NO EASY VICTORIES

African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950–2000

Edited by
William Minter, Gail Hovey, and Charles Cobb Jr.

with a Foreword by
Nelson Mandela

FOR THE FIRST TIME, A PANORAMIC VIEW OF U.S. ACTIVISM ON AFRICA FROM 1950 TO 2000.

"We were part of a worldwide movement that continues today to redress the economic and social injustices that kill body, mind, and spirit. *No Easy Victories* makes clear that our lives and fortunes around the globe are indeed linked." —NELSON MANDELA

Hundreds of thousands of Americans mobilized to oppose apartheid in the 1980s. They built on decades of behind-the-scenes links between African liberation movements and American activists, both black and white.

No Easy Victories draws on the voices of activists of several generations to explore this largely untold history. While U.S.-based groups and individuals contributed to African liberation, African struggles also inspired U.S. activism, including the civil rights and black power movements.

Today Africa and the world face global injustices as deadly as apartheid. Understanding this history of solidarity is essential for finding new paths to a future of equal human rights for all.

Richly illustrated with 120 photographs, *No Easy Victories* features chapters by William Minter, Lisa Brock, Mimi Edmunds, Joseph F. Jordan, David Goodman, and Walter Turner. Shorter essays highlight a wide array of individual activists and organizations.

"*No Easy Victories* tells the compelling stories behind the U.S. anti-apartheid movement in the voices of those who were there. It reminds us that movements emerge over time, built on hard work by movement foot soldiers and on personal networks that bridge generations and continents." —Danny Glover, actor, activist, chair of TransAfrica Forum

"Africa today is experiencing a second wind of change, with Africans demanding good governance, respect for human rights, and empowerment of women. Those who are in the forefront are standing on the shoulders of those whose voices and stories we hear in *No Easy Victories*." —Charlayne Hunter-Gault, author of *New News out of Africa: Uncovering the African Renaissance*

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"*No Easy Victories* is equal parts inspiration, education and celebration of how social change happens. It is a remarkable chronicle of how activists on opposite sides of the Atlantic united around their shared commitments to freedom and self-determination." —Amy Goodman, host, *Democracy Now!*

WILLIAM MINTER taught at the secondary school of the Mozambique Liberation Front in 1966–68 and 1974–76. An independent scholar, widely published author, and activist, he is the editor of *AfricaFocus Bulletin*.

GAIL HOVEY, among the founders of *Southern Africa* magazine in 1964, served as research director for the American Committee on Africa/The Africa Fund and as managing editor of *Christianity and Crisis*.

CHARLES COBB JR., senior correspondent for allAfrica.com, was a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi in 1962–67. His latest book is *On the Road to Freedom: A Guided Tour of the Civil Rights Trail*.

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"This is a remarkable and often insightful collection of essays and reflections ... in its very strength it exposes an entire realm of research that has yet to be completed." - Gerald Horne, H-Net review January 2008

Chapter 2

The 1950s: Africa Solidarity Rising

Lisa Brock

In the summer of 1979, I attended my first demonstration in solidarity with the people of Africa. Little did I know that this would be the first of many such actions, or that out of it would grow my intellectual and political work for the next 20 years. The Southern Africa Support Project in Washington, DC called the demonstration to protest the presence in Washington of Bishop Abel Muzorewa. Recently installed as leader of what was briefly called Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, Muzorewa was in town to gain support for his government, which had been established to forestall genuine majority rule in Zimbabwe.

Even before, I had been involved in domestic anti-racist issues, as a student at Howard University and as a member of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. I had begun to see the connections between the local and the global, especially in terms of racism, sexism, power, and imperialism. Meeting Dennis Brutus, while I was a graduate student at Northwestern University, solidified my growing sense of internationalism with concrete action. It was at Dennis's urging that I became a co-chair in Chicago of the Stop the Apartheid Rugby Tour in 1981, and I never looked back. I came to understand that I was part of a tradition of activists and intellectuals who had made that same political and personal journey.

In this chapter about the 1950s, I will present three "lions," activists who preceded me on this journey and emerged as leaders: George Houser, Bill Sutherland, and Charlene Mitchell. For each of them, but in very different ways, the 1950s was a determining decade that shaped the work they would engage in for the next half century.

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, it is important to grasp that the 1950s was a messy dance of a decade. The Cold War was omnipresent, both shaping and being shaped by rising demands for freedom and civil rights on the African continent and in the United States. The struggles against racism, colonialism, and nuclear proliferation were intertwined. Enormous, almost impossible, hopes and dreams were placed on Africa and African leaders by Americans, especially African Americans, who wanted to believe that colonialism and racial oppression were finite and vulnerable.

As I began to explore the 1950s, probably most revelatory for me was the discovery that virtually all U.S.-centered activists and scholars whom we identify with the civil and human rights movements consciously saw themselves as working in solidarity with the peoples of Africa. The list is far too long to name in full but includes Paul and Essie Robeson, St. Clair Drake, Thurgood Marshall, Sidney Poitier, Ella Baker, Billie

Lisa Brock
Photo courtesy of Lisa Brock.

Holiday, and Harry Belafonte. This discovery reinforced the need for the sort of history we present here, and it raised important questions. Why are the histories, documentaries, and biographies of these people and this era problematically constructed to emphasize the national and not the international? How does the desire for a "national narrative" obscure the evolution of an international one? Could this be one postmodern undertaking of scholar activists, to deconstruct the "imagined past" toward a reimagined future? This small essay dreams so.

Race, Ideology, and the Fall of the Council on African Affairs

Before I present the lives and work of George Houser, Bill Sutherland, and Charlene Mitchell, a few words should be said about the Council on African Affairs. The council closed its doors in the mid-1950s, just as Houser's American Committee on Africa was opening up for business.

Formed in 1937, the Council on African Affairs was by the 1950s the largest Africa solidarity organization in the United States up to that time. Its history illustrates the power of African American solidarity with the peoples of Africa as well as the threat this solidarity posed to the American establishment. At the beginning of World War II the organization was "crafted by the left" but embraced by "the full range of black American liberals, church leaders, [and the] professional and middle class" (Von Eschen 1997, 19), as well as by black nationalist organizations. At its height, under the leadership of giants like Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Alphaeus Hunton, the council had the ear of the U.S. president and drew tens of thousands to mass rallies at Madison Square Garden and Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church.

From its office on 26th Street in New York City, the council linked the struggle against racism in the United States with the colonization of "colored peoples" the world over. Guests from South Africa and India were honored at its events. CAA campaigns—opposing Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia; advocating for a strong United Nations; championing workers' causes in South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana; demanding the end of the South African mandate over South West Africa—were widely applauded in U.S., European, and African newspapers. The council in the late 1940s had varied and deep personal, political, and journalistic ties in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Europe.

By 1952, however, the liberal-left coalition was imploding under the weight of a totalizing Cold War. Robeson and Du Bois were hounded by U.S. authorities and Hunton served nine months in jail in 1951 for his political and ideological beliefs. Labeling them as subversive and soft on communism was both accurate and effective, and it cost the council considerable support. While none professed

As the Cold War intensified, the Council on African Affairs was attacked as subversive and its leader, Alphaeus Hunton, was jailed for nine months in 1951. On his release, Hunton, left, was welcomed by his wife Dorothy, Paul Robeson, and W. E. B. Du Bois. *Photo reproduced from Hunton 1986.*

membership in the Communist Party at the time, all three men were clearly Marxist or left-leaning. And all three refused to distance themselves from friends and comrades in the U.S. Communist Party or from their belief in a détente between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Choices had to be made. At the end of the war, President Truman had indicated that he was ready to concede certain civil rights demands. But these concessions were predicated on black leadership support for, or at least acquiescence to, U.S. domestic and foreign policy. While this kind of "contradictory politics of inclusion" was not new for African Americans, the stakes were higher in postwar America (Brock 1998). This was so, ironically, because organizations like the CAA and a radicalized NAACP as well as the black media had brought international attention to the horrors of Jim Crow.

Engaged in a deepening ideological struggle with the Left, the United States was touting itself as moral leader of the free world. Yet the United States had an image problem, and this problem became especially acute as old colonial relations in Africa began to fall away and countries moved toward independence. Taking the offensive, the Truman administration set out to craft an Africa policy for the United States and to recruit American blacks to play a role in these new initiatives.

