolonialism into the 1950s, her own argument about the organization’s marginalization with the change in administration points to the liabilities of hitching black internationalism’s wagon to the fortunes of a president or political party. Appeals to the world community outlived appeals to any one administration. Furthermore, while black liberals carved out space to protest European imperial adventures and the continuation of colonialism, they were less willing or able to defy US empire, as John Munro demonstrates.<sup>48</sup> In the end, the NAACP’s chosen path opened the door for the radical CRC to escalate the black freedom struggle on the international stage.<sup>49</sup>

## Charging Genocide

The CRC began work on *We Charge Genocide* in the summer of 1951. That October, they published the 240-page book with the subtitle, *The Historic Petition To the United Nations for Relief From a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*.<sup>50</sup> Joining William Patterson to draft it were journalist Richard Boyer, political biographer Elizabeth Lawson, poet Yvonne Gregory, CP co-founder Oakley Johnson and civil rights attorney Aubrey Grossman.<sup>51</sup> Ninety-two people – men and women, blacks and whites, spread across twenty-five states – added their names.<sup>52</sup> This politically ecumenical group included members of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, a black left feminist organization fighting colonialism and Jim Crow, whose National Chairman, Charlotta Bass, became the first black woman nominated for Vice President (for the Progressive Party) the following year.<sup>53</sup> Other signatories included Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as publishers, writers, journalists, editors, lawyers, CP leaders, clergy, teachers, trade unionists, prisoners, community organizers and the bereaved family members of prominent lynching victims.<sup>54</sup>

The opening paragraph signaled the worldview of CRC in all its complications and intersections. It took a tone that was as eschatological as it was searing:

Out of the inhuman black ghettos of American cities, out of the cotton plantations of the South, comes this record of mass slayings on the basis of race, of lives deliberately warped and distorted by the willfull [sic] creation of conditions making for premature death, poverty and disease. It is a record that calls aloud for condemnation, for an end to these terrible injustices that constitute a daily and ever-increasing violation of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>55</sup>

The crisis of black America was therefore both localized (in ‘inhuman black ghettos’) and an international concern that demanded the attention of the world’s highest intergovernmental body. *WCG* also situated black lived experience in a *longue durée* of exploitation and migration, a story in which racist violence had made itself apparent at every repulsing turn, causing ‘premature death, poverty and disease’.<sup>56</sup> In this way, the CRC petition illustrates Leslie James’ distinction between liberal organizations such as the NAACP who emphasized the equality of all peoples and black radical internationalists who indicted ‘the high crimes of imperialism’.<sup>57</sup>

The CRC’s conception of genocide in *WCG* was wider in scope than its precedents, owing to the petition’s more developed length and a concerted effort to provide the strongest possible empirical case. Patterson and his co-authors gleaned data from Truman’s 1947 federal civil rights commission, NAACP publications and the Census Bureau – hardly spurious or hyper-partisan sources.<sup>58</sup> *WCG* highlighted the economic, civic, social and mental anguish caused by the daily indignities black Americans endured. Furthermore, it articulated this in terms of the cardinal sin of postwar violence – genocide. The CRC’s wider definition of state-sponsored violence distinguished them from their center-left civil rights rivals. The CRC had already taken the position that the overrepresentation of African Americans on death row constituted cases of ‘legal lynchings’. This position can be seen in a pamphlet from earlier in 1951 on the case of the Trenton Six, who had been sentenced to death by an all-white jury for the alleged murder of an elderly white shopkeeper. ‘Yes, this is a lynching,’ the CRC contended. ‘Not by men in klansmen’s robes. But a lynching *northern* style.’<sup>59</sup> Against the Southern exceptionalism which assuaged liberal whites’ anxieties throughout the civil rights era, the CRC located white supremacy in the halls of state power. The anti-black violence of Klansmen was fundamentally similar to the violence committed ‘[b]y men in court robes and police uniforms’ as a ‘Jim Crow policy of government’.<sup>60</sup> With *WCG*, the CRC took their critique of anti-black violence further, charging the US government with genocide.

The CRC’s legalistic approach would have been immediately apparent to the reader. *WCG* opened with a reading of Articles II and III of the Genocide Convention – which provided the definition of genocide – even before it listed the petitioners. The section devoted to evidence repeated Article II, before laying out a day-by-day chronology of cases of violent crimes suffered by black Americans: from rapes, beatings and shootings at the hands of police to public lynchings and attacks on union organizers. This evidence filled over 150 pages. Read from cover to cover, *WCG* was a disturbing and exhausting

account. Yet, the petition's reliance on international law, rather than moral outrage alone, was a logistical weakness for two reasons. First, *WCG* erroneously suggested the Genocide Convention superseded US law, an assertion which was useless considering Congress had not ratified it in the first place.<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to imagine that the CRC, who followed international and American politics closely, were unaware their claim was patently false. Yet, such a straightforward omission made them vulnerable to matter-of-fact rebuttals, thereby undoing the CRC's attempt to put the US government on the defensive. The second weakness was that the CRC appeared unable to make up its mind as to whether *WCG* was an indignant polemic able to stand on its own moral animus or a focused call for legal redress through the mechanism of the United Nations. Quoting the Genocide Convention prominently suggested it was the latter, but the CRC's choice to frame its appeal to the United Nations General Assembly 'not as a court of law' (which it was not) 'but as the conscience of mankind which it should be' pointed to the former.<sup>62</sup>

Inevitably, a third potential obstacle to the petition's political viability was the Communism of its authors. The Communist Party (CP) and its Stalinism had alienated members and more liberal fellow travelers with the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact in 1939.<sup>63</sup> Once the 'sparkplugs of insurgency', the postwar period put Communists 'on the defensive'.<sup>64</sup> Communists' belief that their struggle was for a truer American democracy and a more equitable world order was contradicted by the CP's fidelity to the Soviet Union and its blindness to Stalin's crimes. As Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps write, lionizing the Soviet formation foreclosed 'more democratic concepts of socialism from gaining traction'.<sup>65</sup> The CP's record on race and civil rights was not without its contradictions, either, as the party opposed Randolph and his March on Washington, backed the internment of Japanese-Americans during wartime and assented to the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the name of antifascism.<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, understanding the CRC within a transnational history of black internationalism means recontextualizing these familiar nation-bounded critiques of the CP and Stalinism. Whatever their experiences within 'communist party paternalism', black radicals were no Comintern dupes.<sup>67</sup> One way of doing this has been to argue, which Robin D.G. Kelley does of the CP in Alabama, that the everyday concerns of black communists typically 'had nothing to do with international crises'.<sup>68</sup> More recently, others have compellingly argued the opposite – that black radicals ran afoul of Stalinist orthodoxy and pushed the limits of Comintern hegemony through internationalist campaigns often independent of – and sometimes at-odds with – national Communist parties.<sup>69</sup> By combining Kelley's attention to the local with a transnational approach, a clearer picture of the CRC and *WCG* comes into vision. Opening up the spatial field of our analysis allows us to think beyond the constraints of the CP or even the Comintern, towards a view of on-the-ground internationalist activism embedded in particular transatlantic locales rather than emanating from party structures.

### **The Antifascist and Anti-Imperialist Roots of *We Charge Genocide***

Postwar changes to the international mood legitimated the CRC's view that lynching and inequalities in the justice system were inseparable. The Nuremberg Trials, the advent of human rights and the UN Genocide Convention together provided a foundation for the CRC to charge genocide. The 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race further signaled international support for rectifying the 'enormous amount of human and social damage' carried out in the name of the 'myth of "race"'.<sup>70</sup> In this milieu, Patterson hotly insisted on the similarity between Jim Crow and Auschwitz. 'I could not fail to recognize,' Patterson later recalled, 'that just as the United States, under cover of law, carried out genocidal racist policies in police murders of Black men, framed death sentences, death that came from withholding proper medical care to Black people, just so had Hitler built and operated his mass death machine under cover of Nazi law.'<sup>71</sup> Patterson here saw *WCG* as an opportunity to raise the consciousness of white Americans. He was not alone. African Americans with a variety of political stances made use of the comparison.<sup>72</sup> After the war, harnessing the horror Americans felt towards the revelations of the Holocaust offered Patterson and the CRC a way of cutting through white America's complacency and exposing their complicity in black deaths.

