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The *Negro Digest*: Race, Exceptionalism and the Second World War

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This article examines the border-crossing journalism of the *Negro Digest*, a leading African American periodical, published from 1942 to 1951. The first title produced by the Johnson Publishing Company, the *Digest* had an international focus that connected Jim Crow to racial oppression around the world. However, while the magazine challenged white supremacy on a local and global level, its patriotic tone and faith in American democracy occasionally restricted its global analysis of racism. Ultimately, the internationalism of the *Negro Digest* was quintessentially American – wedded to the exceptional status of American freedom and an overriding belief that the US could change the world for the better.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Second World War, as nations debated the state of international politics, the African American writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston published "Crazy for This Democracy." This short four-page article offered a damning indictment of US foreign policy, focussing on America's relationship with the colonial powers of Europe. Full of her acerbic wit, Hurston used the piece to try and pin down what democracy meant for her as a black American in the postwar world. "Since 1937 nobody has talked about anything else," she noted, adding: "All I want to do is to get hold of a sample of the thing, and I declare, I sure will try it. I don't know for myself, but I have been told that it is really wonderful."

Hurston was scathing of the recently deceased Roosevelt, and what she saw as his failure to guarantee the principles that had been set out in both his "Four Freedoms" address and the Atlantic Charter. Referencing the President's famous December 1940 "Arsenal for Democracy" speech, she asked, "Did F.D.R., aristocrat from Groton and Harvard, using the British language say "arse-and-all" of Democracy when I thought he said plain arsenal?" Extending her gaze beyond the borders of the United States to the Indian

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Ocean and to movements for colonial independence throughout Asia, she added: "That must be what he said, for from what is happening over on that other, unmentioned ocean, we look like the Ass-and-All of Democracy."[1] Linking Jim Crow to colonialism, Hurston condemned the US for behaving like an imperial power, commenting, "Have we not noticed that not one word has been uttered about the freedom of the Africans? … The Ass-and-All of Democracy has shouldered the load of subjugating the dark world completely."[2]

For Hurston, the Second World War clearly exposed the hypocritical nature of American democracy. The stark contrast of the US supposedly fighting a war against intolerance overseas while simultaneously tolerating bigotry and race prejudice at home was striking. Indeed, as she noted in her article, the recent destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided a further "example to the dark people of the world" of the way in which the Western powers dealt with regimes that challenged the organizing "logic" of white supremacy.[3]

This scathing denunciation of American democracy first appeared in the pages of the black-owned monthly the *Negro Digest*. The inaugural title of the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC), the *Digest* appeared on newsstands in November 1942. Operating out of Chicago with a small editorial staff, it was launched as a response to the perceived public demand for "a magazine to summarize and condense the leading articles and comment on the Negro."[4] The *Digest*'s editors made it their mission to provide extensive coverage of the racial issues of the day, publishing work from a stellar list of black writers and political activists including Hurston, W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter White, Langston Hughes, George Schuyler, George Padmore, Eslanda Robeson and William Patterson.

Given the tone of "Crazy for This Democracy" and the outspoken nature of Hurston's fellow contributors, it might be tempting to assume that the *Negro Digest* was part of the radical and internationally focussed African American press that was in the ascendency at this time.[5] The historian Penny Von

[1] Zora Neale Hurston, "Crazy for This Democracy," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1945, 45.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 46. This is not to say that imperial Japan represented an enlightened alternative to the Allies. Nevertheless, the expansion of Japanese power provided a compelling counternarrative to the racial politics of European colonialism. In addition to this, Japan had consistently made appeals for racial solidarity with black Americans. See Gerald Horne, *Race War! White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), esp chapters 2, 5 and 9.
[4] "Introducing …," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1942, 2.
[5] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 103–4.

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Eschen has referred to the late 1930s and the 1940s as a "diaspora moment" for the African American press, a period when black journalists – concerned with the struggle for democracy and the consequences this would have for colonized peoples – persistently connected the struggle against Jim Crow with the global opposition to colonial rule.[6] However, while the *Negro Digest* did print decisive criticisms of American racism, and provided extensive coverage of global racial politics, it doesn't neatly fit into the category of radical black diasporic journalism often associated with this era.[7] Indeed, the magazine contained a range of voices and opinions – radical, liberal and conservative – that speak to the diverse ways in which black Americans compared and contrasted racism in the US to the experiences of people of African descent globally.

Publishing commentaries on race from across the political spectrum, the *Digest* illuminates the tensions and disagreements that characterized African American responses to the Second World War, as well as how black writers and readers engaged with the coloured world beyond the borders of the United States. The magazine shows how African Americans successfully placed racial politics at the centre of the war effort and, in the process, internationalized the struggle against Jim Crow. However, when examined in its entirety, the publication also calls attention to the patriotic pressures that shaped black print culture in the 1940s. As the US expanded its influence around the world, the *Digest*'s embrace of the nation often led to clear distinctions being drawn between African Americans and oppressed people of colour globally.

The creation of John H. Johnson, the format of the *Negro Digest* was modelled on that of the *Reader's Digest*. In a move indicative of his entrepreneurial drive, Johnson financed the first issue of the magazine by taking out a five-hundred-dollar loan against the value of his mother's furniture set.[8] Initially operating from a desk in the library of the Supreme Life Insurance Company, the magazine would run for nine years between 1942 and 1951.[9]

[6] For information on the rise of the black international press see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), chapters 1 and 2.

[7] For two excellent recent studies of the African American press during the Second World War see Paul Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II: Toward Victory at Home and Abroad* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2016), chapter 15.

[8] John Harold Johnson and Lerone Bennett, *Succeeding against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 2–3, 118.

[9] Ibid., 120. While the *Digest* evolved over time in terms of design, the magazine's reprinting of articles alongside specially commissioned pieces essentially remained the same throughout

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The production of the *Digest* was a key formative experience in the history of Johnson's publishing empire, offering important lessons that informed the later development of the hugely successful *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Johnson effectively coedited the early issues of the *Digest* with the white *Chicago Defender* journalist Ben Burns, as well as a small editorial team that, from 1947, included the writer Era Bell Thompson.[10] *Digest* staff combed major white- and black-owned publications for articles that would interest its predominantly black readership. While the magazine also commissioned original pieces, this process of selecting, condensing and reprinting articles resulted in competing political viewpoints being brought together in each issue.[11]

The broad coverage of the *Digest* was immediately popular with the black reading public and within eight months the publication was selling 50,000 copies.[12] While circulation figures fluctuated over the course of its print run, by 1945 sales regularly topped 200,000 – a figure that constituted 20 percent of all black magazine sales at the time.[13] The broad scope and encyclopedic nature of the magazine was key to its appeal. As one reader from Washington, DC wrote to the editors, "I honestly think *Negro Digest* is one of the best magazines on the market today of its kind or any other kind … It's honest, free from bla bla, sticks to documented facts … I keep my copies as reference books."[14] Given its popularity and formative role in the

its print run. On the consistency of the *Digest*'s editorial policy see John H. Johnson, "From the Editor," *Negro Digest*, July 1943, back cover; "Editor's Note," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1947, inside front cover; "Editor's Notebook," *Negro Digest*, March 1948, inside front cover; "Editor's Notebook" *Negro Digest*, May 1949, inside front cover.

[10] The editorship of the *Negro Digest* is disputed. In his autobiography, *Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), Burns claimed he was the de facto editor of the publication. Johnson's autobiography, *Succeeding against the Odds*, paints a very different picture where Burns effectively appears as an editorial assistant. Both men clearly played a key role in the development of the publication and it is safe to assume that the production of the *Digest* was a collaborative effort. As the historian Adam Green has commented, "it seems most appropriate to argue the magazine was, in essence, edited jointly." Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 138.

[11] Ben Burns alludes to Johnson's skill at keeping production down costs, noting that the *Digest* paid between $10 and $15 to reprint articles and never more than $25 for original pieces. Burns, 33, 37.

[12] Ibid., 128. The publication was the only black magazine on the War Department's approved publication list and read widely by American overseas servicemen. The *Digest* also received correspondence from readers in the Caribbean, South America, Europe and Africa who had bought the publication. See John H. Johnson, "Round the World," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1944, back cover; "Cheaper by the Dozen," *Negro Digest*, July 1950), back cover.

[13] Green, 138. As Penny Von Eschen, 8, has noted, the circulation of leading black publications the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* more than doubled between 1940 and 1946.

[14] Mrs. J. W. Haywood, "The Mailbag," *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1951, 97.

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development of the JPC, the *Negro Digest* has been afforded relatively little scholarly attention.[15] While historians regularly cite articles that appeared within its pages, they have largely failed to analyse the *Digest* as a publishing initiative in and of itself, and have overlooked its influence on African American print culture in the mid-twentieth century.

