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TRANSNATIONALISM, REVOLUTION AND RACE:
THE CASE OF CUBA’S RADIO FREE DIXIE

A Dissertation in
Mass Communications

by

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ABSTRACT

During the early 1960s, the Cuban Revolution was creating a new country based on anti-colonial revolutionary principles. Simultaneously, Robert F. Williams and his wife Mabel R. Williams preoccupied themselves with broadcasting *Radio Free Dixie*, a radio program that aired from Cuba’s *Radio Progreso* in Havana, Cuba, to spread their messages of anti-imperialism and self-defense to parts of the Jim Crow South and North. This dissertation, therefore, aims to connect the Cuban Revolution to the Black Power Movement in the United States by positioning *Radio Free Dixie* at the center of a historical moment that intersected the Cold War and black struggle. Such a story is significant because it historicizes previous literature on transnationalism and transnational media and also contributes to recent scholarly conversations that have connected global politics to the United States Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s. While previous historical studies have briefly discussed the existence of *Radio Free Dixie* and Robert F. Williams’ relationship with the Cuban government, this literature has mainly overlooked the ways in which *Radio Free Dixie*’s broadcasts helped frame the debates on race, class, revolution, self-defense, and imperialism using both nationalist and internationalist messages. Such an analysis attempts to underscore how the broadcasters positioned themselves within a Cold War context that explicitly linked the Cuban Revolution to the United States Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, therefore, illustrating how an analysis of alternative media de-centers United States’ national discourses about civil rights struggles. Furthermore, it explores how the concepts of racism, imperialism and socialism were simultaneously integrated and separate on *Radio Free Dixie*. 
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**Introduction**

“Nosotros, los jóvenes obreros y estudiantes de Cuba, que miramos al hombre como hombre, como ser pensante y suma de la evolución de la material, y no separamos a los hombres en altos y bajos … admiramos profundamente y nos sentimos sólidamente unidos al negro norteamericano.”

“We, young workers and students of Cuba, who look at man like man, who are mindful and make up the material evolution of humanity, and don’t separate high men from low … profoundly admire and feel solidarity with the black North American.”

Letter to Robert F. Williams from the Asociacion de Jovenes Rebelde

“I invite you to listen to jazz, Afro-American folklore, news, interviews, and commentary over Radio Free Dixie,” announced civil rights leader Robert F. Williams from Havana, Cuba, a country he called the “free territory of the Americas.” Williams’ announcement about Radio Free Dixie, “the free voice of the south,” occurred days prior to the radio program’s first broadcast, which aired July 27, 1962. The hour-long radio program was dedicated to providing listeners with a “better understanding of the Afro-American struggle in North America.” Every Friday night, from 11 to midnight EST, listeners would be able to tune into Radio Free Dixie, which aired over Radio Progreso’s 50,000-watt long-wave station and 690 on AM radio.

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2 Ibid, Reel 11.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
On July 27, 1962, anyone lucky enough to catch Williams’ voice in the United States heard the following announcement:

The following program is brought to you as a public service. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy of this station. The revolutionary people of Cuba sympathize with all peoples who struggle for social justice [and] it is in this vain that we proudly allocate the following hour in an act of solidarity, peace, and friendship with our oppressed North American brothers.”

Every time listeners tuned into Radio Free Dixie, they heard that announcement. Following this introduction, various voices reverberated over the air. Some read, some sung, and some offered insight into the everyday realities of black communities. Next, the broadcasters would play Winifred Atwood’s “Yancey Special” or Louis Armstrong’s “Ain’t Misbehavin.” Mable R. Williams’ voice then appeared, reading from editorials and stories that described recent news regarding the civil rights struggle at home. Following these readings, Jo Salas’ voice once again introduced listeners to the program: “You are tuned to Radio Free Dixie, coming to you from Havana, Cuba. Stay with us for news, commentary and more music. Let’s jam it up a little with Dave Brubeck’s quartet and ‘Things ain’t what they used to be.’” After playing more music, Salas introduced Robert F. Williams’ longer section of the show: “Radio Free Dixie now presents, Robert F. Williams, Afro-American refugee from racial oppression in the United States of America.” Fading out from Williams’ political commentaries would be more of “John’s Brown Body,” a marching song about a famous abolitionist named John Brown. Once again Jo

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.
Salas’ voice broadcasted over the air, asking listeners to write to Robert F. Williams’ *Crusader* (a newspaper he published weekly and later monthly) if they were interested in receiving a copy. In closing the program, the broadcast would fade from another song to Carlos Moore’s news highlights, which would provide a brief overview of world affairs. Songs like “I Can’t Sit Down” filled the airwaves one more time. Finally, until the following week, listeners would hear Jo Salas’ voice: “You have been listening to Radio Free Dixie, coming to you from Havana, Cuba, Free territory of the Americas. Join us next Friday at the same time for Radio Free Dixie. Until then, muy buenas noche.”

How was *Radio Free Dixie* able to reach the shores of the U.S.? In 1961, approximately a year before *Radio Free Dixie*’s first announcement went on air, the Freedom Riders (who were temporarily visiting Monroe, North Carolina, as part of their campaign against racial segregation) were viciously attacked by local members of the Ku Klux Klan. After encountering a group of black protesters who were angry about the violent attacks, a white couple found themselves seeking refuge in the home of Robert F. and Mabel R. Williams. At the time, Robert F. Williams was serving as one of the local leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). That same day, the local police threatened to arrest Robert F. Williams for allegedly kidnapping a white couple. Thus, in an attempt to escape police threats (and eventually the FBI), the family fled to Canada, then to Mexico, and arrived in Havana, Cuba, in late August. Here, the family received political asylum from Cuba’s Prime Minister Fidel Castro.

The Williamses’ escape to Cuba signified the intersection of two seemingly separate social movements prior to the peak of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement (BPM) and in the early phase of Castro’s Cuban Revolution. While recent research on the Civil Rights and Black Power movements has been linked to global concerns of the 1960s, many

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10 Ibid.
studies focus on illustrating how U.S. social movements have influenced international events. Less research, however, has attempted to understand how Caribbean movements have influenced United States history, thus contributing to a conversation that moved from the global South to North America. This dissertation, therefore, argues that while the Cuban Revolution may not have had a direct impact on the evolution of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, it did have some influence on how race and class politics would be debated among United States black activists.

The case of Radio Free Dixie, furthermore, illustrates the role transnational media have played in bringing awareness about social justice issues to people across national borders. There has been much debate about the effectiveness of media technologies in actually fomenting social change. This project, however, does not examine the direct impact that Radio Free Dixie had on mobilizing the Black Power Movement and Cuban social movements; rather, it argues that the existence of such a radio program itself was important as it explores how activists produced, constructed, and circulated their political messages via radio within a national and international context.

This dissertation intersects the Black Power Movement and the Cuban Revolution by positioning Radio Free Dixie at the center of this relationship. Such a story is significant because it historicizes previous literature on transnational media and also contributes to recent scholarly

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conversations that have connected global politics to the United States Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Furthermore, while previous historical studies have briefly discussed the existence of Radio Free Dixie and Robert F. Williams’ relationship with the Cuban government, this literature has mainly overlooked the ways in which Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts helped frame the debate not only on race but also class, revolution, self-defense, and imperialism. Such an analysis, therefore, attempts to understand how the broadcasters positioned themselves within a Cold War context that explicitly linked the Cuban Revolution to the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, where the concepts of racism, imperialism, and socialism were simultaneously integrated and separate.

Transnationalism in the Twentieth Century

The story of Radio Free Dixie can be placed into a longer historical context that analyzes the role of media in global processes. Globalization’s history dates back to the sixteenth century, via European colonialism as royal authorities and voyagers sought economic expansion across physical borders and seas. Since then, various forms of communication, specifically alternative transnational media outlets, have emerged with specific interests in mind. For instance, in the early 1800s, alternative forms of communication among slaves played crucial roles in mobilizing the 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba. The rebellion was a “crude episode in early nineteenth-century Cuban history, when the initial development of the sugar plantation economy transformed the island from its long established role as a port of call for ships trading in the Atlantic.” Jose Antonio Aponte, a free “Moreno” with a military background, was one of the leaders of the

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12 Existing literature on Williams will be explored later in this chapter.
rebellion. In his possession, he had a book of his own drawings that depicted black soldiers defeating white slaver owners and planters.\textsuperscript{15} The sketches included portraits of Haitian revolutionary leaders such as Henri Christophe, Touissant L’Overture, Jean Francois and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The drawings, thus, led colonial officials in Cuba to believe that Aponte used the book as a blueprint for revolution.\textsuperscript{16} This book of drawings demonstrated the importance of the Haitian Revolution throughout the Caribbean, as it served as a symbol invoking insurrection and radical change in the history of slave revolts.\textsuperscript{17} Aponte’s rebellion and his book of drawings underscores early movements that utilized transnational forms of communication as tools of resistance, occurring within local settings but also fitting within the larger context of the black Atlantic world (as it sought to draw on global events like the Haitian Revolution).

The processes of globalization during the nineteenth century also set the stage for the economic, political and cultural developments that would occur during the 1900s. While sixteenth-century Europe became the original metropole for globalizing (especially socio-economic) tendencies, the twentieth-century experienced intense migration, expansion of trade, and the growth of new organizations that began to influence international conflicts. By “1914, nearly all of humanity had either achieved liberation from or remained directly ruled by Western imperialism, and even the world’s most remote regions bore some imprint of Western culture.”\textsuperscript{18} As Europe’s great powers turned against each other during World War I in 1914, the empires, ideologies, and economic order they had “so carefully constructed since 1815” was destroyed.\textsuperscript{19} World War I, thus, marked the end of Europe’s domination of the world, but the United States Empire had begun to take its place in the world during its own involvement in the Mexican-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Nester, \textit{Globalization: A Short History of the Modern World}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 62.
\end{itemize}
American War, what the United States called the Spanish-American War, as well as victories in World Wars I and II.

In the stories of European domination, decline and the development of the United States Empire, there are alternative narratives of people who were at times forced to migrate because of Western exploitation (i.e., slavery and colonialism) and in other instances, voluntarily moved (albeit with limited choices) throughout the Atlantic world once free from bondage. In an effort to escape the continuation of economic and racial oppression throughout the Atlantic world, thousands of individuals moved from the South to the North. Thus, black rebellion and exodus played a role in furthering globalization processes. The growth of United States socio-economic cultural domination throughout the Americas, thus, is important for understanding how and why radical intellectuals, activists, and their media moved outside of national borders.

Where the United States Empire would largely take precedence, especially during the nineteenth century, was not too far from its southern shores. Geopolitical conflicts “over the predatory economic strategies of governments and corporations, along with ever worsening global environmental catastrophes, have become the most urgent items on the international agenda.”20 During the 1900s, geopolitics between the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean, led to the migrations of thousands of African-descended people who wished to escape the consequences of United States economic and political influence throughout the Americas. The period between the late 1800s to the 1960s highlights various political and economic transformations, including decolonization (i.e., independence revolutions that overthrew colonial powers), the growth of Caribbean nation-states and the racial ideologies that helped define those nations (i.e., racial democracy or “racelessness”), and the rise of the proletariat class and Afro-Caribbean struggles (and achievements) toward equality and citizenship. During this time, various historical agents contributed to the constructions of Caribbean history, creating narratives

20 Ibid, 146.
that intersected but also diverged with United States politics. Of course, each Caribbean country has addressed such outside influence with different strategies; thus, I do not treat the Caribbean as a monolithic region. Indeed, the different colonial legacies present in each country have contributed to a diverse group of Caribbean islands. Yet, United States’ influence in the Caribbean often has resulted in similar trends, particularly helping to incite political and economic resistance as well as integration.

The “struggle for citizenship and economic and social advancement” throughout the Americas “continued into the 1900s but under new and different structural conditions.”21 As the United States and Western Europe entered the Second Industrial Revolution, demands for Latin American and Caribbean raw materials increased.22 Latin American and Caribbean people saw the implementation of United States capitalism within their own borders. Emancipation had freed the slaves, but because of Western imperialism, severe labor conditions continued to limit the quality of life for many Afro-Caribbean people. Thus in the early twentieth century, growing international markets—those specifically owned by the United States (e.g. the United Fruit Company) and Western Europe—poverty, and racism during the interwar years led to the migrations of people from the global South. Afro-Caribbean migrants, therefore, began to travel throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States, including Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Harlem.23

In particular, from the 1920s until the 1940s, Caribbean migrants and radical intellectuals like Hubert Harrison and Marcus Garvey contributed to debates about the relationship between slavery, capitalism, and racism throughout the black Atlantic world (i.e., Latin America, the

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22 Ibid.
Caribbean, and the United States). Their proactive uses of media helped develop particular
moments of resistance in which both racial and economic inequality (within the United States and
Caribbean) were called into question. Harrison’s *Voice* and Garvey’s *Negro World* circulated
across the Atlantic, spreading political messages about repatriation (a notion that advocated for
people of African-descent to return to their homeland, Africa) and black nationalism (a
philosophy that emphasized self-determination, self-defense, and economic independence among
black communities). In the 1950s and 1960s, black activists like the Williamses continued to
contribute to these conversations through their publication of the *Crusader*. Now in addition to
the written word, radio also became one of the accessible forms of transnational media. Such
voices were speaking across the Caribbean and United States public spheres “about the common
experiences of African peoples around the globe, about their common suffering and common
aspirations, and about the need for collective action to make shared dreams a united reality.”

**Cold War Politics, Radio and Revolution**

The history of transnational media, thus, illustrates that people have always utilized
communication technologies to facilitate their own political interests and to extend their political
influence. Most recently, scholars have become increasingly interested in whether and how
media have helped movements link across borders, promoting political change transnationally.
This dissertation seeks to place such research within a historical context, particularly in relation to
radio, which was central to Cold War politics and the mobilization of social movements.

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24 Ibid, 110.
25 Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements 1768-2008*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009);
Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna eds., *Social Movements: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2008);
de Jong, Shaw and Stammers (eds.), *Global Activism, Global Media*. 
As Cold War conflicts escalated during the 1960s, black journalists and activists throughout North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean increasingly found themselves under government surveillance (e.g. the Federal Bureau of Investigation COINTEL Program) or experiencing United States military interference. While the United States government extended its containment policy, socialist-inspired movements throughout the Americas were overthrown or simply stopped before they could be developed.26 After decades of establishing a broad-based coalition inspired by the Communist International and other Soviet Union-based movements, the United States Communist Party began losing ground. But United States black activists continued to join black and white organizations to fight racial segregation, Jim Crow laws, infringement of voting rights, and police brutality at home. As a result of decades of building a long Civil Rights Movement since the 1920s in which the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) was heavily involved (especially in the Jim Crow South), a debate about the roles of race and class in United States politics had begun to form.

Yet the conversation was not solely born out of the involvement of the CPUSA but one that reflected Marcus Garvey’s early arguments about the relationship between capitalism, communism, and racism. Garvey’s Back to Africa movement had placed racial identity at the forefront of a movement that advocated for a sovereign black nation with political and economic independence. For Garvey, it was not communism, but capitalism that would help black individuals achieve greatness. The debate on race and class in the 1960s echoed similar concerns. This time, such a conversation was intertwined with the Cold War rhetoric of containment and capitalist propaganda in the United States.

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26 George F. Kennan’s cable to U.S. Defense Secretary James Forrestal in 1946 consisted of a report, which was published years later in Foreign Affairs, that became the basis for this policy. The report outlined a new foreign policy strategy where the United States would seek to contain communism, thus preventing the spreading of communist and socialist movements outside of the Soviet Union.
Simultaneously, radio, began playing an important role in propagating institutional politics. For the United States, Soviet Union and other interested nation-states, radio largely sped up the process for propagating political messages overseas. During the early to mid-1900s, radio conveyed a “powerful sense of ‘liveness,’” as it was an account of “what {was} happening.”

Post-World War II, communication technologies were not only important political tools for imperial powers like the United States and Soviet Union, but also for the Latin American region where radio would serve as a political tool for mobilizing working-class social movements.

Despite the primary use of radio in propagating institutional powers’ specific ideologies, non-institutional agents also used radio for distributing and circulating their alternative political messages. It provided “niches and outposts for different people of different tastes, attitudes and desires.” Furthermore, the uses and reach of radio illustrated that it was not just a national phenomenon where people imagined the community simultaneously; it also was a medium that stretched across physical borders.

Radio Free Dixie would become an example in which black activists were primarily responsible for producing and distributing messages that promoted an armed black revolution in the United States, one inspired by anti-imperialist arguments, national and international philosophies of self-defense, and the Cuban Revolution. In this instance, a non-government radio program from Cuba aired to the United States, just as United States propaganda simultaneously aired from multiple geographic locations to the island. These United States-supported clandestine radio stations advocated for overthrowing Fidel Castro, while the Williamses spoke to United States black Americans in hopes of mobilizing what Robert F. Williams called “revolutionary militancy.”

28 Ibid, 11.
Radio Free Dixie: A U.S. and Cuban Construction

To position Radio Free Dixie within the history of the 1960s suggests that the program was possibly an outcome of Cold War politics, tense U.S.-Cuba relations, and U.S. domestic policies. The tensions between Cuba and the U.S., which resulted from Fidel Castro’s nationalization of the country’s private industries (i.e., telecommunication infrastructure, land, etc.), possibly created a political opportunity for the Williams family. Castro’s goal to point out how the United States acted as a racist, imperial power in the world and toward its own citizens aligned with black activists’ interests in bringing awareness about United States racism to the international arena. This study, however, does not seek to compare Cuban politics to the United States (except a brief tangential discussion in chapter five) nor does it simply treat Radio Free Dixie or the Williamses as pawns for the Cuban government to propagate political messages to the United States. On this issue, Robert F. Williams said the following in 1962:

As for my being used as a pawn in the struggle of Cuba’ against imperialist and racist North America, I prefer to be on the side of right than on the side of Jim Crow and oppression. I prefer to be used as an instrument to convey the truth of a people who respect the rights of man, rather than to be used as an Uncle Tom whitewasher of black oppression and injustice and an apologist for America’s hypocrisy.30

Thus, this dissertation focuses on Radio Free Dixie’s media messages as separate from and part of Cuban politics, examining how such content contributed to the broader political discourse of the 1960s.

Several scholars have added to previous literature, providing analyses about Robert F. Williams’ activism and his promotion of revolution in the 1950s and 1960s.31 Such studies also

31 Walter Rucker, “Crusader in Exile: Robert F. R. Williams and the International Struggle for Black Freedom in America,” Black Scholar 36, no. 23 (2006); Robert Carl Cohen, Black Crusader: A Biography of
have offered discussions about the role that Williams played in promoting a revolution based on race. This study, too, seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on Williams and *Radio Free Dixie* by addressing how the Williamses as well as other activists like Carlos Moore (an Afro-Cuban activist and black nationalist who worked on *Radio Free Dixie*) produced and constructed specific messages about the relationship (or lack thereof) between race and class politics. While existing historical studies offer insight into the Williamses’ contribution to the 1960s BPM, I frame *Radio Free Dixie* as a political tool that was central to a transnational movement connecting Cuba to the United States Civil Rights Movement and BPM, one that was defined by moments of solidarity and division.

The fact that *Radio Free Dixie* stopped airing in 1966 when the Williamses moved to China raises some questions about the divisions that ultimately occurred between Robert F. Williams and the Cuban government. Recent histories of Williams have mainly focused on his clashes with Cuban government officials and how these conflicts revealed Cuba’s problems with ongoing racism and internal divisions. This study, however, attempts to move away from such arguments by positing that understanding Cuba’s history of race and class politics is important for understanding the miscommunications and misinterpretations between Williams and the Cuban government. In fact, Williams’ perceptions were often influenced by his own United States American identity and experiences, which led him to overlook Cuba’s historical tendency to address issues of racism within class struggle and a raceless ideology. In addition, this study is not a biography of Williams (as his wife Mabel R. Williams and Carlos Moore also significantly contributed to the radio programs); rather, it primarily seeks to explore how the Cuban

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Revolution as a transnational influence entered a public conversation on *Radio Free Dixie*, helping shape the discourse of race and class politics in the United States.\(^{33}\)

*Radio Free Dixie*, indeed, was an outcome of United States-Cuba relations, but it also served as an alternative medium that allowed the Williams family to distribute militant messages specifically targeted to black Americans in the United States that were similar to the messages from his publication, the *Crusader*. Previous studies have noted that the messages of *Radio Free Dixie* focused on promoting armed black rebellion over the airwaves.\(^{34}\) Yet, this dissertation goes beyond available analyses by framing the radio program as a transnational medium that illustrated how the broadcasters negotiated their national identities and political arguments within a transnational location. In particular, *Radio Free Dixie*’s dialogues on imperialism, self-defense and revolutionary philosophies were often couched within a nationalist and internationalist discourse. As a result, a story about *Radio Free Dixie* must highlight the ideological tensions and agreements that occurred between black activists and the Cuban government during this period. As such, this dissertation will similarly examine the production and construction of *Radio Free Dixie*’s messages by analyzing the tensions that arose from airing *Radio Free Dixie*. An examination of these tensions highlights how moments of solidarity and conflict occurred via radio, helping shape specific types of transnational relationships among political leaders.

