


# *The legacy continues*



*“I had the good fortune during World War II to be assigned, through the mysterious workings of the United States Army, to the Africa Section of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services. Heading this office was Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche. Little did I know how this chance and privileged assignment would shape my future. He was an inspiring mentor and working with him was intellectually and personally rewarding. I owe my career in academia, towards which he steered me and my keen interest in the work of the United Nations, to his credo as champion of peace and human dignity.”*

*Dr. Benjamin Rivlin, Director Emeritus, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, City University of New York, Graduate Center.*



# *My father believed in the African continent*

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*“If my father had been alive today, he would have been disappointed that the African continent has not progressed as quickly as it seemed possible in the sixties, and he would be working tirelessly to try to ensure that its economic and social plight (would be) narrowed for the benefit of Africa and its people, and equally for the health and safety of the more developed world. My father believed strongly that the African continent had a great deal to contribute to this world.”*

*Ralph Johnson Bunche, Jr., for UN Chronicle, 2003.*

# “Un-diplomatic” dining in the ‘50s

“EVEN in Bunche’s own life there were plenty of reminders, ranging from the ridiculous to the serious, that the (race) struggle was by no means won. Typical...was his experience at a dinner in 1950 which (Secretary-General Trygve) Lie gave in honor of Crown Princess Martha of Norway. Bunche was seated next to the wife of the head of Swedish-American Lines, a bibulous American-born Mrs. Lundbeck who, when Lie proposed a toast to U.S. President Truman, whispered to Bunche, “I hope he chokes.” “Who? Mr. Lie?” Bunche inquired. “No, the President,” she replied, and proceeded to denounce Truman’s modest origins. When Bunche rebuked her, Mrs. Lundbeck said, “You talk like one of those people who believe colored people ought to be equal.” A heated discussion of the alleged mental inferiority of blacks followed, after which Mrs. Lundbeck said, “Tell me, would you let your daughters marry colored men?” Bunche drew a deep breath and replied, “Why, my dear lady, I don’t think I would object. My daughters...are necessarily colored because I am colored. In fact, I not only am colored but am an American Negro.” Mrs. Lundbeck panicked, said Bunche was different, tried desperately to defuse the situation and asked him if he had been to Norway. He said he was about to go. “What for?” she asked. “The Nobel Peace Prize,” he answered. “Who’s getting it?” she asked. “Well, as a matter of fact, I am,” Bunche replied. Mrs. Lundbeck later complained she had not been properly briefed.”

—Excerpt from the biography *“Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey”* by Brian Urquhart.

# *Local support for a young scholar*



Although Ralph Bunche was first in his high school graduating class of 1922, he was excluded from the Ephebian Society—the citywide student honor society—because of race. Angered by this insult, Ralph almost abandoned academics. However, encouraged by his grandmother “Nana” Johnson and with the aid of an athletic scholarship, he went on to pursue his undergraduate studies at UCLA. He worked several jobs to support his personal expenses, including campus janitor, and a summer job working on a coastal steam ship.

In May 1927, Ralph Bunche graduated summa cum laude in international relations and was valedictorian of his class. The following year he was awarded a scholarship to study political science at Harvard University in Massachusetts—more than 3,000 miles from California. Ralph couldn’t afford the trip to Harvard, so his aunt and uncle, Nelle and Tom Johnson organized a series of concerts at churches in Los Angeles to help fund the journey. The Ladies of the Iroquois Friday Morning Civic and Social Club of Los Angeles raised more than their targeted \$1,000 for Bunche’s traveling and personal expenses.

In 1969, when Nelle and Tom Johnson’s grandson Ronald Taylor began his studies at Yale, Bunche sent him a check “in recollection...of the good will and generosity of the black women of the Friday Morning Club of Los Angeles who in 1927 helped me to Harvard.”

—From the biography *“Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey”* by Brian Urquhart.

# Architect of UN peacekeeping



“Ralph Bunche was unquestionably the original practical architect of...United Nations peacekeeping, and he probably did more to develop the technique than any other person. He started in this function by accident when it became clear that the mediator in Palestine would have to have an operational team to supervise the truces or cease-fires in the Arab-Israeli war...In 1948, this turn of events came as a considerable surprise to the United Nations, which had been set up primarily as a diplomatic organization with little provision for operational effort...

As Bunche himself described it in 1949, ‘We started from scratch...we had to improvise as we went along. We made many mistakes. But if we produced results—and we did produce results—it was because of the fact that we had intelligent, adaptable, devoted members of this Secretariat who were even willing to risk their lives in order to carry on their mission.’”

— Excerpt from “*Ralph Bunche and the Development of UN Peacekeeping*” by Brian Urquhart, from the collection “*Ralph Bunche: The Man and His Times*” edited by Benjamin Rivlin.

# *FBI “witch-hunt”*



The “threat of Communism” was a near national obsession in America during the 1950s. Even Ralph Bunche came under suspicion, most probably for a combination of reasons, including McCarthyism, racism and general suspicion of the motives of the United Nations. Under the United Nations Loyalty Program, mandated at the request of the U.S. Department of State in February 1953, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began looking into Bunche’s activities. Weeks later, on 10 March 1953, Bunche was summoned by the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee to a hearing before the Senate Committee of the Judiciary at Foley Square Courthouse in New York. A panel of Senators asked whether Nobel Peace Prize winner Bunche had ever been a member of the Communist Party.

Bunche, a lifelong opponent of communism, was fully backed by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter White of the NAACP, among others, but he still needed the support of former friend John P. Davis to trounce the most damaging charges against him. Bunche and Davis had parted ways in 1940 following the communist takeover of the National Negro Congress, which Bunche had helped to found in the 1930s. Nonetheless, and at enormous risk to his own livelihood, Davis insisted on taking the stand, so strong was his belief in Bunche’s innocence. The White House regarded all charges against Bunche as ludicrous, as did a Grand Jury, which ultimately found no evidence of Bunche’s ever having been a communist.

In spite of this, the FBI continued to file “reports” on Bunche’s activities throughout the 1960s.

—Excerpt from the collection *“Ralph Bunche: The Man and His Times”* edited by Benjamin Rivlin.

*“I feel that I’ve done something for Dag now.”*



In 1960, the former Belgian colony of the Congo achieved independence. A turbulent transition period ensued, during which the newly independent Congo faced mutiny by armed forces, Belgian military intervention and increasing disorder. The Congolese Government requested UN military assistance and the UN Security Council established the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC). The Province of Katanga seceded from the Congo, and ONUC faced the job of maintaining the country’s territorial integrity and political independence, preventing civil war and securing the removal of foreign military elements.

UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and his party took off from Leopoldville on 17 September 1961, bound for Ndola in a UN DC-6. Their aircraft crashed less than ten miles from the Ndola airport, killing all on board, and Ralph Bunche took over the task begun by Hammarskjöld. On 14 January 1962, Moïse Tshombe, President of Katanga, renounced his secession, accepted the reconciliation plan Bunche painstakingly negotiated and gave ONUC complete freedom of movement. Seven days later, UN forces peacefully entered Tshombe’s last stronghold, and Katanga’s secession ended.

In his journal that day, Bunche wrote: “Big day for the Congo operation. Peaceful entry into Kolwezi...That about winds up the military phase and takes us over the big hump—after two and a half years! We ought to breathe a bit easier now. I feel that I’ve done something for Dag now.”

Excerpt from Ralph Bunche: *An American Odyssey*, by Brian Urquhart