This was a game two could play. Leading black liberal groups—the NAACP, the Urban League, the National Council of Negro Women—employed a carrot and stick of their own. If the government desegregated the armed forces, for instance, they would not demonstrate in Washington; if the government appointed blacks to key government, judicial, labor, and military positions, the black press would applaud U.S. programs such as the Marshall Plan in Europe. More African Americans than ever before (although still only a handful) emerged to play roles on the national and international stage. Ralph Bunche, an early supporter of the CAA, became the U.S. representative at the United Nations and won a Nobel Peace Prize. Max Yergan, one of the original founders of the CAA, turned to the far right and even collaborated with the FBI against the CAA. Edith Sampson, a prominent attorney from Chicago, became the first African American federal judge, while Maida Springer, a union organizer, served as the AFL-CIO's African representative for many years.

All of these African Americans became at one time or another part of U.S. State Department tours that traveled abroad to "reassure Africans and Asians that the U.S. government treated [black Americans] fairly" (Lutz 2001, 328). This was one aspect of the messy dance mentioned above. African Americans hoped their involvement in these international jaunts would lead to increased justice at home, while the U.S. government encouraged and promoted a black presence on such tours in hopes of pushing its own corporate, political, and economic goals in Africa.

Although the Council on African Affairs was harassed and charged with sedition, it refused to back off of its critique of race relations in the United States, where segregation and white-on-black violence continued. Nor would it uncritically support an emerging U.S. policy in Africa. The CAA moved its office to the more friendly environs of 125th Street in Harlem. It was the only U.S. organization in the early 1950s to offer an incisive analysis of the two major trends in Africa at that time: first, the deepening African anticolonial/antiracist struggles, and second, the desperate attempts by colonial powers to retain control.

The council paid a price for its clear questions and straightforward analysis. In October 1954, Alphaeus Hunton was subpoenaed to appear before a federal grand jury and was forced to surrender all records detailing the CAA's relationship with the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress. The CAA's newsletter, *Spotlight on Africa*, reported that the grand jury sought to determine "whether these activities represented a violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act" (October 28, 1954).

One of Hunton's last involvements before closing the Council on African Affairs was to attend the Asian African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Although he criticized the conference for not having enough African participation, he clearly identified with the Cold War weariness in the "colored" world that motivated them to find their own nonaligned path. "It is possible and practicable," he said, "for Communist, non-Communist and anti-communist to live together, meet together, speak together, and

contribute toward the common good of all mankind" (Von Eschen 1997, 172).

America in the 1950s had no room for Hunton's kind of inclusiveness. For more than 15 years the Council on African Affairs had packed the churches and streets of Harlem, building support for the end of colonialism and African liberation. The American Committee on Africa began its work just as the CAA closed its doors. Although the two organizations understood the Harlem community to be a key constituency and shared a focus on Africa, ACOA did not give credit to or claim any continuity with the CAA. Silences in history speak as eloquently as words, and this omission, given the times, may suggest if not outright anticommunism on the part of ACOA, then at least a fear of being associated with communists.

George Houser and the American Committee on Africa

Africa was rising and its people welcomed support from a broad spectrum of sources in their struggles for independence and majority rule. These included the American Committee on Africa as well as the Council on African Affairs. ACOA began as Americans for South African Resistance, which was formed in 1952 to support the South African Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws. In 1953 AFSAR broadened its mission and changed its name. George Houser, one of the founders, served as executive director from 1955 until his retirement in 1981, creating, with his staff and board of directors, what was to become the most successful U.S. Africa solidarity organization of the next 50 years.

George Mills Houser was born in 1916 in Cleveland, Ohio, the son of Methodist missionaries. By the time he finished college, he had lived in the Philippines, New York, California, Colorado, and China. Influenced by the social gospel his father preached, Houser entered the world of activism through his faith. He followed in his father's footsteps, entering New York's Union Theological Seminary to become a minister himself.

The outbreak of World War II opened a new chapter in Houser's life. Called to register for the draft before the United States was formally at war, he was one of eight seminary students who refused to register. They were arrested and sentenced to a year and a day in federal prison. Upon their release from prison, the seminary asked them not to take any other action that would bring adverse publicity to the seminary, or at least to seek permission before acting. Houser and four others moved to Chicago instead and entered Chicago Theological Seminary.

While Houser was in prison, A. J. Muste, a leading pacifist, visited him and offered him a job with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in Chicago. FOR was an international pacifist organization that had been established in 1914, and Houser took up the position when he arrived in Chicago. In 1943, through his involvement with FOR, he helped found CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. With offices on Chicago's South Side, CORE would become a key organization in the fight for desegregation and civil rights in the 1960s. Foreshadowing what was to come, FOR and CORE conducted the first Freedom Ride in the U.S. South in 1947 and launched campaigns to desegregate restaurants, pools, and beaches, beginning in Chicago.

In this way Houser discovered his life's path. "I realized, well, I am not just looking around for a church. I've got a vocation going here." Houser became a national FOR/CORE organizer and returned to New York in 1946. It was a natural step for him to move from this work to work on South Africa.

> I was on the national staff of the FOR working with Bayard Rustin and others. Bill Sutherland was a good friend of ours. . . . We had been on many projects together—antiwar, antirace, what have you—in the New York area. Bill came back from London saying that he had met a representative of a South African publication who was connected with the African National Congress of South Africa and there was a big campaign coming up. I said to myself . . . defiance against unjust laws was very much like some of the CORE activities, civil disobedience against Jim Crow laws here, against apartheid laws there.

I interviewed George Houser at his modest home in Pomona, New York in 2004. Gray-haired, with sparkling eyes, he talked about the 1950s. For him, just as for members in the CAA, the connec-

tion between fighting racism in the United States and in South Africa was too obvious to ignore.

Americans for South African Resistance was formed with Don Harrington of the Community Church and the Reverend Charles Y. Trigg of the Salem Methodist Church in Harlem, along with Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party and Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union. Houser, although still working for FOR and CORE, began a rich correspondence in February 1952 with Walter Sisulu and Yusuf A. Cachalia, leaders of the African National Congress and South African Indian Congress respectively, the two organizations leading the Joint Planning Council for the Defiance Campaign. He also wrote to many others, including people in the ANC, the Unity Movement, and the South African Institute of Race Relations. All wrote back, welcoming AFSAR'S support for their work in South Africa. During this flurry of letters, Z. K. Matthews, a Fort Hare professor and ANC leader, came to spend a year at Union Theological Seminary. He passed on to AFSAR the letters he received from his son Joe, leader of the Defiance Campaign in the Cape Province. Matthews and Houser become friends, and on his return to South Africa Matthews remained an invaluable contact.

This correspondence was to set the agenda for AFSAR: information dissemination and raising funds. The ongoing vehicle for both was a small newsletter called *AFSAR Bulletin*. It kept its readers informed of the stages of the Defiance Campaign and solicited donations for those who were putting their lives on the line in South Africa. During its brief and somewhat irregular run, it managed to reach some 2,000 to 3,000 people scattered around the country. With the *Bulletin*, AFSAR was able to raise around $2,000, which it sent to the campaign. One woman from Arizona sent her diamond ring with a note saying, "use this to raise funds for the cause." The immediate cause was legal defense and support for families whose breadwinners were imprisoned for defying unjust laws.

In spring 1952, AFSAR held its first big event in support of the Defiance Campaign. Hosted by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. at his Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, the event drew more than 800 people, black and white. A featured speaker was actor Canada Lee, who was starring in a Broadway production based on the South African novel *Cry the Beloved Country* (Paton 1948). He had just returned from South Africa and spoke passionately of what he had experienced. After the program, Houser recalls, a motorcade of nearly 50 cars drove from Harlem all the way down to the South African consulate at 58th Street to hold a lively demonstration.

George Houser, left, and Bill Sutherland greet each other at Houser's 90th birthday party in Nyack, NY in 2006. Over more than 60 years, the two met time and again on the road they each traveled for African liberation.
Photo courtesy of George Houser.

As the Defiance Campaign was winding down in spring 1953, a group came together to decide what to do next. Houser, Harrington, Thomas, Baldwin, and Muste were joined by George Carpenter, Africa secretary of the National Council of Churches; Professor Rayford Logan of Howard University; Peter Weiss, a lawyer and director of the International Development Placement Association; James Farmer, a

founder and later director of CORE; and Walter Offutt of the NAACP.