In bringing together currents of antifascism, anti-racism and anti-imperialism, Patterson built upon a decade of intellectual and political struggle to dismantle 'the global color line'.<sup>73</sup> Historians have too

often treated antifascism as if it had been contained within Europe.<sup>74</sup> The history of antifascism is also a history of black diasporic politics. Historians have begun to reconstruct the world of possibilities which black internationalists inhabited between the world wars, concretized by a shared ‘opposition to the racial order of empire’.<sup>75</sup> In fact, Fascist Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia and the republican cause in Spain stoked African Americans’ international consciousness more than perhaps any others.<sup>76</sup> Against those who would limit the antifascist struggle to the European continent by distinguishing Jim Crow and European imperialisms from Nazi racial politics, the black diasporic left in metropolises around the world sought to build ‘an anti-imperialist cultural front’.<sup>77</sup>

If fascisms in Europe posed no direct physical threat to black leftists, this did not stop them from connecting the racial politics of fascism to their own lived experiences of gendered and racialized violence.<sup>78</sup> ‘These activists,’ Minkah Makalani writes,

‘were convinced that whether humanity enjoyed greater freedoms or suffered even harsher colonial regimes hinged on the struggles that peoples of African descent in the United States, Caribbean, and Africa would wage against racism, colonialism, and capitalism and on their ability to link these struggles with similar movements in Asia, Latin America, and Europe.’<sup>79</sup>

Through ‘an array of transatlantic exchanges’, they brought ‘pamphlets and periodicals, correspondence, and debates’ to new and old shores.<sup>80</sup> As part of the directive to build popular fronts, however, the Comintern prioritized growing antifascist alliances over cultivating anti-imperialist ones, a move which Trinidadian Marxist George Padmore insisted was self-defeating. As white communists and socialists dropped their anti-imperialist rhetoric, black internationalist intellectuals like Padmore renewed their insistence that an antifascism that was not also anti-imperialist was hardly worth fighting for.<sup>81</sup>

This period profoundly shaped William Patterson and Paul Robeson’s political trajectories. Each was deeply immersed in what Leslie James calls the ‘anti-colonial ideological laboratory’ of the black diaspora.<sup>82</sup> Through a series of anti-imperialist, trade union and black workers’ conferences between 1929 and 1937, Patterson came to work closely with African, Caribbean, European and North American radicals such as Padmore and fellow black Communist James Ford of Alabama – the latter a *WCG* signatory.<sup>83</sup> Before they were married, William Patterson and Louise Thompson each participated in the 1937 World Congress against Racism and Anti-Semitism in Paris.<sup>84</sup> Paul Robeson recalled that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was a turning point for black Americans, a confirmation that their struggle for emancipation paralleled colonial peoples’ right to self-determination.<sup>85</sup> To civil rights activists, broadly defined, ‘the fascist contagion, whether it flourished in Germany, Italy, Spain or Mississippi, represented everything they were working to abolish.’<sup>86</sup> It was in this context that the CRC refused to disentangle world imperialism, US racism and the genocidal consequences of fascism in Europe.

The CRC aimed to do more than rankle the federal government and promote the anti-lynching cause. International solidarity was central to the worldview of the CRC. In particular, movements for peace and for decolonization clearly shaped the tone and language of *WCG*. By the time William Patterson began work on *WCG*, a strong Africanist critique of Great Power politics was several years old. At the Fifth Pan-African Conference in 1945, the assembled representatives declared:

The delegates to the Fifth Pan-African Congress believe in peace. How could it be otherwise when for centuries the African peoples have been victims of violence and slavery. Yet if the Western world is still determined to rule mankind by force, then Africans, as a last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve Freedom, even if force destroys them and the world.<sup>87</sup>

Two years later, W.E.B. Du Bois (a *WCG* signatory) made his own provocative link, this time between Nazism, racism and imperialism:

[T]here was no Nazi atrocity – concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of children – which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folks in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.<sup>88</sup>



Far from an historical aberration, the Holocaust was for Du Bois only intelligible when situated within the heinous stories of the subjugation of racialized peoples the world over. In this light, the responses of the United States and United Nations, sincere as they were, could only fail to impress or even pacify the African American student of history.

It was within this global context that *WCG* became ‘the most damning human rights report on Jim Crow written during the Cold War’.<sup>89</sup> In the months surrounding its publication as a book, the CRC forged alliances with labor unions, civil rights leaders and student organizations throughout the Western hemisphere, as well as in Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Burma.<sup>90</sup> These ties sharpened Patterson’s understanding of how political moderates at home and abroad were implicated in the imperial plunder of what is now called the Global South. Patterson was not alone: black leftists saw colonial exploitation as inherent to advanced capitalism, while black liberals viewed antidiscrimination legislation as the goal.<sup>91</sup> In at least one speech, Patterson made this point in historical terms. Pointing to the aftermath of World War I, Patterson argued that Wilsonianism had not made the world safe for democracy, but rather had reinforced colonial strangleholds in the global south. ‘Millions of men and women in Africa and the colonial lands got new masters,’ he told an audience in 1951.<sup>92</sup> Patterson’s knowledge of the reality of Jim Crow made incantations of human rights ring hollow in his ears: ‘golden words were often used to hide the inhuman deed,’ he recounted in his autobiography.<sup>93</sup> ‘No government bound up with racism could want or seek world peace.’<sup>94</sup> Patterson’s internationalist perspective altered his fundamental understanding of the federal government’s complicity in anti-black violence within the United States. In short, he came to see that ‘the lyncher and the atom bomber’ were one.<sup>95</sup>

Paul Robeson shared Patterson’s commitment to the inseparability of domestic and international violence. Robeson’s activism was often more explicitly anticolonial than Patterson’s, in particular his work as the leader of the Council for African Affairs (CAA). As Lindsey R. Swindall notes, the concept of a Global South with a shared history of (neo)colonialism was instrumental to the CAA’s efforts, whether they were protesting apartheid in South Africa or federal hand-wringing over lynching at home.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, women in the CAA who later signed *WCG*, including Charlotta Bass and Louise Thompson Patterson (who was also William Patterson’s wife), saw anticolonialism as a feminist issue, arguing that South African women’s freedom was ‘inextricably linked’ to their own.<sup>97</sup> The CAA monitored the formation of the United Nations extremely closely during the war and by 1945 was calling for it to support African self-determination.<sup>98</sup> Robeson’s work with the CAA likely contributed to *WCG*’s international acclaim. It was with great pride that William Patterson wrote that the petition had found fervent support ‘from the Gold Coast and other countries in Africa’, plus Haiti and the British West Indies.<sup>99</sup> It is therefore important to consider the decolonization context in which the CRC charged genocide. Using international law in the fight for civil rights was a way of ‘lengthening the battlefield’, according to Gerald Horne,<sup>100</sup> of enabling African Americans to connect their own experiences to the history of racial violence in the colonial and postcolonial world.

### **Cold War Liberalism and Civil Rights**

The CRC petition was also a response to President Harry Truman’s tepid attempts to address anti-black violence. Truman had committed himself to at least a limited civil rights agenda. Civil rights became a plank of his 1948 platform and the president went so far as to desegregate the government and military via executive orders. He also commissioned a federal study on civil rights that tabled the report *To Secure These Rights* (1947). Though the committee considered a broad scope of injuries and indignities, its approach might have flummoxed most African Americans. In its section dedicated to recommendations, for example, the report shifted abruptly from the topic of segregation to lynchings to a surprisingly lengthy lament that black boys were not being allowed to participate in ‘such things as Washington’s annual marble tournament’.<sup>101</sup> Whether most African Americans considered this segregated marble tournament among the most emblematic or urgent examples of anti-blackness in the United States was not a question that the authors of *To Secure These Rights* took up.