Reflecting on the groundbreaking role of the *Digest* in the history of African American publishing, Ben Burns commented,

> In a sense *Negro Digest* was an entirely new publishing concept for the black press: the first time a black publication did not polemicize, was not agitational, did not protest, did not editorialize in anyway, did not plead the Negro's cause. Its sole aim was to reprint what was most significant in the white and black media about Negroes. Even if the material was unfavorable to the race.[16]

The magazine's unique blend of articles represented a clear departure from the model that had traditionally dominated African American publishing. While titles such as the *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* largely reflected the political line of a single organization, the *Digest* included diverse opinions that offer a fascinating insight into the key racial debates of the 1940s.[17] Indeed, in a bold move, *Digest* editors occasionally reprinted pieces from white commentators that presented a rosy picture of American race relations and warned against the need for federal intervention against legal segregation.[18]

However, while the magazine was certainly unconventional, Burns's insistence that it did not agitate was wide of the mark. Even though the *Digest* lacked a clear and consistent editorial message, the publication of pieces such as "Crazy for This Democracy" shows how it also housed important commentaries that were uncompromising in their opposition to white supremacy. Articles covered issues such as lynchings, race riots, the shortcomings of the Fair Employment Practice Committee, the effects of the Great Migration, the experiences of black GIs during the war, and the rise of anticolonial

[15] Notable exceptions include C. K. Doreski, *Writing America Black: Race Rhetoric and the Public Sphere* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 4; Green; James C. Hall, "On Sale at Your Favourite Newsstand: *Negro Digest/Black World* and the 1960s," in Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 188–206; Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America since 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), chapter 2.

[16] Burns, 35.

[17] This approach was generally welcomed in the black press. For example, see "New Negro Digest Answering Demand," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 Nov. 1942, 3; S. I. Hayakawa, "Second Thoughts: Happy Birthday to Negro Digest," *Chicago Defender*, 16 Oct. 1943, 15.

[18] Articles by southern liberals such as John Temple Graves, warning against federal intervention in the region, were printed in the magazine. See John Temple Graves, "Should Negroes Demand Equality Now?", *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1942, 49–51; Graves, "Through Southern Eyes," condensed from "The Fighting South," *Negro Digest*, July 1943, 16.

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nationalism in Asia and Africa. Although it was not connected to a specific black activist group, and was generally more moderate in tone than many of the leading black newspapers of the day, the *Negro Digest* provided an important space where African Americans could read about and interpret racial politics on both a domestic and an international level.[19]

This article traces the hybrid nature of the *Negro Digest* to examine the vision of the world and racial politics it transmitted to its readers at this crucial phase in the African American freedom struggle.[20] Although the radical roots of civil rights had been established earlier, the movement against segregation gained considerable momentum in the 1940s.[21] African Americans used the battle against fascism to call for a "Double Victory" against both the Axis and racism at home, engaging in mass protests, boycotts, legal action and individual acts of civil disobedience against Jim Crow.[22] The March on Washington Movement (MOWM), launched by A. Philip Randolph in 1941, targeted segregation in the armed forces and defence industries, bringing together a variety of organizations and activists working on

[19] For more on the complex relationship between the black press and the American government during World War II, see Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II*, 143–45; Patrick Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, 1st edn (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), chapter 6.

[20] The extent to which *Digest* articles featured in the leading black newspapers of the day hints at the important role the publication played in shaping debates about American race relations. For example, see "'Opportunity in the South' – Spaulding," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 Feb. 1943, 3; "Leaders Plead Cause of Race in Negro Digest May Issue," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 8 May 1943, 16; "About Mrs. Roosevelt's Article If I Were a Negro," *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 Oct. 1943, 6. Eleanor Roosevelt, "If I Were Colored," *Afro-American*, 30 Oct. 1943, 5; "Swedish Author's Race Analysis in Negro Digest," *Chicago Defender*, 11 Dec. 1943, 4; "Jim Crow Must Be Jim Crowed, Says Orson Welles," *Chicago Defender*, 5 Aug. 1944, 5; "Lists 4 Ways to Beat Bigotry," *Cleveland Call and Post*, 30 Sept. 1944, 2; "Americans Feel Whites Are Superior," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 Jan. 1945, 17; "North Fairer to Negro than Dixie, Magazine Poll Shows," *Chicago Defender*, 15 Sept. 1945, 5; "Cayton Names 'Best' Cities," *Atlanta Daily World*, 21 Sept. 1947, 1; J. A. Rogers, "ROGERS SAYS: Ottley's List of Negro Leaders Is Not Realistic," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 May 1948, 6; "Columnist Claims Dixieland Must Have Jim Crow," *Atlanta Daily World*, 28 Sept. 1948, 3; "KKK Being Laughed to Extinction," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 9 Aug. 1949, 9.

[21] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008). Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91, 4 (March 2005), 1233–63.

[22] Stephen Tuck and Kevin M. Kruse, "Introduction," in Tuck and Kruse, eds., *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–14. For information on African anti-interventionism in the early years of the war see Daniel W. Aldridge, "A War for the Colored Races: Anti-interventionism and the African American Intelligentsia, 1939–1941," *Diplomatic History*, 28, 3 (June, 2004), 321–52.

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grassroots campaigns to protest the hiring practices of local businesses and desegregate public amenities.[23] The membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) grew eightfold in this decade, as the organization worked to challenge discriminatory employment, housing and education practices in the courts, while launching campaigns for black voting rights in the South.[24] Organizations such as the National Negro Congress (NNC), Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), and the Council on African Affairs (CAA) challenged race discrimination from the left, while groups such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) called for a nonviolent dismantling of Jim Crow throughout the United States, in the North and the South.[25]

The *Negro Digest* covered and assessed these developments in the African American freedom struggle, while also documenting the influence that the Second World War and colonial independence movements had on the civil rights movement.[26] It placed articles that challenged racism in the United States, and the Jim Crow South in particular, alongside reporting on racial issues overseas. As such, the magazine demonstrates how African Americans made sense of their place within the nation at the same time as they debated their relationship with the "darker races of the world."

Indeed, the *Digest* embodied the tensions that existed between the nation, race and the politics of the black diaspora in this era. As Nikhil Pal Singh reminds us, if there was a "great divide" in the twentieth century black freedom struggle,

> it was between black activists and intellectuals who gravitated toward an identification with the U.S. state and social policy as the answer to black discontent, and those who eyed the rhetorical professions of American universality and inclusiveness from the more exacting and worldly standpoint of subjection to racializing power.[27]

[23] Gilmore, 359–69, 384–87; David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941–1946* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

[24] Patricia Sullivan, "Movement Building during the World War II Era: The NAACP's Legal Insurgency in the South," in Tuck and Kruse, *Fog of War*, 71–80; Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), chapters 7 and 8.

[25] Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*, reprint edn (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956* (Fairleigh, PA; Dickinson University Press, 1988); Brian Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 31–36.

[26] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, chapter 3; Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, chapter 4.

[27] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 109.

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This division was clearly articulated in the pages of the magazine, running throughout each issue in ways that point to both the political opportunities and the compromises that the wartime call for a Double Victory presented.

Digest commentaries tying racial exploitation in the United States to fascism and colonial rule overseas were printed alongside articles that extolled the virtues of American democracy, while simultaneously calling for the extension of these constitutional rights to the nation's black minority. As Jodi Melamed has forcefully demonstrated, it was this latter standpoint that gained political traction in the aftermath of the Second World War. As fascism made overt support for white supremacy increasingly difficult to maintain, many intellectuals and policymakers – white and black – responded by embracing a politics of antiracist liberalism that challenged biological racism but privileged the American nation as the ultimate guarantor of freedom and equality.[28] This had the effect of watering down challenges to American power and ignored the intimate ties that existed between racism and the development of capitalist modernity. As anticommunist repression marginalized voices that connected Jim Crow to European systems of colonial exploitation following the Second World War, the United States readied itself for global leadership. As Melamed has asserted, as the Cold War began, "Official antiracism now explicitly required the victory and extension of U.S. empire, the motor force of capitalism's next unequal development."[29]

While scholars have documented the ideological dominance of antiracist liberalism in the 1950s, it is important to note how exceptionalist narratives of American freedom influenced black thought and protest during the Second World War. Comparing the *Negro Digest*'s coverage of southern racism with its international reporting on race highlights how racial liberalism influenced African American engagements with the wider world throughout the 1940s. The publication provided a global perspective on race, but this did not always result in the promotion of international solidarities that connected the freedom struggles of African Americans to movements for racial justice overseas. Instead an examination of the *Digest* reveals how an insistence on American, southern and African American distinctiveness shaped debates about race in ways that could rhetorically separate black America from the wider African diaspora.

[28] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.

[29] Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism," *Social Text*, 24, 4 (21 Dec. 2006), 1–24, 6; Jodi Melamed, "W. E. B. Du Bois's UnAmerican End," *African American Review*, 40, 3 (2006), 533–50, 536–7.