This mix of religious, civil rights, socialist, and pacifist leaders was Houser's natural community, and it would continue to be the core constituency of the organization they were about to create. Calling itself the American Committee on Africa, the infant organization proclaimed that "one of the world's continents is missing from America's consciousness . . . The ACOA is being organized to help bridge this gap between Africans and Americans" (Houser 1989, 63).

The Community Church of New York on 35th Street and Park Avenue gave ACOA office space. George Shepherd, who had been traveling in Uganda and was well known to the founding committee, agreed to be temporary volunteer executive. They decided that Houser should travel to Africa to become more familiar with conditions on the ground. From May to October 1954, he traveled to London and from there to West and Southern Africa, establishing contact with leaders and movements and conducting hundreds of hours of interviews. Upon his return, he became the executive director. Lydia Zemba joined him as a second staff member, leaving a job at Doubleday to work for an organization with a nonexistent budget.

Supported by small contributions, ACOA spent the first year finding its feet and defining its work. In a document dated April 21, 1955, it announced a three-point program comprising education, action, and projects. The vehicles for education would be its journal *Africa Today*, as well as a speaker's bureau, special literature on topics of importance, and public conferences. Action would focus on influencing the course of American foreign policy. This would involve a considerable amount of time spent at the United Nations working with African petitioners. ACOA's projects included an African Leadership Lecture Program, which began organizing speaking tours for emerging African leaders (Shepherd 1956).

For projects, a fund was established and began by supporting two African education initiatives. In South Africa, the imposition of "Bantu education" nationwide forced most mission schools, which provided education for Africans, to turn over their operations to the government. ACOA provided support to Father Trevor Huddleston, who was fighting to keep his integrated St. Peters school independent. In the Gold Coast, soon to become Ghana, Bill Sutherland called for support for village education. An old friend of FOR, CORE, and now the ACOA, he had moved to the Gold Coast in 1953.

Both fundraising campaigns achieved some success. By mid-1956, $10,000 had been sent to Huddleston (Houser 1989, 65). In September 1958, just a year after Ghanaian independence, 515 books and several records were shipped to Accra by the New American Library. Cora Weiss, married to board member Peter Weiss, was volunteering for ACOA. She cultivated contacts with publishers, national library associations, and record companies, asking them to defray the cost of shipping material aid to Ghana (C. Weiss 1958).

The third major initiative was the South African Defense Fund, established in response to the infamous Treason Trials. Among the 156 people put on trial were a number of ACOA contacts including Z. K. Matthews, Walter Sisulu, Yusuf A. Cachalia, and Albert Luthuli. ACOA drew on the prestige of its national committee, which included emerging civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., actor Sidney Poitier, Senator Hubert Humphrey, and African American baseball pioneer Jackie Robinson. The fund continued after the trial, and ACOA contributed about $75,000 to legal defense over the years (Houser 1989, 120–21).

In another highly successful initiative in the 1950s, ACOA sponsored a tour by the Kenyan labor leader Tom Mboya. Only 26 at the time, Mboya was a rising star in a dazzling constellation of brilliant young African leaders engaged in the anticolonial nation-building endeavor. First belonging to Jomo Kenyatta's Kenya Africa Union, by his 1956 tour he was the elected general secretary of the newly formed Kenyan Federation of Labor. Kenya had been front-page news since 1952, when the Mau Mau rebellion erupted on the scene. Chapter 1 describes this armed insurgency that shook British control and seeped into the consciousness of 1950s America. Tom Mboya, a leader who appeared willing to pursue a moderate, nonviolent path of action, seemed to many Americans to offer a welcome alternative.

The ACOA sponsored two tours with Mboya. The first, in August–September 1956, was heavily geared toward trade unions. Mboya spent time with many regular workers and trade union leaders and

Meeting Kwame Nkrumah. At the first All-African People's Conference in Accra in 1958, the ACOA delegation was photographed with the Ghanaian president. From left: John Marcum, Homer Jack, George Houser, Nkrumah, Frank Montero, Bill Scheinman. *Photo courtesy of George Houser.*

also met Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers and George Meany, the highly influential national president of the AFL-CIO. Back in Kenya in December, Mboya wrote Houser that the Kenyan Federation of Labor had received a $35,000 grant from the AFL-CIO to build a trade union center. "At least one important aspect of my trip has been fulfilled," he wrote. "For this the ACOA must take some credit" (Houser 1989, 83).

During the second trip begun on April 8, 1959 and ending "thirty-five days and about 100 speeches later" (Houser 1989, 88), Mboya became one of the most well-known African leaders in the United States. He established contacts in the highest echelons of the U.S. government and the civil rights community. Because of this trip, Mboya saw the achievement of a second goal: the ACOA was able to facilitate, through the formation of the African-American Students Foundation, an airlift of Kenyan and other East African students to U.S. colleges and universities. The fundraising appeal to charter a flight to bring the 81 students to the United States was led by Jackie Robinson, Harry Belafonte, and Sidney Poitier (Okoth 1987, 88).

On September 6, 1959, 61 men and 20 women arrived in New York and were met by a contingent led by Robinson, who himself gave $4,000. "I have had few more rewarding experiences in my entire life," Robinson said. "As they talked in the same quiet calm, self-assured way with which Tom Mboya made such a hit on his recent tour here, I couldn't help but feel that here undoubtedly was a whole group of potential Tom Mboyas, Kwame Nkrumahs and Nnamdi Azikiwes" (Okoth 1987, 88). Returning to their home countries, many of the students went on to become part of the first generation of civil servants who would help run their countries after independence. It was one of the few women, Wangari Maathai, who would become

the most outstanding leader, winning the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her groundbreaking environmental work in a far different period of Kenya's history.

Tom Mboya, his tours, and the student airlift program, while hugely successful for the ACOA, became controversial soon after, a reflection of the strange political space that Mboya and the ACOA found themselves in during the Cold War. In an effort to influence an emerging U.S. policy, the ACOA had taken Mboya to Washington to meet Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator John F. Kennedy, and State Department officials, among others. Over the next few years Mboya would move closer and closer to the United States government, establishing a relationship with the CIA. He eventually affiliated his Kenyan Federation of Labor with the U.S.-backed International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which guaranteed some funds, rather than with the Eastern European–backed World Federation of Trade Unions (Richards 2000, 8). He was touted in establishment circles as the anticommunist spokesman for Africa (Wechsler 1959).

Cora Weiss, who directed the African-American Students Foundation and its airlift, came to know Mboya well. Reminiscing in 2003, she described herself as "Miss Innocent" in the 1950s. ACOA did not know of Mboya's connection to the CIA, she said, though she remembers driving him to what she suspects now was an appointment to pick up a check: "If we had known, we probably wouldn't have had anything to do with him" (C. Weiss 2003). For reasons that remain unclear, Tom Mboya was killed by a fellow Kenyan in 1969.

ACOA during its first few years emerged as the premier U.S. Africa solidarity organization. It did so through sophisticated coalition building, through work with the young United Nations, and by cultivating good relationships with emerging African leaders. ACOA held public events and sponsored speaking tours for these leaders. Houser's continued travel to Africa, where he developed an expertise on regional conflicts, was critical to the organization's development. Its regular publication of *Africa Today* and *Africa-UN Bulletin* as well as numerous analytical pamphlets began to build an educated constituency on Africa in the United States.

The ACOA also continued to review and evaluate its projects, work, and internal structures. The only significant power struggle came in the 1950s. Would ACOA give priority to support for the African liberation movements and include on its board men like A. J. Muste, who were pacifists and socialists? Or would it focus on a more mainstream constituency, with public relations and lobbying of Congress and the State Department as its main priorities? The issue came to a head at a March 1959 meeting of the board of directors at which Eliot Newcomb, arguing for the more conservative strategy, ran for chair against the incumbent Don Harrington. Newcomb, associated with the fundraiser Harold Oram, was narrowly defeated on a vote of 14 to 15, opposition to him having been organized by Peter Weiss. Houser believes that if the vote had gone the other way, ACOA would have distanced itself from the liberation movements and he would have been out of a job (Houser 1988).