Radicals like Robeson and Patterson were unimpressed by the Democratic Party's 'politics of symbolic equality'.<sup>102</sup> Truman desperately hoped to retain the Dixiecrat wing of the party, which came at the cost of considering the whole system of racism, which was made manifest in black poverty, sham trials and anti-black violence. As the Cold War tightened, domestic anticommunism within both major parties compelled black political organizations (such as the NAACP) to settle for narrower formulations of civil rights. Red-baiting was made a useful weapon in the arsenal of segregationists as well, who, as Carol Anderson writes, 'twisted the definition of human rights into the hammer and sickle.' What could have been a platform for addressing the violent oppression of African Americans was 'roundly repudiated as subversive, communistic, and even treasonous'.<sup>103</sup>

In trying to break this political deadlock, Patterson made powerful use of the language of genocide, human rights and international law. *WCG* strategically concluded by appealing to the precedent of the Holocaust, for which the term genocide had been established. 'We recall the words of Mr. Justice Jackson at the Nuremberg trial,' insisted Patterson. 'We cannot believe that the General Assembly will not condemn the crimes complained of in this petition.'<sup>104</sup> A series of lengthy quotations from Jackson's opening address at Nuremberg filled the back cover. Patterson had already sought to establish a relationship between the global histories of fascism, antisemitism and anti-blackness. In an earlier speech, he referred to lynchings as 'pogroms' and 'the counter-part of Czarist Russia's murder of the Jewish people'.<sup>105</sup> Three months later, Patterson credited women like anti-fascist organizer Charlotte Stern with making it possible to 'destroy fascism before the ovens and the concentration camps are built in the USA'.<sup>106</sup> Patterson's statement shows he knew what rhetoric was most likely to shake up the civil rights impasse of the early Cold War years. With human rights and decolonization on the international agenda, the moment was ripe for the CRC to charge genocide.

The prominence of racial liberals in government, combined with the advent of human rights discourse, presented an enormous opportunity for a civil rights movement emboldened by the war.<sup>107</sup> The consolidation of its interventionist foreign policy made the US sensitive to world opinion. 'At a time when the U.S. hoped to reshape the postwar world in its own image,' Mary L. Dudziak concludes, 'the international attention given to racial segregation was troublesome and embarrassing.'<sup>108</sup> Official commitment to civil rights, however, remained partial, qualified and strategic. As Carol Anderson summarizes, 'although the United States was willing to use the rhetoric of human rights to bludgeon the Soviet Union and play the politics of moral outrage that the Holocaust engendered, the federal government, even liberals, steadfastly refused to make human rights a viable force in the United States or in international practice.'<sup>109</sup> Perhaps no moment demonstrated liberal wariness towards civil rights radicalism more clearly than Eleanor Roosevelt's refusal to take up *WCG*. Roosevelt publically dismissed the petition and countered that the shorter life expectancy of blacks owed to 'sickness and disease', which she insisted were now being sincerely addressed by the federal government.<sup>110</sup>

The official response to *WCG* demonstrated the strict political limits of liberal support for civil rights. No sooner had Patterson put forward the petition in Paris – with the Soviet delegation's enthusiastic support – than the US Embassy demanded the activist's passport. Forced to flee France for New York City (via Eastern Europe), Patterson turned his journey home into an impromptu speaking tour where he further embarrassed the US and found opportunistic friends in the governments of the Soviet orbit.<sup>111</sup> With Patterson's return to the US, the American delegation successfully prevented any debate on the *WCG* petition. Paul Robeson, who had been monitored by the US, Britain and Canada since he visited Spain during its civil war, was similarly grounded.<sup>112</sup> In fact, it was Robeson who was first tapped to deliver the Paris version of *WCG*, but he was barred from holding a passport.<sup>113</sup> Dr. Raphael Lemkin, the Yale historian who coined the term 'genocide', attacked the petition in the pages of the *New York Times* and suggested leftists redirect their efforts to addressing the treatment of ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union.<sup>114</sup> President Truman knew the black northern electorate had helped secure his victory in the 1948 election, but civil rights was like a thorn in his administration's side that the Soviet Union continually pressed its thumb against.<sup>115</sup> Soviet propagandists did not have a monopoly on such criticism, however. A State Department report on foreign coverage of US racism found 'flagrant examples of infringements of the civil rights of any American citizens are considered news by papers of all political orientations in most

of the countries of Europe.’<sup>116</sup> While Patterson prepared to table *WCG*, an anxious FBI agent reported back to Washington that a coalition of Latin American and European nations, joining India and Egypt, would ‘raise the Genocide Question’ at the UN General Assembly.<sup>117</sup>

Members of the CRC did not need these official US responses to convince them that there were limits to having a seat at the table, the strategy taken by the NAACP. A few months before presenting *WCG* to the UN, Patterson told a crowd that his faith in working within legal and government arenas had been destroyed by the trial of the Italian-born anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in 1921. ‘I have learned that no rights are guaranteed except to those in power,’ Patterson warned. ‘No constitutional liberties are fully enjoyed by a people except where those from whom these liberties have been wrested no longer control the government.’<sup>118</sup> In a speech to seven hundred people in May 1951, Patterson accused ‘[t]hose Negro “leaders” bedecked with Nobel prizes, United Nations Commissions and seated on federal court benches’, of being race-traitors, complicit in ‘the crimes of the government they serve against the Negro people’.<sup>119</sup> Here Patterson was attacking Ralph Bunche, an African American diplomat who had won the Nobel Peace Prize, had been instrumental in drafting the United Nations Charter, was once a key member of the NNC and who gave Patterson the silent treatment in Paris.<sup>120</sup>

The lengths the liberal civil rights coalition took to prevent the CRC from getting its petition heard in the UN were unsettling. The NAACP co-produced a pamphlet entitled *The Negro in American Life* (1952) with the United States Information Agency, the successor of Washington’s wartime propaganda wing.<sup>121</sup> The State Department called on Edith Sampson, a black member of the UN delegation, to ‘declare that the horror stories about lynching and segregation were just a pack of lies’.<sup>122</sup> In a lecture tour of northern Europe arranged by the State Department, Sampson told audiences that ‘the KKK has disappeared.’<sup>123</sup> Far from being stooges of the Truman administration, however, black liberals like Bunche had their own reasons to spurn Patterson and the *WCG* petition. Though NAACP leaders Walter White, Channing Tobias and Rayford Logan quickly and publicly rejected the genocide charge, this revealed the narrow political space available to respectable African Americans during the Second Red Scare as much as it illustrated an ideological disagreement. White had already dropped the language of human rights to maintain his access to President Truman. Tobias, meanwhile, was grilled about his prior involvement with Robeson’s CAA during his UN delegation-appointment hearings.<sup>124</sup> Even more strikingly, Logan’s public acquiescence contradicted a sardonic remark he made in private that if the US intended to shield its foreign policy with the pretense of making the world safe for democracy, ‘it might not be a bad idea to have some democracy to defend.’<sup>125</sup> The anticommunism of the NAACP and liberal civil rights leaders was distinct from the white Dixiecrat Congressmen who used red-baiting to defend white supremacy. Though the NAACP understood that ‘Communists were certainly not a grave threat to American national security’, neither were they apparently ‘attractive allies’.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, black anticommunism was by no means limited to elite civil rights leaders.<sup>127</sup> Seeing no advantage in supporting the CRC radicals, black liberals chose to distance themselves from *WCG* as fast as possible.