**Methodology**

To place *Radio Free Dixie* in historical context, I adopt a cultural historical approach. As opposed to traditional history, new history (or cultural history) has focused more on everyday

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human activity, the social construction of realities, greater variety of evidence, and analytical rather than narrative history. Cultural historian James Carey argued that historians need to focus on the “perception of reality,” meaning how people in the past “grasped reality.” Furthermore, cultural history is concerned with both events and the “thought within them” or what Carey called “historical consciousness.” My research questions specifically address not only the development of *Radio Free Dixie* but also how key activists, including the Williamses, Carlos Moore, and others, grasped the meaning of the radio program and the surrounding political and cultural conditions of black people both in the United States and in Cuba.

To understand how key figures interpreted this historical moment, I conducted two oral histories with Muhammad Ahmad (also known as Maxwell Stanford) and Richard Gibson, two black activists who worked closely with the Williams family in the 1960s. I also conducted a textual analysis of the radio program’s broadcast, various archival documents and previous interviews found in Robert F. Williams’ personal papers. These archives and interviews helped provide insight into the production, construction, and tensions of the media messages.

The microfilm of Williams’ papers and radio transcripts are housed at the University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library. Williams’ papers not only included radio transcripts, but also previous interviews and correspondence between United States American listeners and Williams. In addition, his personal papers included various memos and letters that provided insight into his family’s experiences in Cuba and the production of *Radio Free Dixie*. While I focused primarily on analyzing the transcripts, I also used the archives and oral histories for providing the context of *Radio Free Dixie* and as supporting evidence for the themes that

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37 Ibid, 88.
emerged in the broadcast messages. Furthermore, to completely interpret these documents and transcripts as solely representative of the broadcaster’s voices was extremely difficult, especially being that the Williamses were not available for interviewing. Williams passed away in the late 1990s and his wife, Mabel R. Williams, was recovering from cancer at the time of analysis. Thus, I offer my own interpretations of all available broadcasts, which were aired weekly between July 1962 and March 1966 (180 broadcasts), but use letters and previous interviews with the Williamses conducted by other interviewers to include their voices as much as possible.

My analytical approach was informed by two primary methodological considerations when examining the political and cultural discourse of Radio Free Dixie. Norman Fairclough’s definition of language and discourse as well as Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia helped inform my arguments regarding the themes that have been highlighted in Chapters three, four and five. Fairclough states that language “defines a certain potential, certain possibilities, and excludes others.”38 Discourses can illuminate representations of the material world, social practices and “reflexive self-representations of practices.”39 Furthermore, discourse can reveal “ways of acting, ways of representing and ways of being.”40 Through an analysis of Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts, I was able to see the possibilities, exclusions, reflexive self-representations, and ways of representing to illustrate how the Williamses’ constructed meaning about local, national, and global political arguments and trends. For instance, while the broadcasters placed a focus on promoting rebellion in the United States, any conversation about class struggle was absent, which may have been indicative of Robert F. Williams’ criticisms of the Communist Party in the United States and Cuba. An analysis of archival documents highlighted that Williams cared much more about racial solidarity than class identity. Archives also revealed that his personal

39 Ibid.
experiences in Cuba led him to believe that any kind of integration with the white working class (without dealing with racism first) would fail to solve racial injustice. Simultaneously, the radio broadcasts praised the Cuban Revolution from a race-based perspective, and not from a class lens (which was the main framework through which many of the Cubans saw their revolution). Thus, an analysis of the discourse found in the broadcasts and archival documents helped underscore tensions, moments of solidarity or integration, and representations or misrepresentations of certain social agents’ real-world actions.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia was also useful for examining how Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts used nationalist discourses to appeal to its listeners while borrowing from international movements to re-imagine the black struggle for civil rights and racial equality in the United States. According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia can be defined as “differentiated speech” and mean not “simply the variety of different languages which occur in everyday life, but also their entry into literary texts.”41 Such languages carry everyday associations in which dialogic interaction can occur. For the purposes of this dissertation, such dialogic interaction (languages in opposition but also convergence) occurs with discussions about the national and transnational. Later chapters will analyze how the broadcasts’ messages reveal both the intersections and divergences between the local and global. Such contradictions highlight a dialogic conversation that moves between and across borders.

Furthermore, heteroglossia can take two general forms, including “social languages” within a single national language and “different national languages within the same culture.”42 Such forms can appear within the characters’ dialogue. Here, we can see how the Williamses’ dialogue often integrated conflicting notions of the national and global. While self-defense was often couched as a United States American tradition, in contrast to Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent

42 Ibid.
movement, the broadcasters also borrowed from international strategies (especially those that focused on class struggle, not necessarily race) in an effort to demonstrate how a black revolution could form. Therefore at times, the broadcaster’s messages would place privilege on United States American “traditions,” excluding anything outside of the nation. Yet, the radio program’s critiques included an anti-United States imperialist framework. Using these two main approaches for analyzing text, therefore, helped highlight the contradictions found in Radio Free Dixie’s political discourse. These inconsistencies tell a story about the radio program’s connection to a national and global dialogue, and how its location in Cuba (as a transnational space) became an important component of that conversation.

Chapter Overview

To place Radio Free Dixie within historical context and to provide a holistic analysis (as much as possible) of the radio program, this dissertation highlights three main themes that underscore the production and construction of Radio Free Dixie’s messages as well as the tensions that emerged during the Williamses’ five-year stay in Cuba. The following chapters highlight how the radio program’s messages placed the Williamses at a crossroads, one between the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, the Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, and global anti-imperialist movements. The chapters in this dissertation tell a story that highlights how the Williamses attempted to construct political messages, essentially placing the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement within a larger struggle against United States racism, imperialism and power.

Radio Free Dixie’s political messages can be seen as extensions of a long Black Power Movement that can be traced back to the slavery rebellions of African slaves in the Atlantic world and one that anticipated the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter one locates
*Radio Free Dixie* within the history of black resistance and black journalism but also reveals how international politics became increasingly important as black leaders re-appropriated the revolutionary politics of other nations. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and further explores how the Cuban Revolution became an important symbol of racial egalitarianism for black activists. It also examines the importance of Cold War radio in helping both institutional and non-institutional agents propagate their political messages. Chapter two explains how the Williamses arrived in Cuba and began broadcasting *Radio Free Dixie* from Cuba’s *Radio Progreso* facility. This chapter utilizes archives and oral histories to provide insight into the goals of *Radio Free Dixie*, its structure, its audience, and the broadcasters who worked on the program.

An analysis of the radio program, including its music, news highlights, reading of print editorials, and political commentaries, highlights how *Radio Free Dixie’s* messages placed the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement within a larger struggle that reflected global resistance around the world. Chapter three focuses on two ways that the radio program simultaneously globalized and localized the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. First, *Radio Free Dixie* re-framed and re-interpreted the “double v” campaign launched by the *Pittsburgh Courier* during World War II. The second way in which the program’s messages globalized the local (and localized the global) was to equate United States racism with imperialism. The broadcasts accused the United States government of exporting its own version of democracy around the world, which were extensions of its local racist practices. United States imperialism, therefore, directly tied to the internal structural oppression of black people.

But the radio program did more than just globalize United States racism; in fact at times, it seemed to privilege United States traditions of struggle. As a result, it simultaneously re-appropriated the symbolism of the United States American Revolution of 1776 while promoting other international movements like the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The United States American
Revolution and other international events (i.e., the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the Warsaw Uprising during World War II) served as exemplary models that helped justify self-defense in contrast to an international strategy that did not fit within the United States/Western context (i.e., non-violence). As such, Chapter four highlights how the Williamses exploited the contradictions in United States history to expose its hypocrisy. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how the Williamses’ negotiated between their own national identities and their transnational locations in relation to a conversation about self-defense and non-violence.

Chapter five further explores how the Williamses negotiated the national and transnational by analyzing the radio program’s messages about Cuba. This chapter provides a brief history of race and class in Cuba to provide insight into the national construction of its raceless ideology. Following this history, the chapter highlights how the Williamses (as United States black Americans) also interpreted Cuba as a “raceless” nation but did not endorse its class politics. Their lack of class analyses on *Radio Free Dixie*, however, may have been influenced by their off-air experiences. Here, the tensions of *Radio Free Dixie*’s messages (by comparing the broadcasts to Williams’ archives and some oral histories conducted with the Williamses and other activists who worked with them) are explored to understand Williams’ interpretations (or, in some cases, lack of engagement with Cuba’s specific history) of Cuban nationalism and racial politics.

Chapter six will offer concluding statements that highlight how *Radio Free Dixie* became an important symbol for black activists during a particular historical moment. While little evidence suggests that the Cuban Revolution and the Williamses’ exile from the United States actually had any effect on the early Black Power Movement of the 1960s, this dissertation argues that *Radio Free Dixie* was an important tool nevertheless. The radio program contributed to historical debates about race and class struggle by reinforcing the binaries of the Cold War (i.e. capitalism versus communism). This dissertation, therefore, illustrates how black struggle in the
U.S. was intermeshed with global revolutionary politics as well as Cold War ideologies (particularly one largely influenced by United States-Cuban relations), thus moving away from United States- centered narratives about black journalism. The researcher concludes by asking what a historical moment like Radio Free Dixie can teach us regarding the relationship between transnational media, Atlantic history and recent social movement phenomena.
Literature Review

While many media historians have yet to highlight the intersections between the local and global struggles that pervaded twentieth-century black social movements, the historiography from other disciplines, such as black studies and traditional history programs, has increasingly argued for a need to move beyond United States-centered definitions of black identity and politics. Within this literature, activists, intellectuals, and scholars have developed a series of conceptions that have sought to define the particularities and/or commonalities of the African diaspora. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy’s defines his concept of the black Atlantic world as the “stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering.” Gilroy’s concept shares similarities with other notions that have sought to underscore the trans-cultural and trans-political linkages among people of African descent, including Pan-Africanism and black internationalism.

Like the black Atlantic, pan-Africanism crossed borders by calling on a solidarity movement that would draw upon the similar struggles of African-descended people worldwide. Kwame Nantambu defines pan-Africanism as “the promotion of national self-determination among Africans under African leadership for the benefit of Africans themselves,” emerging as a “manifestation of fraternal solidarity among Africans and peoples of African descent.” Scholars have primarily credited W.E.B. Du Bois for promoting the pan-African movement of the

44 Ibid.
twentieth century. As Manning Marable suggests in his edited book *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line*, Du Bois certainly “expanded his understanding about the common grounds that people of African descent shared throughout the colonial and segregated world.”\(^{46}\) In addition, scholars have extended the concept of pan-Africanism by underscoring the importance of black movements that fought for emancipation starting in the second half of the eighteenth century. Black internationalism, therefore, has become another common concept found in more recent studies on black thought and movements.\(^{47}\)

The black Atlantic, furthermore, describes those local and global struggles that crossed the Atlantic Ocean and American borders (e.g. the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean) from the beginning of Western slavery. Because this dissertation largely underscores the relationship between the Caribbean, particularly Cuba, and the Black Power Movement in the United States, the author draws on previous scholarship that underscores the trans-cultural and trans-political connections that have occurred across the black Atlantic, in this case the United States and the Caribbean. This work primarily seeks to intersect literature on the black Atlantic with the recent body of work on transnationalism and social movements.\(^{48}\) According to Manning


\(^{47}\) Michael West, William G Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Eds). *From Touissant to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009)

Marable, the South Atlantic and especially the Caribbean were “highways” for constant cultural, intellectual, and political exchange between people of African descent, especially during the past three centuries. Also, any story about the connections between black people across the Americas calls for a discussion on transnationalism and social movements. These concepts are further expanded upon in chapter one.

As black people mobilized across the Atlantic world, media became central to these transnational connections and movements. In the early 19th century, the emergence of black journalism, particularly with Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm’s first black newspaper *Freedom’s Journal*. This newspaper established a liberating tool for the black world. Black journalists began to employ writing as a mechanism for expressing activism, calling for the liberation of black communities worldwide and correcting mainstream perceptions of black inferiority. These journalists “wrote during a time when black people who had been freed after the Civil War were struggling to gain an economic foothold, equality, and access to opportunities that would allow them to do more than merely exist.”

Almost a century later, the Great Migration of the early 1900s saw a rapid expansion of black-owned newspapers, as physical and intellectual interactions between hundreds of United States and Caribbean black activists...
continued to grow. Caribbean activism, as a result, became a core component of United States politics.

Such technologies have helped key activists produce and circulate political messages, not only nationally but also across borders. It is crucial to note, however, that activists’ use of media is not a new phenomenon nor was it only a Cold War strategy; the history of media illustrates that people have always utilized media to facilitate their own interests. Most recently, scholars have become increasingly interested in whether and how communications technologies have helped movements link across borders, promoting political change transnationally. In the mid-twentieth century, radio was central to Cold War politics but also the mobilization of social movements, especially in relation to race and class. As such, this dissertation will examine the cultural and political conditions of activists who created and distributed messages via radio during the early 1960s. In addition, how activists distributed and constructed media content as well as its underlying themes, the mission, impacts and outcomes of their media messages, and how moments of solidarity and conflict occurred via radio, helping shape transnational relationships among political leaders were analyzed.

Lara Putnam explains how the Great Migration of the early 1900s and the rise of various local newspapers helped establish a black internationalist movement across the Atlantic world. Local struggles in the twentieth century (e.g., Marcus Garvey’s movement in the United States and Latin America, and other socialist movements throughout the Caribbean) sought to overthrow


54 Putnam, “Nothing Matters but Color: Transnational Circuits, the Interwar Caribbean, and the Black International.”
and restructure the capitalist and racist systems that had shaped the conditions and statuses of African-descended people.\textsuperscript{55} At the same time, activists who participated in these struggles utilized print media to call for social action. These smaller social movements connected with one another via the distribution of local newspapers across borders. The migrations of Afro-Caribbean people (and Southern Afro-Americans) to other Caribbean nations or to the northern parts of the United States also linked local struggles to global movements. “Migration and migrants’ activities created a West Indian-centered black internationalist world in the first decades of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{56} In the first concise history of African American foreign correspondence, Jinx Broussard further examines the writings and travels of black journalists in the United States since the inception of the black press in the early 1800s.\textsuperscript{57} Broussard’s historical analysis suggests that the black press has always sought to cross borders both physically and intellectually, as black writers sought to compare racial oppression in the United States to the experiences of other oppressed communities abroad. Therefore, black writers and activists from the United States often provided readers at home with an account of world affairs as well as with information that helped shape how black citizens perceived race relations outside of their national borders.

At the core of this study is an analysis on how Radio Free Dixie, a Cuban-based radio station broadcasted by African-American Robert F. Williams, helped shape the debates on U.S.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 112. The establishment of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) mass movement, which was a “phenomenon of the British West Indian diaspora,” helped create such movement. \textsuperscript{56} According to Putnam, however, the UNIA was not the only organization to cross Caribbean borders. The Mosaic Templars of America, an Afro-American fraternal society, created chapters worldwide as well. Afro-Caribbean social clubs, including the West Indian Democratic Club, the Chorillo Dominoe Team and the Anti-Cussing Club for Boys, to name a few, increasingly appeared in the 1920s throughout the Panama Canal Zone. These clubs also reached the borders of Costa Rica and Cuba. Social clubs linked members to additional black fraternal societies throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. The “expansive geography of fraternal action stretched lodge members’ sphere of belonging beyond their own potential destinations to encompass the New World African Diaspora more broadly.”

\textsuperscript{57} Jinx Broussard, \textit{African American Foreign Correspondence: A History} (Louisiana State University Press, 2013).
racial and class politics during the 1960s. Thus, this dissertation presents *Radio Free Dixie* and the Williamses’ roles as broadcasters in Cuba as an extension of Broussard’s analysis of African-American foreign correspondence. *Radio Free Dixie*, in many ways, extended historical dialogues on international and national affairs found in the black press via another medium that was arguably more immediate. While *Radio Free Dixie* focused on promoting revolution in the United States, it was not a United States-based technology. The radio station’s airwaves crossed Cuba’s borders into the United States, reaching as far as Seattle. *Radio Free Dixie* is not only important because it was one of the few stations to air from Cuba to its northern neighbor, but it also was a crucial political tool that became part of a larger story about Cold War history and the interconnections between black struggles that have occurred throughout the black diaspora. This dissertation also draws on previous scholarship that has underscored the relationship between media and Cold War politics, including the literature on the international radio propaganda wars between the United States and Latin America during the mid-1900s and those studies that have highlighted the debates between race and class in the Cold War era. This literature is further examined in chapter one as well.

Historian Robin D.G. Kelley provides insightful histories on the black-working class in *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* and *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. These “histories from below” document the black

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struggle of the mid- to late 1900s, providing narratives that analyze the economic, social, and cultural history of the black-working class. These historical narratives reveal the realities and “worlds from which these radicals [Black Communists] came, the worlds in which they lived and the imaginary worlds they sought to build.” Kelley asserts that black Americans who joined the Communist Party of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s had been people who emerged from “the postwar black Left that had been deeply touched by the Bolshevik Revolution as well as by workers’ uprisings and racial violence in American cities during and after World War I.” Such events caused black Americans’ to believe that socialist revolution could possibly eliminate both racial and class oppression.

In *Hammer and Hoe*, Kelley suggests that “African-Americans who made up the Alabama radical movement experienced and opposed race and class oppression as a totality.” A majority of black Americans living in Birmingham worked mostly as coal miners and in the iron and steel industry, while a small group of black elites established a separate community in the business district of the city. Kelly contends that a movement was “built from scratch by people without a Euro-American left-wing tradition.” Instead, a “meshing of an African-American culture of opposition and a Stalinist version of Marxism-Leninism” developed. This new identity allowed Alabama’s Black residents to interpret “Communism through the lenses of their own cultural world and the international movement of which they were now a part.” The Party primarily served as a model for understanding racism and poverty through an international

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63 Ibid, xiii.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid, 93.
66 Ibid, 93.
context, according to Kelley. As a result, the relationships between the Communist Party and black activists became central to twentieth-century social movements, particularly from the 1920s to the 1960s. Chapter one, thus, expands upon the debates and relationships that emerged from United States campaigns that attempted to intersect and separate race and class politics.

The dialogues between race and class politics among black activists, however, did not end within the borders of the United States. One of the most influential campaigns of solidarity among Caribbean people and Americans was the ongoing relationship between Afro-Cubans and African-Americans from the early to mid-twentieth century. The early 1900s particularly marked a period of American occupation and intervention in Cuba, opening doors for a movement that would place racial identity at the forefront of black internationalism. Several black Americans like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass would influence the political, social, and economic mobilization of Afro-Cubans on the island—which had become a protectorate of the United States in 1901 following the Cuban Independence Wars. Editors and journalists who worked for black newspapers in the United States, including Jet, the Pittsburgh Courier, and the Baltimore Afro-American, had sympathized with Cuban revolutions, beginning with the Cuban Independence Wars in the late 1800s. Afro-Cuban magazines, including Minerva: Revista Quincenal Dedicada a la Mujer de Color (Minerva: The Bi-weekly Magazine for the Women of Color), also facilitated interactions between both countries. These writers sought to communicate with other African-Americans and Cubans abroad by ensuring that their publications reached international borders, especially the United States.
Cuba’s close proximity and its myth of racial democracy led many Afro-Americans to perceive the island as a “prospective site for large-scale emigration.” These promoters urged Afro-Americans to escape racist America and bring their “North American” skills to help “develop” the largely poor and black Cuban nation—elites justified American imperialism by characterizing Cuba as a “black nation” that lacked the ability to develop an independent and “progressive” civilization. While many African-Americans and Cubans did not support such programs, the establishment of clubs like the Afro-American Cuban Emigration Committee illustrated that some Americans “could ally themselves as race brothers while possessing both North American chauvinism and a belief in capitalism at the same time.” Ironically, they lacked capital and status on their own lands. While the experiences and struggles of black Americans from the United States certainly resulted in multiple movements that helped shape racial politics in the United States and worldwide, this author argues that the black thought in the United States also was influenced by international events, particularly through the political discourse of Radio Free Dixie. Such connections also are further explored in chapter one and are additionally expanded upon throughout the remaining chapters as this dissertation seeks to illustrate the ways in which Radio Free Dixie contributed to a conversation that nationalized but also transnationalized a black experience and black thought that is often assumed to be particular to the United States.