The 1950s was a strange time. Not only was ideological conformity demanded, but false accusations could destroy individuals and organizations. ACOA's success stemmed in large part from its careful navigation of these charged waters. Under Houser's leadership, the organization, while unalterably opposed to McCarthyism, declined to work in collaboration with communists or communist organizations. Houser was very focused on getting noncommunist liberals involved in the cause of African freedom (Houser 1989, 13). When I asked him why there had been no contact with the Council on African Affairs, he said it was because of their connection to the communist Party. He told me that he saw those in communist parties in both the United States and South Africa as defenders of Soviet policy, which he did not support. But Houser also said that the driving motivation for his involvements were his religious orientation and his belief in nonviolence, not anticommunism.

When he visited South Africa in 1954, Houser saw that white communists were playing an important role, keeping the national struggle from being simply antiwhite. He called it a "real tragedy" that there were practically no militant noncommunist South African whites involved. This discovery increased his determination to recruit white liberals to the anti-apartheid struggle (Houser 1954).

He was able to achieve this goal. The ACOA and the U.S. civil rights movement succeeded in getting a wide range of white Americans interested and engaged in the nonviolent struggle for racial

justice, both in the United States and on behalf of Africa. And while Houser sought to get more whites involved, he clearly had no intention of building a white organization. Although he came out of a nonracial movement, Houser understood that historically Africa had been an issue of concern mainly to Pan-Africanists and African Americans. But the United States was a majority white country, and if U.S. policy was to be affected, Houser believed, members of the majority group had to be engaged. The fact that he managed to accomplish this *and* gained the respect of black politicians, entertainers, and athletes was clearly significant for this time in African and U.S. history.

Over the next decades, the space for ideological debate increased in the United States. At the same time, the number of African liberation movements asking for support proliferated. ACOA took the position that it was not the prerogative of an American organization to judge the legitimacy of these movements. Instead, it took its direction from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), working with any movement that the OAU recognized. A number of these movements had strong ties to the Soviet Union and were heavily influenced by communist ideology. In 1969, in an exception to its policy of following the OAU lead, ACOA endorsed the primacy of the MPLA and directed its support for Angolan liberation to this movement. Houser himself became friends with many South African communists. How could he not? If the ACOA was going to do its work, it had to engage with Africans on their own terms.

Two Voices: Charlene Mitchell and Bill Sutherland

It was a glorious time, it was.

—Charlene Mitchell, speaking of the seating of independent Ghana at the United Nations in 1957

My life, living it, has helped some people. You know, by actually going and living in Africa, I have very often been a bridge between the African American movements and the African movements.

—Bill Sutherland

Charlene Mitchell and Bill Sutherland had connections with the Council on African Affairs and the American Committee on Africa respectively. The lives of these two African Americans represent examples of committed journeys shaped by political beliefs and engaged activism. Charlene Mitchell was born in Ohio in 1930. She joined the Communist Party at age 16 and ran for president on that ticket in 1968. Bill Sutherland was born in New Jersey in 1918 and became a believer in nonviolence. He grew up knowing, from family stories passed down through the generations, that his ancestors came from Nigeria, and he had even met distant cousins from that country at family reunions. As a young man he decided to move to Africa, and he lived there for much of his life. Of the 1930s and 1940s, both Mitchell and Sutherland remember racial experiences in the United States. Of the 1950s, they both remember Africa.

At an early age, Sutherland moved into the all-white community of Glen Ridge, New Jersey, where he says he experienced "a great deal of ostracism and discrimination" because of his race (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 3). Searching for a place to fit in and trying to find his own way, Sutherland was drawn to the local Congregational Church, whose young white Southern minister was a pacifist and a socialist. The minister and his congregation invited Sutherland to become a member of the Young People's Society. He also recalls attending an African American church with his father and hearing a fiery speaker from India who spoke of Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns. He was so excited by this that he reported on it in his social studies class, much to the dismay of his white teacher who, he remembers, seemed intent on defending British colonialism. Another teacher gave him the seminal work by W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), and Sutherland remembers it having a tremendous impact on his young mind (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 8).

While in high school Sutherland became involved in the junior NAACP and in youth groups that focused on international relations and socialism. In college he joined the Student Christian Movement and met David Dellinger, who would become a major figure of the anti–Vietnam War era. Dellinger was also the principal founder of the Newark Ashram, a Gandhian-based community

center, which Sutherland joined. When the United States initiated the military draft in 1940, Sutherland, Dellinger, and other members of this community decided to resist. All of them, like George Houser, were sentenced to jail. But Sutherland and Dellinger spent almost four years in prison, while the others served only a year. Upon his release in 1945, Sutherland helped found the New York office of CORE at the same time that Houser was working with CORE's national office in Chicago.

Charlene Mitchell spent most of her youth in Chicago. Her father was active in the local NAACP, in Chicago machine politics, and in the Communist Party. Charlene belonged to a cluster of integrated, mostly communist, youth in Cabrini. Cabrini, she remembers, "was a big integrated [working-class] community and it was wonderful." At age 13 she joined an organization called American Youth for Democracy, and she took her first political action with this group. It was 1943 and the neighborhood theater, the Windsor, was a segregated facility. She and her friends were frustrated and insulted that as a mixed group they could not sit together. So they integrated the theater using, as it turned out, the same tactics being used at a similar time and in the same city by the older CORE activists, including Houser.

The theater's seating pattern required the African American patrons to sit in the balcony while the white patrons sat downstairs. One day Charlene and her friends simply exchanged places. The management could not tell the white kids they couldn't sit in the balcony. Even if management required the African Americans to return to the balcony, that section would still be integrated by the presence of whites. Others joined the effort and before long the management gave in and ended segregated seating.

This kind of activity was part of the broader Double V campaign initiated by African Americans during World War II, in which they sought to use the war effort strategically in the struggle against racism and segregation at home. With African Americans fighting in Europe just as white Americans were, African American activists called for a victory against Hitler in Europe and a simultaneous victory against lynching and second-class citizenship in the United States.

In the interviews conducted for this chapter, Sutherland and Mitchell recalled the 1950s as a decade of great hope and great sadness—hope for African freedom on the one hand, and sadness and disillusionment at the rise of Cold War hostility on the other. In 1950 Sutherland joined the Peacemakers, a group of radical war resisters opposed to the Korean War. Their members organized on street corners in Boston and New York. As is often the case during war, antiwar efforts were not well received, and the resisters heard taunts of "Tell it to the Russians." So Sutherland and the others decided to do just that. They organized a bicycle trip from Paris to Moscow on which Sutherland was joined by Dave Dellinger, Ralph DiGia, and Art Emory, all of whom he had known from the Ashram in Newark. Their goal was to "call upon the young men on both sides to lay down their arms and refuse to fight" (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 5).

While Sutherland may not have persuaded many to resist war, the contacts he made on this trip would have far-reaching consequences. He met a number of Africans, students and others, who explained colonialism to him and talked about their struggle against it. Their enthusiasm for African liberation was infectious.

Sutherland describes one such encounter:

> I met this man who was the editor of the *Bantu World*. And he was the one who told me that there was going to be the Defiance Campaign Against the Unjust Laws. And then I came back and told George [Houser] and Bayard Rustin about it, and they were CORE executives . . . and that was the beginning of Americans for South African Resistance. (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 4)

Returning from his travels, Sutherland was disillusioned by what he found at home. "The possibilities of progressive social change looked rarer and more remote. . . . Everyone was knuckling under to [Senator Joseph] McCarthy." In Africa, by contrast, it seemed that there was "a real possibility to put the values we were talking about into practice . . . and I had a vision of Africa so idealistic" (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 7).

Sutherland decided to move to Africa. He traveled first to London to get his visas and papers. There he met George Padmore, the well-known Pan-Africanist and writer for the *West African Pilot*, one of the most important African newspapers. Its founder,

Nnamdi Azikiwe, like many other Africans, had traveled to the United States, where he had attended the historically black Lincoln University. He had gone home to found the newspaper and take part in the struggle for independence. In 1953 Sutherland took up residence in the Gold Coast, which was moving toward independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party.

Sutherland found in Nkrumah's pamphlet, *What I Mean by Positive Action* (1949), many of the same "intensified nonviolent methods of struggle" that he had come to embrace (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 30). Sutherland became friends with Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, one of Nkrumah's trusted comrades, and he married Efua Theodora, a Ghanaian poet and teacher. When Ghana became independent in 1957 with Nkrumah as its first president, Sutherland became progressive America's unofficial ambassador to the new nation.