Furthermore, emphasizing the effectiveness of the campaign to discredit the CRC risks overestimating state control and exaggerating the marginality of dissenting voices in the civil rights conversation. In a statement to the *Arkansas State Press*, Patterson was resolute: ‘Neither the State Department, nor its hired apologists, Negro and white, will stop the filing of this historic petition, nor its circulation throughout the United States by the tens of thousands.’<sup>128</sup> A new historiographic consensus appears to be forming, maintaining that anticommunism’s assault has been overstated. This literature includes Carol Anderson’s reminder (discussed earlier in this essay) that the NAACP and other black liberals remained active in anticolonial activism during the early Cold War.<sup>129</sup> At the other end of the political spectrum, a left-wing and vehemently internationalist anticolonialism, one never confined to the CP, as John Munro documents, survived the Second Red Scare and influenced a new generation in the 1960s.<sup>130</sup>

The propagandistic response from the Truman administration and its liberal supporters indicated the seriousness with which the ideological differences between the left and center-left of the nascent civil rights movement were treated by those closest to power. The State Department, US delegation and US embassies together effectively blocked *WCG* from being discussed at the UN and muzzled its authors. Yet, Patterson and Robeson each had a tremendous following at mid-century and neither delivered their

message to a small group of already-converted radicals.<sup>131</sup> In June 1946, Robeson organized a Madison Square Garden rally that was covered by New York City's left-wing and mainstream press alike (including the *Times* and *Post*) and which was attended by fifteen thousand people.<sup>132</sup> When, in 1949, Robeson was attacked for suggesting African Americans would refuse to fight in any war against the Soviet Union, comrades inside and outside of the CP came to his aid.<sup>133</sup> In fact, the men and women who charged genocide had an afterlife: their story did not end with the revocation of William Patterson's passport. Though Gerald Horne contends that this severed 'the oxygen supply for his activism',<sup>134</sup> the old adage that ideas are less easily killed than their authors – the very lesson Robeson dramatized with his version of the labor song "Joe Hill" – is worth bearing in mind. The ghosts of anti-black violence refused to stay quiet.

### Charging Genocide Since 1951

Despite the fierce official response to *WCG*, the accusation of genocide was not suppressed for good. On 17 July 1964, Malcolm X brought a memorandum before the Organization of African Unity conference in Cairo, which, in the mold of *WCG*, called on African nations to stand with the millions of African Americans subjected to 'murder', 'psychological humiliation and physical mutilation' as 'an everyday occurrence'.<sup>135</sup> The history of racist violence – especially enslavement and the slave trade – underpinned Malcolm's thinking.<sup>136</sup> As the child of two Garveyites, from Grenada and Georgia, respectively, Malcolm was also the product of a transnational, diasporic black politics borne on the waves of the Atlantic.<sup>137</sup> That the American landscape was 'full of the corpses' of black ancestors similarly drove James Baldwin to link a national history of violence to his own internalized racism. Before an almost entirely white audience in Cambridge, England, Baldwin recounted,

It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, or 6, or 7, to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to discover that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, when you were rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians were you.<sup>138</sup>

Though neither Baldwin or Malcolm uttered the word 'genocide' here, the implications of their statements are clear. Like the signatories of *WCG* before them, each located the birth of the nation in the ghosts of genocidal white supremacy. What connected Malcolm and Baldwin to the CRC in the early fifties was a shared belief that the soil beneath their feet teemed with blood. In attributing the vulnerability of his own black body to being in a country inaugurated in settler colonialism and chattel slavery, Baldwin anticipated more recent activist and scholarly attempts to understand racialized violence against black and Indigenous people in the Americas in tandem, a topic which I take up later in this essay.

It is also important to note that Baldwin recalled this childhood experience as a moment of clarity, equivalent to what Avery Gordon calls being haunted and an ontological state that Christina Sharpe calls being 'in the wake'. Gordon defines haunting as when 'abusive systems of power make themselves known,'<sup>139</sup> in other words, 'when the over-and-done-with comes alive and when what's been in your blind spot comes into view.'<sup>140</sup> Haunting is a collapse of past and present that becomes the grounds for politics. It is at once a moment of disorientation and of newfound clarity of vision, since a ghost 'demands its due, your attention'.<sup>141</sup> Unlike trauma, which in itself cannot be operationalized, haunting represents a 'something-to-be-done'.<sup>142</sup> The child Baldwin's realization is also an example of what Christina Sharpe calls being 'in the wake'. The triple metaphor of the 'wake' brings together historical memory and personal trauma: as in the disturbance along the water of the ships which brought chattel slaves to the hemisphere, as in the rituals of mourning which seek collective meaning from the occasion of individual death, and as in a state of wakefulness (of race consciousness). Being in the wake means being haunted by 'deathly repetition', of 'living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery'.<sup>143</sup> The ghosts of genocide form 'the ground we walk on'.<sup>144</sup> In Baldwin's retelling, being in the wake was, as Sharpe would put it, a position of 'deep hurt and deep knowledge': the terrifying but mobilizing understanding that your country is built on black and Indigenous bodies.<sup>145</sup>

Where Baldwin refrained from using the term genocide, ‘Queen Mother’ Audley Moore took up the genocide charge explicitly. Over the course of her life, Moore was a Garveyite, Communist, black nationalist and founder of the sixties reparations movement.<sup>146</sup> She thus embodied many of the radical threads that tied the history of African American appeals to the world together: Pan-Africanism, anticolonialism and an economically – and historically – driven critique of white supremacy. She also anticipated the work the genocide charge could do for black internationalist feminism. Moore referred to what contemporary theorists would call internalized racism and misogyny as a ‘mental genocide’, a cognitive state which necessitated decolonizing the mind.<sup>147</sup> According to Erik S. McDuffie, Moore ‘viewed white supremacy, Jim Crow, political persecution, the oppression of black womanhood, colonialism, lynching and the notion of black depravity as forms of genocide.’<sup>148</sup> Like the Marxists in the CRC, Queen Mother Moore’s critique was thoroughly historical and emphasized the systemic, economic damages committed against blacks in addition to legal, political, social and psychological injuries. Unlike the male members of the CRC who played the most prominent public roles, her approach integrated patriarchy, another feature of contemporary genocide charges that this essay will revisit.

The stamp of *WCG* was discernible in a younger generation of activists as well. In the tumultuous sixties, activists leveled the genocide charge against the Chicago Police Department for their use of black recruits to police majority-black areas and against New York State in the aftermath of the Attica Prison uprising.<sup>149</sup> Patterson maintained his ties to radicalism long enough to serve on the Board of Trustees for the Angela Davis Legal Defense Fund as an octogenarian. A 1971 full-page ad soliciting donations included Patterson’s endorsement alongside the likes of James Baldwin’s, surely a sign of his continued influence. Out of a life’s worth of radical activity, ‘Author of “We Charge Genocide”’ appeared first.<sup>150</sup> For his part, Robeson also remained a vaunted figure of the internationalist left, leading C.L.R. James to call him ‘the most magnificent human being I have ever known or ever heard of’ in 1970.<sup>151</sup> Patterson also forged ties with the Black Panther Party and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>152</sup> In 1967, SNCC approached him with the idea to reprint an updated *WCG* to disseminate in the decolonizing world. With racial uprisings at home and the US waging war in Vietnam, the message of *WCG* was as relevant as ever. ‘Unwarranted and brutal suppression of black people in the United States is a matter of international concern,’ SNCC’s Elizabeth Sutherland wrote to him.<sup>153</sup> SNCC’s Stokely Carmichael even borrowed the phrase ‘we charge genocide’ to accuse the United States of shipping racism and militarism to Southeast Asia.<sup>154</sup> Just as SNCC leaders looked outward, their gaze soon also turned to the history of the internal empire.