Chapter 1

The Globalization of Race and Class Struggle

“History proves that the myth of racial superiority is predicated upon a web of deliberately woven false concepts that fade like a formless vapor when placed under the stress of unmitigated reality.”

—Robert F. Williams on Radio Free Dixie, May 15, 1964

Citizenship and Black Internationalism

According to historians Michael West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins, “black movements have been a leading force in the search for emancipation since at least the second half of the eighteenth century,” mostly occurring within a globalized world. While these movements operated as local phenomena, prominent figures who emerged as heroes during these periods soon realized that their struggle mirrored the societies of other nations. Resistance to the oppression of black people worldwide was symbolized by various key figures throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, from Toussaint L’Ouverture—who led Haiti’s revolution in the late 1700s—to late American hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. The black international, thus, possessed one “defining characteristic: struggle.” Struggle, however, did not necessarily create black internationalism; instead, “black internationalism [became] a product of consciousness, that is, the conscious interconnection and interlocation of black struggles across man-made and natural boundaries.” Migration, furthermore, became a core component of this black struggle.

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70 Michael West, William G Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Eds). From Touissant to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid, 1.
73 Ibid, 1.
From the Haitian Revolution to the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, black leaders increasingly sought to move across borders, both physically and intellectually, to challenge Western racism and colonialism, and to call for racial and class equality.

As historian Robin D.G. Kelley notes, the history of black people “has been a history of movement—real and imagined.” Before “New World Africans laid eyes on the Bible, the fundamental idea behind Exodus was evident in the formation of Maroon societies throughout the Americas.” These Maroon settlements were made up primarily of runaway slaves, some indigenous people, and, at times, white indentured servants. Following the Civil War and emancipation, a growing debate about the practicalities of repatriation became one of the ways in which black nationalists and internationalists envisioned a new and equitable society for black communities. During the early 1900s, black leaders like Henry McNeil and Marcus Garvey saw migration from the U.S. to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Haiti (to name a few countries) as the solution to Western oppression. The “desire to leave Babylon, if you will, and search for a new land tells us a great deal about what people dream about, what they want, how they might want to reconstruct their lives.” These “exodus” movements, including the establishment of Maroon societies and repatriation to Africa, attempted to not only resist white supremacy and colonization, but also sought to develop self-determined independent black nations with their own rules, beliefs, and cultures.

While Maroon societies sought to preserve their original African cultures as they adopted New World traditions, separatist impulses challenged black claims to citizenship within the
United States. The battle for national citizenship, however, took precedence in many black communities throughout the Americas. Because some black people believed they had invested their own blood in building and protecting the United States, the idea of separatism increasingly clashed with claims to full citizenship and compensation for helping build the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century, some black leaders had begun to insist on full citizenship, while others such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Martin Delany called for the establishment of a new, independent black nation. Marcus Garvey’s Back to Africa movement in the early 1920s added to previous calls for global black solidarity, repatriation, and self-determination. Both forced and voluntary emigration, thus, rendered black people “transnational” and has remained a central part of a long debate about citizenship and exodus within black communities. The question of citizenship became a core component in this debate, ultimately influencing whether black people would continue the struggle for racial equality and citizenship within the United States or flee it to build an independent nation free of United States racism.

This desire to leave the United States persisted late into the twentieth century, especially during the years of Garveyism, but World War II proved to further complicate the debate on citizenship and repatriation. The presence of black soldiers in the United States military further highlighted the role of black individuals in helping grow United States military and political power worldwide. As a result, many black people who served in the armed forces questioned the rationale for supporting the war. James G. Thompson’s letter to the editor in the Pittsburgh Courier (a national black newspaper), on January 31, 1942 suggested that black leaders begin a “double v” campaign to call for victory within and outside the nation:

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid, 17.
82 Ibid, 18.
83 Ibid.
Like all true Americans, my greatest desire at this time, this crucial point of our history; is a desire for a complete victory over the forces of evil, which threaten our existence today. Behind that desire is also a desire to serve, this, my country, in the most advantageous way. Most of our leaders are suggesting that we sacrifice every other ambition to the paramount one, victory.\textsuperscript{84}

Thompson added that he wondered if “another victory” could be achieved at the same time. His letter suggested that the campaign stand for victory over the Axis powers and victory to end discrimination at home. Following the publication of Thompson’s letter, the \textit{Courier} began to promote the campaign through the use of lapel pins, stickers, songs and posters. By the end of the war, the “double v” campaign had become so popular among black people that the \textit{Courier} had a weekly circulation of two million readers. Placing black internationalism at the forefront of the war, the campaign sought to connect the local struggles of black people at home with those abroad.

The role that the \textit{Pittsburgh Courier} played in promoting the double-v campaign and intersecting local and global concerns points to the ways in which alternative media contributed to the debates about citizenship as well as racial and class justice in the United States. In fact, the debates about United States citizenship and repatriation mostly existed within the pages of black newspapers.\textsuperscript{85} But such debates went beyond U.S. borders. Black journalists often wrote and spoke about the issues that connected them to the rest of the black Atlantic world (i.e., the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean). These media, in turn, physically moved throughout the


Americas. As this chapter will later demonstrate, *Radio Free Dixie* became another medium through which transnational activists attempted to intersect local and global politics to resist racial oppression, economic impoverishment, and white supremacy throughout the Atlantic world.

**Shaping the Atlantic through Transnational Media**

Transnationalism across the Atlantic world is important for understanding any story about migration, black media, black power, and global black solidarity. For the purposes of this project, the author borrows from Steven Vertovec’s broad definition of transnationalism: the “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states.”

More specifically, the author uses transnationalism as a concept to examine the “diaspora consciousness” of black struggle across the Atlantic region (i.e., Cuba and the United States). Throughout history, diasporas have left “trails of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment.” This project also sees transnationalism as a “mode of cultural production” as it examines how black identity has been transferred through global media (including print media but with a focus on radio). Finally, *Radio Free Dixie* represents a transnational medium that serves as a “site of political engagement,” influencing global and local dialogues that have not necessarily fit within national politics.

During the early twentieth-century BPM, migrating activists mobilized largely via print media to distribute their political messages. Print media, therefore, became an early transnational

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid. This concept helps address the collective memory of exodus in global black communities, which sought to escape racism by rebuilding new racially equal societies elsewhere.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
form of communication as it acted as a tool for spreading black consciousness within the diaspora, acting as a “mode of cultural reproduction” where blackness was transferred across borders. Black newspapers also served as “sites of political engagement” for activists who sought to fight both domestic and global racism (which many equated to imperialism). Global activism challenged both local and global power structures and provided black individuals with alternatives to the prevailing racist structure of the African Diaspora.91 Therefore, alongside the globalization of social movements has been the advent of alternative media (in this case black newspapers), illustrating how radical activists historically have created their own media and placed emphasis on self-management, empowerment, and resistance to mainstream society.92

The Great Migration of the early 1900s saw an expansion of black-owned newspapers, as physical and intellectual interactions between hundreds of United States and Caribbean black activists continued to develop. Despite the promises that Afro-Caribbean people and those who migrated from the Jim Crow South held onto when emigrating to the North, many of them experienced a particular political and social environment that did little to help their economic situations, especially in cities like Harlem. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born printer and trade unionist, was one of many migrants who moved to the United States in the early 1900s. Just as he had adopted a political life in Jamaica, Garvey would seek to do the same here.


Local struggles like Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement in the twentieth century sought to challenge the Western capitalist and racist systems that had shaped the conditions and statuses of African-descended people. To resist Western racism, capitalism, and colonialism, and create alternative media outlets and social groups, activists frequently utilized print media to call for social action across borders. For example, following the launching of Garvey’s newspaper the *Negro World* and “Back to Africa” movement during the 1910s, his political and economic endeavors had begun to clash with other black activists. But while Garvey used the *Negro World* to challenge traditional Western ideals of economic and political sovereignty, he also embraced the notion that capitalism, not socialism, was the solution to racism. Simultaneously, other black activists like Hubert Harrison and Claudia Jones advocated for both racial and class justice. Furthermore, prominent black leaders like intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois and organizations such as the CPUSA challenged Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement and his belief that black power trumped class consciousness. This debate between race and class struggle shaped an early twentieth-century black internationalist movement and appeared in newspapers like the *Negro World* where black activists and journalists became involved in helping shape transnational discourses about the role of race and class politics in the United States and abroad.

The debate between racial solidarity and class consciousness, however, was not necessarily exclusive. According to Kelley, some United States black Americans who joined the Communist Party in the 1920s and 1930s had been Garveyites and/or people who emerged from “the postwar black Left that had been deeply touched by the Bolshevik Revolution as well as by

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94 The *Negro World*, which was published between the 1910s and 1930s, was the official organ of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).
workers’ uprisings and racial violence in American cities during and after World War I.”

Yet, for some activists, Western notions of socialism could not apply to black communities throughout the Americas, in the Caribbean or on the African continent due to the legacies of slavery and “white colonialism.” Thus, even though Garvey did believe both race and class exploitation created the poor conditions of black people worldwide, he believed that only a separate black industrial society would lead to social and economic equality. Garveyism, therefore, helped shape a debate that would continue to pervade the 1950s and 1960s as black activists and journalists participated in ongoing dialogues that reinforced and re-conceptualized earlier arguments about the relationship between race and class politics.

The Fight for Race and Class Equality in the New Left Movement

The struggle for equal citizenship and economic justice among black people inside and outside of the United States continued throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. As the mid-1900s saw a rise of revolutions challenging Western imperialism, black activists continued to consider the prospects of escaping the United States; however, the quest for full citizenship within the nation also expanded as black leaders saw that connecting local and global struggles could ultimately prove to be useful for fighting racism at home. By the mid-twentieth century, black leaders both re-invoked and resisted Garvey’s arguments about racism and socialism as they increasingly turned to socialist movements, which some believed provided viable solutions to racism. With the emergence of the Communist Party in the United States, labor movements in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Communist International, class struggle gradually became

96 See Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1967). Fanon indicated that Marxism or Eurocentric radicalism had to be “stretched” when addressing the colonial situation in the Caribbean.
interlinked with race. Black nationalism and internationalism re-conceptualized the conversation on race and class. By the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution, the numerous liberation movements throughout the world (particularly in Africa), Mao Tse-tung’s Cultural Revolution in China and the growing Black Power Movement placed race and class consciousness at the core of what Max Elbaum called the Third-World Marxist Movement.97

Simultaneously, all forms of media continued to play a role in calling for both race and class solidarity. During the 1960s, Robert F. Williams’ *Negro with Guns*, Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, and *The Black Scholar* magazine—which often featured Marxist pieces—inspired key black figures to mobilize with a more militant approach that challenged the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement.98 Marxist theories in James Boggs’ *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* (1969) and *Racism and the Class Struggle* (1970) as well as Robert L. Allen’s *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (1969) educated activists and followers about the importance of class struggle.99 Furthermore, alternative print sources like the *Guardian*, *The Crisis*, the Nation of Islam’s *Muhammad Speaks*, the student-run Los Angeles *Free Press* and *Berkeley Barb*, and *The Black Panther Black Community News Service* also promoted these political messages of race and class struggle.

As indicated by the numerous class positions of emerging black activists, the 1950s and 1960s saw a shift in politics, but this “New Left” movement was not necessarily a new trend. According to Van Gosse, the new movement had “deep roots in the radical tradition that began

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
with the American Revolution.”\textsuperscript{100} Struggles for racial and gender equality as well as full
citizenship had predated the Civil War, and from 1880s through the 1940s, the “Old Left” of
socialists and communists focused on class struggle to contest Western capitalism.\textsuperscript{101} Following
1945, activists shifted to a new focus of democracy, one that returned to the Declaration of
Independence as they revisited questions of inalienable rights and citizenship. This newer
movement that emerged post-World War II, therefore, primarily was influenced by three
historical developments: 1.) World War II’s emphasis on fighting Nazism abroad while practicing
racial discrimination at home; 2.) the emergence of Cold War politics; and 3.) the post-war
economic boom where economic growth and containment of communism became the political
consensus. As a result, the two phrases that highlighted the main strategies of the “New Left”
movement were: “speaking truth to power” and “the whole world is watching.”\textsuperscript{102}

Long before the 1950s, black leaders fought against segregation laws, the Jim Crow
South, the lynching of United States black Americans, and for voting rights. By the mid-1950s,
thus, a more radical movement that infused earlier race and class politics emerged with United
States black Americans leading the fight.\textsuperscript{103} The National Association for the Advancement of
Colored People “won a series of legal battles, chipping away at segregation and
disenfranchisement of African-Americans.”\textsuperscript{104} In the meantime, anti-colonial movements in Asia
and Africa resisted Western colonialism and imperialism “providing powerful evidence that white
dominance was vulnerable.”\textsuperscript{105} By the time that the United States Supreme Court ruled against

\textsuperscript{100} Van Gosse, \textit{The Movements of the New Left, 1950-1975: A Brief History with Documents}, (Boston,
Massachusetts: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 2.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{103} For a comprehensive history on the Civil Rights Movement, see Taylor Branch, \textit{Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63}, (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1988).
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 6.
segregation in schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, black leaders had joined global anti-colonial movements in an effort to challenge both United States racism and imperialism.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case strengthened the Civil Rights Movement but also helped establish the formation of the White Citizens Councils throughout the South.\(^{106}\) The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the emergence of a global nonviolent Civil Rights Movement, however, would continue to challenge Jim Crow, Ku Klux Klan violence and United States imperialism abroad. For instance, in the United States, radical pacifists created the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) and the *Liberation* magazine.\(^{107}\) The *Liberation* brought socialists, liberals, black and white people together as it advocated for a nonviolent, global revolution to end capitalism and war.

By 1960, sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, inspired mass protests throughout the nation as well as the creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).\(^{108}\) The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), another interracial pacifist group, organized the Freedom Rides, which included black and white activists who rode on buses throughout the South to “test the enforcement of desegregation statues.”\(^{109}\) Simultaneously, SNCC began a voter registration project between 1960 and 1962. A year later, Dr. Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) confronted white supremacy in Birmingham, Alabama.\(^{110}\) After King and SCLC sent high school students to the streets of downtown Birmingham, national media coverage captured the city’s police department fire hosing protesters and using dogs to attack them as well.\(^{111}\) The imprisonment of protesters (including King himself) that day resulted...

\(^{106}\) Ibid.  
\(^{107}\) Ibid, 7.  
\(^{108}\) Ibid.  
\(^{109}\) Ibid, 8.  
\(^{110}\) Ibid.  
\(^{111}\) Ibid.
in King’s famous “Letter from Birmingham,” which indicted those who failed to stand up against state racism.

After years of black mobilization and white violence in the South, in 1965 Congress finally “passed bills outlawing segregation, racial discrimination, and disenfranchisement.”\(^{112}\) Despite these achievements, United States black American citizens continued to face challenges in the voting booth. The peak of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965 did not stop John Lewis and other activists from marching toward Montgomery, Alabama as part of SNCC and SCLC’s voter registration campaign.\(^{113}\) The march, however, resulted in another major violent attack on black protesters, known as Bloody Sunday. Following the national and international media coverage of Bloody Sunday, President Lyndon Johnson signed the comprehensive Voting Rights Act in August 1965.\(^{114}\) One hundred years after the Civil War, “African Americans had finally secured a national guarantee of full citizenship.”\(^{115}\)

But these achievements were met with some disappointment as activists turned to more radical strategies for fighting ongoing white violence, economic inequality, and United States interference in Vietnam. Furthermore, as black protesters continued to face state repression, violence, and the FBI COINTEL Program, leaders like Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams promoted strategies that the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement opposed. Nevertheless, early “Black Power activists were simultaneously inspired and repulsed by the civil rights struggles that served as a violent flashpoint for racial transformation.”\(^{116}\) Not only did black radicals re-interpret the Civil Rights Movement as it was happening, but they also re-visited earlier political messages of black power, armed self-defense, and self-determination. International events like the

\(^{112}\) Ibid, 11.
\(^{113}\) Ibid, 12.
\(^{114}\) Ibid.
\(^{115}\) Ibid, 12.
Cuban Revolution of 1959 became even more symbolic for the rise of black radicalism, echoing from Havana to Harlem. Fidel Castro’s resistance to United States interests helped captivate the imagination of black activists, by providing them with a solution that would successfully eliminate United States repression: armed rebellion. As a result, throughout the 1960s, black activists not only fought racism within the nation, but they increasingly fought it outside of the United States both symbolically and physically as they moved across national borders.

The 1950s and 1960s, however, do not demonstrate a monolithic agreement between black activists regarding the quest for equal citizenship in the United States context. Instead, leaders often engaged in debates that raised questions about the practicality of black nationalism, a race-based concept that primarily called for a separate and independent black nation in Africa (or in other parts of the African Diaspora). Throughout the twentieth century, some activists claimed that economic empowerment via “black capitalism” and repatriation to Africa, not socialism, would solve racism. Others remained skeptical of such ideas, and, instead, adopted ideologies that emphasized both race and class struggle (or only class consciousness). Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, black leaders like Malcolm X, Carlos Moore, Angela Davis and Huey P. Newton continued to engage in similar debates about whether revolutionary socialism or black nationalism would eradicate Atlantic racism and imperialism.

Whether in the early 1900s or in the latter part of the century, history demonstrates that such debates about race and class helped shape transnational relationships between activists.

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Media outlets helped black communities worldwide connect and communicate about their identities and political messages. As historian Penny M. Von Eschen notes, black “intellectuals and journalists in the United States, Britain, West Africa, and the Caribbean elaborated a conception of democracy that focused on the struggles of black peoples and their potential democratic transformations, yet also embraced a universalism that linked all struggles for democracy and independence.” The Black Panther Party’s news publication became one of these newspapers that attempted to communicate with other black leaders throughout the Atlantic world. Robert F. Williams’ *Crusader* served a similar purpose, as it sought to challenge mainstream notions of black inferiority and white supremacy. To resist mainstream representations and conceptions of black communities, activists who employed media often found it necessary to connect to other non-white people throughout the world as they too experienced United States racism via its imperialist practices. Black journalists, thus, situated their struggles within a transnational context.

**Cold War Politics, Black Power and the Cuban Revolution**

As black activists increasingly participated in transnational movements and developments, the relationship between the Caribbean and the United States became even more intertwined. Even before the Cuban Revolution of 1959, black individuals saw Cuba as an island free of racism. In the early 1900s, Cuba’s close proximity and its myth of racial democracy led many United States black Americans to perceive the island as a “prospective site for large-scale

emigration.” The history of race relations in Cuba allowed for this illusion of an anti-racist nation. Cuba’s social construction of race differed from most of Latin America and the Caribbean, which reflected of a three-tier or multiracial system where slaves were integrated into societies that lacked “rigid horizontal stratifications” along racial lines. The country’s two-tier hierarchy was more similar to the United States (where distinctions between free and slave were absolute), except that the boundary separating black and mulatto people from white was based on “visible” African ancestry, not the one-drop rule (where one drop of African blood identified an individual as being “black”). Thus, the unique experiences of Afro-Cubans were primarily based on the societal constructions of race in Cuba. Their high voluntary military participation and Cuba’s early adoption of universal male suffrage in the early 1900s also created a unique political environment compared to the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean as the large participation of black military soldiers integrated Afro-Cubans into the nation.