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REPORTING AMERICAN RACISM

John H. Johnson believed that the *Negro Digest* had an important role to play in reporting on the struggle against segregation in the United States. In his autobiography, cowritten with the journalist and historian Lerone Bennett, he outlined what he believed the magazine offered readers in the 1940s.[30] Noting that, "In 1942, Black men and women were struggling all over America for the right to be called 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.'," he explained,

> In that year, we couldn't try on hats in department stores in Baltimore, and we couldn't try on shoes and dresses in Atlanta. We couldn't live in hotels in downtown Chicago then, and the only public place a Black could get a meal in the downtown section of the nation's capital was the railroad station. It was in this World that the "Negro Digest" was conceived. It was a world where the primary need, almost as demanding as oxygen, was recognition and respect.[31]

This statement speaks to two key features of the *Digest*. First, the publication provided a space where African Americans could keep up to date with the latest developments in the struggle against Jim Crow while considering their relationship with the American nation. It was explicitly designed to promote black pride and to help prepare the intellectual groundwork for the push for racial integration within the nation. Second, this comment also reveals how the *Digest* was aimed at the expanding African American middle class. Johnson defines black freedom as the ability to consume, to eat and to shop in spaces reserved for whites. In part, this first foray into publishing reflected these aspirational and consumerist sensibilities, featuring articles that covered the lives of black celebrities and the latest musical crazes, while promoting black tourism and travel. Johnson's drive to make money and his belief in the democratic potential of the United States undoubtedly shaped the magazine's overall content and tone.[32] However, while the *Digest* did not consistently rebuke American capitalism, or the economic forces that marginalized African Americans, it nevertheless played an important political role in terms of mapping and critiquing race relations in the United States. As Johnson himself noted in a way that nicely summarized the tone of the publication, "*Negro Digest* spoke to an audience that was angry, disillusioned, and disappointed. You couldn't digest that world without digesting the frustration and the anger."[33]

[30] For more on Lerone Bennett and the Johnson Publishing Company see E. James West, "*Ebony* Magazine and the Making and Selling of Modern Black History," PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2016; West, "Lerone Bennett, Jr.: A Life in Popular Black History," *Black Scholar*, 47, 4 (2 Oct. 2017), 3–17.

[31] Johnson and Bennett, *Succeeding against the Odds*, 118–19.

[32] For Johnson's moderating influence on the *Negro Digest* see Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 34.

[33] Ibid, 123.

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The *Digest*'s coverage of race relations in the American South provides a clear example of the publication's antisegregationist politics. The vast majority of the magazine's articles challenged southern white supremacy, casting racial violence and discrimination in the region as a source of national shame – a stain on America's reputation that was clearly at odds with wartime efforts to defend freedom and democracy around the world. This is not to say that the publication focussed solely on racism in the southern states. Indeed, articles on race riots in the North featured heavily in the *Digest*, particularly in the aftermath of the 1943 Detroit Riots, which prompted the appearance of a series of articles that debated the national scale of the "race problem."[34]

This issue was clearly raised in a roundtable and poll in the February 1944 issue that asked, "Is the Negro Problem Primarily a Southern Problem?". The African American scholar J. Saunders Redding answered this question with a resounding "No." Drawing attention to the shared experiences of racism faced by African Americans throughout the United States, he argued, "It does not matter whether the capitol of Negro America is in New York or in Atlanta. It only matters that the capitol should be *one* capitol."[35] Redding's article cast racism as a national problem, arguing that black northerners and southerners needed to be united in the struggle against white supremacy. The *Digest*'s coverage of American race relations was extensive and did not solely focus on the South. Indeed, it was hard to ignore northern racial politics as more than a million black southerners crossed the Mason–Dixon line looking for jobs and new opportunities during the Second World War.[36] However, while the geographical contours of American racism were occasionally debated within its pages, the *Digest* frequently determined that the roots of racial inequality in America could be firmly located in the South.[37]

This was made clear in an article by the black sociologist Horace Cayton Jr. that contemplated whether race riots had the potential to spread to the West

[34] Articles that debated racial disturbances in the North included Thomas Sancton, "North and South," condensed from *American Scholar*, *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1943, 17–18; Frank Hughes, "Why Race Riots?", condensed from *Chicago Tribune*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943; Roundtable, "Is The Negro Problem a Southern Problem?," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 26–28.

[35] "Is the Negro Problem Primarily a Southern Problem?", 25–29, original emphasis. Responses were divided, with US Attorney General Francis Biddle weighing into with the argument that race intolerance "is no longer a matter merely of domestic concern. For it undermines our moral authority as a nation which apparently can profess but cannot practice democracy."

[36] Clive Webb and David Brown, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 253.

[37] This issue was debated in the August 1945 issue of the *Digest*. See "Is the North or South Fairer to the Negro?"" *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1945, 47–55. Also articles such as William J. Norton, "After the Riots – What?" condensed from *Survey Graphic*, *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1943, 80.

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Coast.[38] Cayton implied that the racial attitudes of the South had infected the country as a whole, as southerners migrated North in search of jobs.[39] "It is obvious," he asserted, "that the Negro problem, which was at one time confined almost solely to the South, has rapidly become a national problem by the distribution of the black people to the urban centers of the Middle West and East, and now throughout the Pacific Coast."[40] According to Cayton, it was not only the movement of African Americans to the North that produced unrest, but the increased presence of southern whites looking for work above the Mason–Dixon line.[41] Indeed, he argued that racial animosity was being fuelled by white southern workers who felt it was "necessary to inform northern whites about the manner in which they feel the Negro should be treated," adding, "Many of them are also anxious to impress upon Negroes, both Southern and Northern, that they intend to keep them in their place."[42] Although he refused to paint the North as racially enlightened, Cayton confidently identified the South as the source of racial prejudice in the United States.[43] The South occupied a special place in the *Digest*, a region that spoke to the hopes and frustrations of black America as a whole. While racism might indeed be a national or even international problem, it was always closely bound up with the politics of the American South.

Original features that showcased the South's virulent defence of Jim Crow reinforced the distinct character of the region within the magazine. The most prominent of these was a feature called "Dixie Drivel" (later "Chatter"), which each month reprinted a selection of quotes from southerners that vividly

[38] Horace Cayton, "Will Race Riots Go West?," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1943, 63–65.

[39] For the effect on the war industry of migration to the North and West see Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapter 4.

[40] Cayton, 63–64.

[41] Picking up on a similar theme in the 1970s, the journalist John Egerton referred to this process as "the Americanization of Dixie." John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

[42] Cayton, 64.

[43] Other articles in the *Digest* reinforced this view. For example, an article reprinted from the *Chicago Tribune*, "Why Race Riots?", noted that race riots in cities like Detroit were not simply a result of African American migration north, but were also caused by "the simultaneous arrival of southern whites in the city," as "a strong Ku Klux Klan movement arose." The article quoted Walter White, who asserted, "The number of Klansmen in Detroit may be small, but the hate they have fanned in the southern white population is immense." Frank Hughes, "Why Race Riots?", condensed from *Chicago Tribune*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943, 60. Writing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, J. A. Rogers came to much the same conclusion when he noted, "Southern Jim Crow is America's greatest evil; the great enemy, the great poisoner of American democracy." J. A. Rogers, "Rogers Says: Race Trouble Originates in the South and Seeps like Poison into the North," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 July 1943, 7.

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documented the entrenched nature of white supremacy in the region.[44] The feature was made up of hate-filled statements from a roster of white segregationists, including Congressman John E. Rankin and Senator Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi, Senator James Morrison of Louisiana, Governor Frank Dixon of Alabama, and the gubernatorial rivals Eugene Talmadge and Ellis Arnall of Georgia. Although their politics varied, each of these men insisted that Jim Crow was going nowhere, making such bold claims as: "There never has been a day and there never will be a day when the Negroes in Louisiana will be equal to the whites."[45] Other quotations threatened violence against anyone attempting to disrupt the "Southern Way of Life," with elected officials making such statements as: "If a nigger ever tried to get in a white school in my part of the state, the sun would never set on his head," and "If you people keep stirring up trouble for us in the South, we are going to need our young men trained when this war is over in order to take care of the domestic situation."[46] *Digest* readers themselves were encouraged to keep an eye out for comparable quotes emanating from the South, with the promise of a dollar in exchange for every clipping that was reprinted. As a feature, "Dixie Drivel" established the South as the home of American racism in the *Digest* – a special geographical space that was often alienated from and hopelessly out of step with the nation as a whole.[47]

African American commentators regularly reinforced this view.[48] NAACP executive secretary Walter White bemoaned the stance of southern liberals

[44] Ben Burns claims that the name was changed at Johnson's behest as he thought that southern liberals might be offended. Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 34.

[45] Rep. James Morrison of Louisiana, "Dixie Drivel," *Negro Digest*, March 1943, 60.

[46] Ellis Arnall, "Dixie Drivel," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1942, 32; John E. Rankin, "Dixie Drivel," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1942, 44.

[47] Other articles that emphasized this point include Graves, "Should Negroes Demand Equality Now?"; Tom Powers, "Shadow of the South," condensed from *Tomorrow*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943, 3–5; Thomas Scanton, "Go North, Black Man!", condensed from *New Republic*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943, 38–39; "Dixie Justice," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1943, 6; David L. Cohn, "Dead-End for the Negro," condensed from *Atlantic Monthly*, *Negro Digest*, March 1944, 33–36; Horace Cayton and George S. Schuyler, roundtable responses, "Should Negroes in the South Migrate North?", *Negro Digest*, June 1944, 39–41, 44–45; Stanley Frank, "Jingo John," condensed from *Liberty*, *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1945, 61–63; Odell Griffith, "Back Home in Dixie," *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1946, 16–17; Ira De A. Reid, "How the Same Old South Stays That Way," condensed from *Survey Graphic*, *Negro Digest*, April 1947, 13–18; Eugene Griffin, "Report on the South," condensed from *Chicago Tribune*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1947, 71–73; Harold J. Laski, "The Tragedy of the South," condensed from the book *The American Democracy*, *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1948, 19–31.