Looking across the ocean, as well as the gulf of history, the Black Panther Party (BPP) similarly situated police violence in Oakland, the Vietnam war and the combined 200,000 civilians killed at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, within a history of American white supremacy since the time of settler conquest.<sup>155</sup> In fact, no organization mirrored the CRC’s rhetoric as self-assuredly as the Panthers. Its *Ten Points Program* (1966) compared the injuries of the black community to the Holocaust.<sup>156</sup> Huey Newton’s Executive Mandate No. 1 called for black self-armament while referencing the genocide of ‘American Indians’, the internment of Japanese Americans and the war in Vietnam.<sup>157</sup> In a recruitment appeal from the following year, Barbara Arthur wrote of ‘police brutality and black genocide’.<sup>158</sup> The Panthers’ genocide charge was not an outcome of militant posturing or an obsession with violence. In November 1970, as the Party shifted its priorities away from armed struggle, Huey Newton addressed a Boston audience on the topic of the party’s ‘survival programs’ amid the triple threat of ‘genocide’, ‘racism’ and ‘fascism’.<sup>159</sup> That same month, Newton appeared at a rally in New York City alongside the likes of Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson and William Kunstler, posters for which featured the text ‘WE CHARGE GENOCIDE’ emblazoned over the UN logo.<sup>160</sup>

It was more than a fondness for the CRC that motivated the BPP to take up the term genocide. The idea that black people were being systematically wiped out must have resonated with a group of activists whose lives could be snuffed out at any moment by police assassination.<sup>161</sup> The idea that the BPP might invoke international law to assert their right to survival was not illogical. This possibility may have even worked against them. As a 1970 pamphlet disseminated by the Defenders of The American Constitution indicated, conservative and anti-civil rights groups helped prevent the ratification of the Genocide Convention until 1988. ‘Calling all Patriots!’ the pamphlet announced, ‘The Ratification Of

The Genocide Treaty Will Remove The Last Vestige Of Our Freedom.’ In calling upon true patriots to oppose ratification, the pamphlet not only practiced red-baiting (it labeled the Convention as part of a ‘One World Plot’), it also warned that ‘Black Panthers could charge the Police with Genocide’. ‘Chaos would result’, spelling nothing less than, ‘death to our American way of life’ at the hands of these insidious black rabble-rousers. The possibility of another UN genocide charge thus provoked the same blend of racism and anticommunism that the CRC, NAACP and NNC had each faced in the 1950s.<sup>162</sup>

Though this conservative criticism was misplaced, the Panthers’ genocide charge also drew important criticism from inside and outside the Party. Namely, members of the Black Panthers and SNCC’s H. Rap Brown each opposed federally-subsidized reproductive care as a government plot to lower black birthrates in urban areas. Bound up in this claim was the idea that black women’s place within the freedom struggle was as the vessels for producing the next generation of revolutionaries. At the same time, the theory seems to have begun with black civil rights liberals.<sup>163</sup> The NAACP opposed state-funded birth control access as early as 1965, a year before the BPP was even established and two years before the Black Power Conference declared birth control ‘black genocide’.<sup>164</sup> The National Urban League worried Planned Parenthood clinics would carry out ‘population control’ as early as 1962.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, unlike these civil rights moderates, the Panthers put greater emphasis on capital punishment or the overrepresentation of black soldiers in Vietnam in their discussions of ‘black genocide’.<sup>166</sup> In fact, the BPP also protested the coercive sterilization laws that reproductive justice organizations of color targeted.<sup>167</sup> In her history of reproductive rights activism by women of color, Jennifer Nelson argues the BPP ‘contributed to the development of a new public discourse on *involuntary* reproductive control that foregrounded problems of sterilization abuse and population control among people of color.’<sup>168</sup> Of course, this pivot was only possible because women within the Party pushed it to accept black women’s right to reproductive care. ‘Despite their earlier anti-fertility control rhetoric,’ Nelson argues, ‘the Black Panthers aided in the transformation of an abortion rights campaign into one of reproductive rights.’<sup>169</sup>

For these reasons, historians should approach Charles H. Martin’s claim that ‘the [CRC] Genocide Petition failed to have a substantial impact on the black community’ with considerable skepticism.<sup>170</sup> Rather, the history of the genocide charge matches John Munro’s recuperation of the ‘anticolonial front’ within the black freedom struggle: an ‘intergenerational group of mostly Black radicals’.<sup>171</sup> Recovering such continuities complicates the declension thesis common to the earliest studies of black internationalism. Emblematic of this tendency is Penny Von Eschen’s remarkable monograph *Race Against Empire*, which argued that black liberals’ acceptance of Cold War foreign policy, combined with the ‘prosecution of activists such as [Paul] Robeson [...] effectively severed the black American struggle for civil rights from the issues of anticolonialism and racism abroad.’<sup>172</sup> Yet as this essay demonstrates, the language of genocide connected several generations of black radicals. Each of these activists and intellectuals, in different historical moments, rejected a narrow focus on domestic ‘civil rights’ in favor of a historically-, economically- and globally-minded approach that maintained space in its analysis for the experiences of racialized people worldwide.

### **Conclusions: Violence in US history**

Studying the CRC and its echoes in late twentieth-century activism connects the past to our present, as longstanding grievances against police violence continue to revive the language of genocide. The ghosts of anti-black racism continue to linger, not to mention the specters of William Patterson and Paul Robeson. The phrase ‘We Charge Genocide’ has resurfaced as the name of a world-minded group of activists protesting police violence and in outcries over the Flint, Michigan water crisis.<sup>173</sup> Revisiting the genocide charge and other African American appeals to a world community across time also enables historians to internationalize the long civil rights movement, enriching our geographic and ideological narratives.<sup>174</sup> The appeals launched by William Monroe Trotter, to the NAACP and CRC and to the Black Panthers, spanned a wide range of ideological commitments and were rooted in different but compatible etiologies of black death. What connected many of these and other black political formations is the recognition that racialized violence takes place at different scales, from localized Jim Crow to global patterns of colonial plunder, in ways which have entangled racialized peoples the world over.

Considering *WCG* within a longer history of internationalist appeals and discourse about genocide also identifies the linkages African American radicals sought to forge with other racialized people. Both the Black Panthers and James Baldwin, for example, made what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call ‘the twin genocides of conquest and slavery’ the tentative rhetorical basis for cross-racial organizing in response to histories of violence.<sup>175</sup> Twenty years ago now, Saidiya Hartman called historians’ attention to ‘the still-unfolding narrative of captivity, dispossession and domination that engenders the black subject in the Americas’.<sup>176</sup> However, except for specialists of Native American studies, this is a story historians and activists have sometimes been slower to tell about Indigenous slavery and elimination.<sup>177</sup> Like the black bodies forming ‘the ground we walk on’, Indigenous corpses have filled ‘the American soil’.<sup>178</sup> James Baldwin made this connection in horror as a child, watching Gary Cooper killing ‘Indians’ and feeling in the pit of his stomach a vicarious phantom pain – what Hartman calls ‘the history that hurts’.<sup>179</sup>

In recent iterations, the genocide charge has also been made to encompass the intersection of gendered and racialized violence. In 2016, for example, the Brooklyn-based organization Black Women’s Blueprint launched a Black Women’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).<sup>180</sup> The name invoked similar efforts to unearth and address systemic violence and its profound legacies such as in post-apartheid South Africa and Chile following the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The Truth and Reconciliation framework also suggests the possibility of foregrounding the history of colonialism in anti-racist appeals to human rights and an international community. Canada’s commission established that the government and participating churches carried out cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples through its residential school system. Canada’s ongoing National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls may recognize what the Black Women’s Blueprint has insisted – that sexual violence against racialized women and girls is a ‘human rights atrocity’.<sup>181</sup>

Women of color are not new to the international fray of charging genocide. Women like Claudia Jones, who affixed her name to *WCG* and wrote ‘Lament for Emmett Till’, put colonial self-determination, human rights, international peace and women’s emancipation on the agenda and helped create a postwar black internationalism through what Kennnetta Hammond Perry calls ‘the politics of mourning’.<sup>182</sup> Along with Eslanda Goode Robeson and Louise Thompson Patterson, she waged ‘a transnational struggle for a type of Black freedom that contested all forms of racial oppression’.<sup>183</sup> Such activists played vital roles within the anticolonial front, which John Munro defines as ‘a tendency within the postwar Black liberation struggle’ that prioritized ‘the imperial structure of gendered racial capitalism’.<sup>184</sup> Yet, much work remains to be done to ‘engender’ black internationalism.<sup>185</sup>

Revisiting the discourse of those activists who refused narrower formulations of civil rights means coming to terms with a tremendous counter-factual history, the ‘archive of historical possibilities lost to the Red Scare’ and other ‘hidden archives of human struggle and political engagement’.<sup>186</sup> It means historians must continue to consider political arenas other than the voting booth, the public march or the desegregating classroom. William Patterson himself decried that racial violence has left its mark everywhere in American history: violence took place on Southern chain gangs and ‘in the back rooms of sheriffs’ offices’, as well as in jail cells and police stations across the country.<sup>187</sup> Yet, Patterson refused to isolate these residues of slavery within a paradigm of American or southern exceptionalism. Patterson and the CRC made explicit (if overstated) comparisons to the Holocaust, while sharpening their critique of imperialism. These radicals tugged on the thread of racialized violence, which connected, at different times, anti-black violence and ‘Northern style’ lynchings to Great Power empires, European fascist movements and settler colonialism’s logic of elimination. Theirs and others’ attempts to truly internationalize the anti-racist struggle deserve further reconsideration.