126 Following Cuba’s independence in the late 1800s, Afro-Cubans sought to adjust to an emerging society that seemed more unjust and unequal. As a consequence, they mobilized and resisted hegemonic ideologies that defined the nation as racially democratic—because thousands of black soldiers had participated in the independence war, leaders like Jose Marti had declared that Cuba was a “raceless” nation. The large participation of Afro-Cubans in the independence war played an important role in helping them fight for their freedom, citizenship and racial equality. Yet, Afro-Cubans continued to face racial discrimination and prejudice. To fight for freedom, citizenship and racial equality in the independent nation, they developed numerous political organizations and black fraternities. The historiography on Cuban racial politics alone has produced an important dialogue that illustrates how Afro-Cubans mobilized and struggled for their rights as Cubans. See Aline Helg, Our Rightful share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality 1886-1912 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alejandro De La Fuente, A Nation for All (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Lillian Guerra, “From Revolution to Involution in the Early Cuban Republic: Conflicts over Race, Class, and Nation, 1902-1906,” in Race and Nation in Modern Latin America, eds. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 132-162. Chapter six will expand on the history of Cuban race and class politics and its origins of racelessness.
As Cuba attempted to grapple with building an independent nation separate from Spain following its independence, it also found itself within the United States’ zone of influence. Because of United States imperialism, black Americans in the United States and Afro-Cubans who saw similarities in their legacies of slavery and colonialism sought to develop cultural ties with one another. By the 1960s, this relationship shifted to a political one as Fidel Castro attempted to adopt state policies that supported black liberation movements abroad as well as an anti-racist campaign that was designed to uplift the Afro-Cuban population on the island (i.e., via desegregation, education, public employment, and healthcare). A socialist movement had finally succeeded in eliminating United States imperialism, nationalizing private industries and restructuring the economic system in order to distribute wealth more equally. Simultaneously, the Black Power Movement in the United States continued to fight for civil rights and equality through a more radical, self-defense approach. Black activists like Robert F. Williams emerged from the social and political turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s—as Jim Crow laws persisted throughout the South and events like the Vietnam War in the late 1960s helped propel a struggle that would become part of the “Third World Marxist” movement. Because the Cuban Revolution had succeeded in resisting United States imperialism, it became the exemplary model of socialism but also armed rebellion in the Western Hemisphere. By 1962, the new government

127 Following a combination of several events during the nineteenth century, including the development of the Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary and the Cuban Independence Wars (also known as the Spanish-American War) of the late 1800s, the United States intended to play a powerful role that sought to “teach Cubans to speak English, enact U.S. laws, adopt American management practices [and] buy made-in-the-U.S.A. products.” See Tom Gjelten, Bacardi and The Long Fight for Cuba (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 81. In order to exercise its control over Cuba indefinitely, the United States had issued an order for a general election to elect delegates who would develop a Cuban constitution that essentially sought to maintain U.S. political and economic interests. See Frank D. Pavey, “The Independence of Cuba,” The North American Review, March 1901, 403. Such interests extended to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America as well.
129 Max Elbaum, Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che (London: Verso, 2002).
claimed that the island was free of racism, allowing some activists to perceive socialism as the ultimate solution to racial oppression. Furthermore, Castro placed himself on the side of “blackness” not only to challenge the United States Empire but also by protecting black American fugitives.

To further support post-revolutionary Cuba, in 1961 black journalist Richard Gibson and Robert Tabor founded the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC). On April 25, 1961, Fair Play published its first advertisement in the *New York Post*. The advertisement stated that black Americans in the United States had the right to protest against oppression abroad:

One third of Cuba’s people are Afro-Cubans, of the same African descent as we. Many of our own forefathers passed through Cuba on their way to the slave plantations in the United States. … Today, thanks to a social revolution which they helped make, Afro-Cubans are first-class citizens and are taking their rightful place in the life of their country where all racial barriers crumbled in a matter of weeks following the victory of Fidel Castro.130

The advertisement further charged that a “group of mercenaries” (Cuban exiles who migrated to Miami), who were threatening to destroy Cuba’s achievements, were armed, trained and funded by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Furthermore, the Fair Play identified the “enemies of the Cubans” as their own enemies, which ultimately were the “Jim Crow bosses of [the] land where [they] were still denied [their] rights.”131 Black activists Robert F. Williams, William Worthy, Julian Mayfield, James Baldwin and John Henrik Clarke, to name a few, joined Fair Play. The committee held rallies, distributed leaflets and organized several tours to Cuba.132

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131 Ibid., 56.
Not only had several black power leaders formed a movement against the “enemies” of Cuba and visited the island in its early stage of revolution, but the “black leader” himself (i.e., Castro) appeared in front of hundreds of black Americans in Harlem on September 19, 1960 during a United Nations meeting. His appearance in Harlem occurred partly because no other hotel would accept his presence in New York City (and probably an attempt to show that he was on “their side”). In 1990, Castro recalled meeting with Malcolm X in Hotel Theresa:

I always recall my meeting with Malcolm X at the Hotel Theresa, because he was the one who supported us and made it possible for us to stay there. We faced two alternatives. One was the United Nations Garden—when I mentioned this to the Secretary-General, he was horrified at the thought of a delegation in tents there. But when we received Malcolm X’s offer—he had spoken with our comrades—I said ‘That is the place, the Hotel Theresa.’

The developing relationship between Castro and black activists in the United States was not lost on white newspapers. News articles from mainstream newspapers also entered the conversation, commenting on Castro’s involvement in the United States civil rights struggles:

“The Castro regime in Cuba has been developing a special propaganda campaign aimed at Negroes in Harlem and in other Northern communities. But, so far, according to Negro leaders, it has met with little success.” According to journalist Will Lessner, black activists and white trade union workers were placed on the list of Revolucion, a Havana newspaper. But because many activists in the United States did not know Spanish, the “effort [was] largely wasted.” In another article, a journalist surmised that Castro was failing to “lure Negroes,” because Fulgencio Batista was favorably regarded as closer to African heritage, thus celebrated within black

133 Rosemair Mealy, Fidel and Malcolm X (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean View Press, 1993).
135 Ibid.
communities.\footnote{Ibid.} Whether black communities believed Batista had treated Afro-Cubans well on the island, however, has not necessarily been supported in historical accounts of Cuba’s political stages before 1959. But this news article significantly highlights an effort to discredit Castro’s involvement in the United States. The \textit{Police Gazette}, however, attempted to suggest that Castro had indeed succeeded in arming Southern black activists like Robert F. Williams: “Williams had organized dozens of ‘rifle clubs’ in Negro communities throughout the South. It has now been determined by the U.S. government investigators that the guns and ammunition for these ‘rifle clubs’ are being smuggled into the U.S. from Castro’s Cuba. They bear the marks of Communist origin.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Again, whether Castro smuggled guns into the United States is dubious at best and has not been supported in any documents or histories about this time period. Nevertheless, such a conversation in print media underscores the fear that some sectors of the population sought to enhance, as rumors spread regarding Castro’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. Of course, as this dissertation will argue, Castro or Williams did not have a direct influence on mobilizing and organizing an armed rebellion in the United States (except for Williams’ role in establishing a local armed community in Monroe, North Carolina, before he fled). Yet, what was influential was how the political discourse shaped certain debates within the Civil Rights and Black Power movements on race and class politics.

In Pedro Perez-Sarduy’s 1990 open letter to Cuban exile Carlos Moore,\footnote{This open letter appeared as a critique to Moore’s 1989 book \textit{Castro, the Black and Africa}, which argued that Castro mainly used race as a domestic and foreign policy to take advantage of certain political opportunities.} Sarduy recalled Castro’s appearance in Harlem. Sarduy evoked a historical moment that united the Cuban Revolution with the United States civil rights struggle. Castro’s appearance in Harlem signaled to people that the Cuban Revolution of 1959 would serve as a symbol of black liberation in the
United States. The 1960s, thus, not only marks an important era for United States black Americans, it also highlights the popularity and controversy of Fidel Castro among black activists. While some believed Castro’s administration would eradicate racism through a socialist agenda, Moore accused the Cuban government of continuing racial discrimination on the island. In fact, the relationship that would develop between the Black Panther Party and the Cuban government during the late 1960s illustrated both moments of solidarity and conflict. Divisive struggles within Cuba’s leadership often contributed to growing tensions between some black activists and Cuban officials. Some United States black Americans during the 1960s, however, perceived Cuba as the exemplar, a socialist government that could potentially create a racially and economically equal society. Because of Castro’s visit to Harlem, his policies toward African liberation movements and his granting of political asylum to black activists, social justice for black people was placed at the forefront of the Cold War, particularly in relation to United States-Cuba relations.

Repression during the Cold War, however, also had “done in” the “long civil rights movement” that had begun even before the 1950s. According to Eric Arnesen, anti-communism persecution “undermined civil rights by labeling them ‘subversive.’ Both the illusion and reality of the Communist Party’s prominent role in the development of the civil rights movements

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140 Ibid.


142 Whether or not black activists allied themselves with leaders like Fidel Castro, the Federal Bureau of Investigation continued to implement an intense surveillance program (COINTEL Pro) that often resulted in the United States government portraying many black leaders as communists. The government’s containment policy, conflicting interests with growing socialist movements abroad, a growing national movement critiquing the country’s domestic and foreign policies, and the presence of the CPUSA (in which many black activists participated during the 1920s and 1930s) helped propel an intense period in which race politics in the United States would become central to the Cold War.

that emerged during the 1930s resulted in a “Red Scare” that “undercut civil rights activism and progress.”\textsuperscript{144} Yet as some scholars have highlighted, the “newer” movement adopted a narrower definition of civil rights and lacked the same anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist discourses that appeared in the earlier civil rights movements (i.e., before the 1950s).\textsuperscript{145} But the need to reach across national borders continued to place black activists in-between nation-states.

Just as migration became important to African slaves who sought to establish independent communities in Maroon societies throughout the Americas, emigration during the 1960s and early 1970s became crucial for intersecting the local, national and global. While black activists in the United States fought domestic repression and racism, the nation was involved in global conflicts that often connected local and national black struggles to global human rights movements. More specifically, Cold War ideological clashes between capitalism and communism turned Latin America and the Caribbean into sociopolitical pawns and military playgrounds for the United States and Soviet Union. While the United States and Soviet Union sought to reinforce their own interests abroad through military interventions and other covert operations, liberation movements emerged throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas. As a result, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism became central to a conversation among black leaders. Black activists who had begun to fight in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s found themselves physically and intellectually moving across borders to join anti-colonial movements that were resisting Western colonialism and imperialism. As such, black activists sought to link local and national racism to United States foreign policy strategies, \textit{a Radio Free Dixie} theme that will be further explored in Chapter Three.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
Before discussing the role that radio played in escalating Cold War politics, it is important to note the significance of radio prior to the 1960s. As feminist scholar Susan Douglas indicates in her book about radio in the United States, millions of people “born after World War II remembered lying there in the darkness of [their] bedrooms, or driving around at night in [their] parents’ cars, listening to Sam Cooke, or the Beatles, or the Doors, and feeling illicit pleasures.”146 Music “transported” people out of their houses and neighborhoods to another place where “life seemed more intense, more heartfelt, less fettered.”147 Even when the advent of television changed the media landscape in the mid-1900s, those born after World War II continued to have a special connection with radio (albeit in different ways). During the 1930s and 1940s, listening to radio was a family event, one where people could personalize and function in an “impersonal mass culture.”148 But by the mid-1950s, televisions in United States American homes would change the ways listeners connected to radio.149 The role of radio once again adopted a different purpose. Baby boomers born after the 1940s and 1950s, went to radio for “rebellion.”150

As the transformations of radio throughout the twentieth century influenced the ways in which people listened to the airwaves, it also introduced consumerism as a “national language” and played an important role in constructing people as “mass-mediated humans.”151 By the mid-1900s, radio fell into the hands of corporations, raising even more concerns about the role of

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147 Ibid.
149 Ibid, 5.
150 Ibid, 5.
151 Ibid, 5-6.
radio in society (primarily as one that reinforced consumerist values and conformity). Radio, however, as a “tool of corporate agenda is not the only or at times even the most important historical story.” Radio’s role in constructing, deconstructing (at least, in the case of *Radio Free Dixie*) and stimulating collective memories also should be pertinent in understanding how people listen and how radio accounts for “what is happening.” For many listeners, such an act meant entering a public sphere, since radio voices broadcast to much of the nation. This sphere became one in which ideas were shared with people disconnected from one another personally and physically. According to Bruce Lenthall, listeners “participated in a common civil society and culture that existed on the air.”

Political broadcasting, in particular, allowed listeners to update and maintain their ideas of democratic engagement in an era of “mass politics.” By the mid-1900s, radio became more than just another tool for maintaining corporate, consumer and democratic interests; it also heavily influenced the ways in which governmental institutions would communicate during moments of conflict. As a result, radio blurred the boundaries between the private and public sphere, and the commercial and political life. In countries like Cuba and Nicaragua, the dissemination of revolutionary politics via airwaves became essential for winning the fight against current dictatorships and United States imperialism. In fact, in Latin America, radio reached more people than any other medium, especially among rural peasants and urban communities. As William Barlow suggests, before capturing state power, “radio was used as [clandestine] propaganda weapons by the insurgents.” Such broadcasts were one-way forms of

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152 Ibid.
155 Ibid, 105.
158 Ibid, 123.
communication and were “filtered through guerilla command structures before being sent out on shortwave transmitters to potential supporters.”159 Once the Sandinistas (socialist party in Nicaragua) and the July 26th Movement (guerrilla fighters in Cuba) overthrew their respective dictatorships, radio was expanded and institutionalized. Thus in Latin America, revolutionary radio and its institutionalization further blurred the lines between the private and political.

Latin America, however, was not the only region to institutionalize radio for political purposes. In the post-World War II era, the advancement of communication technologies became increasingly essential for both the United States and the Soviet Union to further expand their imperial powers. Radio particularly served as a political tool that propagated Cold War rhetoric (both capitalist and communist ideologies) throughout the United States and Soviet Union, as well as in other regions around the world, especially in Latin America. Radio propaganda, thus, became an essential political strategy (i.e., foreign policy) to communicate across national borders and fight ideological conflicts between countries. Such a struggle for imperial power resulted in Latin America and the Caribbean becoming pawns in the larger conflict between the United States and Soviet Union, with both governments seeking to establish their own politics in different regions of the world.

Being that Cuba had decided to challenge United States rule on the island, the country became one of the main focuses of United States foreign policy. In fact, United States influence in Cuba before and during Batista’s presidency was one of the driving forces that led to Cuba’s socialist revolution. To deter a domino effect in which bordering Latin American countries would begin adopting socialist economic policies, United States propaganda, such as Voice of America, increased in intensity. When Fidel Castro took over Cuba and began collaborating with the Soviet Union in 1962, the United States launched an ongoing propaganda war that continues today. For example, TV Marti became reflective of current United States approaches to multilateralism and

159 Ibid, 124.
global information strategies, and a new era of government external broadcasting, one which moves beyond shortwave radio to the transmission of television signals across borders.”  

Furthermore, it was United States propaganda that “set the stage for the confrontation between the United States and Cuba.”  

As a result of the nationalization of Cuba’s private industries after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista and the emergence of *Radio Rebelde* as a propaganda weapon promoting revolution (and the removal of U.S.-backed dictators like Batista), Cuba became the “target of the most intense counterrevolutionary broadcasting campaign on record.”  

The launching of United States American-owned *Radio Swan* and the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in the 1960s forced Cuba to react with the establishment of *Radio Habana Cuba*, which became one of the largest international propaganda tools in the world.  

For Cuba, the widest range of media was radio, serving as the “party’s arm” locally and supplying the needs of small communities with certain programs intended to promote the Cuban Revolution.  

Furthermore, Fidel Castro’s interest in socialism created an “external propaganda set-up, mainly *Radio Habana Cuba*, directed toward the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America.”  

The Castro administration utilized *Radio Habana’s* 300 kW transmitter as an international tool for “bringing [Castro’s] truths” to the world.  

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165 Ibid, 609.  
corners of Latin America, providing eleven hours of airtime; however, to the north, only two
hours of English-language services reached the United States. During the 1960s, it added a few
language stations, but its maximum 100 kW per transmitter made reception outside of the
Americas challenging. Following the launching of Radio Habana, “air time on other white Cuban
stations was made available to the variety of exile groups that flocked to Havana.” These
groups produced exile programs, transmitting from high-powered Cuban stations to their home
countries. In addition to Radio Habana Cuba, the Havana station Radio Progreso became another
important tool for distributing the government’s politics. It was through Radio Progreso that
Radio Free Dixie would participate in counteracting United States propaganda to the island but
also distribute its own messages about the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. While the radio
program aired on Radio Progreso, an official mouthpiece of the government, the radio program
became one of the first illegal and politically-motivated operations to reach the shores of the
United States from Cuba. Initially, Castro granted Robert F. Williams permission to use Radio
Progreso’s facilities to air this one-hour long broadcast once a week starting in August 1962.
Months later, it began airing three times a week. Williams eventually asked Castro for
permission to use Radio Habana’s facility, since the radio station had a wider reach. His request,
however, was turned down as some Cuban officials became increasingly hesitant about Radio
Free Dixie’s messages regarding armed black rebellion.

167 Ibid.
168 Soley and Nichols, Clandestine Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary
Electronic Communication, 182.
169 See Andrew Yodder, Pirate Radio: The Incredible Saga of America’s Underground, Illegal Broadcasters,
(Solana Beach, California: HighText Publications, Inc., 1996) for more on the history of illegal radio
stations.
170 Mabel R. Williams, Negroes with Guns, DVD, directed by Sandra Dickson, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill
and Cara Pilson (Florida: The Documentary Institute, 2005).
171 Reasons for these tensions will be explored later in the dissertation. But one can argue that Cuba’s
history with black radicalism (particularly its history with the Partido Independiente de Color, PIC, which
was infamous for creating a black rebellion in 1912 that resulted in the mass killings of Afro-Cubans and
would affect the fate of future black organizations on the island) may have influenced how Cuban officials
At the same time that *Radio Free Dixie* became an important part of Cuban international politics and the United States-Cuba international propaganda war, it also played a part in another story: one about the emergence and significance of black radio in the U.S. William Barlow explains that while the advent of radio in the early twentieth century introduced “racial ventriloquy” to United States American audiences, by the postwar era, black disc jockeys were “reversing and undermining the racial ventriloquy [sic] cycle by privileging contemporary black vernacular in their announcing styles.”\(^{172}\) In addition, during the 1930s, black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* had highlighted radio’s power in propagating racist messages. Literary writer Langston Hughes commented that radio had “failed [United States] America both by perpetuating racist images of blacks and by denying alternative voices a platform to speak.”\(^{173}\) But as racial ventriloquy diminished in importance throughout the 1900s, the history of black radio became increasingly “woven into the fabric of the broader African American struggle for racial equality, political empowerment, economic prosperity, and cultural self-determination.”\(^{174}\) Thus, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, black radio distributed important information about civil rights issues and activities (including the time and place of meetings, protests, details about court cases and police brutality incidents, to name a few).\(^{175}\)

*Radio Free Dixie*, therefore, did not solely reflect Cuban interests. In fact, in his personal communication (off-air), Robert F. Williams consistently denied any participation of the Cuban

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\(^{175}\) Ibid.
government with the radio program. For example, in many of his responses to letters he received in Cuba regarding Radio Free Dixie, he wrote: “Radio Free Dixie is not an official government broadcast. It reflects my own personal views. I am an Afroamerican from North Carolina, where I was an official of the NAACP until I was forced into exile by the Ku Klux Klan on a racist kidnap frameup that stemmed from my fight for human rights for my people.”

Despite Williams’ acknowledgements that Radio Free Dixie was independent of the Cuban government, it can be argued that Castro’s approval of the radio station itself was a political act. Radio Free Dixie played a dual role: The radio station provided Cuba another political tool to speak back to United States domestic and foreign policy (even if it was not directly controlled by the Cuban government), while also joining other United States domestic black radio programs in informing and mobilizing black communities across the country.

Radio Free Dixie continued to air until 1966 when escalating tensions between Williams and some Cuban officials (who Williams believed were trying to sabotage his reputation and relationship with Castro) led to its closing. Then in August 1966, seeing that he had to leave the island before it was too late (as Williams believed that Cuban officials would turn him into the United States Central Intelligence Agency), the Williamses left Cuba and relocated in China.