[48] The argument that southern segregationists were "un-American" and actively hindering the war effort was reinforced throughout the African American press. See Frank E. Bolden, "'White Supremacists Are a Nuisance to the Nation's War Effort' – Bolden," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 21 Feb. 1942, 12; "South's 'Leaders' Reject Pleas Asking Democracy," *Chicago*

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during the war, noting that, "For various reasons they are taking to cover at an alarming rate – fleeing before the onslaught of the professional Southern bigots." Langston Hughes added his voice to this criticism, denouncing southern senators for diluting American democracy and asking,

> Shall we, who are the Negro people of America, have no great dreams? Shall we ask only for the half-freedoms that move nobody to action for the great freedoms that this war is supposed to be about? Or shall we, with all other Americans of foresight and goodwill, seek to create a world where even Alabama will respect human decency?

George S. Schuyler was critical too, commenting that what the average African American "privately thinks of the South is usually unprintable." However, it was perhaps the novelist Richard Wright who best summed up black criticism of Dixie in the magazine when he concluded upon his return from a southern sojourn that "Jim Crow was still Jim Crow and not a single practice had altered during my twenty-five-year absence."[49]

These articles all helped establish a narrative of "southern exceptionalism" within the *Negro Digest*. As Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino have noted, the portrayal of the South as the singular manifestation of the "Negro problem" in the United States deflects attention from the support that existed for white supremacy across the nation. The perception that racism was fundamentally a "southern problem" has been used to prop up the political project of American exceptionalism, placing an unwarranted faith in the nation's democratic structures and emphasizing the benevolence of American power.[50] As Lassiter has stated, "The postwar tendency to view race relations across a regional chasm obscured the national growth policies that were remaking the metropolitan South, as well as the prominence of modern forms of state-sponsored segregation in every other part of the nation."[51]

Defender, 1 Aug. 1942, 15; "Refighting the Civil War," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 Aug. 1942, 6; Earl Brown, "Timely Topics: The Southerners Attack," *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 Dec. 1943, 10.

[49] Walter White, "Decline of Southern Liberals," condensed from *Chicago Defender*, *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1943, 43; Langston Hughes, "The Case against Segregation," condensed from *Chicago Defender*, *Negro Digest*, July 1943, 46; George S. Schuyler, "What the Negro Thinks of the South," *Negro Digest*, May 1945, 54; Richard Wright, "How Jim Crow Feels," condensed from *True*, *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1947, 48.

[50] Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, 'Introduction', in Lassiter and Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–24, 7.

[51] Matthew D. Lassiter, "De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth," in Lassiter and Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 25–48, 29. See also chapters in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

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To a certain extent, the *Digest*'s coverage of southern politics engaged in this exceptionalist narrative, helping to paint a picture of the region as a unique problem that was set apart from the rest of the nation.[52] In representing the South as the embodiment and root cause of America's racial problems the magazine sometimes overlooked the complicity of the US government in perpetuating institutionalized race discrimination and white hostility to integration in the North.

An example of this was an article that appeared in the August 1949 edition of the *Digest* titled "There's New Hope for the South." Written by the African American journalist and author of *New World A-Coming* Roi Ottley, the piece carried a generally hopeful message that the postwar South was perhaps ready for reform.[53] In contrast to Wright's observations, Ottley commented on a recent trip to the South, "I came away with the feeling that the long dark night in the South was slowly and inexorably passing," a product of what he interpreted as a "noticeable lethargy" amongst the "white rank-and-file" in their determination to reinforce Jim Crow codes. However, despite this belief that the wind of change was blowing throughout the region, Ottley continued to draw attention to what viewed as the unique character of Dixie.[54] Towards the end of the article he asked,

> Who but a Southern white man would shoot a Negro boy for participating in Brotherhood Week? Where but in the South would a modiste wrap a Negro woman's hair in paper before allowing her to try on a hat? Where but in the South would a city equip car conductors with guns to intimidate Negro riders? Where but in the South would a Negro real estate salesman lose his license because he sold property owned by whites to a Negro family? Where but in the South would a school system refuse to employ truant officers on the theory police are not beneficial to Negroes?[55]

Here the American South, where the structures of white supremacy pervaded day-to-day life and legal segregation was regularly reinforced by unconscionable violence, was positioned as the last bastion of white supremacy in the United States. Ottley was hopeful that these practices could be eroded and that

[52] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 21.
[53] Roi Ottley had also been the editor of the *New York Amsterdam News*, 1931–37.
[54] David R. Jansson, "American National Identity and the Progress of the New South in 'National Geographic Magazine'," *Geographical Review*, 93, 3 (2003), 350–69. Other *Digest* articles that had a more optimistic view of the South include Virginius Dabney, "Is the South That Bad?," *Negro Digest*, July 1946, 53; Hodding Carter, "A Southerner Looks at the South," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1946, 45–50.
[55] Roi Ottley, "There's New Hope for the South," *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1949, 14.

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democratic values would spread throughout the nation.[56] His conclusion that "no area in the country is doing more to pull itself up by its own bootstraps" hinted at how the South was expected to bring itself into line with the alleged principles of American "democracy."[57] For Ottley, the region was a symbolic space where readers could assess how the struggle against racism was progressing in the United States as a whole.

The South, as it appeared in the *Digest*, was both distinct from and connected to the American nation. Articles regularly positioned the region as the last great barrier to the development of American democracy – an obstacle that would have to be overcome as fascism was defeated and the principles set out in the Atlantic Charter were realized.[58] The racist customs and practices of Dixie were outdated. The South had been left behind by the modern world and it was only a matter of time before America's rhetorical commitment to democracy and freedom would win out and positively transform race relations in the region. Such interventions reflected a general hope among many liberals that the international aspirations of the United States following the Second World War would sync up with and reinforce black American calls for race equality.[59]

This belief was perhaps most clearly reflected in Gunnar Myrdal's landmark work on race relations in the United States, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, published in 1944.[60] Indeed, Myrdal's text was featured as the "Book Section" selection in the March 1944 issue of the *Digest* – an editorial decision that was indicative of the faith that the magazine and Johnson Publishing placed in the American democratic system. Another article by the white Swedish sociologist, "America's Uneasy Conscience," appeared the previous year.[61] Noting that Jim Crow laws in the southern states were the "only important exceptions" to America's constitutional commitment to democracy, Myrdal argued in this earlier piece,

> What has actually happened within the last few years is not only that the Negro problem has become national in scope rather having been mainly a southern worry.

[56] David L. Carlton, "How American Is the American South?", in Larry J. Griffin and Don Harrison Doyle, eds., *The South as an American Problem* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 33–56, 37.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Thomas Sugrue demonstrates how black activists in the North used the language of antifascism to draw connections between totalitarianism overseas and racist practices in the United States. See Thomas Sugrue, "Hillburn, Hattiesburg, and Hitler: Wartime Activists Think Globally and Act Locally," in Tuck and Kruse, *Fog of War*, 87–102.

[59] Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 103.

[60] Gunnar Myrdal, "Book Section: 'An American Dilemma'," *Negro Digest*, March 1944, 91.

[61] Mrydal's earlier piece in the *Digest* attracted attention from other African American news publications. See "Swedish Author's Race Analysis in Negro Digest," *Chicago Defender*, 11 Dec. 1943, 4.

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It has also acquired tremendous international implications, and this is another decisive reason why the white North is prevented from compromising with the white South regarding the Negro.[62]

The implication here was that the backward nature of southern politics was infecting the nation and damaging America's reputation in the world. As Myrdal noted, "America, for its international prestige, power and future security, needs to demonstrate to the world that American Negroes can be satisfactorily integrated into its democracy." The Jim Crow South was presented as a key problem that would have to be overcome if America was to realize its global political and economic potential in the aftermath of the Second World War. The South would have to be "Americanized" through the Enlightenment ideals that had shaped the nation at its founding.[63] Indeed, how could America lead the "Free World" against the Axis powers while segregation and racial violence were still commonplace in the South?[64] As Myrdal concluded, "The Negro problem is not only America's greatest failure but also America's incomparably great opportunity for the future."[65]

Such reasoning placed too much faith in the potential of liberal reform and the power of American democracy.[66] The insistence that the "American Creed" of liberty, equality and individual rights would inevitably signal the end of racial oppression in the US also hides the extent to which the meaning of American democracy was contested during this era.[67] By determining that the roots of racism could be found in Dixie, articles that embraced the "American Creed" when discussing race relations overlooked the complicity of the nation in the establishment and entrenchment of white supremacy. This, in turn, fed myths of American exceptionalism that ultimately helped justify the expansion of the international political and economic power of the United States in the post-Second World War era.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge how black writers used the "American Dilemma" to tackle Jim Crow and expand definitions of political freedom. *Digest* articles gave the clear impression that Jim Crow was on the

[62] Gunnar Myrdal, "America's Uneasy Conscience," condensed from *Free World, Negro Digest*, Dec. 1943, 37.
[63] Carlton, 36.
[64] Kimberley S. Johnson, "Jim Crow Reform and the Democratization of the South," in Joseph E. Lowndes, Julie Novkov and Dorian T. Warren, eds., *Race and American Political Development* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 155–79, 167.
[65] Myrdal, "America's Uneasy Conscience," 38.
[66] Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism," 6.
[67] John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9–11; Larry J. Griffin and Katherine McFarland, "'In My Heart, I'm an American': Regional Attitudes and American Identity," *Southern Cultures*, 13, 4 (Nov. 2007), 122–24; Singh, 38–40, 108–9.