Sutherland could not have played this role at a more significant time. Because Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence, thousands of people attended the inaugural celebration. Sutherland suggested that an invitation be extended to the young civil rights minister Martin Luther King Jr., and King and his wife Coretta accepted. They were afforded a deference and attention on this trip that they had not experienced at home. Even Vice President Richard Nixon, the head of the U.S. delegation, who had ignored King's efforts to communicate at home, treated King like an ambassador in Ghana and invited him to Washington for private talks.

Sutherland recalls that the changing of the guard in Ghana made a deep impression on King, so much so that Nkrumah's powerful words would later come to be identified with King himself:

> On that fateful night in 1957, [when] the British flag was lowered, and the flag of Ghana was raised, Nkrumah, dressed in traditional kente cloth, his fist waving in the air, tears streaming down his face, shouted over and over again: "Free at Last, Free at Last, Free at Last." (Sutherland and Meyer 2000, 35)

Martin Luther King chose these same words to close his historic "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington in 1963.

Bill Sutherland (holding photo of Kwame Nkrumah) with his wife and three children in Accra in 1957. From left: Efua Theodora, his wife, with Esi and Ralph, and family friend Margaret Cartwright holding Amowi. *Photo by Willis E. Bell. Courtesy of Bill Sutherland.*

Those who attended Ghana's independence celebration were a veritable who's who of African American leaders, including A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Ralph Bunche, and Mordecai Johnson. Shirley Graham Du Bois, Dorothy Hunton, and Essie Robeson attended on behalf of their husbands, whose passports had been confiscated by the U.S. government.

Sutherland would continue to be progressive America's unofficial ambassador in Ghana for the next few years, especially during the pivotal All-African People's Conference held in 1958, at which almost every African country and liberation movement was represented. At this conference huge debates unfolded about the future direction of Africa, with Nkrumah emerging as a leading Pan-Africanist voice.

But the climate in Ghana was changing, with intrigue and splits in the Convention People's Party leadership and among the Ghanaian people. By the time of the CIA-inspired murder of Patrice Lumumba in the Belgian Congo in 1961, Sutherland had begun to sense that it was time to move on. After a year or two in Israel he moved to Tanzania, where he would live for the next 30 years.

Charlene Mitchell, somewhat younger than Sutherland, initially came to understand the African liberation struggle not by traveling or living in Africa but through the teachings of the Communist Party. "I was taught that the struggle in Africa was part of

the struggle for socialism all over the world. And that it would never be complete unless the colonialists were forced out of Africa."

However, not everyone on the left agreed with Mitchell on the importance of Africa. She read as much as she could get her hands on. She read *Freedom Magazine*, and later the journal *Freedomways*. She read Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*, anti-imperialist literature on the Belgian Congo, and the writings of Robeson and Du Bois. Alphaeus Hunton made a particular impression on Mitchell, she recalls. It was not only about Africa, it was about the world economy: cocoa and coffee, for example, and how the West was paying so little for what they got.

It was a dangerous time to be a member of the Communist Party, especially for black communists. African American party members went to jail, among them Ben Davis, who had been a city councilman in Harlem, and Henry Winston; both had been very active in the anti-apartheid movement. It was clear that the intent was to jail anybody who was openly a communist.

Seeing what was happening, people became frightened, and many members of the party went underground. Mitchell was one of them. She moved from Chicago to St. Louis in 1952 and lived there under an assumed identity for nearly two years. She particularly remembers the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were tried, convicted, and sentenced to death on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.

> I was in St. Louis. Nobody knew I was a communist. When I heard the news that the Rosenbergs had been executed, I cried. I was completely alone, just completely alone. The people from whom we had rented an apartment were African Americans, they were Catholic, very conservative. So I couldn't tell them I was crying because of the Rosenbergs. And it was one of my most difficult times.

Mitchell emerged to live first in Los Angeles and then in Harlem. When asked what she remembers of the African liberation struggle after her time underground, she beams and says "Nkrumah!" She took great pride in the seating of Ghana at the U.N. "It was a glorious time," she says, with people wanting to be around him, to help build his nation.

I asked Mitchell about the impact of the Cold War on her African solidarity work in the 1950s. Of course it was impossible then to be open about membership in the Communist Party and remain involved in a mass movement; as an admitted communist you'd be kicked out of the movement and probably arrested. Her experience with ACOA was that it did not welcome members of the party. From Mitchell's point of view it was an illogical position: "What is it that communists ever did to the anti-apartheid movement," she asked, that would mean party members could not be involved?

Houser based his anticommunism on opposition to the Soviet Union. Mitchell argued that most people, especially people of color, joined communist parties not out of love for the Soviet Union but because they believed socialism to be the necessary response to capitalism and oppression. Mitchell also said that over the years the ACOA became more inclusive, especially under the leadership of Jennifer Davis.

In 1960 Mitchell was able to travel. And like Sutherland and Houser, her life was expanded by what she learned. In London she went to see Claudia Jones, a member of the Leading Committees of the Communist Party who had been deported from the United States. Through Jones she met Yusuf Dadoo, who had been a member of the South African

With President Kwame Nkrumah at Government House in Ghana, 1958. From left: Alphaeus Hunton, Shirley Du Bois, Nkrumah, and Eslanda Robeson.
Photo reproduced from Hunton 1986.

Indian National Congress and was now a member of the ANC and a leader of the South African Communist Party. These meetings and exchanges in London helped her see the connections between imperialism, Africa, and the world, and appreciate that solidarity between the United States and Africa is always a two-way street.

> Africans did not all come from either princesses or princes or from slaves. They were workers, they were farmers, they were people. And they fought for freedom from day one. But we [in the West] seem to see [Africans] only as a bunch of people who need help; [we don't see] that they have been of assistance to the whole world's development and that a lot of the wealth in the world has come from those workers. Africa opened its doors to me, more as part of the movement and solidarity with us as we were with them. And I always saw that as an equal thing, because I would learn so much from it.

Mitchell would continue on that two-way street for decades. In the United States, she continued as a leader in the Communist Party from the late 1950s until she left the party in the late 1980s when she too began to question many of its domestic and international policy positions. In Africa, her closest link was with the ANC and the South African Communist Party. Because of the international connections between communist parties and her personal relations with ANC exiles and activists in the United States, Mitchell was among those invited to international conferences and asked to help host delegations visiting the United States.

Assessing the contribution of Mitchell and others in the Communist Party remains difficult, because throughout the entire Cold War period membership in the party could have unwelcome consequences. It is not known how many Communist Party members were involved in African solidarity work in the United States because many, fearful of repression, were not open about their membership. Nevertheless, veteran activists with links to Communist Party networks in the labor movement and other local struggles were almost always valued participants if not leaders of local anti-apartheid coalitions. Their ideological grounding in class analysis, their mass organizing skills, and their strong links within the black community were a significant part of ongoing African solidarity activity.