Radio Free Dixie, thus, appeared on air during a brief but intense historical moment where the broadcasters found themselves in a unique position. They inhabited a space where multiple events and actors were largely influential in shaping the outcomes and impacts of Radio Free Dixie. The

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Cuban Revolution and the island’s transition into a socialist country, the United States Civil Rights Movement and early BPM, and Cold War politics between Cuba and the United States all would affect the fate of Radio Free Dixie. As a result, these events and relationships would not only influence the Williamses’ actions but also their political messages and the tensions that would arise from the emergence of the radio program. To further understand the context of how Radio Free Dixie came to be one of the few clandestine radio programs to air from Cuba to the United States, the following chapter provides an overview on Williams’ contributions to the United States Black Power Movement and his exile.
Chapter 2

Exile, Rebellion and Journalism Advocacy: Radio Free Dixie in Cuba

“I was born in a segregated society, but at that time I accepted a segregated society because that’s all I knew,” recalled Mabel R. Williams in an interview released in 2005. Her own father had kept a “pearl-handled” pistol under his pillow, but she had not yet confronted the implications of segregation until the older people in her family told her that the purpose of the gun was to protect them: “That possibly some night riders might come and try to do something to us in the middle of night.”

After she and Robert F. Williams were married in Monroe, North Carolina (their hometown), she realized they “just kept running into barriers of segregation.” While Robert F. Williams grew up in Newtown, Mabel lived in Quality Hill, about three miles from downtown Monroe. To arrive in the downtown area, they would have to walk those three miles through a white neighborhood:

I didn’t mind walking with my black friends through the white neighborhood, through the downtown area, over across town to the segregated school. After I got married, after I had met Robert Williams, whose grandparents came out of slavery literate, and whose grandmother had taught him that he should stand up like a man like anybody else. And I never heard these kinds of arguments in my neck of the woods, you know, because my parents were always telling us, ‘This is the law. You abide by the law. You keep a low profile and don’t make the white folks angry.’ Because they were afraid that we would get killed.

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179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
Robert F. Williams, according to Mabel, however, was different. “When I met Robert and we started raising a family, I realized right away that I was in a different situation. Robert was always listening to the news and he’d talk about current events and what was going on in the world.”

Following their marriage, Mabel watched her husband write “protest articles” that opposed discrimination and segregation in newspapers. Soon, following Robert’s return from the United States Marines in the mid-1940s, Mabel would her join her husband in organizing the community to fight discriminatory laws and segregation.

In 1962, a year after arriving in Havana, Cuba, Robert F. Williams published his memoir *Negroes with Guns*. Finally, he could tell his story through his own words. He wrote, “Why do I speak to you from exile?” His answer brought him back to Monroe, North Carolina:

Because a Negro community in the South took up guns in self-defense against racist violence—and used them. I am held responsible for this action, that for the first time in history American Negroes have armed themselves as a group to defend their homes, their wives, their children, in a situation where law and order had broken down, where the authorities could not, or rather would not, enforce their duty to protect Americans from a lawless mob. I accept this responsibility and am proud of it.

How did Williams come to advocate for self-defense (a message that would become a large part of his political discourse on *Radio Free Dixie*), creating a small army of armed black men in Monroe, North Carolina?

Williams path to self-defense, perhaps, began years earlier, when he first saw police officer Jess Alexander Helms Sr. attack a black woman by “flattening her with his huge fists” and dragging her to the closest jailhouse with “her dress up over her head, the same way that a cave

181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
183 Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 3.
man would drag his sexual prey.” Even more disturbing was the way the black men who also witnessed the scene “hung their heads in shame and hurried silently away from the cruelly bizarre sight.” While Williams, his four siblings, and parents would do well economically in Newtown, a mile from the business district of Monroe (since his father worked as a boiler washer with the Seaboard Air Line), they were always aware of the surrounding environment, a city that in many ways reflected the violence of the Jim Crow South.

But Williams’ own relationships with his paternal grandmother Ellen Isabel Williams, who was born into slavery, and uncle Charlie Williams, who attended college at Florida A&M and law school at Wilberforce University in Ohio, played important roles in the development of his political consciousness. Ellen Williams told her grandchildren stories about her late husband, Sikes Williams, who learned to read and write while he was a slave and joined the Republican Party amid the “white terror of Reconstruction.” In the midst of a growing violent environment for black people, Sikes Williams became an activist who also may have written several campaign fliers that promoted the Populist Party’s platform (which fought against disenfranchisement, among many other issues) in North Carolina during the late 1880s. He and Darling Thomas would obtain a printing press and begin publishing a small newspaper called the People’s Voice.

After hearing stories from his grandmother Ellen Williams and witnessing the consequences of Reconstruction and the continuance of a violent South, Robert F. Williams “climbed aboard a segregated Greyhound bus and headed for Detroit” at seventeen years old. But Detroit was just as intense as Monroe. There, he joined the Local 600 of the United

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185 Ibid., 2.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid., 12.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid., 26.
Automobile Workers of America and would become part of one of the worst race riots where a black worker would hit a white foreman for calling him “nigger” at the plant Williams worked. The worker fractured the foreman’s skull and killed him. Shortly after, not eager to stay in Detroit, Williams decided to leave for California to work in a shipyard. But three months later, after experiencing more racial clashes and severe sinus headaches, he returned to North Carolina. Not too long after, on July 12, 1945 (less than a month before the atomic bomb would fall on Hiroshima), he was drafted into the United States Army for eighteen months. He arrived at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, just as World War II was coming to an end. In this brief period of Williams’ life, his understanding of white people changed, thus leading him to believe that white people were not superior and, in fact, ‘had certain weaknesses’ that led them to react violently against ‘anything’ outside of their interests. In fact, Williams’ “contempt for white authority soon earned him a three-month sentence in the stockade for insubordination.” On November 27, 1946, Williams was honorably discharged for “convenience of the government.”

Such experiences would influence his own philosophy on self-defense. Williams, who became a “newsman” in the late 1930s when he began delivering afternoon newspapers, returned to his hometown in the mid-1946 from service in the United States Marines. After returning home, his first stint as an armed black activist occurred when the Ku Klux Klan threatened to kill a local black funeral director unless he removed the United States flag atop the war veteran Bennie Montgomery’s casket. On May 31, 1946, Montgomery, who was Williams’ classmate in high school, killed his white landlord during a fight that resulted from Montgomery asking for his wages at noon and explaining that he had to fix his father’s vehicle (which he crashed the night before). Montgomery was tried and convicted of murder by the state and was gassed nearly a year

191 Ibid.
193 Ibid, 47.
194 Ibid.
later. In an effort to keep the Ku Klux Klan, who accused the state of preventing the lynching of Montgomery, away from Montgomery’s body, Booker T. Perry, a World War I veteran, organized a group of forty black soldiers to stand in front of the Harris Funeral Home. When the Ku Klux Klan’s motorcade drove by, they “leveled their rifles, taking aim at the line of cars.”

Williams and three other men carried rifles that night, foreshadowing the “black militia” that Williams would organize ten years later.

After assuming leadership in a dissolving local NAACP chapter, Williams initiated a variety of campaigns that addressed legal racism, economic rights, education and equal protection under law. In particular, one of these campaigns attempted to challenge racial discrimination at a community swimming pool. Such campaigns, however, were often met with violent resistance from the local white community. After Williams and other community leaders started various stand-ins at the pool, the Ku Klux Klan began organizing rallies. The *Monroe Enquirer* claimed that the numbers of members who participated in the rallies went up to 5,000. The rallies were designed to discuss “dealing with the integrationists, described by the Klan as the ‘Communist-Inspired-National-Association-for-the-Advancement-of-Colored-People.’” The Klan also circulated a petition that stated Williams and Dr. Albert E. Perry (vice-president of the Monroe chapter of NAACP) should be driven out of Union County because they were members of the Communist-NAACP. According to Williams, when the Klan discovered they could not intimidate the local chapter leaders, they took direct action, “driving through their community in motorcades, honking their horns and fire pistols from the car windows.” In one incident, the Klan captured a black woman by herself on a street corner and “made her dance at pistol

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195 Ibid, 50.
196 Williams, *Negroes with Guns*.
197 Ibid, 16.
198 Ibid, 17.
Community and police officials rejected the requests of the NAACP, which demanded that these motorcades be prohibited. As a result, after pleading to Luther Hodges (who was at the time the Secretary of Commerce and the Governor of North Carolina) and receiving no support, the local chapter decided to defend themselves. Williams wrote to the National Rifle Association (NRA) in Washington in hopes of starting a local NRA chapter. Within a year, the chapter had sixty members and some guns.200

During his time in Monroe, North Carolina, two more significant cases would also influence Williams’ thoughts on armed self-defense. The famous “kissing case” consisted of two young black kids (seven-year-old David Simpson and nine-year-old Hanover Thompson) who were arrested on rape charges (punishable by death in North Carolina). According to Williams, Simpson and Thompson had participated in a game of “cowboys and Indians” and “house” with a few white children on one afternoon in the fall of 1958. A white friend of Thompson, Sissy Sutton, sat on Thompson’s lap and kissed him on the cheek. When Sutton arrived home that evening, she told her mother that she had been happy to see Thompson (whose mother had worked for Sutton’s family) and had kissed him on the cheek.201 Sutton’s mother called the police and before Thompson and Simpson arrived home, they were arrested. Following their arrest, Thompson and Simpson were sent to a reformatory. But a friend of the civil rights lawyer Conrad Lynn (who would later work on Mae Mallory and Williams’ cases) sneaked into the reformatory and published a story about the case in the London News Chronicle on December 15, 1958. The article made the “kissing case” an international cause. Protest demonstrations appeared throughout London, Rotterdam, Rome, and Paris.202 Then on February 13, 1959, once President

199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid.
Eisenhower heard about the case (because of the international attention it received), the children were released.

In 1959, another incident brought Williams’ promotions of self-defense to the world stage. Georgia White became the victim of an attempted rape by a white man who physically assaulted her outside of her home. During the trial against White’s attacker, Williams convinced White’s brothers to not kill him. But when White’s attacker was acquitted, several black women turned to Williams and asked what he would do since they (the white community) could do anything to black women without any consequences. Once again, Williams’ response would bring him back to self-defense:

In a civilized society the law is a deterrent against the strong who would take advantage of the weak, but the South is not a civilized society; the South is a social jungle. So in cases like this we have to revert to the law of the jungle; it had become necessary for us to create our own deterrent. I said that in the future we would defend our women and children, our homes and ourselves with our arms.

His statement was reprinted all over the country. From that moment on, Williams’ statements, “meet violence with violence” and “lynching with lynching,” reached the ears of anyone who listened to his voice or read his words. In a moment of reflection in *Negroes with Guns*, Williams admitted that at the time he did not know they were doing anything “new,” but in retrospect he realized they were “establishing a principle, born out of [their] experience, which could, and would, set an example to others.”

But in the next few hours following his statement about self-defense, Roy Wilkins, the NAACP’s executive secretary, suspended him. A national debate ensued and Williams believed

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid, 26.
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
there “was no provision in the NAACP constitution to justify or authorize this hypocritical action by Roy Wilkins.” Williams was tried by the NAACP’s Committee on Branches in New York City on June 3, 1959. The committee ruled that he would be automatically reinstated following his six-month suspension:

As a result of the trial I was more convinced than ever that one of our greatest and most immediate needs was better communication within the race. The real Afro-American struggle was merely disjointed network of pockets of resistance and the shameful thing about it was that Negroes were relying upon the white man’s inaccurate reports as their sources of information about these isolated struggles. I went home and concentrated all of my efforts into developing a newsletter that would in accurate and no uncertain terms inform both Negroes and whites of Afro-American liberation struggles taking place in the United States and about the particular struggle we were constantly fighting in Monroe.  

The Williamses published their first mimeograph issue of the *Crusader* on June 26, 1959. Not too long after the launching of the weekly newspaper, in 1960, Robert F. Williams visited Cuba twice. Thus, his experiences in Monroe and with the NAACP had “sharpened” his awareness about the struggles of “Negroes in every part of the world.”

According to Williams, the publication of the newspaper and his visits to Cuba led to a deeper self-consciousness of international black struggle. The *Crusader*, particularly, played an important role in telling the “truth” about the Cuban Revolution, publishing “factual articles” about racial equality on the island. Mabel R. Williams and Ethel Azalea Johnson (whose byline was Asa Lee in the *Crusader*) also wrote in the *Crusader*, often in an attempt to educate readers about the history of black people in the United States. For instance, in their first issue on June 26,

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208 Ibid, 29.
209 Ibid.
211 Ibid, 32.
1959, Mabel wrote a column that asked readers to think about how far they were from slavery. The column noted that one of her sons had come home from helping another elderly neighbor who was born into slavery. Mabel R. Williams’ columns, other editorials as well as local, national and international news filled that first four-page newspaper. As the newspaper grew to ten pages within the next year, it continued to educate readers about the local environment of Monroe and the civil rights struggles across the country, while also providing information about the outside world (much like *Radio Free Dixie* did). Robert F. Williams also saw the *Crusader* as a publication that would “counteract Roy Wilkins” of the NAACP and the organization’s newspaper *The Crisis*.212

The Williamses continued to publish the *Crusader* until the mid-1960s and resumed publishing it once they returned to the United States in the 1970s. While there were issues with distribution while abroad (since the *Crusader* had to be mailed from Cuba) and some counterfeit issues that were published without Robert F. Williams’ knowledge and approval, the newspaper still lasted far longer than *Radio Free Dixie*. But the existence of *Radio Free Dixie* was no less important. In fact, as Robert F. Williams’ close friend Muhammad Ahmad would suggest, they often informed one another.

Before fleeing to Cuba (where he seemed to get along), his situation in Monroe grew more complex. His messages of self-defense faced criticisms from the nonviolent strand of the Civil Rights Movement. In an effort to disprove that nonviolence was a better strategy, Williams asked the community to support the Freedom Riders when they arrived in Monroe in August 1961. The arrival of the Freedom Riders, however, quickly escalated into a violent confrontation that led to Williams allowing a white couple, who had driven through his neighborhood and found themselves in the middle of a group of black protesters (who were angry with the local Ku Klux Klan’s violent actions toward the Freedom Riders and supporters), to take refuge in his

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house until the crowd calmed down.\textsuperscript{213} While the Stegalls sat in the Williamses home, police cars blocked both ends of the street where they lived: “I realized they were trying to trap me into waiting until the state troopers got there.” In haste, the Williams family fled. When they arrived in New York for a brief moment, Williams heard the news: two policemen had accused him of kidnapping (allowing the Stegalls to seek security in their home). Furthermore, when the Williams family arrived in Canada, Williams saw that the FBI was charging him with avoiding prosecution via international flight. “Wanted” notices appeared throughout the country, referring to him as a dangerous and schizophrenic armed criminal.\textsuperscript{214}

After seeing his picture in the Canadian news, Williams decided he would not be safe. Soon after, the Williamses and their children flew to Cuba via Mexico. There, Castro granted the Williams family political asylum. According to Mabel R. Williams, once they received free shelter, a car for transportation and a monthly salary, they put themselves to work: “he [Robert Williams] came up with the idea of Radio Free Dixie. … We had to fight hard within Cuba to get on the air. But eventually when he told Castro what his idea was, he said ‘we’ll see what we can do’ [and] they allowed him to have the Radio Free Dixie program.”\textsuperscript{215} According to Williams, he was never given any employment in Cuba and \textit{Radio Free Dixie} had been given to him as a gift from Fidel Castro.\textsuperscript{216} Years later, Williams admitted that he “didn’t even know what [he] was going to put on the radio,” as there was no “sistership or anything.”\textsuperscript{217} But his purpose was to

\textsuperscript{213} Williams, \textit{Negroes with Guns}. For more on the incident, also see Tyson, \textit{Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. R. Williams & the Roots of Black Power}.  
\textsuperscript{215} Mabel R. Williams, \textit{Negroes with Guns}, DVD, directed by Sandra Dickson, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill and Cara Pilson (Florida: The Documentary Institute, 2005).  
\textsuperscript{216} Robert F. Williams, interviewed by Joanne Fenney, August 19, 1978, CD, University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.  
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
“reach the black people in the South of the United States, which it did because they [the United States] started to block it.”

radio free dixie aired for the first time on july 27, 1962. on that same day, cuban exile carlos moore, who at the time still lived in cuba, and musical hostess jo ann salas also broadcasted their own sections of radio free dixie. while moore focused on providing listeners with brief summaries of current events (including recent protests, civil rights meetings, news concerning civil rights court cases and police brutality), salas announced the various songs that played over air: “this is jo salas, your musical hostess, inviting you to stay tuned to radio free dixie. winfred atwell puts us in a groove with a boogie beat.”

salas’ role in playing jazz and soul music over the air highlights the williamses’ attempt to gain support for their radical agenda. as joe street indicates in his chapter on black radio and jazz, such music was ignored on mainstream radio in the united states; as a result, they sought to “manipulate listeners’ emotions through music, using it to accentuate the feelings that his commentary generated,” and to “experience the power of african-influenced polyrhythmic drumming that added urgency and complexity to the work of drummers such as max roach and art blakey.”

in mabel r. williams’ recollections of listening to the songs that aired over radio free dixie, she illustrated the power of linking black struggle with jazz music: “the music was fantastic. the jazz was fantastic. now i can hear those songs echoing in my mind, watermelon

218 Ibid.
219 Robert F. Williams’ papers did not include any biographical information on the different broadcasters that worked on radio free dixie nor was the author able to find more information elsewhere. because his wife mabel r. williams also was not available, the author could not verify salas’ role on radio free dixie. however, the transcripts of the radio program stated her name and her section of the program, which focused on introducing music during the hour-long show.
220 tyson, the black power movement part 2, the papers of robert f. williams, microfilm, august 10, 1962.
222 Ibid, 75.
mind, the protest, Mississippi goddamn …” Music added to the radio program’s provocative and visual commentaries on civil rights protests, police brutality, the ineffectiveness of nonviolence strategies, the racist policies of the United States government, and the role that successful international revolutions played in speaking back to power.

But how far did this radio program reach? The program’s music and political commentaries, indeed, reached throughout the South, “thanks to an underground railroad of private individuals and broadcasters,” but recordings of the program also reached parts of the North. For example, on August 19, 1963, the radio station KPFA-FM 94.1 informed Williams that the station would be rebroadcasting *Radio Free Dixie* from 2 to 3 p.m. on Thursday, September 5, 1963. The program itself was a “recording, made by [their] WBAI-FM in New York City.” In addition, it would be airing a broadcast that had been aired earlier that year in May. On July 30, 1963, the same station sent another letter to Williams informing him that it would be rebroadcasting an additional *Radio Free Dixie* recording on Sunday, August 17 at 11 p.m.

Due to the sporadic re-broadcasting of *Radio Free Dixie* as well as its original air dates, between 1962 and 1966 many people would hear the radio program. Starting in March 1963, more recordings circulated as the program began airing three times a week. Monroe, North Carolina resident Pat Coffey recalled “embracing the radio just to hear his voice,” which was the “treat of the weekend.” Muhammad Ahmad, a friend of the Williamses and black activist who

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224 Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 75.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
became involved with Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) in the later 1960s, also recalled gathering with his friends to listen to Williams’ voice: “We could hear Radio Free Dixie. … I think it was Saturday, every Saturday evening, early Saturday evenings, here in Philly [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania]. Oh yeah it would get as far as Philly.”  Ahmad and his friends, however, could not always hear the entire hour-long program, as they “would pick it up for a while” but “they [the United States government] began to block it,” so it would “go in and out.” But the few personal minutes that Ahmad would get with Radio Free Dixie left a lasting impression: “Robert … was our Lenin. He was our revolutionary leader calling for armed self-defense. He wasn’t pulling no punches.” For Ahmad, Williams’ struggles with the Ku Klux Klan during the 1960s remained an important symbol of the Civil Rights Movement. Radio Free Dixie had coincided with “mass explosions in Jacksonville, Florida, Richmond, Maryland, Philadelphia and Buffalo, New York.” These cities “were going off and people were fighting back, so people were listening” and that was an “international message.”