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run, often reaffirming the call for a "Double Victory" against fascism abroad and racism at home that had been launched in the pages of the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1942, and had inspired grassroots protests against race discrimination throughout the nation.[68] In stark contrast to white southern conservatives who argued that "subversive" civil rights agitators were undermining "white democracy" and damaging the American war effort, *Digest* articles documented how international forces were buffeting the South in ways that further underlined the undemocratic nature of Jim Crow.[69]

J. Saunders Redding made this point explicitly in his March 1943 article "Southern Awakening." Redding traced how wartime forces were challenging the social order of the South. Noting the rise of black student protest, efforts to boycott stores that refused to hire black staff, and the emergence of interracial tenant farmers' and sharecroppers' committees, he asserted that African Americans would no longer tolerate the iniquities of Jim Crow. Redding made it clear that the international political climate was forcing change. Insisting that "at a time when peoples all over the world are affirming the concept of equality, the Negro, too, in America is affirming with strong voice that the rights fundamental to all men shall no longer be denied to him," he concluded that "the sound of that voice avowing change is dreadful to the white South."[70]

Even as he portrayed the South as exceptional, Redding argued that the state of the region was of national concern:

> The outstripping and supplanting of outworn Negro leaders, the effects of the growing class consciousness on the race problem, the tremendous pressure of world forces generating the global war, the war itself for the equality of peoples – all these taken together are a stupendous challenge to the South. It is a challenge to her customs, her isolation, to her oft-repeated belief that the South is a different world and that the South can handle her own problems alone.[71]

[68] Beth Bates, "'Double V for Victory' Mobilizes Black Detroit, 1941–1946," in Theoharis and Woodard, *Freedom North*, 17–40; Caroline Rolland-Diamond, "'A Double Victory?' Revisiting the Black Struggle for Equality during World War Two," *Revue française d'études américaines*, 137, 3 (April, 2014), 94–107; Patricia Sullivan, "Movement Building during the World War II Era: The NAACP's Legal Insurgency in the South," in Tuck and Kruse, *Fog of War*, 70–86, 71, 74–80; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, Chapters 7 and 8.

[69] Jason Morgan Ward, "'A War for States' Rights': The White Supremacist Vision of Double Victory," in Tuck and Kruse, *Fog of War*, 126–44, 137–38. Langston Hughes's poem "Total War" (1943), circulated through the Associated Negro Press, clearly demonstrates how antifascist politics were harnessed to challenge white supremacy in the South. Langston Hughes, "Total War," *Afro-American*, 13 Feb. 1943, 4.

[70] J. Saunders Redding, "Southern Awakening", condensed from *Atlantic Monthly*, *Negro Digest*, April 1943, 41.

[71] Ibid., 44–45.

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The War, it was argued, presented a seismic challenge to the "Southern Way of Life." Claims that southern traditions and customs should be protected from the whims of the Federal Government – made by white liberals and conservatives alike – were destabilized. There would be no exceptions in the fight against racism. As Saunders surmised: "In pledging a war against the Fascist we have pledged to wipe racialism and the threat of racialism from the earth."[72] The South may well have appeared as exceptional in the pages of the *Digest*, but it was this very difference that black writers played upon to demand intervention and racial reform in the region.[73]

Contributions to the magazine also assessed how American race relations, and the politics of the Jim Crow South, played out in the international arena. Prominent African American commentators made it clear that the rest of the world was watching and judging the United States on its racial record. Proclaiming that, "[q]uite simply, the future of the American Negro is the future of America itself," Langston Hughes insisted, "The American Negro is a barometer of American progress at the moment, not only on a national scale, but on a world scale."[74] Singling out the southern states, he decried how "absurd" it was for the United States to promote its "Four Freedoms" to nations around the world, while millions of African Americans were denied the vote and were routinely forced to use segregated facilities. Embracing the language of the "Double V" campaign, he argued that the fight against racism in the United States was vital in terms of gaining the trust of the Allied nations, commenting,

> How then may we solve this problem of obvious contradiction between democratic theory and undemocratic practice? If we do not solve it the people of the Allied countries, particularly those of Asia and Latin America, will not believe us when we say we follow democracy. The Axis, particularly in Japan, will continue to use this great contradiction as a strong psychological weapon against us.[75]

The racial practices of the South were positioned as a global concern in that they undermined the war effort by tarnishing American democracy before the "darker races of the World." Others black writers made this point, including the educator Benjamin Mays, who argued following his travels throughout the Middle East and South Asia that "the global character

[72] Ibid., 45.

[73] This viewpoint was repeated throughout the black press in this era. See, for example, Langston Hughes, "Klan or Gestapo? Why Take Either: Foremost Negro Author Writes of Devils, Hams, Dixie Drawls and Axis Dictators," *Chicago Defender*, 26 Sept. 1942, 4; "Sudetenland in Mississippi," *Chicago Defender*, 17 April 1943, 13; Langston Hughes, "Here to Yonder: If Dixie Invades Europe," *Chicago Defender*, 24 July 1943, 14.

[74] Langston Hughes, "The Future of Black America," condensed from *New World*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943, 3–4, 3.

[75] Ibid., 3–4.

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of race and how American behavior is reflected abroad were driven home to me as never before."[76] He followed this up with another article, published after the Second World War, where he explained, "As isolationism fades away, America cannot continue its racial attitudes lest it infect the entire world community."[77] Horace Cayton made a strikingly similar point when he – once again – noted how southerners were spreading racial discontent throughout America. As he stated in an article titled "Should Negroes in the South Migrate North?"

> If the northern migrations have made the Negro a national problem, then the war has made the American negro an international problem. The interaction of these two facts has called the plight of the Negro to the attention not only of the nation but of the world – a gain which is immeasurable.[78]

Each of these messages reflected the strength of black America's engagement with international affairs during the 1940s. They demonstrate how the Second World War not only was configured as a fight against fascism overseas, but also represented an opportunity to defeat Jim Crow in the United States. The South regularly bore the brunt of this criticism. Articles deliberately drew attention to Dixie, arguing strategically that it was holding back and distorting the American nation's supposed commitment to freedom and democracy. The construction of an "exceptional" and backward South therefore served an important political purpose as African Americans incorporated the patriotic fervour gripping the nation at a time of war into their demands for race equality. This framing of the region provided an opportunity for African Americans to position southern race relations as a pressing national and international concern.

African American commentators used the war to pressure the US government on the issue of race oppression, hoping that this would provide the impetus for state action that would remake the nation in progressive ways. The need to defeat Nazism and the goal of achieving racial equality were intimately interlinked.[79] The call for integration and the extension of democratic rights to black America was positioned as a patriotic demand – an opportunity to prove the universalism of American democracy that was a central part of the broader war effort.

[76] Benjamin E. Mays, "Eyes on America," condensed from *Missions*, *Negro Digest*, April 1944, 17.

[77] Benjamin E. Mays, "How America Exports Race Hate," *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1949, 65.

[78] Horace Cayton, "Should Negroes in the South Migrate North?," *Negro Digest*, June 1944, 41.

[79] As Johnson declared in an editorial note in 1943 that reaffirmed the political message of the *Negro Digest*, "essentially we stand where we started out: 'Unqualifiedly for the winning of the war and the integration of all citizens into the democratic process.'" John H. Johnson, "From The Editor," *Negro Digest*, July 1943, back cover.

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RACE AROUND THE WORLD

The *Digest* further internationalized the struggle against Jim Crow by printing articles that explored racial politics beyond the borders of the United States. Each issue contained pieces that examined the colour line as it was drawn throughout the global South, discussing race relations in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 greatly expanded the global vision of the African American press, prompting a range of black journalists to examine the ties that existed between colonial rule and white supremacist power in the United States.[80] However, while historians have documented the vital anticolonial agenda advanced by black newspapers during the Second World War, the international outlook of the *Negro Digest* has often been overlooked.[81] The very format of the magazine encouraged African Americans to think about white supremacy beyond the borders of the United States. Articles entitled "Uncle Sam's Black Caribbean" and "War Report from Dixie" were printed next to one another, while coverage of Josephine Baker's performance for the Allied troops in North Africa was placed alongside an article on "Dixie Justice" that outlined lynching and race discrimination in the southern courts.[82] Indeed, the issue of the *Digest* that featured the roundtable "Is the Negro Problem Primarily a Southern Problem?" contained articles that covered the war in the Pacific, claimed that Jim Crow would have to be defeated if America was to win support in East Asia, explored the history of African Americans in Liberia, traced the heroic contribution of the "Negro patriot" Jose Morales to the Mexican

[80] Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), chapter 6; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), chapter 6; James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Prologue and chapter 1; Aric Putnam, *The Insistent Call: Rhetorical Moments in Black Anticolonialism, 1929–1937* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), chapter 5.