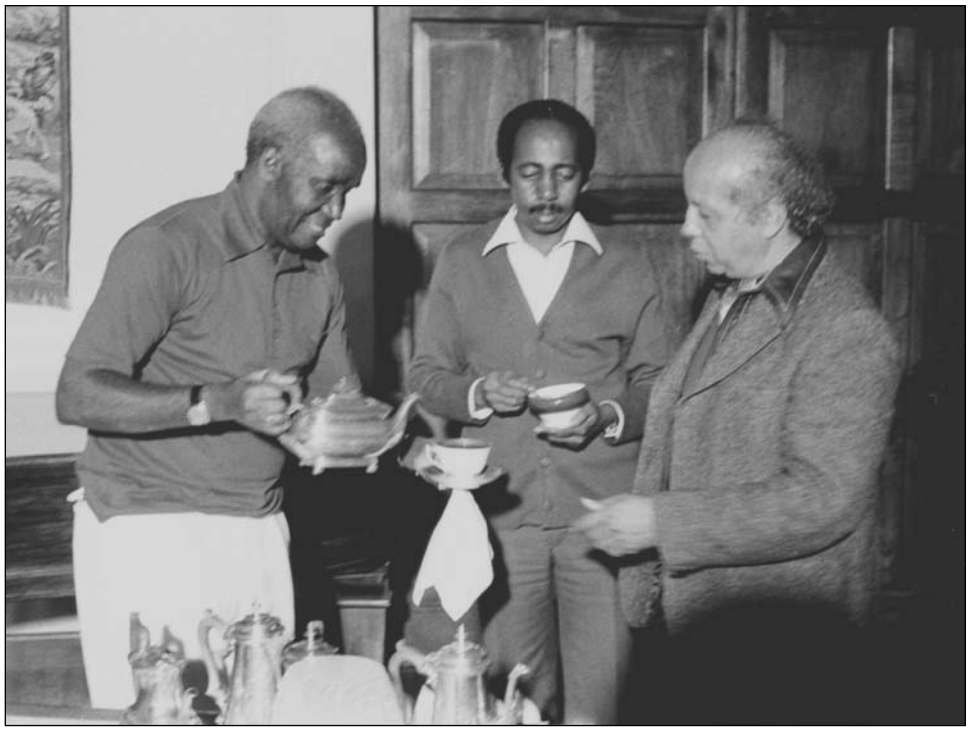
Sutherland stayed in contact with a wide range of people and political movements reflecting various ideologies. While he played an important role in the founding of Americans for South African Resistance, which became the ACOA, his most consistent organizational link in the United States was with the American Friends Service Committee. Based in Dar es Salaam, he served formally as Southern Africa representative for the organization between 1975 and 1982 and traveled each year to the United States for extended speaking tours. In this period and later in the 1980s, when he occasionally returned for speaking engagements, the AFSC was one of a handful of organizations that served as national contact points for anti-apartheid activists. Although not specifically focused on Africa, it had the unique advantage of having offices around the country. Sutherland's speaking tours helped to link diverse sectors of activists across racial and ideological lines

Angela Davis, left, and Charlene Mitchell visit Soweto during their trip to South Africa as guests of the African National Congress and others in 1991. *Photo courtesy of Charlene Mitchell.*

and increased participation by minority activists within the AFSC itself.

Sutherland also put the AFSC in touch with Desmond Tutu. The organization used its position as 1947 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize to repeatedly nominate Tutu for the prize, which he eventually received in 1984.

On his return from South Africa in October 1954, George Houser articulated an understanding that would remain important for the American Committee on Africa over the years. Putting aside the question of communism, Houser said that the struggle against colonialism "cannot be understood unless one recognizes it as revolutionary in nature" (1954). This fundamental conviction was common ground for Houser, Mitchell, Sutherland, and others of their generation who supported African liberation.



Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda serves tea to Bill Sutherland, right, in Lusaka in 1977. *Photo by Harry Amana. Courtesy of the American Friends Service Committee.*

Oral sources for chapter 2 include interviews with George Houser (2004), Charlene Mitchell (2004), Bill Sutherland (2003, 2004), and Cora Weiss (2003, 2005).

Alphaeus Hunton & *Why Worry about Africa?*

Alphaeus Hunton

"Dear Sir, I have come upon a copy of your paper *New Africa*. I have read and re-read with fervent interest the articles contained therein. First, allow me to ask a question. Why in the world would one worry about the racial conditions in Africa when we as a minority group catch hell in this country? Chances are that I'll never make it to Africa, therefore, I'm not the least bit interested in what goes on over there, but very concerned about conditions here at home.

I would appreciate an answer to this question and also any literature you have concerning the problems of our illustrious race, and additional information from your organization."

Alphaeus replied:

You ask why one should worry about racial conditions in Africa, when as a minority group we catch hell in the U.S.A.? It is a question that arises frequently, although usually asked by liberal minded white people instead of Negroes.

The answer is two-fold. First, we have to be concerned with the oppression of our Negro brothers in Africa for the very same reason that we here in New York or in any other state in the Union have to be concerned with the plight of our brothers in Tennessee, Mississippi or Alabama. If you say that what goes on in the United States is one thing, quite different from what goes on in the West Indies, Africa or anywhere else affecting black people, the answer is, then you are wrong. Racial oppression and exploitation have a universal pattern, and whether they occur in South Africa, Mississippi or New Jersey, they must be exposed and fought as part of a worldwide system of oppression, the fountain-head of which is today among the reactionary and fascist-minded ruling circles of white America. Jim-Crowism, colonialism and imperialism are not separate enemies, but a single enemy with different faces and different forms. If you are genuinely opposed to Jim-Crowism in America, you must be genuinely opposed to the colonial, imperialist enslavement of our brothers in other lands.

Our great leaders from Frederick Douglass to Paul Robeson have emphasized and re-emphasized this lesson in both word and deed. It was Douglass' support of the Irish people's freedom struggle in his day that made it possible for Britain to rally the British workers to fight [with] the North in the Civil War. The workers of England took their stand on the side of Lincoln and emancipation. This leads to the second important part of the answer.

It is not a matter of helping the African people achieve freedom simply out of a spirit of humanitarian concern for their welfare. It is a matter of helping the African people, because in doing so we further the possibility of their being able to help us in our struggles in the U.S. Can you not envision what a powerful influence a free West Indies or a free west Africa would be upon American Democracy? . . .

William Alphaeus Hunton Jr., who led the Council on African Affairs and edited its publications from 1943 to 1955, was born in 1903 in Atlanta, Georgia. His parents, William Alphaeus Hunton Sr. and Addie Hunton, were national and international leaders of the YMCA and YWCA respectively. The younger Alphaeus Hunton graduated from Howard University, received a master's degree from Harvard University, and taught English at Howard from 1926 to 1943. He was active in the National Negro Congress and moved to New York in 1943 to work for the Council on African Affairs.

As editor of the council's magazine *New Africa*, Hunton received a letter from a reader questioning the group's emphasis on Africa. According to James H. Meriwether (2002, 271), the letter was written in July 1950. The letter and Hunton's reply are included in a book by Hunton's widow.

Reprinted from Dorothy Hunton, *Alphaeus Hunton: The Unsung Valiant* (Richmond Hill, NY: D. K. Hunton, 1986), 60–62.

Dorothy and Alphaeus Hunton in Conakry, Guinea, in 1962.
Photo reproduced from Hunton 1986.

E. S. Reddy
Behind the Scenes at the United Nations

E. S. Reddy

I was already interested in the anti-apartheid movement in the 1940s, when the struggle in South Africa took on new forms and Indians and Africans were cooperating in the struggle. During the Second World War, the United States and Britain talked about four freedoms in the Atlantic Charter, but those freedoms didn't apply to India or South Africa. As Indians we were very much interested in South Africa, because a lot of Indians were there and they were treated as second-class citizens or worse. And of course Nehru was talking about South Africa, Gandhi was talking about South Africa and so on.

I arrived in New York in 1946, shortly before the Indian passive resistance and the African mine labor strike in South Africa. I learned from a friend that there was a Council on African Affairs in New York with a library that got newspapers from South Africa. So I began to go to the council almost every week and look at the newspapers. That is how I met Dr. Alphaeus Hunton, a very fine man. He was head of research at the council at that time, later executive director. We became good friends.

In June 1946, India complained to the United Nations about racial discrimination against Indians in South Africa and the matter was discussed in November and December of that year. A delegation led by Dr. A. B. Xuma, president-general of the African National Congress, came from South Africa to advise the Indian delegation and lobby the United Nations. Paul Robeson, who was chairman of the Council on African Affairs, hosted a reception for them and I met the delegation. The council organized a demonstration in front of the South African consulate in New York. I was in contact with the council, and took a group of Indian students to join the demonstration.

When the Indian delegation came to the United Nations in '46 for the first time—the free Indian delegation—they said the main issues in the world for us are colonialism and racism. They were not interested in the Cold War. India felt very strongly about discrimination in South Africa, and also took up the question of South West Africa [Namibia]. It not only tried to get support from other countries, but tried to build up support from the public, especially in Britain and the United States.

All those who supported India's freedom now began to support African freedom, because solidarity can easily be transferred when the basic issue is freedom. The people who were in the solidarity movement for South Africa in those early days were mostly the people who were in the solidarity movement with India.

In 1952, after the African National Congress decided on the Defiance Campaign, India and some Asian and African countries got together and asked the United Nations to discuss the whole question of apartheid. By

Coming to the United States from India in 1946, E. S. Reddy was both a witness to and an important participant in the international struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. He went to work for the United Nations Secretariat in 1949 and served there for 35 years. From 1963 to 1984 he was the U.N. official in charge of action against apartheid, first as principal secretary of the Special Committee Against Apartheid and then as director of the Centre against Apartheid.