While this essay has focused on the history of African American appeals to international law and the genocide framework, further work could certainly devote itself to considering the basis of the charge itself.<sup>188</sup> At the same time, historians may find that the usefulness of quantifying and classifying black suffering and death according to an empiricist paradigm and the strictures of international law has its limits. Shereen Ilahi argues that comparative approaches can obscure the fact that the actual experiences of violence are not understood in such a relativizing manner. For the colonial subject in Ireland or in India (or, I would add, for the black citizen in the United States), it does not matter so much that subjects of the

French or German empire had it ‘worse off’ in the eyes of historians.<sup>189</sup> As Patterson himself understood, ‘words and statistics are but poor things to convey the long agony of the Negro people.’<sup>190</sup> What is beyond dispute, however, is that violence has played a constitutive role in American history and, as this essay has argued, provoked black Americans’ attempts to reckon with the past and build alternative futures.<sup>191</sup>

### Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I also wish to thank the members and conveners of the Black Research Roundtable at the University of Michigan and the anonymous reader for *Radical Americas*, each for their comments and suggestions. I also acknowledge that the research and writing for this article took place on the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Ojibway, Odawa, Mississaugas, Potawatomi, and Seneca peoples.

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, James and William F. Buckley. “The American Dream and the American Negro,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1965, 32. The debate is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w> (accessed on 26 July 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 195.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide*, 195.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan Goodman’s account in his biography of Paul Robeson is typical in this regard: Goodman depicts WCG as a heroic but destined-to-fail attempt which “would not be tried again.” Jordan Goodman, *Paul Robeson: A Watched Man* (New York: Verso, 2013), 183. The petition receives a scant paragraph in Martin Duberman’s 500-plus (not including notes) biography of Paul Robeson. Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 398. Charles H. Martin likewise interprets WCG as having “briefly expanded the intellectual boundaries of the contemporary racial debate.” Charles H. Martin, “Internationalizing ‘The American Dilemma’: The Civil Rights Congress and the 1951 Genocide Petition to the United Nations,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 4 (1997): 56. Carol Anderson downplays the anticolonial context or internationalist ambitions of WCG, flattening it into a “deftly crafted” but merely symbolic “CP [Communist Party] document.” 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), 185.

<sup>7</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233–63. For a discussion of the impact of Hall’s essay, see Lindsey R. Swindall, *The Path to the Greater, Freer, Truer World: Southern Civil Rights and Anticolonialism, 1937–1955* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in the epigraph to Hall, “Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1233.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Arnesen, “Reconsidering the ‘Long Civil Rights Movement,’” *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 2 (2009): 32. For similar arguments, see Steven F. Lawson, “Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement,” in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (University Press of Kentucky, 2011); Jeffrey Helgeson, “Beyond a Long Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of African American History* 99, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 442–55.

<sup>10</sup> Arnesen, “Reconsidering,” 33.

<sup>11</sup> Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 266.

<sup>12</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*; Robyn Spencer, “Merely One Link in



the Worldwide Revolution: Internationalism, State Repression, and the Black Panther Party, 1966–1972,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 215–31; Nicole Waligora-Davis, *Sanctuary: African Americans and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2014); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations, The United States in the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War, The United States in the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Nicholas Grant, *Winning Our Freedoms Together: African Americans and Apartheid, 1945–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); John Munro, *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonisation, 1945–1960* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> David Featherstone, “Black Internationalism, International Communism and Anti-Fascist Political Trajectories: African American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 7, no. 7 (Fall 2014): 14.

<sup>14</sup> That the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasized economic injustice and global exploitation has been demonstrated by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall as well as Martha Biondi. Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement”; Martha Biondi, “The Rise of the Reparations Movement,” *Radical History Review* 87, no. 1 (October 9, 2003): 5–18.

<sup>15</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, 196. As Leslie James puts it, “Black people under colonialism, whether in Africa, the West Indies, or indeed Europe and the United States, were more closely connected than they imagined.” Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 47.

<sup>16</sup> Arnesen, “Reconsidering,” 31–2; Cha-Jua and Lang, “‘Long Movement’ as Vampire,” 271.

<sup>17</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), 147. Similarly, in her powerful reconstruction of the story of Angélique, an Afro-Lusophone slave executed for allegedly setting fire to a significant part of the city of Montreal in 1734, Afua Cooper searches for Angélique’s ghostly traces. Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America, Race and American Culture* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>19</sup> Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1–15.

<sup>20</sup> Charles H. Martin, “Internationalizing the ‘American Dilemma’”; Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 1997, 80–130.

<sup>21</sup> William L. Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 170. Scholarship on black internationalism has grown immensely in recent decades, cross-pollinated by the transnational turn, the new imperial history, and studies of the Atlantic world, among other developments. I find Michael O. West and William G. Martin’s definition of black internationalism usefully capacious: “the conscious interconnection and interlocution of black struggles across man-made and natural boundaries—including the boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans, and seas.” Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins, eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883–1950,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1045–77.

<sup>23</sup> Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Kelley, “Local Phase of a Global Problem,” 1075.

<sup>25</sup> A 1970 biography of Trotter is the exception. In his seminal biography of W.E.B. Du Bois, David Lewis briefly mentions Trotter’s National Equal Rights League as a competitor to the NAACP, writing that after

Trotter arrived in Paris, “[d]isheveled and friendless,” he was “taken in by a compassionate family of color that must have observed with perplexity his fruitless efforts to make contacts with high officials at the conference.” Jonathan Rosenberg similarly describes Trotter’s trip to Paris as “quixotic” and “an adventure.” In Erez Manela’s detailed history of the “Wilsonian moment,” Trotter gets lost in the shuffle of petitions by “Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Koreans, as well as many others.” Adam Ewing’s recent global history of Garveyism dedicates two paragraphs to the Universal Negro Improvement Association’s presence at the Paris Peace Conference and makes no reference to Trotter. Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (New York: 1970); David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 60; Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 17; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), 57; Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ewing, *Age of Garvey*, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Ewing, *Age of Garvey*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Rosenberg, *Promised Land*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg, *Promised Land*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 230.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Bostelmann, *Cold War Color Line*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 234.

<sup>35</sup> Robin Kelley describes Aptheker as perhaps the first white historian to incorporate—through his personal relationships, activism, and scholarship—the internationalist approach to African American history pioneered by W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James and others. Kelley, “Local Phase of a World Problem,” 1074–5.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 80–4; Martin, “Internationalizing the ‘American Dilemma,’” n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Bostelmann, *Cold War Color Line*, 41–2.

<sup>38</sup> Though he does not explicitly connect it to William Monroe Trotter’s efforts, Jonathan Rosenberg argues the NAACP petition “reflected an assumption long embraced by leading reformers” about “the global nature of racial oppression” and the necessity of appealing to supra-national institutions. Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Martin, “Internationalizing the ‘American Dilemma,’” n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 112.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 127.

<sup>42</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 229.

<sup>43</sup> Martin, “Internationalizing the ‘American Dilemma.’” Carol Anderson cites the liberal civil rights coalition’s decision to domesticate its approach and focus on civil rights as constitutive of the turn away from an international black politics based around human rights. Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Alvin B. Tillery, *Between Homeland and Motherland: Africa, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Black Leadership in America* (Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2011), 75–99; Manfred Berg, “Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 1, 2007): 75–96; Eric Arnesen, “The Traditions of African-American Anti-Communism,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 6 (2014): 124–48.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941–1960* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, 8.