[81] Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *Journal of American History*, 60, 3 (1973), 692–713; Plummer, *Rising Wind*, chapters 2 and 3; Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), chapters 5 and 6; Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, chapters 1 and 2; Patrick Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice Of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), chapter 6; Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), especially chapters 2 and 3.

[82] Lawrence Martin, "Uncle Sam's Black Caribbean," condensed from *Tomorrow*, *Negro Digest*, March 1943, 53–56; John Beecher, "War Report from Dixie," condensed from *Science and Society*, *Negro Digest*, March 1943, 57–60; Morton Eustice, "Double Bill in North Africa," condensed from *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1943, 3–5; "Dixie Justice," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1943, 6.

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Revolution, and featured a piece by the white novelist and historian Henrietta Buckmaster in which she declared,

> it is impossible to ignore the fact that the world's majority – that is, the colored people – will have an important place at the peace table. Filipinos, Chinese, Burmese, Indians, Malayans, Asiatic Russians, Egyptians, Arabs, and Africans are as much a part of this global war, in suffering and participations, as the white allies.[83]

The *Digest* therefore reflected the international politics of the day and encouraged its readers to see race in global terms. As many of these articles make clear, the fight against fascism overseas had the potential to reenergize the struggle for race equality in the United States.

A particularly striking example of this appeared in the January 1943 *Digest*, where the heroic war exploits of France's first black governor Felix Eboue shared a page with that month's edition of "Dixie Drivel."[84] The figure of Eboue, who is described in the essay as "a prophetic example of the constructive potentialities of the welding of two diverse cultures when they meet on equal and favorable terms," was brought into direct conversation with the white supremacist pronouncements of such luminaries as Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi and Frank Dixon of Alabama.[85] The messages contained within the two articles may well have been jarring for the *Digest*'s African American readership, who were effectively given the opportunity to contrast the institutionalized white supremacy of the American South with Eboue's efforts to prevent the spread of fascism in Africa.[86] While this could well have been an editorial coincidence, the ordering of articles within the magazine effectively encouraged the reader to think about the domestic struggle within a broader global context. Southern race prejudice was contrasted with interracial

[83] Roundtable, "Is the Negro Problem Primarily a Southern Problem?," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 25–29; Edgar Snow, "Road to Tokio," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 3–4; Alvin Johnson, "Race in the World to Come," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 7–11; "Return of the Natives," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 41–43; Harold Preece, "South of the Southland," *Negro Digest* Feb, 1944, 63–66. Henrietta Buckmaster, "The World Watches America," *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1944, 67–70.

[84] Eboue was regularly heralded in the African American press. See Aldridge, "A War for the Colored Races", 346.

[85] Egon Kaskeline, "Felix Eboue: Free Frenchman," condensed from *Survey Graphic*, *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1943, 39–42; "Dixie Drivel," *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1943, 42; Mercer Cook, "World's No. 1 Negro," condensed from *Chicago Defender*, *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1943, 47–49; Walter Anderson, "African Saga," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1944, 64.

[86] For more on how Eboue's role in the Second World War was interpreted by African American commentators see Thyra Edwards, "A New Deal for French Africa," *The Crisis*, Jan. 1945, 10–12, 29. The NAACP's Walter White wrote to President Roosevelt to try and secure Eboue an invitation to the White House to consult on the war effort in Africa. Walter White to President Roosevelt, 2 Jan. 1943, Records of the NAACP, 1940–55, Part II, Box A3, General Office File, Africa, Eboue, Felix, 1941–1944.

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efforts to secure freedom and democracy for all. Reports on figures like Eboue, combined with coverage of black servicemen fighting in every corner of the world, undermined the white supremacist claims of the Dixiecrats.

In a move that further underlined the archaic nature of Jim Crow, the *Digest* also printed pieces that documented how racial conditions in the US compared unfavourably with the rest of the world. A number of "No Color Line" stories appeared in the magazine, characterizing Latin American and Caribbean countries – such as Brazil, Mexico and Cuba – as racially enlightened societies.[87] Headlines like "Latin America Looks at the Negro" and "Race Hate Is Greek to Latins" made it clear that racial disturbances in the United States were damaging to America's reputation south of the border.[88] Articles outlined "the inability of Latin Americans to understand the instinctive race prejudice – embryonic Nazism – of North Americans toward the Negro," and asked questions such as: "Do North Americans, in spite of the Good Neighbor policy, secretly regard us as belonging to an inferior race?"[89] This outward-facing journalism gave a clear sense that racism could either be challenged or reinforced across borders.[90]

With its history rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, Brazil frequently appeared as an important site of comparison for *Digest* readers. As the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued in his article "No Race Problem in Brazil," the United States could find a model for tackling segregation by looking to South America. Stating, "We are beginning to give more

[87] For work that explores the interconnected racial histories of the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean see Lisa Brock, *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade* (New York: NYU Press, 2007); Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); David Luis-Brown, *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[88] Luis Alberto Sanchez y Sanchez, "Latin America Looks at the Negro," condensed from *Antioch Review*, *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1942, 14–18; James Paul Stokes, "Race Hate Is Greek to Latins," condensed from *Esquire*, *Negro Digest*, May 1945, 41–42.

[89] Stokes.

[90] Some *Digest* articles also expressed concern that America was exporting Jim Crow overseas. For example, as the white author Carey McWilliams noted in a piece about Puerto Rico, "Where the color line has been drawn, we have drawn it." Carey McWilliams, "No Color Line in Puerto Rico," reprinted from *Brothers under the Skin*, *Negro Digest*, June 1943, 35. For other articles that made similar observations see Joseph Julian, "Jim Crow Goes Abroad," condensed from *The Nation*, *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1943, 49–50; Joseph Dynan, "Jim Crow for Export?", condensed from the Associated Press, *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1943, 69–70; Ollie Stewart, "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience," *Negro Digest*, July 1944, 10; Roi Ottley, "Dixie Invades Britain," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1944, 3–7; Gene Fisher, "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience," *Negro Digest*, July 1945, 36; Robert Lucas, "Jim Crow and Jim Fish," *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1947, 53.

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serious attention to Brazil where despite its absolutely and relatively large Negro or colored population there is no problem in the American sense," Frazier suggested that the US should consider its own race relations and how they compared internationally.[91] Adopting a global analysis of race oppression, he expressed hope that

> [o]ur provincialism in regard to race relations may be broken down as we are forced to meet with the colored peoples of Asia and become more closely tied to Latin-America … While we may provide Brazil with technical skill and capital, Brazil has something teach us in regard to race relations.[92]

While Frazier did not oppose the expansion of American political and economic influence overseas, he argued that the United States should be open to learning from others when it came to integrating different groups into the nation. Brazil was presented as an example of racial success – a diverse nation that had eschewed segregation and white supremacy.

Other articles in the *Digest*, with titles such as "Nature Builds No Race Barriers" and "Laboratory of Civilization," cast Brazil in a similar light.[93] This romanticized image of Brazil – along with other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean – suggested that there may be an alternative to the way in which race was defined and policed in the United States.[94] By adopting an international outlook, the *Negro Digest* demonstrated that there were political alternatives to Jim Crow. The expansion of US influence overseas during the Second World War only furthered this belief that America could learn valuable lessons from abroad when it came to tackling its own "race problem."[95]

[91] E. Franklin Frazier, "No Race Problem in Brazil," *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1943, 17.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ruth Benedict, "Nature Builds No Race Barriers," *Negro Digest*, March 1943, 17–20; Afrano Coutinho, "Laboratory of Civilization," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1943, 23–27. See also Harold Preece, "Black Brazil," condensed from *People's Voice*, *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1943, 18–21; Dynan; Gilberto Freyre, "Brazil Mixes Its Races," *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1946, 61–63; Charles Anderson Gauld, "Race in Rio," *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1949, 37–41.

[94] For work that compares and contrasts race in the US and Brazil see Charles V. Hamilton, *Beyond Racism: Race and Inequality in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001); Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[95] This sentiment was echoed by the African American press in general. As John Robert Badger commented in his *Chicago Defender* column, "American Negroes today are talking more about imperialism and colonial rule, more about what is happening in far-off lands like Greece and India because they have learned that what happens in distant nations and colonies has a great deal to do with what happens then here at home." John Robert Badger, "World View: Spotlight on Africa," *Chicago Defender*, 6 Jan. 1945, 11.