United Nations action both legitimated and was influenced by the momentum of popular mobilization against apartheid. Reddy was probably the most consistent and influential of the U.N. officials working behind the scenes, ensuring that the United Nations not only represented governments but also helped build bridges between liberation movements and their supporters in the United States and other countries.

Inspired by his own country's struggle for independence, he first connected to Africa through the Council on African Affairs in New York. Later, when African countries gained influence at the United Nations, he was able to use his position in the Secretariat to work closely with the American Committee on Africa and Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa in New York, and with other groups around the United States and around the world.

E. S. Reddy spoke with Lisa Brock in New York City on July 20, 2004.

that time I was working in the U.N. Secretariat, and my boss called me in for a chat. He said, "Don't you think it's illegal to bring that up? It's an internal problem." So I said, "No, I don't think so. I think it's a matter of how you interpret the charter." Because you know when the U.N. charter was signed, the real India was not there. And we had a different attitude towards the charter than some of the Western countries; it's a psychological thing. He didn't like that at all. He said I was prejudiced, not objective. Supposedly U.N. staff should be objective, neutral and all that sort of thing. So he moved me from research on South Africa to the Middle East.

The atmosphere in the U.N. was terrible for many years, until the sixties. It changed after many African countries became independent and joined the United Nations. Third World countries became a majority. So the situation was much better when the Special Committee Against Apartheid was established and I was appointed secretary.

The Western countries refused to join the Special Committee. As a result, all the members and I thought alike. Not only were we against apartheid, but we supported the liberation struggle and opposed Western collaboration with South Africa. The members of the committee, who were delegates of governments, and I could work together as one team. That could not happen in other committees where the members were divided and the Secretariat was supposed to be neutral.

Coming from India, with the influence of Gandhi and Nehru, I felt that we had a duty not only to get India's freedom, but to make sure that India's freedom would be the beginning of the end of colonialism. Rightly or wrongly, I had a feeling that I had not made enough sacrifice for India's freedom, so I should compensate by doing what I could for the rest of the colonies. That feeling was in the back of my mind.

The real opportunity came when I was appointed secretary of the Committee against Apartheid in 1963. Other officials were not interested, as they felt the committee was worthless. I wanted to give the best I could and I did for more than 20 years.

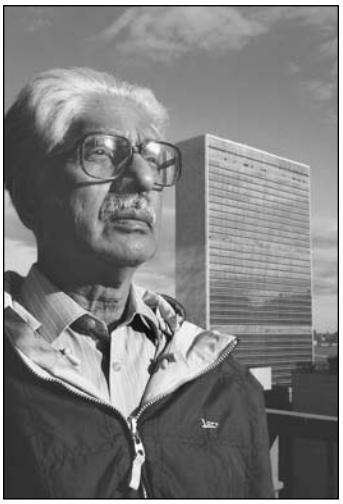
Soon after the committee was formed, we had a private meeting of the officers. I explained to them what I knew of the situation in South Africa and what I thought the committee and the United Nations could do. The chairman was Diallo Telli from Guinea, who later became secretary general of the Organization of African Unity. He liked my presentation, and said, "Look, Mr. Reddy, we are small delegations, we are terribly busy with so many things, so many issues, documents and meetings and so on. We don't have the time or the staff to do research. So you study the situation, you propose to us what we should do, and we'll say yes or no."

So our relationship developed into tremendous confidence. Most of the resolutions were written by me. Reports were written by me. Even speeches were written by me for many years. But I can't claim too much credit because nothing would have happened unless the chairman and other members took the responsibility and made the necessary decisions.

And I told them, "Look, I'm a very junior official in the U.N., so there is a limit to what I can do. I will get into trouble if it gets known that I did

this or that. You have to take the responsibility for everything." That they very loyally did. And of course they obtained credit for all that I quietly and often secretly helped them in doing. So with their protection I was able, for instance, to discuss with the liberation movements about their needs and the possibilities in the United Nations, contact anti-apartheid groups and seek their advice and help, and propose initiatives for the Special Committee.

I was very lucky that I had a job doing something I believed in; it has given me a lot of satisfaction. In the course of my work, I was able not only to help the liberation movements, but to develop closest cooperation with anti-apartheid groups because their activities in promoting public opinion and public action against apartheid were crucial for the effectiveness of the United Nations.



E. S. Reddy made the U.N. Centre Against Apartheid an indispensable resource for the anti-apartheid movement.
Photo by Nils Amar Tegmo.

It could have been an extremely frustrating job because whatever we did, repression was getting worse in South Africa year after year and people were suffering. But I was not frustrated.

Once a proposal I suggested did not get enough support and I was depressed. Robert Resha, a leader of the African National Congress, was with me. He said, "E. S., why are you frustrated? We are not frustrated. It's none of your business to be frustrated. We are going to win." So I kept that in mind.

We were able to win small victories and help people. For instance, we set up a fund for scholarships, we set up a fund to help the political prisoners and their families. And they developed into big things. Thousands of South Africans got scholarships. The fund for the prisoners was my idea. And millions of dollars started coming in after a while. Every day we could see that this fund was helping a prisoner or his family, financing defense in a trial and so on. We could derive some satisfaction from what we could do. So we had faith that we were going to win, and that faith never left me.

Robert S. Browne
A Voice of Integrity

Charles Cobb Jr.

Robert S. Browne, who died in 2004 at the age of 79, was a leading thinker and activist best known for his work on black economic development in the United States and for his early leadership in opposing the Vietnam War. He also had a lifelong commitment to Africa and was one of the original founders of the American Committee on Africa. To the end of his life he served as a mentor to other activists. People of many political persuasions trusted him for his personal and intellectual integrity and his respect for all those with whom he worked.

Charlie Cobb recalls Bob Browne's remarkable life, drawing on Browne's writings and on a 2003 interview by William Minter.

With training in economics from the University of Chicago and the London School of Economics, Bob Browne founded three organizations that served as critical, radical voices around economic issues. The Black Economic Research Center founded in 1969 sought to pull in other black economists for black economic development projects, and it published the *Review of Black Political Economy*. The Emergency Land Fund founded in 1971 fought to protect black land ownership and reverse its decline, especially in the rural South. Also in 1971 he founded the Twenty-First Century Foundation to "promote strategic black philanthropy." He helped organize the 1967 National Conference on Black Power and presented proposals at the 1972 National Black Political Convention for black economic empowerment. Respected by both radicals and moderates, Browne explored the issue of how demands for reparations to African Americans could be channeled into workable programs for economic development.

Browne worked for the U.S. aid agency in Cambodia from 1955 to 1958, and in Vietnam from 1958 to 1961. On his return to the United States, he was one of the earliest active opponents of the war in Vietnam. As he explained in an article in *Freedomways* in 1965, his marriage to his Vietnamese wife, whom he met in Cambodia, gave him an insight shared by few other Americans at the time. "The fact that I was a non-white, Vietnamese-speaking member of a Vietnamese family frequently made me privy to conversations intended only for Vietnamese ears, and provided me an unusual measure of insights . . . which led me to become a constant and vigorous critic of the United States policy" (Browne 1965, 152–53).

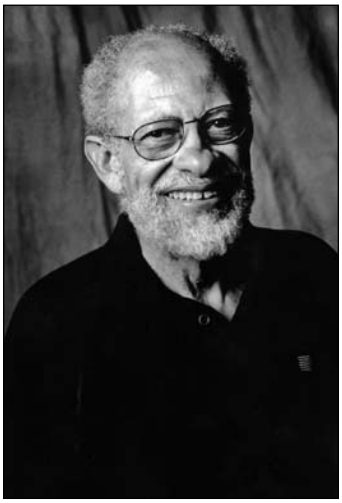
His introduction to Africa, interrupted by the time in Southeast Asia, came first in Chicago and then in New York. In a tribute to Paul Robeson published by *Freedomways* in 1978, Browne wrote:

> My earliest recollection of Paul Robeson is from news stories about him in the Chicago Defender, which I read avidly as a child growing up on Chicago's South Side in the late thirties and the forties. The stories were full of Robeson's views on Africa—views which described a different Africa from the one the movies and the white press described.
>
> I sent for literature from his organization, the Council on African Affairs, and I devoured it avidly, for Robeson wrote and talked about the Africa which I wanted to believe [in]. Thanks to him, I discovered Africa a full two decades ahead of most of my contemporaries.
>
> In 1942, I was privileged to meet Robeson when he came to Champaign-Urbana to sing at the University of Illinois. Few of the black students could afford to buy tickets to the university's cultural events. However, after his performance Robeson met with a number

> of us at the Alpha house and I recall how his presence electrified us as had no one else's. . . .
>
> I was to meet him on a couple of later occasions when he visited Chicago, for he usually stopped with the Hansberrys and Lorraine [author of *A Raisin in the Sun*] would invite a group of us over to see him. By this time he was being overtly persecuted by the federal government and his stirring bass voice had been banished from America's major concert halls.
>
> His admiration for the Soviet Union, which had been acceptable (grudgingly) to Washington during the brief wartime interlude, was clearly unacceptable in the cold-war climate of the fifties, but for us the validity of his anti-imperialist message was merely enhanced by the consternation he caused in Washington. . . .