But as Ahmad pointed out when recalling the importance of Radio Free Dixie in black communities, listeners did not hear Radio Free Dixie without also reading the Crusader: “See you get the Crusader and you be listening to Radio Free Dixie. The Crusader went through many hands. So they were master propagandists, in the sense that as black revolutionaries they lived that process out.” These mediums raised “so much hope,” because Williams “wasn’t supposed to make it.” When Williams was “chased out, people held their breath until we saw he got political asylum in Cuba, ha!”

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231 Muhammad Ahmad, interview by author, Philadelphia, PA, June 2, 2012.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
recordings word of mouth and helped the Williamses gain access to contemporary jazz and soul music. According to Ahmad, it “got to the point that the Crusader would say they needed records and stuff like this, and we’d go to a record store and get what you thought.” Ahmad’s recollection highlights that the radio program’s songs often came from cassette tapes that were mailed to the Williamses. When Ahmad visited Cuba in 1964, he received the opportunity to finally observe the Williamses working on Radio Free Dixie: “I see it on DVDs now and it’s like okay I saw that. I was actually there. I was young and it was history. It happened so fast. That was the amazing thing.”

What particularly drew listeners to Radio Free Dixie was its link between black music and the freedom movement. Salas often introduced songs before moving to Mabel R. Williams’ folklore, literature and news. Then Salas’ voice would reappear to introduce more songs before moving to Robert F. Williams’ political commentary and Carlos Moore’s news highlights. Listeners sometimes wrote to Williams, asking him to play more music on the air: “I first heard your program in August; it came in on my little transistor here on the east end of Long Island. I can’t tell you how surprised and happy I was, hearing that beautiful sound.” Writer David Rattray added that he knew the broadcast had to be coming from Cuba because “U.S. stations [did] not care or dare to broadcast the new music [their] musicians [were] really playing.”

When the Williamses received letters from United States residents reporting that they had heard the radio program, writers would often cite the time and day as well as the content of that

239 Ibid.
240 Ibid. In addition to reaching listeners in the United States, Radio Free Dixie also reached other parts of the world. In Vietnam, it aired over the North Vietnamese station Radio Hanoi. Mabel R. Williams, Negroes with Guns. Street, The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement.
241 Street, The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement.
242 David Rattray, letter to R. Williams, Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, Reel 1. Here Rattray adds that jazz programs in the United States played excerpts of “Coltrane and others,” but did not play the “music whole and life-size the way” Radio Free Dixie did on air.
particular broadcast. For instance, on August 22, 1963, a writer from Miami, Florida, wrote to Mabel R. Williams, indicating that she had listened to the radio program within recent days:

“Dear Madam, I have listened for several days to your evening broadcasts of music and news. Thank goodness someone is saying what most people are afraid to say in this country. I have no political interests or fidelity, but I can see about me, all the time, evidence of political, as well as racial, bigotry.”244 The writer added that she or he was “32, a sculptor and artist, caucasian (not that it matters), and in sympathy with [their] broadcasts.”245 This letter indicates that not only did black individuals listen to the broadcasts, but that there were some white sympathizers who regularly listened to the program when possible.

_Radio Free Dixie_, however, did not always capture the minds and hearts of its listeners; instead, the provocative radio program also angered some listeners. A letter written on August 26, 1963 arrived at the Williamses’ address in Havana, Cuba, from Golden Beach, Florida. Angrily, the writer condemned _Radio Free Dixie’s_ criticisms of the Kennedy administration. Clark Nobil wrote that the program’s broadcast of August 23, 1963, would “diminish by one the number of ardent American listeners.”246 According to Nobil, _Radio Free Dixie_ had “diabolically and systematically abased the Kennedy administration and disparaged their efforts to bring about racial equality into its fullest form.”247 The letter further accused the radio program for “twisting facts,” making “false imputations” and “militating in favor of widespread revolt by the Negro against the white.”248 Speaking on the power of radio, Nobil also added that he was “sorry to say we have such a formidable enemy,” in the form of “50,000 watts [that] reached out and spread

244 Wm, Johnson, Jr., letter to Mabel Williams, Tyson, _The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams_, microfilm, Reel 1.
245 Ibid.
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
Not only did the letter condemn Williams’ politics, but it also claimed that Williams would be defeated: “You can and will be combatted. Not through all out war but through interminable expostulation. For FREEDOM surely is an irrefutable loss.”

Eventually, Radio Free Dixie did lose more than one audience member but not because citizens would not want to listen to his provocative messages. Williams grew increasingly skeptical of the radio program’s actual effectiveness as he believed he was speaking into a “dead microphone.” During the early months of 1966, Williams wrote that he was discontinuing Radio Free Dixie, because he thought his situation in Cuba was worsening. According to some accounts, Cuban censorship and CIA jamming of the station eventually made the program’s audience much smaller. Mabel R. Williams recalled feeling concerned about “what the government would say about all of [their] speeches.” But she knew that they had “to continue doing something” and that they were not “so concerned that [she] was willing to stop.” Thus despite Robert Williams’ personal criticisms off-air, Radio Free Dixie aired for approximately four years before closing. What did Radio Free Dixie say about the political turmoil of the 1960s? The next three chapters examine how Radio Free Dixie contributed to a larger conversation that moved beyond and within the United States BPM, helping shape a transnational dialogue about race, imperialism and revolution.

249 Ibid.
250 Ibid.
251 Richard Gibson, interviewed by author, Skype, June 15, 2012. Gibson, who helped found the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), lived in London during the 1960s, worked closely with Robert Williams while Williams lived in Cuba and China.
252 Timothy Tyson, Negroes with Guns, DVD, directed by Sandra Dickson, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill and Cara Pilson (Florida: The Documentary Institute, 2005).
253 Mabel R. Williams, Negroes with Guns.
254 Ibid.
Chapter 3

Globalizing the Local and Localizing the Global

The transnational dialogue that emerged from Radio Free Dixie was one that moved between Cuba and the United States. But the radio program did not solely discuss the Cold War politics of these two countries. Instead, Radio Free Dixie often reported on events around the world, thus, informing listeners in the United States about world-wide protests and revolutions. Of course, Cuba played a bigger role than the liberation movements in Africa and Asia; perhaps, the fact that the Williamses decided to air the radio program from Cuba influenced what topics they would comment on and report. The next three chapters provide an analysis of how Radio Free Dixie (as both a cultural and political mode of production) constructed a conversation about the relationship between black participation in the United States military, race, and imperialism, self-defense as both a national and international philosophy, and Cuban revolutionary politics.

Specifically, this chapter will analyze how Radio Free Dixie re-introduced the double-v campaign to its audience, particularly in relation to United States military projects in the 1960s (i.e., Vietnam and Cuba). It also discusses how the program sought to frame imperialism as “no mere coincidence,” being that it stemmed from United States racist domestic policies; thus, this chapter argues that the radio program’s attempt to de-class and racialize imperialism was largely a result of the Williamses’ United States-American identities. Chapter Four further explores how the Williamses negotiated their national identity with their transnational linkages. Here, the author argues that the broadcasters’ messages of self-defense did not only just promote armed rebellion. What a discussion on self-defense demonstrates is how Radio Free Dixie framed such a strategy within an “American” context while simultaneously borrowing from international revolutionary politics. In the fifth chapter, the author expands on how international revolutionary politics helped shape the radio program’s dialogue on the Civil Rights Movement and Black
Power Movement in the United States. This chapter explores how the Cuban Revolution, in particular, became central in influencing the debate on race and class within the United States context.

**Extending a Historical Conversation: “Double-V” and Imperialism**

When *Radio Free Dixie* aired for the second time on August 3, 1962, R. Williams, angry over the bombing of a black woman’s house in Alabama, declared on air: “No just government would have the audacity to compel men to defend and die for a rotten system that accords common street dogs more respect than that reserved for their mothers.”

Accusing the United States of creating a false image of democracy and acting as the “noble guardian of the rights of man,” R. Williams denounced the government for its hypocrisy. To further prove his point that the United States was a hypocritical institution, he claimed that the government’s treatment toward Cuba was representative of the racism shared by the White Citizens Council and the Ku Klux Klan. The United States government, thus, sought to export the ideas of democracy abroad even while it did not practice such ideals at home. R. Williams’ attempt to link the global with local indirectly evoked the *Pittsburgh Courier’s* headline, “Race Unites for Drive to Secure Real Democracy,” when black activists and reporters also highlighted the connection between global and local politics during the 1930s.

Just as the *Pittsburgh Courier* placed the struggle for equal citizenship within a local and global context, so did *Radio Free Dixie*’s hour-long broadcasts. The program placed the local struggle of black individuals in the United States within a larger story of struggle against the

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255 Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, Reel 11. To distinguish between the Williamses and to not assume that using “Williams” automatically refers to Robert F. Williams, I will use the first initial and last name of the broadcasters. For example, I will refer to Mabel R. Williams’ sections as recorded by M. Williams.

256 Ibid.
country’s imperialist practices around the world. This chapter illustrates how the radio program extended the conversation on domestic politics by globalizing the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement in two main ways. The first strategy was to re-visit the “double v” campaign that had appeared in black newspapers during the interwar years. It is important to note that the Williamses’ re-framing of the “double v” campaign sought to highlight the hypocrisy of the United States promoting democracy at home (i.e. Vietnam) while black men in military service were still being treated as second (or third) class citizens. Thus, the broadcasts differed from the *Pittsburgh Courier*’s double-v campaign in that the Williamses did not argue for democracy at home and abroad; rather, *Radio Free Dixie* argued that the United States was not *capable* of promoting democracy around the world while it simultaneously oppressed its own citizens. In fact, at times *Radio Free Dixie* placed emphasis on developing a “true” democratic society at home before exporting it elsewhere. While *Radio Free Dixie* never referred to the “double v” campaign itself, its interpretation of the relationship between the local and global provided a crucial critique of this long-debated discourse that directly connected military service to full citizenship.

Not only did *Radio Free Dixie* re-appropriate the underlying ideological foundations of the “double v” campaign by highlighting United States hypocrisy, it also sought to show how global concerns shaped the local struggle for equality. For R. Williams, United States foreign policy was a direct result of domestic racism, primarily because the “racists” in Washington wanted to export racism around the world in the disguise of “democracy.” Therefore, while the United States attempted to export democracy abroad, it simultaneously practiced racism on people of color around the world (e.g., Cuba and Vietnam), thus jeopardizing “real democracy.” What *Radio Free Dixie* did was to highlight how the internal racial oppression of black people in the United States intersected with the state’s imperialist and colonialist practices abroad.
Fighting From Within and Out: Black Military Service and the “Double V” Campaign

The “double v” campaign gained traction during the interwar years and World War II, when black activists and journalists highlighted the contradiction between fighting for democracy abroad while maintaining second and third-class citizenship of black people at home. As black people played prominent roles in building the nation during slavery and reconstruction and also fought in the United States military, rights for full citizenship were expected. During World War II as black individuals increasingly found themselves fighting for United States global interests, black leaders and journalists claimed that the United States needed to win against oppression abroad (namely against Nazi Germany) while also achieving victory at home (first-class citizenship for black men).

In many ways, Radio Free Dixie’s interpretation of the “double v” campaign reflected this concern over citizenship and United States military service. A few decades following the end of World War II, the Williamses indirectly re-appropriated this campaign by highlighting the hypocrisy of exporting democracy while continuing the oppression of black people at home. But instead of promoting democracy abroad and at home, the Williamses sought to discredit the ideals of United States. The exportation of United States democracy was a hypocritical act, since it actually did not exist. According to R. Williams, “the oppressed Afro-American will die along with his white racist oppressor in defense of a mythological vital interest” and the “noble sounding myth of a non-existent so-called Free World.”

On Radio Free Dixie’s first broadcast, R. Williams immediately took up the call to expose this hypocrisy, especially in relation to war and military service. He declared that it was “shameful that black soldiers [were] ordered to help crush the liberation forces of exploited and oppressed foreigners while pregnant black women and children [were] being brutally clubbed

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down in noble efforts to make the USA a decent and safe place even for black soldiers whose lives [were] jeopardized on the streets of home and inspite [sic] of their uniforms.” Such a statement underscored the paradox that black men and women found themselves in when fighting United States-led wars abroad. This time, black individuals were not fighting against Nazi Germany; instead, they fought for and represented United States interests in other non-white parts of the world even while they faced racial discrimination at home.

Not only did R. Williams’ editorials point to the fact that black men had to die abroad and at home via the racists acts of the United States, but Carlos Moore’s news highlights also addressed the hypocrisy of black military service. On October 18, 1962, Moore reported that Radio Free Dixie sources close to the Pentagon claimed that black American Marine Corps personnel were being sent to the Guantanamo Naval Base, the “only remaining racist territory in Cuba.” Approximately a month earlier, Moore claimed that United States citizens who lived in Cuba had sent a telegram to President John F. Kennedy. The telegram stated that these citizens condemned the “barbaric attack of woman and children in a residential section of Havana at 11:30 p.m. of August 24, 1962.” The attacks (which became part of a subsequent number of incidents that eventually led to the Bay of Pigs invasion) were part a CIA covert operation designed to topple Castro’s presidency. The Department of Defense had begun to plan strategies for justifying United States military intervention in Cuba earlier that year. The “Cuba Project,” relied on heightened United States-Cuba tensions that justified military intervention. These actions included “developing the international image of the Cuban government as rash and

262 Ibid.
irresponsible,” and “as an alarming and unpredictable threat to the peace of the Western Hemisphere.” Furthermore, it was clear that the United States wanted to plan the timing of certain actions within the following months of March 1962. These actions included “starting rumors” via clandestine radio, “landing friendly Cubans in uniforms ‘over the fence’ to stage attacks on base,” “burning aircraft,” “capturing militia groups which storms the base,” conducting “funerals for mock-victims” and “starting riots near the main base gate (friendly Cubans).” When Moore said that United States citizens demanded the President order the “cessation of military actions,” including the “despicable spy flights,” he was referring to United States military actions in Cuba. According to Radio Free Dixie, such actions would lead to the “annihilation of millions of [their] fellow countrymen and the devastation of many of [their] proud cities.” For black military soldiers to fight against other oppressed communities served not only to alienate and disrupt Cuban society but also to further marginalize black citizens at home as they continued to face racial discrimination even while fighting for national interests.

Thus fighting for a “big stick” policy abroad, while the United States “pursued a weak-kneed, do-nothing policy in the matter of the racial oppression of [their] people in the USA” underscored a crucial contradiction in the country’s politics. The lack of equality and legal protection against racial discrimination and brutality stood for everything opposite of the “so-called democracy” that the United States promoted abroad. “Racist America” had the “mistaken illusion” that “God [had] personally assigned the USA the task of policing and dictating the

263 Ibid, 2.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid, 7-8.
policies of the entire world." R. Williams also argued that the “master race complex” had influenced the belief that the United States’ “concept of justice and human relations [was] the standard that must be used by the entire world." Even though the United States promoted “peace” in the world, the nation also defined “peace” as the maintenance of submissive slaves, force and violence. As a result, its law was implemented “under the writ of kangaroo jurisprudence” while its teachings were “all things yankee.”

Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts on United States foreign policy added to growing criticisms of the Vietnam War but also to other United States military actions occurring abroad. Its critique of United States foreign policy, furthermore, claimed that the government’s justification for the war (i.e., to save the people of Vietnam from themselves) embodied its hypocrisy.

Not only did Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasters attempt to dissuade black men from fighting in the United States military, but they also sought to discourage other countries abroad from helping the United States fight its conflicts. The broadcasts underscored the contradictions between international support for the United States government, black soldiers dying for the nation, and the lack of black citizenship in the United States. For instance, on February 8, 1963, R. Williams accused the international world of not paying attention to the raping, maiming, and dehumanization of black people, as they were too busy with seeking friendship and mutual respect from the United States. He indicated that the “Negro, who, for four-hundred years wet nursed, saw to his comfort, performed the hardest, dirtiest tasks, built him an empire without just compensation, clandestinely bore his offspring and died on his battle fields both foreign and

269 Ibid.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid.
domestic, have never been accepted as a friend in a humane way." In an attempt to build solidarity, Williams suggested that if black people had not been accepted in their own nation, United States allies also would never be accepted. But as the world became increasingly aware of the quest for racial equality within the United States and the effects of the Vietnam War, Radio Free Dixie began to demonstrate that support was turning away from the United States government and moving toward the black struggle. On May 30, 1963, R. Williams contended that the “entire world [had] been shocked to learn that the nation seeking to lead it has a racist attitude equaled only by Nazi Germany and South Africa.”

Gaining international support became crucial for resisting United States military intervention abroad. On July 23, 1964, R. Williams told readers that “white supported and Government approved Negro leaders [were] being forced to denounce outside support as possible interference in America’s internal affairs” while the slaughter of black United States Americans continued. He claimed that it was time for the “just-minded peoples of the world to brand her as a barbaric, uncivilized, outlaw nation.” Initially, R. Williams perceived the radio program as an effective tool for getting important international figures on their side. One of the strategies that Williams used was to emphasize the increasing numbers of black soldiers who died overseas. On May 15, 1964, R. Williams argued that the “black man was the first to die in the U.S. Revolution, and yet, almost 200 years hence the black man is being asked to die in a phony white supremacy war of conquest in South Viet Nam, while he has less rights than a common street dog at

276 Ibid.
home.” A week later, R. Williams declared that the racist “beast Mr. Charlie” murdered black soldiers, unleashed police dogs on black people while simultaneously “arming and marching black men off to foreign battle fields like senseless robots.” He hoped that such claims aired over *Radio Free Dixie* would “shock Mr. Charlie” (in this case, anyone who represented white supremacy) into “reality.”

The criticisms against self-defense also symbolized United States hypocrisy. While R. Williams argued that the government’s actions justified the need for self-defense, he also pointed out that the United States and other leaders primarily supported nonviolence among black activists. On August 7, 1964, R. Williams argued that it was an insult to black people to deny them the right of self-defense while “ordering them to die in a war of white supremacy conquest waged by under the cloak of maintaining democracy, peace and security abroad.” For R. Williams, the denunciation of self-defense by public officials combined with the continuation of violence against people of color at home and abroad became another crucial element to the country’s hypocrisy. As he saw it, self-defense among black “freedom fighters” in the United States would expose the country’s racism to the world.

To further support the importance of self-defense and to illustrate the effect war had on black people, R. Williams declared that “black Americans” (along with white United States Americans) had made “sacrifices during the war for the cause of white supremacy.” Moreover,
he noted that the war “brought many shortages of consumer goods, some were not available at all and [they] did not complain because [they] felt this to be a necessity for the survival of what [they] thought to be democracy.” Here, R. Williams distinguished between United States democracy and “true democracy.” He highlighted that democracy in the United States consisted of a system in which “racist white men [were] free to rape, murder and starve our people with immunity of law.” On the other hand, black people had become engaged with a “true democracy” of equality and justice that would take less sacrifice than the “white man’s war to be the big dog of the world.”

Just as R. Williams’ editorials addressed the issue of black service, so did M. Williams’ news reports support this claim that black people had been dying for “their country,” while simultaneously feeling the repercussions of racism at home. For instance, on July 12, 1963, M. Williams read from an editorial published in Muhammad Speaks, a black militant newspaper. The editorial reported on a five-mile march (which was sponsored by the Harlem Anti-Colonial Committee) from Harlem to the United Nations meeting in New York. According to the news report, one sign that appeared during the march read: ‘To the United States Government – In memory of all black Americans who have died protecting the country which does not protect them.’ Over the course of the lifespan of Radio Free Dixie, M. Williams’ news reports persistently re-visited this idea that black men protected and defended the country while receiving nothing in return.

For instance, on April 17, 1964, she recited another news article that was published in the San Francisco Examiner on March 5, 1964, over the air. The article reported on a black soldier

283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
who was discharged from the army earlier that year.\textsuperscript{287} Charlie Pyatt, one of the “most publicized absent without leave draftees,” earlier that year wrote several letters to the editor, which “broadcasted his disenchantment with white democracy.”\textsuperscript{288} Pyatt’s letters, according to \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, was an example of a black soldier admitting to defend, not challenge, white supremacy. On another broadcast, before playing Charles Mingus’ song “Haitian Fight Song” and “Love Chant,” M. Williams read another letter written to a local board in Detroit, Michigan, that objected to the army draft. In his letter to local board No. 90, Charles Wallace Johnson Jr. claimed that he wanted “no part of this White Man’s army” that discriminated against “the black man.” Not only did black military fighters receive discrimination at home, but they also experienced racial prejudice while at war. Johnson declared that he “would not fight in the service of such a brutal, beastly white imperialist and racist aggressor nation.”\textsuperscript{289} Johnson further condemned the act of fighting his “non-white brothers in China, Africa and Latin America for white devils.” M. Williams’ reading of Johnson’s letter placed further emphasis on the contradictions of black military service. But Pyatt and Johnson’s letters also served to place emphasis on establishing, not splitting, black solidarity.