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This global analysis of race was occasionally accompanied by articles that challenged colonialism and questioned America's role in the world. While the publication was far from politically radical, it played an important and underexplored role in articulating anticolonial politics to its large African American readership. Du Bois's writings in the publication are especially illuminating here.[96] His articles made it clear that anticolonial movements in Asia and Africa needed support if there was to be peace in the aftermath of the Second World War.[97] This was combined with strident criticism of "Western civilization" and the fiction that colonial peoples represented an inferior race.[98] As Du Bois wrote in "Color and Colonies," an extract taken from his 1945 book *Color and Democracy*, "To most minds … Colonies are filled with peoples who never were abreast with civilization and never can be. But historically these lands also were seats of ancient cultures among normal men. Here human civilization began, in Africa, Asia, and Central America."[99] Du Bois worked to create a positive image of colonized peoples by challenging myths of primitivism and, in the process, questioned the supposed moral and political superiority of white Western civilization.

Inspired by the anticolonial activism taking place throughout the world, as well as by the bold demands for self-determination that were issued at gatherings such as the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945, Du Bois argued that colonial independence was a postwar imperative.[100] As he outlined in another article, this was essential if the governments of the world wanted to avoid another global conflict:

[96] For Du Bois's anti-interventionist politics see Aldridge, "A War for the Colored Races," 347–48.

[97] A total of nine pieces authored by Du Bois appeared in the *Digest* throughout its publishing run: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Black Voices in the Peace," condensed from *Amsterdam Star–News*, *Negro Digest*, Feb. 1943; Du Bois, "Africa at the Peace Table," condensed from *Foreign Affairs*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1943, 75–78; Du Bois, "If I Were Young Again," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1943, 63–65; Du Bois, "Roundtable: Will the Peace Bring Racial Peace?", *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1944, 44–45; Du Bois, "Color and Colonies," condensed from the book *Color and Democracy*, *Negro Digest*, Sept. 1945, 65–68; letter from Du Bois, "Parlex-Vous Francais? Da Da, Jovarich," *Negro Digest*, March 1945; Du Bois, "Can the Negro Expect Freedom by 1965?", *Negro Digest*, April 1947, 4–8; Du Bois, "Progress Report on Negro America," condensed from *New York Times*, *Negro Digest*, May 1949, 19–24; Du Bois, "Paul Robeson: Right or Wrong – Right: says W. E. B. Du Bois," *Negro Digest*, March 1950, 9–14.

[98] For more on the importance of Africa for Du Bois see Eric Porter, "Imagining Africa, Remaking the World: W. E. B. Du Bois' History for the Future," *Rethinking History*, 13, 4 (Dec. 2009), 479–98.

[99] Du Bois, "Color and Colonies," 66.

[100] Marika Sherwood, *Manchester and the 1945 Pan-African Congress* (London: Savannah Press, 1995).

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I would say first that it is necessary to renounce the assumption that there are a few large groups of mankind called races, with hereditary differences shown by color, hair and measurements of the bony skeleton which fix forever their relations to each other and indicate the possibilities of their individual members. There is no proof that persons and groups in Africa are not as capable of useful lives and effective progress as peoples in Europe and America.[101]

Du Bois combined his criticism of biological assumptions of racial difference with a sustained attack on the capitalist forces that underpinned colonialism. He drew attention to how the thirst for cheap labour and access to raw materials drove the colonizing process, noting how white governments justified this practice by insisting that they were playing a vital role in "developing" so-called primitive societies. The "father of pan-Africanism" insisted that if this "fiction of inferiority" was maintained it would inevitably lead to the widespread "revolt of the suppressed races themselves," commenting, "It would be a grave mistake to think that Africans are not asking: 'is it a white man's war?'"[102] Du Bois concluded by noting how white leaders discussed Africa, "with only a passing consideration for black folk," and without any regard for "the aspirations of the people of Africa themselves."[103] Asserting that it was essential that the natural resources of the continent be returned to Africans, he challenged the greed and exploitative practices of the Anglo-Saxon world, insisting on the need to "repudiate the more or less conscious feeling, widespread among the white peoples of the world, that other folk exist not for themselves, but for their uses."[104] Du Bois made it clear that events in Asia and Africa would have inevitable implications for the struggle against white supremacy in the United States.[105] In doing so, he called into question America's role in the world as well as the US government's ties to the colonial powers of Europe.

Although articles that questioned US foreign policy were in the minority, inclusion of writings by Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston and others challenged *Digest* readers to see the world in revolutionary ways that defied colonial power and questioned racist assumptions concerning the supposed superiority of white civilization. This amounted to an important anticolonial thread within the magazine that speaks to radical black calls for a "Triple Victory" during the Second World War. This would not only guarantee the fall of

[101] Du Bois, "Africa at the Peace Table", 78. [102] Ibid., 77. [103] Ibid., 78–79.
[104] Ibid., 79.
[105] Du Bois's analysis of Africa was not without its problems. Although he called for self-government and challenged imperialism, he was sometimes guilty of advancing a paternalistic attitude towards Africa that assumed that African Americans would lead their African cousins to freedom. Porter, 483.

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Jim Crow and fascism in Europe, but also signal the end of colonial rule throughout the global South.[106]

This kind of militant journalism is not usually associated with the Johnson Publishing Company. As Ben Burns recalled, Johnson's management of the *Digest* was largely driven by his concern that the magazine strike a moderate and pro-American tone.[107] Indeed, the insistence in its opening issue that the *Digest* was "dedicated to the development of interracial understanding and the promotion of national unity" underlines the magazine's liberal politics and patriotic stance.[108] However, while the JPC was primarily invested in promoting black American citizenship, the inclusion of articles that condemned colonialism also prompted *Digest* readers to think about their ties to people of colour overseas.

This was reinforced by pieces that positively assessed black culture, history and identity beyond the borders of the United States. The writer, anthropologist and activist Eslanda Goode Robeson made this point clearly in her article "Old Country for Thirteen Million." Encouraging black readers to think about their racial heritage and to engage with anticolonial politics, she declared, "For the past ten years I have been looking into this matter of race, my own race, and have found a great deal to be proud of." Robeson recalled how, as a child, she believed that she was the only one of her classmates without an "Old Country." Noting that African history was never taught at school, she described how she only really came to understand her own identity when living in London in the 1920s and 1930s. Reflecting on her experiences studying anthropology in the colonial metropole she stated,

> There, in England, I gradually became conscious of the fact that I knew very little indeed about the Negro people. To my amazement, the Negro people were not just our own familiar thirteen million American Negroes. They were also the ten million West Indian Negroes and the one hundred and fifty million African Negroes, about whom I knew nothing whatever. Finding out about my new relations, about my African brothers and sisters, has been a thrilling adventure. It answered questions and fulfilled vague yearnings which had faced me as a young American.[109]

[106] Stephen G. N. Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle from Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 222.
[107] Burns, *Nitty Gritty*, 34–37.
[108] "Introducing …," *Negro Digest*, Nov. 1942, 2. Johnson also outlined his pro-American politics in an editorial in June 1945 where he stated, "Free discussion is the American way and we hope to make *Negro Digest* a champion of the American way of life." John H. Johnson, *Negro Digest*, June 1945, back cover.
[109] Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Old Country for Thirteen Million," condensed from *Asia and the Americas*, *Negro Digest*, Jan. 1945, 3.

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Robeson called for African Americans to follow her lead, to find out more about their roots and to draw inspiration from the long and complicated history of the African continent. This was important, she noted, as Africa was ready to take its place in the modern world. The appearance of an extended extract of Robeson's book *African Journey*, an account of her travels throughout East and Southern Africa, served to reinforce this view.[110] Robeson argued that black Americans could draw inspiration from their African heritage in ways that would strengthen their push for civil rights in the United States. As she concluded when pondering what Africa offered black America, "I think it has a great deal to do with us. Knowing our history, our background, we can take our places with dignity, with confidence on an equal footing with our fellow Americans."[111]

However, this celebration of African heritage and support for anticolonial independence movements rubbed up against another, altogether more problematic, theme present in the pages of the *Negro Digest*. In an editorial decision that speaks to the magazine's schizophrenic nature, other articles underscored key cultural differences between black Americans and people of African descent around the world. Pieces titled "Be Kind to Cannibals," "The Sultan's Skull," and "Jumping Giants of Africa" stressed the backwardness and primitivism of the faraway lands of Africa and Asia.[112] Articles of this nature – often by white authors – became a particularly prominent feature of the magazine in the second half of the 1940s, just as World War gave way to Cold War and anticommunist politics stifled more militant critiques of American power. Whereas work by Du Bois and Robeson encouraged black Americans to have pride in and take inspiration from their African heritage, other *Digest* articles mocked the supposedly "strange" and "alien" customs that could be found on the "Dark Continent."

This was particularly prominent in "African Way," a regular feature that reprinted news snippets about life in Africa. Typically, this column featured short stories about cannibalism, promiscuous "native" women, and "cruel" tribal practices. Indeed, its masthead featuring illustrations of jungle animals and topless tribal women gives a clear sense of the feature's tone. Anticolonial ferment in Africa, coupled with phenomena such as the rise of Garveyism and the development of the Pan-African Congress movement, contributed to a positive reconsideration of Africa when it came to the production

[110] Eslanda Goode Robeson, "Book Section: *African Journey*," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1945.
[111] Robeson, "Old Country for Thirteen Million", 6.
[112] William Seabrook, "Be Kind to Cannibals," condensed from *American Weekly*, *Negro Digest*, May 1944, 63–65; Emil C. Schumacher, "The Sultan's Skull," condensed from *Argosy*, *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1945, 65–66; Commander Attilio Gatti, "Jumping Giants of Africa," condensed from *Mechanix Illustrated Magazine*, *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1945, 25.