Browne spent the year 1952 traveling in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, after a short course at the London School of Economics. The trip "internationalized" him, he said in a 2003 interview, and he returned not to Chicago but to New York. He became one of the founders of the American Committee on Africa and a regular participant in the group of volunteers helping out with mailings and other work in the years before he moved to Cambodia. On his return, he joined the board of directors of the organization and continued to be a part of its activities even when his own work took him away from African issues or away from the New York area.

Browne worked both inside and outside of the political and economic establishment. In 1980 the U.S. Treasury Department appointed him as the first U.S. executive director of the African Development Bank in Côte d'Ivoire. Debt and the economic conditions in developing nations, especially African nations, figured prominently among his concerns. With Robert Cummings of Howard University, he wrote an early critique of World Bank policies in Africa (Browne and Cummings 1984). He was Jesse Jackson's adviser on economic policy during his 1984 presidential campaign and from 1986 to 1991 he was staff director of the Subcommittee on International Development, Finance, Trade and Monetary Policy of the House Banking Committee.



Robert Browne. *Photo courtesy of the 21st Century Foundation.*

"The global trading system handicaps Africa," wrote Browne in a 1995 paper criticizing export restrictions, import duties, and agricultural subsidies to U.S. and European farmers. "While African countries may open their economies more widely to imports and investments from other countries, they may not have the capacity to take advantage of new opportunities for exports in sectors other than primary commodities.

"Unfortunately, the architects of the global trading system, including the United States, display very little sensitivity to these issues," he continued. Nevertheless, "it is in the long-run interest of all peoples [to close] the yawning gap between economic conditions in Africa and in the United States."

Peter and Cora Weiss & *"The Atmosphere of African Liberation"*

Gail Hovey

This profile highlights two activists who have played significant roles in the Africa solidarity movement and other progressive causes for over 50 years. Emphasizing their involvement in Africa issues, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, it draws in part on interviews with Cora Weiss by William Minter in 2003 and by Gail Hovey in 2005, and on an interview with Peter Weiss by William Minter in 2003.

For most of those who know Peter and Cora Weiss, personally or by reputation, Africa is not the first connection that comes to mind. Since the 1960s, Cora Weiss has been prominent in the peace movement. She was an early member and one of the national leaders of Women Strike for Peace, which played an important role in bringing an end to nuclear testing in the atmosphere. Cora also served as co-chair of the massive November 15, 1969 mobilization in Washington, DC to end the war in Vietnam, and she was one of the leaders of the June 12, 1982 antinuclear demonstration that drew an estimated 1 million people to New York City. She has been president of the international Hague Appeal for Peace since its founding in 1996. Lawyer Peter Weiss has taken the lead in national and international groups of lawyers opposing nuclear weapons and in the Center for Constitutional Rights, which has pioneered human rights law on both domestic and international fronts since its founding in 1966.

In the 1950s, however, it was Africa and the excitement of the independence struggles that inspired their engagement in international issues. The "atmosphere of African liberation" and the personal contacts they made during the decade, recalled Cora Weiss, set the trajectory for their lifelong involvement with global issues.

Peter Weiss was 13 when his family, fleeing the Nazi onslaught, left Vienna for France in 1938. They reached New York in 1941, where he attended high school before being drafted into the army and later working with the U.S. military government in occupied Germany. After graduating from Yale Law School, he directed the International Development Placement Association, a predecessor of the Peace Corps. That job took him to West Africa, where he established close contacts with nationalist leaders such as Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria. This experience consolidated the progressive internationalist views that he had absorbed at the Foundation for World Government started in 1948 by Stringfellow Barr, former president of St. John's College, Peter's alma mater.

Cora Weiss first came into contact with Africa as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in the early 1950s. She met law student Angie Brooks from Liberia, who later became the first woman to head the U.N. General Assembly. Cora worked with African and Indian foreign students to organize a speakers' bureau that sent students around the state to talk about their countries. The speakers earned $10 per speech, which helped with their school expenses.

In 1957, the newly married couple spent months traveling through West Africa. It was Peter's second trip and Cora's first. In the 1950s, they also became actively involved with the work of the American Committee on Africa in New York. Peter later came to serve as president of the organi-

zation, while Cora took on ambitious projects as a volunteer. She organized a 1,000-person dinner for President Kwame Nkrumah at the Waldorf-Astoria in 1958, an event co-sponsored by ACOA with the NAACP and the Urban League. She also coordinated the Africa Freedom Day rally at Carnegie Hall in 1959, featuring Tom Mboya of Kenya. From 1959 to 1963 Cora directed the African-American Students Foundation, which brought almost 800 East African students to study at U.S. colleges and universities.

Over the next decades, Peter and Cora Weiss continued their involvement with Africa even as their primary attention turned to other issues. They had been close friends with Eduardo and Janet Mondlane when the Frelimo leader worked at the United Nations from 1957 to 1961, and they maintained close ties with the family after Eduardo was assassinated in 1969. They met Oliver Tambo on his first visit to the United States in 1962 and became friends with him and his family. The Samuel Rubin Foundation, which Cora Weiss directed, was part of a small cluster of progressive funding organizations and individuals that paid attention to Africa even when African issues were not in the news. Typical of its progressive vision was its support for Robert Van Lierop's film *A Luta Continua*, a documentary on Frelimo filmed in liberated Mozambique that became an exceptional educational and organizing resource. The foundation was also consistently an important source of support for The Africa Fund.

Cora was associated with Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, the first U.S. college to begin divesting its holdings in companies operating in South Africa. In 1977 Adele Simmons, the new president of the college, asked Cora to become a member of the board of trustees. Simmons's predecessor, Charles Longsworth, had failed to win student trust, and the Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa had occupied the college administrative offices in May of that year. During the occupation, Longsworth had finally acted, reluctantly announcing that Hampshire would sell stocks in the offending corporations. Following her appointment to the board, Cora became a member of the Committee of Hampshire on Investment Responsibility, which set guidelines firmly establishing the ban on South African investment (Dayall 2004; Shary 2004).

Present at the founding of ACOA, Peter Weiss encouraged George Houser to take the position of executive director in 1955. An active board member and longtime president of the board, Peter provided important leadership, fully supporting the need for close working relationships with the liberation movements. Peter also provided legal expertise on a number of occasions. In 1967 he assisted two South Africans, attorney Joel Carlson and recently arrived exile Jennifer Davis, who were working frantically—and as it turned out, successfully—to save the lives of 37 Namibians who had been charged under South Africa's Terrorism Act. In 1972 Peter was succeeded as ACOA president by black community leader Judge William Booth, a former New York City commissioner for human rights. Peter remained active on the board into the 1990s (Houser 1989). He also served on the board of The Africa Fund until it merged into Africa Action in 2001.

In a 2003 interview, Peter recalled that his early interest in Africa came from his involvement with the Foundation for World Government, where

he quickly concluded that a world so divided economically could never function under a world government. His focus had turned to economic disparities and the attempt of the new African countries to climb out of the condition that had been imposed on them by the colonial powers. The world today, he insisted, confronts the same issue: to address "the gulf between the rich and the poor, both internally and globally."

Cora Weiss in Dar es Salaam, probably in 1965. Back row, from left: Pascoal Mocumbi, Eduardo Mondlane, Weiss, Amilcar Cabral. Others in the photo are not identified. *Photo courtesy of Cora Weiss.*