Who was to blame for the killing of non-white people and the ongoing racial discrimination black individuals experienced at home and abroad? \textit{Radio Free Dixie’s} broadcasts specifically targeted President John F. Kennedy’s administration for promoting white supremacist policies that allowed black soldiers to fight for a country that did little to redress their own concerns at home or abroad. R. Williams accused the president of recruiting black men to defend a democratic and “free world.” On February 15, 1963, R. Williams described the murder of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{287} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
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Roman Duckworth, a black colonel who was “gunned down by a white savage thug cop.”

Here, R. Williams criticized Kennedy for not seeing that “the conditions that led to the black soldier’s death be corrected so as to prevent a recurrence.” For R. Williams, Kennedy was just as guilty as the racist Ku Klux Klan and other racist white people for adopting a “do-nothing” policy in dealing with domestic racism. As Moore highlighted in his news section of the program, Kennedy was preoccupied with other foreign policy developments, including its use of Greenville, North Carolina, for broadcasting Washington’s Voice of America. According to Radio Free Dixie’s news report, Voice of America would air in the “Afro-Asian World, while the impoverished and discriminated Afroamerican freedom fighters, [were] without a voice in Kennedy’s America.” In March, R. Williams revisited the Kennedy administration’s goal of sending black people to kill North Vietnamese in the “name of a phony democracy” while thinking that that “barbaric South [had] a God-Given right to reduce the dignity of black humans to a level lower than common street dogs.”

Black publications like Ebony also further supported, not challenged, United States racist projects. In one instance, Radio Free Dixie accused Ebony (a national black magazine in the United States) for acting as a source of propaganda, as it supported United States imperialism in Africa. The editorial argued that the poverty of Africa contributed to the affluence of imperialist countries. According to M. Williams, Ebony enjoyed “the blessings of policy makers in the State Department and the financial support of U.S. big business,” and was “setting out boldly to enslave the mind of Africa with the cheap, dazzling propaganda of the American way of

291 Ibid.
292 Ibid.
Moreover, *Ebony* sought to emphasize an affluent society while forgetting about the “deplorable” conditions that plagued twenty million black people.\(^{296}\)

The administration’s hiring of black public officials also contributed to the inconsistencies between racist oppression at home and foreign policy. *Radio Free Dixie’s* broadcasts criticized those black citizens who benefited from such a system. Another broadcast that aired on March 15, 1962, further illustrated United States manipulation within the black community. Moore reported that John Frederick Thomas had been named the director of the Health, Education and Welfare Department’s Cuban refugee problem. According to *Radio Free Dixie*, this position included full responsibility of the facility in Miami, Florida. Moore reported that the “Kennedy Government [had] appointed this Negro, to serve Cuban counterrevolutionary criminals in segregated Miami, where he [could not] even use a public toilet because of his race.”\(^{297}\) The news report also highlighted recent events in Mississippi, where “thousands of Negro refugees from racist oppression, [were] starving to death, without arousing a stir from the hypocritical Kennedy Administration.”\(^{298}\)

On January 24, 1964, R. Williams commented on the hiring of Carl Rowan, whose third-class citizenship prevented him from the “right to use a public toilet.”\(^{299}\) Rowan’s job of explaining the “virtues of democracy,” for Williams, was the epitome of United States hypocrisy.\(^{300}\) He admitted that Rowan’s new job put him in an advanced position in society, but would mean nothing until the “racial barriers [were] lifted for all 20 million of [their] people.”\(^{301}\) R. Williams added that the appointments of black public officials deceived the “white world” on

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\(^{295}\) Ibid.

\(^{296}\) Ibid.


\(^{298}\) Ibid.


\(^{300}\) Ibid.

\(^{301}\) Ibid.
the status of black citizens. Instead, black people had to illustrate to the world the truth about the United States. R. Williams argued that it was “juvenile and ineffective for a racist government to join hands with klansmen, minutemen, Nazis and other racists in tracking down legally lynching black freedom fighters while appointing Negro apologists to explain the glory of so-called representative democracy.” He made sure to remind listeners that the same person who appointed Rowan (and other black public officials) to export democracy abroad sent other black activists to jail for fighting for democracy.

On February 14, 1964, R. Williams declared over the air that “black Americans” could not afford to “become a part of the deceit and brutality of the cold blooded, conquest-crazed U.S. government.” They could not allow themselves to “apologize for its crimes” against non-white people. R. Williams believed that if black people did intercede in non-white countries, they too would become the “object of the contempt and scorn building up throughout the world.” As a result, the Radio Free Dixie discouraged black public officials, along with black soldiers, from “cooperating” with the racists in Washington because their employment in the United States government signaled two important patterns. First, their presence in the government deceived people around the world, illustrating a racially peaceful nation instead of one filled with police brutality, lynching, segregation, and racial discrimination. For instance, in the radio program’s news highlights on March 6, 1964, Radio Free Dixie announced that the Johnson administration was doing everything it could to tone down news stories about “widespread discontent and demonstrations on the part of Afroamericans.”

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302 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
States media was being encouraged to “play up so called Negro gains.” Second, if black people continued to participate in the conquering of other non-white countries, they would lose the international support that the Civil Rights Movement would need to succeed.

The radio program did more than just highlight the gap between foreign policy and domestic issues. It also underscored the President Kennedy’s willingness to help some individuals primarily because of political interests (i.e., Cuban exiles) before it would address the starvation and unemployment of black Americans in the country. The broadcasts of Radio Free Dixie, therefore, highlights two discrepancies between the relationship between local and global politics. Radio Free Dixie re-framed the “double v” campaign by placing local and national priorities before global ones, even as the Williamses sought to globalize the local by intersecting these two spaces. In fact, a broadcast that aired on June 28, 1963, underscored the importance of saving the nation before turning to the outside world. R. Williams publically asked President Kennedy about his decisions to speak about democracy in the international community while failing to do the same in his own country: “Why is he not speaking of freedom in Washington instead of Berlin? Why is he not speaking to American racists in the US Congress instead of to Europeans? Mr. Kennedy says that Americans cannot be free unless Europeans are free. ... Free to do what?”

It was not that R. Williams argued democracy should not be achieved overseas. Instead, for R. Williams, a double victory of democracy abroad and at home was one that placed emphasis on the local and national civil rights struggle (since the best global strategy would be to discontinue the exportation of a “false” democracy around the world). On February 7, 1964, he

argued that justice and democracy would have to “start at home and spread abroad.”\textsuperscript{310}

Approximately a year later, on March 12, 1965, R. Williams continued to call for a similar approach, arguing that the “Johnson administration piously and hypocritically proclaimed to be defending democracy in far-away Indo-China and the Congo while supporting fascist terror and genocide against colored humanity in the very confines of its own borders.”\textsuperscript{311} Furthermore, he accused the United States of pretending to defend democracy abroad while “pursuing a policy of tyranny by terror at home.”\textsuperscript{312} Radio Free Dixie’s focus on promoting national struggle before a global one, however, in some ways contradicted its goal to intersect the local with the global.

The radio program’s broadcasts demonstrate that the attempt to place the local before the global was not necessarily dismissive of global concerns; instead, it became an effort to localize global issues, as imperialism was merely an extension of racism. In an editorial aired on November 23, 1962, R. Williams defined United States hypocrisy as the “apex of when it asks semi-slaves to shoulder the full responsibility of wars of conquest in times of crises and refuses to grant equal protection under law to these same oppressed peons in their domestic and peaceful pursuits of liberty and happiness.”\textsuperscript{313} This connection between United States interference, democracy, and military service ultimately reframed the earlier “double v” campaign by further blurring the lines between global and local oppression and highlighting the “illusion” of democracy. On February 8, 1963, R. Williams admitted that the “so-called friends of the USA [were] beginning to learn what many Afroamericans learned long ago.”\textsuperscript{314} These friends were learning that the “coexistence with the U.S. racist” meant “subjugation to a humble position of


\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.


the sole defense, enrichment and glorification of the USA.”315 Those nations that were considered friends of the United States, like Canada, France, and England, would have to submit to the country’s “mythological democracy.” According to Radio Free Dixie, as the United States was willing to pillage black communities within its own borders, it was not surprising that it would be willing to violate the national sovereignty of countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.316

‘No Mere Coincidences’: U.S. Racism and Imperialism

Not only did Radio Free Dixie indirectly re-visit the underlying foundations of the “double v” campaign that had appeared in black media during the early 1900s, but it also sought to extend the conversation about domestic race politics to the global community. To further discredit United States military action abroad, R. Williams asked readers to reflect on what they believed made the United States the “so-called Free World.” He argued that the only things in the United States free were “race hatred, oppression and police brutality.”317 This “so-called free world” was no more than a “savage beast to impose his law-of-the-jungle on the peoples of the world.”318 According to R. Williams, United States foreign policy was meant to spread “Birmingham-type justice and democracy to all comers of the earth.”319 It was “no mere coincidence” that the racist state advocated violent aggression against countries like Cuba and that the “Eastland of Mississippi or an Ellender of Louisiana would view free Cuba with the same contempt they hold for the Afro-American.”320 Violating the national sovereignty of a country

315 Ibid.
316 Ibid.
319 Ibid.
320 RFW, RFD B, Reel 11, August 10, 1962, RFW Papers, housed in Bentley Historical Library
like Cuba was reflective of Washington’s “mythological free elections,” racial injustice, and state violence.\footnote{Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, February 3, 1963, Reel 12.}

Support from the Ku Klux Klan was what made the United States government even more of a “savage beast.” The Williamses accused both Kennedy and Johnson’s administrations of promoting foreign policies that aligned with white racists. For example, on November 12, 1965, Radio Free Dixie reported that robed Klansmen (“so-called patriotic group of Christian Americans”) were holding massive rallies in Austin, Texas in support for the Vietnam War.\footnote{Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, November 10, 1965, Reel 13.} The rallies advocated for the “extermination of all Asians who resist the so-called democratic and peace loving forces of Christian White America.”\footnote{Ibid.}

R. Williams contended that the brutality Kennedy’s administration practiced on black Americans in the United States was “ready for export.”\footnote{Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, May 22, 1964, Reel 13.} The government’s “handy-work” was evident throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. United States power, therefore, was manifested in its interference and imperialism around the world. On May 22, 1964, R. Williams argued that “Mr. Charlie [the United States government] considered himself a divining power in a world created for his exclusive prosperity and self-aggrandizement.”\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, the racist and imperialist administration insisted that it alone was capable of selecting the types of government under which people were to live. Its principle, according to R. Williams, was the “principle” of imperialism.\footnote{Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, microfilm, August 10, 1962, Reel 11.} As a result, the government established its foreign policy as “world law.”
From 1962 to 1963, Moore’s news highlights helped support R. Williams’ larger goal of intersecting local politics with global conflicts. His reports often reported on international events further demonstrating the role of the United States around the world. On August 9, 1963, Moore reported that the country had “won another racist victory” in the United Nations as it had successfully led the “colonial block of nations into preserving South Africa’s and Portugal’s seats in the U.N.”\textsuperscript{327} As such, Moore claimed that the United States was “the most formidable champion of international racism,” as it effectively pressured the United Nations to keep the Republic of China out of this international organization.

\textit{Radio Free Dixie} also aired several press releases that furthered the radio program’s goal of spreading the “truth” about racial discrimination and state repression at home and abroad. In a press release on March 12, 1965, \textit{Radio Free Dixie} stated that “the savage brutality being unleashed against black humanity in the Free World of Alabama and throughout racist America [was] symbolic of the type of democracy she [was]” practicing in “the non-Anglo Saxon and non-Aryan peoples of the world.”\textsuperscript{328} This month marked an important time for the Civil Rights Movement at home, as civil rights activist John Lewis led a march in Selma, Alabama, as part of the voter registration campaign formed by the SNCC and SCLC.\textsuperscript{329} The march, which became known as “Bloody Sunday,” ended in an assault on black protesters by the state police. Following the United States media capturing of the violence against black protesters, Congress finally passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Regardless of outcomes like the Voting Rights Act, highlighting the victimization of black protesters by the state was one of the program’s many strategies for galvanizing support.

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid.
from the international world. *Radio Free Dixie* indicted the United States handling of violence against black citizens:

The savagery of the American social system, the conscience of her jungle society and her concept of law, order, justice, morality and human rights stand bare and naked before the entire world. In the free world of the much boasted about representative democracy of self-righteous America, black humanity is being gassed, gunned down, and dragged through the streets like slaughtered cattle simply because they beg for human rights.\(^{330}\)

Such comments warned that the country’s treatment of its own citizens would naturally extend to the rest of the world. The press release added that the United States was “out to add the entire colored population of the world to its stockyard of human bondage.”\(^{331}\) *Radio Free Dixie* equated these foreign policy actions to the local politics of the government. Alabama was no anomaly; it merely represented Washington’s dominant political consensus against people of color at home and abroad.\(^{332}\) Such actions led R. Williams to believe it was important to speak the “truth” to the world in order to garner international attention. On September 6, 1963, he told his listeners that they must inform the world about their suffering and their lives under the type of democracy the United States practiced.\(^{333}\)

On August 9, 1963, M. Williams read over the air a message that R. Williams sent to a rally in support of the “Negro” struggle in Peking, China. In his message, R. Williams linked black oppression to imperialism: “Our enemy is becoming more brutal and savage. He is fast abandoning all human codes of morality as he fanatically tries to stem the tide of the revolting black masses and their allies. The racist USA is a menace and a threat to the peace, security and

\(^{330}\) Ibid.
\(^{331}\) Ibid.
well-being of the whole world.”334 He added that the “enemy and the oppressor of the AfroAmerican is an enemy to the entire civilization world.”335 For R. Williams, black people from the United States shared a common enemy “in the personification of the racist reactionary of North America and his imperialist government” with people living in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.336 In fact, it would be only natural for black people to join hands with the oppressed and colonized world.337

For R. Williams, the quest for national sovereignty among Latin American, African, and Asian nation-states was similar to the search for self-determination and “dignified” sovereignty among black people.338 As a result, the radio program often reported on international events around the world. While actual effectiveness cannot be proven, such a strategy attempted to consolidate black Americans’ interests and causes with those around the world through the radio program’s political discourse. When non-United States public officials, therefore, seemed to do the opposite by positioning themselves as friends of the government, Radio Free Dixie made sure to broadcast the news. For instance, a week before Radio Free Dixie began airing three times a week in 1963, Moore reported on Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt’s visit to Washington: “More plans of naked aggression against Revolutionary Cuba and subversion for Latin America, was the end result of the Kennedy-Betancourt Pow Wow.”339 The short news highlight accused Betancourt of acting as “Kennedy’s chief puppet” in Latin America.

335 Ibid.
336 Ibid.
In addition to Cuba, as the Vietnam War heightened during the 1960s, *Radio Free Dixie* began to comment more on United States military strategies against the people of Vietnam. In a news highlight, Moore reported on a growing number of black leaders who began to condemn Kennedy’s administration for using poisonous gases as a military strategy in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{340} In comparing the United States to Nazi Germany, Moore stated that “Hitler and his fellow fascist conspirators used poison gas to exterminate the so-called inferior races.”\textsuperscript{341} Black leaders, according to Moore, also highlighted that United States foreign policy could turn the country’s “racist vengeance of wholesale murder onto the home front” when they felt time was right.\textsuperscript{342} The United States, therefore, practiced white supremacist politics not only at home but also abroad. On March 22, 1963, R. Williams accused Kennedy’s administration over the air for murdering “thousands of helpless colored women and children in South Viet-Nam” while the “wretched voices of the distressed black Americans fell on Mr. Kennedy’s deaf ears.”\textsuperscript{343} Kennedy, instead, was too busy acting as a “little Ceaser” losing himself to his “dreams of world conquest.”\textsuperscript{344} On August 23, 1963, *Radio Free Dixie’s* news highlights made sure to further condemn military intervention in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{345} The radio program reported that South Vietnam’s ambassador to the United States told reporters that he would resign from his position because he could no longer support the policies of the United States government.\textsuperscript{346} The report highlighted the Diem government’s use of martial law and “terrorism” against Buddhist priests and their followers.\textsuperscript{347} Accusing the United States government of supporting the “regime’s” practices even as the people

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.
of South Vietnam rejected it, the news report stated that the Diem government was the “USA’s 
contribution to representative democracy in South East Asia.”

On November 26, 1965, Radio Free Dixie went further in its condemnation of United States foreign policy. M. Williams issued a statement that said “Radio Free Dixie joined with the international peace forces in condemning the racist and imperialist U.S. government for pursuing a Hitler-like escalation policy of savage warfare that arbitrarily threatens the peace and security of the entire world.” Radio Free Dixie added its voice in “fellowship with and support of the” march for peace on Washington that would happen a day later on November 27. M. Williams’ broadcast called for “North Americans” to support the peace march and petition the Vietnam War, arguing that peace in Vietnam would save the lives of Vietnamese people and North Americans. In a moment of solidarity, Radio Free Dixie followed its broadcast with Vietnamese songs “Love Message” and “March of the Popular Army.”

Moreover, the United States’ foreign policy not only violated the national sovereignty of Vietnam, but it also presented dire consequences for people living in Africa. On January 3, 1964, M. Williams read over the air a report about emerging independent African nations that had begun to coincide with a “determined drive by the U.S. finance capital to gain a foothold in every African state and thereby dominate the African continent.” The significance of this editorial lies in its critique of United States capitalism, and in fact, was one of the few instances where Radio Free Dixie took a hard stance against United States capitalism. The report condemned the “multi-billionaires of Wall Street” who envisioned Africa as a “second Latin America.”

348 Ibid.
350 Ibid.
351 Ibid.
352 Ibid.
353 Ibid.
The methods that the United States began to employ, according to the radio program, included controlling the economy and military arrangements of sovereign African nations. To further illustrate United States influence in Africa (even if such influence was represented by United States black Americans), in the same broadcast, *Radio Free Dixie* aired a news report highlighting that *Ebony* and *Jet* would be launched in 24 African countries with the establishment of sales and advertising offices in Paris, London, and New York. Operating offices also could be found in ten English-speaking and fourteen French-speaking countries.

The strategy of United States imperialism was to promote “its interests in Africa by using American Negroes.” The staffing of black people in their information centers, embassies, and in the United States Peace Corps, as well as the employment of *Ebony* helped the government “continue their onslaught on Africa.” One of the purposes behind United States imperialism was to use people of color to justify its practices on other non-white communities abroad. In the same broadcast, *Radio Free Dixie* called on “Africa” to awaken and called on his listeners to tell the truth: “We are not engaged in a color fight.” The African Revolution, according to M. Williams would help destroy imperialism even as it would continue to “parade” under “black skin.”

At the same time that *Radio Free Dixie* underscored intervention in Africa, it also illustrated its involvement in another country where United States economic interests reigned. On January 9, 1964, known as the “Day of the Martyrs,” Panamanian students marched to Balboa High School (which was located in the Canal Zone with a raised United States flag) to hoist the Panamanian flag. When students reached the entrance of the high school, they found a crowd of

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354 Ibid.
356 Ibid.
357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
2000 “zonians” (supporters of United States occupation of the Panama Canal). As “zonians” attempted to destroy the Panamanian flag that students held in their hands, the protest rapidly turned into a violent encounter between the supporters of United States occupation and proponents of Panamanian sovereignty in the Canal Zone. As a result, approximately twenty-two Panamanians died.