- <sup>48</sup> Munro compellingly argues that “cold war conditions drew liberals away from coalition with the left and toward affiliation with US empire.” Munro, *Anticolonial Front*, 11.
- <sup>49</sup> As Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps have written, together, the NNC, NAACP, and CRC petitions “reflected a left-wing consciousness that saw campaigns against American apartheid and world colonialism as indissoluble.” Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: the US Left since the Second World War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 33.
- <sup>50</sup> Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, 179.
- <sup>51</sup> Patterson, *Man*, 179.
- <sup>52</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, frontmatter.
- <sup>53</sup> Others either in the Sojourners or their orbit that signed the petition were Angie Dickerson, and Dorothy Hunton, Josephine Grayson, Claudia Jones, Maude White Katz, Amy and Doris Mallard, Rosalee McGee, Louise Thompson Patterson, and Eslanda Goode Robeson, Mary Church Terrell. Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press Books, 2011, 176); *We Charge Genocide*, frontmatter.
- <sup>54</sup> Patterson, *Man Who Cried Genocide*, 180.
- <sup>55</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, xi.
- <sup>56</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, xi.
- <sup>57</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 5.
- <sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 177.
- <sup>59</sup> Committee to Free the Trenton Six, *Lynching Northern Style* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 3.
- <sup>60</sup> Committee to Free the Trenton Six, *Lynching Northern Style*, 3.
- <sup>61</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, xii. Despite numerous attempts to ratify the Convention, these were not successful until 1986, under the Ronald Reagan administration.
- <sup>62</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, 57.
- <sup>63</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 25.
- <sup>64</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 64.
- <sup>65</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 20.
- <sup>66</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 29.
- <sup>67</sup> Featherstone, “Black Internationalism,” 19.
- <sup>68</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), xiv.
- <sup>69</sup> Featherstone, “Black Internationalism”; James, *George Padmore*; Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, Calif: University of California Press, 2015); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Munro, *Anticolonial Front*.
- <sup>70</sup> “UNESCO Statement on Race, July 1950,” in Todd Shepard, *Voices of Decolonization: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2015), 57.
- <sup>71</sup> Patterson, *Man Who Cried Genocide*, 170.
- <sup>72</sup> Jonathan Rosenberg writes, “Since it was hoped that every decent American rejected the values inherent in Nazism, it seemed reasonable to assume that by establishing a fundamental similarity between American racial practices and those in Hitler’s Germany [. . .] average Americans might better comprehend the character of their own society.” Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 113. For a treatment of more radical black activists drawing these connections across time and changing political circumstances, see Munro, *Anticolonial Front*.
- <sup>73</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 43. See also Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race, Transgressing Boundaries* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Munro, *Anticolonial Front*.
- <sup>74</sup> Featherstone, “Black Internationalism,” 16.
- <sup>75</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 43.
- <sup>76</sup> Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 103–5, 119–20; Featherstone, “Black Internationalism, 16–7.

- <sup>77</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 42.
- <sup>78</sup> Featherstone, “Black Internationalism,” 18.
- <sup>79</sup> Makalani, *Cause of Freedom*, 17.
- <sup>80</sup> Makalani, *Cause of Freedom*, 17.
- <sup>81</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 41; Matera, *Black London*, 139; Perry, *London is the Place*, 51–2.
- <sup>82</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 3. For a similar analysis that instead looks outward from the British Caribbean, see Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
- <sup>83</sup> Makalani, *Cause of Freedom*, 16; *We Charge Genocide*, frontmatter.
- <sup>84</sup> Makalani, *Cause of Freedom*, 175.
- <sup>85</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 103.
- <sup>86</sup> Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 120.
- <sup>87</sup> “‘The Challenge to the Colonial Powers’ from the Fifth Pan-African Conference, 1945,” in Shepard, *Voices of Decolonization*, 54.
- <sup>88</sup> Quoted in A. Dirk Moses, “Hannah Arendt, Imperialisms, and the Holocaust,” in *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, ed. Volker Max Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 106.
- <sup>89</sup> Erik S. McDuffie, “‘I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People’: The Diasporic Radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the Origins of Black Power,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (2010): 185.
- <sup>90</sup> Gerald Horne, *Communist Front?: The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956* (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 163–6.
- <sup>91</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 108.
- <sup>92</sup> Patterson, “We Must Unite,” 6.
- <sup>93</sup> Patterson, *Man Who Cried Genocide*, 171.
- <sup>94</sup> Patterson, *Man Who Cried Genocide*, 175.
- <sup>95</sup> Quoted in Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 125.
- <sup>96</sup> Swindall, *Greater, Freer, Truer World*, 7.
- <sup>97</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 179.
- <sup>98</sup> Swindall, *Greater, Freer, Truer World*, 95.
- <sup>99</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 127, 136.
- <sup>100</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 128.
- <sup>101</sup> Charles Erwin Wilson, ed., *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 140.
- <sup>102</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 3.
- <sup>103</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 7.
- <sup>104</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, 196.
- <sup>105</sup> William L. Patterson, “We Must Unite” in William L. Patterson, *We Demand Freedom!: Two Addresses* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 7.
- <sup>106</sup> William L. Patterson, “Win Democracy At Home!” in Patterson, *We Demand Freedom*, 24.
- <sup>107</sup> For a recent synthesis of how the experience of World War II strengthened the civil rights movement see James T. Sparrow, “Citizen Soldiers” in *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- <sup>108</sup> Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” 62.
- <sup>109</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 4.
- <sup>110</sup> William A. Ruther, “Mrs. Roosevelt Claims Progress,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 26, 1952, 18.
- <sup>111</sup> Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, 182.
- <sup>112</sup> Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, xiii.
- <sup>113</sup> Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, 180.
- <sup>114</sup> “U.S. Accused in U.N. of Negro Genocide,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1951, 13.
- <sup>115</sup> Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative,” 103.

- <sup>116</sup> Quoted in Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda, and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 161.
- <sup>117</sup> Quoted in Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 137.
- <sup>118</sup> Patterson, “We Must Unite,” 9–10.
- <sup>119</sup> Patterson, “Win Democracy,” 26.
- <sup>120</sup> Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, 181; Makalani, *Cause of Freedom*, 174.
- <sup>121</sup> Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 164.
- <sup>122</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 203.
- <sup>123</sup> Quoted in Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 203.
- <sup>124</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 188.
- <sup>125</sup> Quoted in Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 15. Logan’s involvement is discussed in Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, 181.
- <sup>126</sup> Berg, “Black Civil Rights,” 94; Arnesen, “African American Anti-Communism”; Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*.
- <sup>127</sup> See Tillery, *Homeland and Motherland*, 75–99; Arnesen, “African American Anti-Communism.”
- <sup>128</sup> Quoted in “New Pearson’s Radio Attack On ‘We Charged Genocide’ Blasted By CRC Head,” *Arkansas State Press*, Nov. 30, 1951, 8.
- <sup>129</sup> Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*.
- <sup>130</sup> Munro, *Anticolonial Front*.
- <sup>131</sup> As Jordan Goodman writes, “[Robeson’s] message for peace, equality and justice was understood as clearly on the streets of Manchester, Moscow, Johannesburg, and Bombay as it was in Harlem and Washington, D.C.” Goodman, *Paul Robeson*, xii.
- <sup>132</sup> Swindall, *Greater, Freer, Truer World*, 130–1.
- <sup>133</sup> “Mass support for Robeson,” Erik S. McDuffie writes, “showed that he remained beloved within black communities due in no small part to black women radicals, who collaborated and understood that defending him was critical to protecting civil liberties for all African Americans.” McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 165.
- <sup>134</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 125.
- <sup>135</sup> Conrad W. Worrill, “International Human Rights,” *Chicago Metro News*, March. 24, 1990, 9.
- <sup>136</sup> Biondi, “Reparations Movement,” 8.
- <sup>137</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 1.
- <sup>138</sup> Baldwin and Buckley, “The American Dream and the American Negro.”
- <sup>139</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.
- <sup>140</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.
- <sup>141</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.
- <sup>142</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvii, 7.
- <sup>143</sup> Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.
- <sup>144</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7. No less vividly, historian Jason Young, writing about enslaved people’s memory of the Middle Passage, describes the “specter of bodies” and the “litter of bones,” swept away and “strewn along the sea floor” and, as if the North Star’s perverse opposite, “pointing the way to the New World.” Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 131–2.
- <sup>145</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 27.
- <sup>146</sup> McDuffie, “Communist Philosophy.”
- <sup>147</sup> McDuffie, “Communist Philosophy,” 185.
- <sup>148</sup> McDuffie, “Communist Philosophy,” 183.
- <sup>149</sup> Joseph L. Turner, “Afro-Cops Fear Fascism,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 8, 1969, 4; “Remember the Attica Massacre!!!!” advertisement, *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 2, 1971, 14. For this moment in the context of Chicago radicalism and policing, see Beryl Satter, “Cops, Gangs, and Revolutionaries in 1960s

Chicago: What Black Police Can Tell Us about Power,” *Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 1110–34.