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of black identity in the US in the interwar years.[113] Nevertheless, it is clear that many African Americans still encountered Africa through the lens of white "Western civilization" well into the 1940s. Stereotypical depictions of Africa, coupled with wartime pressure to swear allegiance to the United States, fed narratives of black American difference that had the potential to obstruct the politics of diaspora in this era.[114]

"African Way" prompted complaints from readers, including two African students studying in the US who were concerned about how Africa was being depicted in such a well-known publication. As John D. D. A. Dickson of Wilberforce State College argued, "In this atomic age, intelligent people should publish articles which have scientific proofs. I wonder why civilized people still believe that there are cannibals in Africa … It is time you stop publishing such unwelcome and unwholesome articles."[115] This sentiment was echoed by Julius J. Kiano, a Kenyan student studying in West Virginia, who informed the *Digest* editors,

> The average African is devoted to the course of elevating the African culture to the level of the current standards of life … He is definitely opposed to the misleading terms such as the Dark Continent and the Jungles being used as synonyms for Africa and the snake-drawing as symbols of the African life.[116]

Kiano denounced "African Way" as unrepresentative, noting that a "Day of Awakening has dawned" throughout Africa and arguing that it was unfair "to judge the vast continent by the actions of a few devotees of out-of-date customs and traditions."[117] Dickson and Kiano flipped colonizing narratives on their head by insisting on the inherent modernity of Africa and its people. They called out American ignorance of Africa and challenged *Digest* readers to grapple with the complex and varied nature of their homeland.

That both students felt compelled to write to Johnson Publishing to object to the magazine's depiction of African culture hints at an important disjuncture that still existed between black Americans and Africa during the "diaspora moment" of the 1940s. The *Digest* was sometimes guilty of reproducing narratives of African American exceptionalism within its pages. Articles that cast

[113] Corbould, *Becoming African Americans*, 218–219.

[114] For the pressure placed on the black press to be patriotic during the Second World War see Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II*, 143–45; Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *Journal of American History*, 60, 3 (1973), 692–713; Harvard Sitkoff, "African American Militancy in the World War II South: Another Perspective," in Neil R. McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 7–92.

[115] John D. D. A. Dickson, "The Mailbag," *Negro Digest*, Dec. 1949, 96–97.

[116] Julius J. Gikonyo Kiano, "The Mailbag," *Negro Digest*, Aug. 1949, 97.

[117] Ibid.

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Africa as primitive and exotic not only were disparaging, but also – through their affirmation of "Western" values – separated black America from people of colour living beyond the borders of the United States.

This embrace of American "civilization" was particularly problematic in the aftermath of the Second World War as it reinforced the assumption that the US had an important role to play when it came to the "development" and "uplift" of the (post)colonial world. While it is hard to pin down exactly how and why these editorial decisions were made, the *Digest*'s muddled depiction of African life demonstrates how American universalism could obscure urgent and militant demands for colonial independence that were being made with renewed force throughout Asia and Africa. That Africa was routinely configured as a place of amusement and titillation in one of the best-selling black publications of the decade illustrates how the fervour of war and the associated celebration of American nationality worked to obstruct geographically expansive calls for black Americans to claim their African heritage and express solidarity with anticolonial movements for independence. While black activists were able to proclaim their right to American citizenship and maintain broader international alliances, the positioning of Africa as "primitive" and "backward" gave the impression that African Americans were more "developed" than the "natives" of Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean. The *Digest* presented a hierarchical view of the world that assumed both the cultural and the political superiority of American values and "Western" democracy. Echoing the sentiment of Truman's Point Four Program, the United States was regularly cast as a modernizing power, a nation that had the potential to lift the "veil of darkness" from "savage" and uncivilized lands. In advancing this view of the world, the publication provides a telling reminder of how the promise of US nationality could often stifle the politics of the diaspora, dragging African Americans rightwards to the extent to which they participated in the dominant cultural practice of defaming Africans. Cartoonish depictions of "native" life implied that there was a need for the US to assume global dominance in order to modernize, develop and uplift supposedly "primitive peoples" in far-off lands. In the end, it could be argued that the international outlook of the *Negro Digest* was often wedded to the exceptional status of American freedom and an overriding belief that the US could change the world for the better.

CONCLUSION

The 1940s represented a crucial moment in the internationalization of the black freedom struggle as African Americans responded to the Second World War and reconfigured the fight against fascism into an all-out assault against Jim Crow. However, while black leaders were often inspired by and

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expressed solidarity with anticolonial struggles around the world, the patriotic pressures of war also placed limits on the relationship between African Americans and the "darker races of the world."

The *Negro Digest* speaks to this tension within African American thought, showing the diverse ways black writers from across the political spectrum navigated the Second World War to challenge white supremacy in the United States. The magazine included articles that detailed how the US lagged behind other nations when it came to challenging racism, stressed the achievements of foreign black leaders, reported on anticolonial politics, and documented international criticisms of Jim Crow. Its editors did not shy away from giving a voice to black commentators who assessed the international implications of segregation and exposed the limitations of American democracy in what was a rapidly changing world.

However, while the *Digest* published pieces that challenged racism and colonial power on a global scale, it combined this with writings that stressed America's potential for reform, and which overlooked the national character of white supremacy in the United States. The pervasiveness of the "American Creed" and the liberal values of the nation sometimes appeared to be at odds with the radical pronouncements of figures such as Hurston, Du Bois and Robeson. This was made particularly clear by the *Digest*'s tendency to disparage supposedly "primitive" cultural practices overseas that served to establish clear differences between black Americans and African peoples around the world.[118]

Navigating the multifarious arguments advanced in the *Digest* therefore complicates our understanding of the 1940s as a "diaspora moment" in the African American freedom struggle.[119] It is undeniable that world war and the development of strong anticolonial movements inspired black writers to celebrate their African heritage and visualize forms of "colored cosmopolitanism" that, in the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, once again established the struggle against Jim Crow as "a local phase of a world problem."[120] However, the diverse opinions contained within the magazine also show how the Second World War and the demands for a "Double Victory" prompted many

[118] Johnson Publishing decided to relaunch the *Digest* in 1961. Under the editorship of Hoyt Fuller, the new version of the magazine adopted a pan-African aesthetic and became a key text of the black arts movement. On the relationship between the two magazines see Hall, "On Sale at Your Favourite Newsstand."

[119] Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, chapter 4.

[120] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Color Line Belts the World," in *W E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 42–43, 42; Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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African Americans to reassess their ties to and place within the American nation.

The belief that the struggle for racial justice and the wartime interests of the US government would coalesce certainly energized black protest in the United States.[121] Indeed, *Digest* articles reflected this trend, printing work by black writers that embraced American democracy in order to push for civil rights and integration, particularly in the South. However, these efforts to rework and expand the scope of American democracy influenced how black Americans engaged with racial politics overseas. The international focus of the *Negro Digest* therefore prompts us once again to think through the extent to which differences and disconnections might be just as important to consider when analyzing the relationship between African Americans, Africa and the coloured world.

The work of Brent Hayes Edwards on the "practice of diaspora" is important to remember here. Commenting on what he refers to as "cultures of black internationalism," Edwards reminds us that "as much as they allow new and unforeseen alliances and interventions on a global stage … they also are characterized by unavoidable misapprehensions and misreadings, persistent blindness and solipsisms, self-defeating and abortive collaborations, a failure to translate even a basic grammar of blackness."[122] This observation rings true in the pages of the *Digest*. It was a publication that was as much about disconnectivity as it was about connectivity when it came to thinking about the relationship between black America and the wider world. Although articles in the *Digest* challenged white supremacy in the US and traced the global contours of race, the magazine also gave the impression that African Americans were set apart from the rest of the coloured world. The pressure to support American democracy and to identify as loyal Americans structured the international outlook of African Americans during the Second World War. The magazine encouraged its black readers to think globally, but to do so as patriotic Americans in the hope that this would reawaken the nation's constitutional commitment to equality.[123] While this helped to internationalize the struggle against Jim Crow, it also emphasized the "Americaness" of African

[121] Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 103.

[122] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.

[123] The *Negro Digest* advanced a form of what the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has referred to as "rooted cosmopolitanism" that reminds us how the international vision of African Americans was always in conversation with their relationship with the nation. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," *Critical Inquiry*, 23, 3 (April 1997), 617–39, 622.

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Americans.[124] Ultimately, the spectre of American nationality and narratives of racial progress running through the *Negro Digest* worked to limit international solidarities that openly connected racial injustices in the United States to colonial exploitation abroad.

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[124] Some readers were critical of the *Negro Digest*'s promotion of American values. See Edward Peeks, "The Mailbag," *Negro Digest*, Oct. 1951, 98.

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