<sup>150</sup> “If They Can Come For Angela in the Morning, They Will Come For You in the Night” advertisement, *Cleveland Call and Post*, Sept. 11, 1971, 18A.

<sup>151</sup> C. L. R. James, “Interviews: C. L. R. James,” *The Black Scholar* 42, no. 2 (1970): 24.

<sup>152</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 194.

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 194.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 194.

<sup>155</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 60.

<sup>156</sup> Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 72.

<sup>157</sup> Huey Newton, “Executive Mandate No. 1: Statement By the Minister of Defense,” *Black Panther*, October 26, 1968, African American Periodicals, 1825–1995.

<sup>158</sup> Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 96.

<sup>159</sup> Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 354.

<sup>160</sup> Morris Simon, *We Charge Genocide: November 21, 1970 Mass March-Rally Flier* (New York: Vietnam Peace Parade Committee, 1970).

<sup>161</sup> For a discussion of the FBI and local police departments’ targeting of the BPP, see Robert O. Self, “Black Power” in *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for the Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 217–55.

<sup>162</sup> P.A. Del Valle, *Alert, No. 66, March 31, 1970* (Annandale, Va: Defenders of the American Constitution, Inc., March 31, 1970), Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements.

<sup>163</sup> Simone M. Caron, “Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?,” *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 3 (1998): 545–69; Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 85–112.

<sup>164</sup> Caron, “Birth Control,” 546–7.

<sup>165</sup> Nelson, *Reproductive Rights Movement*, 90.

<sup>166</sup> Caron, “Birth Control,” 547–8.

<sup>167</sup> Caron, “Birth Control,” 547.

<sup>168</sup> Nelson, *Reproductive Rights Movement*, 86.

<sup>169</sup> Nelson, *Reproductive Rights Movement*, 110. For a similar assessment, see Robyn Ceanne Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California,” *Journal of Women’s History* 20, no. 1 (March 17, 2008): 104.

<sup>170</sup> Martin, “Internationalizing the ‘American Dilemma,’” n.p.

<sup>171</sup> Munro, *Anticolonial Front*, 3–4.

<sup>172</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 3.

<sup>173</sup> See <http://wechargegenocide.org/>; Akbar A. Muhammad, “In Flint, Michigan, ‘We Charge Genocide,’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 17, 2016, A7; Third Coast Conspiracy, “Democracy, Disposability, and the Flint Water Crisis,” *The Third Coast Conspiracy* (blog), January 18, 2016, <https://thirdcoastconspiracy.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/democracy-disposability-and-the-flint-water-crisis/>.

<sup>174</sup> For a discussion of “transnationaliz[ing] the long-movement paradigm,” see Munro, *Anticolonial Front*, 6–7.

<sup>175</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (Routledge, 2014), 245.

<sup>176</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 51.

<sup>177</sup> For instance, Iyko Day argues ethnic studies scholars of the United States have “historically sidelined” Indigenous history. Iyko Day, “Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 117–8. For recent work that attempts to understand connections between settler colonialism and anti-black violence, see Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 866–905; Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387–409; Margaret Ellen Newell, *Brethren by Nature: New England*

*Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>178</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7; Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 131; Baldwin in McGonagle, *James Baldwin Debates*.

<sup>179</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 51.

<sup>180</sup> Black Women's Blueprint, "The Black Women's Truth And Reconciliation Commission On Sexual Assault," <http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/tribunal.html>.

<sup>181</sup> Black Women's Blueprint, "Truth And Reconciliation," <http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/tribunal.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 230; Perry, *London is the Place*, 131–2, 146–7. For more on black women internationalists see McDuffie, *Sojourning*.

<sup>183</sup> Perry, *London is the Place*, 139.

<sup>184</sup> Munro, *Anticolonial Front*, 3.

<sup>185</sup> Helen Laville and Scott Lucas, "The American Way: Edith Sampson, the NAACP, and African American Identity in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 565–90; Spencer, "Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle"; Gwen Jordan, "Engendering the History of Race and International Relations: The Career of Edith Sampson, 1927–1978," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 87 (2012): 521; Imaobong D. Umoren, "'This Is the Age of Woman': Black Feminism and Black Internationalism in the Works of Una Marson, 1928–1938," *History of Women in the Americas* 1, no. 1 (2013): 50–73.

<sup>186</sup> James Zeigler, *Red Scare Racism and Cold War Black Radicalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 6; Robeson Taj P. Frazier, "Sketches of Black Internationalism and Transnationalism," *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 2 (2011): 235.

<sup>187</sup> Patterson, "Win Democracy," 28.

<sup>188</sup> For an overview of the Indigenous genocide debate in the history of the US, see Benjamin Madley, "Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 98–139.

<sup>189</sup> Shereen Ilahi, *Imperial Violence and the Path to Independence: India, Ireland, and the Crisis of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 18.

<sup>190</sup> *We Charge Genocide*, 195.

<sup>191</sup> Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*; Monica Muñoz Martinez, "Recuperating Histories of Violence in the Americas: Vernacular History-Making on the US–Mexico Border," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (September 8, 2014): 661–89; William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); See also Saidiya Hartman's discussion of the historicity of pain: *Scenes of Subjection*, 51. For a group of scholars working on this history of violence in the United States (including Martinez), see <https://www.hovcollective.org/about.html>.

## References

Committee to Free the Trenton Six. 1951. *Lynching Northern Style*. New York: Civil Rights Congress (U.S.).

Del Valle, P. A. 1970. 'Alert, No. 66.' Defenders of the American Constitution, Inc., March 31. Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements.

1951. Freedom Dance Sunday to Aid Rights Victims. *New York Amsterdam News*, December 22.

James, C. L. R. 2012. Interviews: C. L. R. James. *The Black Scholar* 42: 22–30.

Baldwin, James, and William F. Buckley. 1965. 'The American Dream and the American Negro'. *New York Times*, March 7.

Muhammad, Akbar A. 2016. In Flint, Michigan, 'We Charge Genocide.'. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 17.

Muhammad, Askia. 1997. We Charge Genocide... Again! *Washington Informer*, May 14.

Newton, Huey. 1968. Executive Mandate No. 1: Statement by the Minister of Defense. *Black Panther*, October 26. African American Periodicals, 1825–1995.

Patterson, William L. 1971. *The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography*. New York: International Publishers.

1951. *We Demand Freedom!: Two Addresses*. New York: Civil Rights Congress.
- Shepard, Todd. 2015. *Voices of Decolonization: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Simon, Morris. 1970. *We Charge Genocide: November 21, 1970 Mass March-Rally Flier*. New York: Vietnam Peace Parade Committee.
2016. Third Coast Conspiracy. Democracy, Disposability, and the Flint Water Crisis. *The Third Coast Conspiracy (blog)*, January 18. Available online: <https://thirdcoastconspiracy.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/democracy-disposability-and-the-flint-water-crisis/>.
1951. *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People*. New York: Civil Rights Congress.
- Wilson, Charles Erwin, ed. 1947. *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office.