Almost a week later, on Radio Free Dixie M. Williams stated in a news highlight\(^{359}\) that the “oppressive and racist power of the U.S. armed forces, [had] introduced Birmingham justice to the small nation of Panama” as United States “mobsters unleashed a savage massacre against the defenseless patriots of the Yankee ravished nation after they protested their flag being trampled under the feet of North American chauvinists.”\(^{360}\) The news highlight reported that the incident revealed the “truth” about United States hypocrisy. As a result, “justice-loving peoples around the world” were fighting against the “brutal and cold blooded repression” of the “patriots of Panama.” In the same broadcast, Jo Ann Salas condemned Andrew Hatcher, assistant White House press secretary, who was assigned to speak on Panama in a “maneuver to off-set any criticism of racists dealings on the part of Uncle Sam in the Canal Zone.”\(^{361}\) Hatcher’s purpose, in other words, was to avoid any criticisms that would highlight United States foreign practices as racist.\(^{362}\)

In addition to the Williamses illustrating how domestic racism directly connected to and, in some ways, explained foreign policy toward non-white countries, they also utilized their program to highlight international events that gave the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power

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\(^{359}\) In 1963, Carlos Moore left Cuba and went into exile. His news highlights continued to air over Radio Free Dixie through the voices of M. Williams and other broadcasters, such as Jo Ann Salas and “Selma” (information about the latter two broadcasters is not available).


\(^{361}\) Ibid.

Movement impetus for continuing their struggle. *Radio Free Dixie* frequently reported on events that illustrated how countries like Cuba and China, and international organizations showed support for the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement in the United States. For instance, on April 12, 1963, Moore reported on the unanimous adoption of a draft declaration in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that condemned racial discrimination around the world.  

According to the radio program, a growing non-white global community consisted of nation-states that had either successfully fought or were trying to fight United States imperialism. In a broadcast aired over *Radio Free Dixie* on November 30, 1962, Carlos Moore argued that a “world alliance” was developing to “internationally expose the racism of the U.S.”

International events like the Cuban Revolution “violently” rejected United States interference. An example is on November 2, 1962, Carlos Moore reported on Fidel Castro’s five-point plan, which called for an end to the economic embargo against Cuba, a stop to covert military operations (“subversive activities”) by the United States, the end of attacks carried out from bases in Puerto Rico and the United States, an end to interferences of air and naval space, and the removal of the naval base at Guantanamo (as well as the return of Guantanamo to the Cubans). Five days after a rally was held in Central Park in Havana, Cuba, *Radio Free Dixie* reported on it. The radio program described it as a march by North Americans, Latin Americans, Asians, Africans, and Cubans who carried signs denouncing the oppression of freedom fighters in Birmingham, Alabama and the rest of the South. It also reported that a

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366 Ibid.
representative from the South Vietnam Liberation Front, a Nicaraguan labor union leader, and Robert F. Williams addressed the rally.

Aside from reporting on international news, the radio station also made sure to highlight tours of activists in Cuba, especially university students. On August 9, 1963, *Radio Free Dixie* reported on the arrival of fifty-nine university students from the United States in Havana.\(^{367}\) These highlights further illustrated support for the Cuban Revolution among United States Americans. According to *Radio Free Dixie*, the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution itself also was a cause to celebrate on July 26, 1963. R. Williams aired a special broadcast dedicated to the revolution:

> We have just witnessed a great occasion in Cuba. The 26\(^{th}\) of July is the day of the great commemoration of the glorious, but solemn day when the forces of liberation set themselves to the task of sweeping the tyranny of Batistaism from the island of Cuba. This is a solemn date because Cuba lost some of her most noble sons in the sacred cause of freedom. The butchers and hench men of the Batista tyranny gloated over the defeat of these gallant patriots.\(^{368}\)

In the same broadcast, the radio program highlighted the arrival of students and reporters who had defied the United States’ ban on travel to Cuba.

The tri-continental conference in Havana from January 3-12 in 1966 became another event that focused on showing global support for international movements occurring throughout the non-white world.\(^{369}\) On January 21, 1966, *Radio Free Dixie* aired the Tri-Continental


\(^{369}\) Even while R. Williams was not allowed to attend the Tri-Continental Conference due to conflicts between him and Cuban officials, nevertheless, he and M. Williams decided to discuss it over the airwaves.
Conference’s adoption resolution on the human rights of “Afro-Americans.” According to M. Williams, the resolution stated that the “first Afro-Asian-Latin American People’s Solidarity Conference” considered “racist violence, brutally and indiscriminately unleashed against black men, women and children and white humanists who sympathize with them, to be but another aspect of North American Imperialism.” Furthermore, the resolution stated that the black struggle against racial oppression in the United States was becoming “sharper,” and more “violent,” while black communities increasingly linked their struggles to the oppression and exploitation of Latin American, Asian and African people. According to the resolution, the uprisings of Watts in Los Angeles in the summer of 1965 occurred in solidarity with the Vietnamese “brothers.”

Moments of solidarity between Cuba, the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement also extended to the rest of the African Diaspora and the continent itself. Radio Free Dixie reported on the meeting of the African Nations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. According to the news highlights, the meeting “condemned the brutal racial oppression unleashed on Negroes in Birmingham and other terror-ridden States of the South of the U.S.” Apparently, African leaders had sent a message to President Kennedy, calling him to put a stop to the violence in southern states. The report stated that Presidents Kwame N’kruhuma (of Ghana), Ahmed Sekou Toure (of Guinea), Gamal Abdul Nasser (of Egypt), and Ahmed Ben Bella (of Algeria) were present at the meeting and pledged support to “their oppressed negro brothers” in the United States. Some news also highlighted the protests of police brutality in other countries. On August 9, 1963, a news highlight reported that Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs Alexander

371 Ibid.
372 Ibid.
374 Ibid.
Bustamente asked Jamaica’s ambassador in Washington to protest the United States’ treatment of a Jamaican doctor who was beaten by the New Orleans Police Department. In the same broadcast, Radio Free Dixie reported that Africa’s liberation movement officially issued a “declaration of support” for the black struggle in the United States, condemning violence against black people and announcing that the “African people” would not forget nor forgive racist acts against black Americans.

Not too long before Radio Free Dixie closed, it aired a statement release regarding Rhodesia. This time, it was African students in Cuba who condemned a declaration of Zimbabwe’s independence by “white settlers.” In the 1960s, conflicts between emerging African leaders (Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe) and Prime Minister of Rhodesia Ian Smith (who had founded a new party based on white supremacist policies) led to a proposal requesting that the British government grant Rhodesia independence based on white minority rule. Witnessing the development of the racist, colonial policies from afar, African students called for Britain to send troops to Zimbabwe, stating that “British imperialism [was] not qualified to liberate the Zimbabwe people.” The release referred to the British settlers as the imperialists, arguing that Zimbabwe Africans had suffered “racial discrimination and ferocious exploitation” by British settlers. Furthermore, they argued that it was not the responsibility of colonialists to “collaborate in the liberation of colonized peoples.” Instead, the responsibility naturally fell to the Zimbabwe Africans. While the statement furthered one of the goals of R. Williams—self-determination for black people—it also supported Radio Free Dixie’s aims to show the

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376 Ibid.
connection between racism and Western imperialism. This time, the relationship between Great Britain (not the United States) and Zimbabwe was the topic. Still, the broadcast underscored the connection between local (Zimbabwe), regional Africa) and global (African students in Cuba) politics. The radio broadcast represented one of very few moments that directly referred to the political sentiments of Afro-Cubans on the island.

Of course, the incident in Zimbabwe also allowed R. Williams to give his own perspective in 1965. Not surprisingly, he took the opportunity to accuse the United States of promoting “sheer hypocrisy of the vilest form.” The government’s opposition to the “racist white minority government in Rhodesia” did not reflect its own local and national racist environment. In fact, according to Williams, “many U.S. southern counties, where black people were brutally lynched, terrorized, exploited and savagely dehumanized, were violently ruled by white minorities.” For instance, a majority of United States citizens (black individuals) lacked the right to vote, an unconstitutional policy. Racist politicians in Washington were placed in office due to situations that were similar to those of Rhodesia. The racist state, therefore, was just as guilty for oppressing and repressing a large group of people as the white Rhodesian government.

While R. Williams provided many of his own critiques of the United States, the radio program’s broadcasters also needed international support for their messages to stick. As a result, Radio Free Dixie highlighted international radio stations and newspapers that expressed solidarity and criticisms against United States racism. In a response to the imprisonment of civil rights activist Mae Mallory who had participated in the freedom rides of Monroe, North Carolina, in 1961 (the incident that forced the Williamses to flee the United States), the Ghana Evening News

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urged the United States to consider the implications of her trial. Radio Free Dixie read from the editorial, repeating the following quote: “Despite the protests of hundreds of thousands of AfroAmericans and sympathetic whites, the officials of Ohio are preparing to surrender Mrs. Mallory to North Carolina, a Southern state where no person of African descent can receive a fair trial.” The brief news highlight also repeated the editorial’s argument that Africa was “vitally concerned with the plight of [their] AfroAmerican brothers and sisters.” According to the program, the Ghana Evening News noted that the surrender of Mae Mallory to the courts in North Carolina would “shame” the United States and would further contradict its image of being the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” Because the United States also acted as a white supremacist government, it had a vested interest in continuing racist rule in Rhodesia, thus opposing any kind of force by black leaders in Rhodesia as it did in the South.

News outlets in Africa and the Diaspora were not the only ones to demonstrate support for the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. On August 23, 1963, M. Williams read on air a news release from Xinjua News Agency from Peking, China. The news release reported that a Chinese rally, which occurred on August 12, 1963, in support of United States civil rights, had received a message of thanks from R. Williams. He publically thanked the “universal appeal made in [their] behalf, and in the cause of justice and humanity by your great revolutionary leader Mao Tsetung.” In an attempt to further link the fight against racism to Asian struggles against imperialism, R. Williams stated that the most militant of our people are fast learning that the brutal racist savages who subject our terrorized women and children to ferocious dogs, policemen’s clubs, fire hoses, bombs

382 Ibid.
383 Ibid.
384 Ibid.
court frame-ups and racist snipers bullets, are also the imperialist who gas, rain death and destruction on, and are waging a brutal campaign of extermination against the helpless women and children of South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{386}

On another occasion, the radio station aired the commentary of a Pyongyan newspaper, \textit{Rodong Shinmoon}, which supported the black struggle against United States imperialism and racial discrimination. By the summer of 1965, the uprisings of Watts in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York had gained international attention. \textit{Rodong Shinmoon} surmised that these uprisings had occurred “as an outburst of the pent-up indignation at racism in the United States and reflected the American peoples stern protest against the policy of the Johnson administration which [was] clinging to its policy of aggression and war.”\textsuperscript{387} \textit{Radio Free Dixie} continued to revisit the significance of China’s support in its later years. On August 17, 1965, M. Williams read over the air a report on the statement of Premier Chou En-Lai of China who expressed support for “North American Negroes” on August 17, 1965.\textsuperscript{388} The statement included En-Lai’s denouncement of the “imperialist yankee policy of racial discrimination, aggression and war.”\textsuperscript{389}

Support from international institutions allowed \textit{Radio Free Dixie} to highlight the gap between United States foreign and domestic policy. As nation-states from the “Third World” continued to fight United States imperialism, they often reached out to black Americans, who also struggled against a racist Empire. This aspect of \textit{Radio Free Dixie}’s story underscores how its messages blurred the lines between United States racism and imperialism. The program emphasized not only the link between racism and imperialism, but it also argued that repression

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{389} Ibid.
was most profound in the one place that most people believed was “free.” Such messages meant to “shock” people into learning the “truth” about the “so-called Free World.”

On May 30, 1963, R. Williams described his experience of “accidentally” picking up on a radio station owned by the Jefferson Standard Broadcasting Company of Charlotte, North Carolina. On this station, the company’s manager Allan Newcomb, “some sort of an expert on Negroes and Communism,” provided his readers with an analysis of a Radio Moscow broadcast that denounced United States racism. R. Williams stated that Newcomb was “out on cloud Jim Crow trying to tell dark cats how much better off they [were] in the racist USA than Russian citizens [were] in the Soviet Union.” In an effort to compare United States racism with Russian politics, he asked his listeners:

Have you ever heard of Russian citizens being lynched by racist mobs simply because their skin may be darker than their fellow countrymen? Have you ever heard of 30,000 Russian babies being taken of the relief roles in one city alone because they belong to a minority race? Have you ever heard of a Soviet soldier being gunned down by mad-dog killer cops because he refused to move to the rear of a racially segregated bus?

R. Williams undermined Newcomb’s criticisms of the Soviet Union by juxtaposing racism to communism, questioning the idea that anyone would want to leave Russia to live in a racist state. Of course, it is not that R. Williams believed that living in communism was better than enduring a racist state; instead, he merely sought to deconstruct the United States narrative that defined democracy as the “good” and communism as “evil.” He suggested that Newcomb’s radio broadcasts capitalized on the ignorance of Soviet life. Adopting a United States-based narrative,

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391 Ibid.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid.
Newcomb denounced communism while praising United States democracy, which precisely reflected the inherent contradictions of the country’s domestic practices and its foreign policies.

**Transnationalizing, Racializing and “De-classing” Imperialism**

As the Williamses attempted to re-interpret the “double v” campaign in relation to the Vietnam War and other United States foreign policies (including its covert military strategies toward Cuba), he sought to explain imperialism through the lens of racism. As Norman Fairclough suggests in *Analysing Discourse*, social agents “texture texts” and set up relations between elements of texts.” In the making of meaning, the Williamses as social agents “put existing expressions into a new relation of equivalence as co-instances of “negative culture.” In the case of *Radio Free Dixie*, the broadcasters used previous meanings (imperialism as a class-based phenomena) and historical relationships between local and global politics (double v campaign) to further illustrate the dire consequences of United States foreign and domestic policy on black citizens.

In its re-framing of the “double v” campaign, *Radio Free Dixie* highlighted several connections: 1.) the Williamses underscored the relationship between black military service and United States foreign policy, arguing that black men and other black leaders should not participate in the “white supremacist” wars of the nation; 2.) their commentaries and news highlights also discredited United States democracy by highlighting the “truths” behind the country’s domestic and global politics; 3.) “real” democracy would start at home where civil rights struggles would become a priority for the United States government (and “true” democracy abroad would mean the decline of its power and intervention around the world).

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395 Ibid.
Still despite the program’s call for a focus on democratizing local politics, the Williamses remained determined to link local politics to global issues. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, the author notes that “basic content is conditioned by specific sociohistorical destinies … by the destinies of ideological discourse and by those particular historical tasks that ideological discourse has fulfilled in specific social spheres and at specific stages in its own historical development.”

Here, the author argues that *Radio Free Dixie* represented an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideological discourse that could be found within the historical context of Cold War politics. In many ways, *Radio Free Dixie* could not only limit its critiques to the domestic policies occurring at home for two main reasons: 1.) the Williamses’ physical location in Cuba forced them to deal with their immediate environment and make sense of what their experiences meant regarding race at home; 2.) events in Vietnam, Cuba, and other African nations pointed not to class struggle (capitalism versus communism) but global racial violence practiced by the United States. The radio program’s destiny could not escape a critique of global politics. In fact, it had to make meaning of international practices by using what was personal and local: racism. Global struggles (such as the Cuban Revolution, protests in Panama as well as the liberation movements in Africa and the Asian continents) underscored the importance of local politics. Imperialism, essentially, was framed as a local practice, one that extended United States white supremacy. Therefore, understanding the relationship between language and history through a Bakhtinian approach helps highlight how *Radio Free Dixie* globalized the local and localized the global.

Furthermore, a Bakhtinian lens also underscores the “socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past” which “intersect in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying ‘languages.’”

The discussion between the local and global found in *Radio Free Dixie*,

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397 Ibid, 291.
therefore, raises an important question about how the Williamses situated both spaces, revealing a contradiction between their intentions and actual outcomes. In some moments, it seemed that the Williamses were calling for the disengagement of the United States around the world and for a re-engagement with local and national politics, primarily in relation to black citizenship. Yet, at the same time, *Radio Free Dixie* also sought to directly link the local with the global to join a larger movement that not only called for civil rights at home but also one that eliminated United States imperialism. The linkages between race and imperialism, therefore, allowed the Williamses and other broadcasters to join a transnational movement filled with solidarity and division, but one that nevertheless connected an international struggle against United States imperialism to the Civil Rights Movement and BPM.

As mentioned in chapter two, transnationalism has been broadly defined as the ties and interactions that have connected people and institutions across the borders of nation-states. In this case, *Radio Free Dixie* tied the Williamses and other broadcasters to movements occurring in multiple locations simultaneously: the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the various liberation movements around the world. Additionally, its project of intersecting the global with the local helped spread a diasporic conversation about black identity and struggle across the Atlantic region but also in those places not traditionally considered part of the African Diaspora. The Asian continent became just as closely related to United States imperialism as Latin America and Africa. They, too, were non-white people who had been exploited by a white supremacist institution. A collective memory of black struggle in the United States and around the world, therefore, created a vision and a “new map of desire and attachment.”

*Radio Free Dixie* as a transnational medium also meant that it served as a site for cultural production through its music and commentary on black solidarity as well as a location for political engagement where local and global politics became intermeshed and inseparable with
national issues. The Williamses’ conscious calls for black solidarity (as they called for international support while also adopting specific rhetorical strategies designed to underscore local and global contradictions) and their linkages of United States foreign policy to state racism helped “transnationalize” the radio program; thus, *Radio Free Dixie* became an important symbol located in the crossroads of a historical moment filled with political strife and struggles for power.

*Radio Free Dixie*, however, focused only on certain aspects of these movements, primarily the racial component. The program attempted to use the local civil rights movement to racialize a global anti-imperialist movement. The fact that *Radio Free Dixie* did not attempt to highlight class struggle in its broadcasts even as it addressed Western imperialism abroad indicates an attempt to “de-class” an anti-imperialist argument. Anti-colonial and anti-imperial arguments have largely focused on highlighting the ways in which Western nation-states (i.e., the United States and Western Europe) economically (and politically) undermined those countries that had once been colonized by imperial powers via military intervention, economic liberalization, and political control; thus, arguments against imperialism contended that the maintenance of Western domination throughout the world led to more dependency and less opportunity for democratic development and economic growth. The anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist messages that often aired over *Radio Free Dixie*, however, failed to provide this class critique.

Instead, the radio program racialized imperialism, primarily by arguing that United States imperialism was merely an extension of its white supremacist policies, not necessarily one that sought to solely maintain its economic interests. *Radio Free Dixie* did not connect race with class; instead, in many ways, blackness (or any other non-white status), not class, was what influenced United States imperialism around the world. Because of local racist policies, it was no “mere coincidence” that the United States would want to export the same policies abroad. While *Radio
Free Dixie did at times discuss the relationship between race and class, it mainly undermined the class component of traditional anti-imperialist arguments. Radio Free Dixie, thus, re-defined imperialism as primarily a racist project rather than as one that intersected class and race. While some scholars have suggested that the late 1960s experienced a shift where black radicalism became intertwined with socialism—creating a New Left Movement and a “Third World Marxist” movement—the earlier roots of black radicalism that had begun with R. Williams remained attached to Garvey-like arguments, placing racial politics before class consciousness.

In its initial phase, however, Radio Free Dixie praised those socialist-based revolutions, particularly the Cuban Revolution, that had successfully fought United States influence. Perhaps the Williamses’ conflicts with the Cuban government, however, influenced their decision not to endorse class politics as R. Williams was coming to believe that Cuba may not have been the racially egalitarian society that he initially thought. These tensions, however, are further explored in chapter five, as the Williamses’ discussions of Cuban race relations and their relationship to the Cuban government became increasingly contentious. A more detailed conversation, therefore, will illuminate the Williamses’ interpretation of a cultural, political system that had its own history of black politics. Yet, the Cuban Revolution remained central to the program’s messages precisely because its strategies were useful for creating another type of revolution. Only this time, the revolution would focus on racial equality, not class solidarity.

How did the Williamses racialize struggle and promote black rebellion? The racialization of imperialism also points to a significant moment in history: one in which socialist revolutions continued to demonstrate, to R. Williams in particular, that an armed black rebellion was possible in the United States. For R. Williams, it became extremely important to borrow from those movements that used self-defense and guerilla warfare strategies to fight United States

intervention. Such strategies provided black citizens with a model that could be mirrored in the local struggle for civil rights. *Radio Free Dixie*, therefore, re-appropriated socialist revolutions by primarily adopting only those elements that were helpful for establishing a race-based revolution. While such a strategy de-classed global revolutionary politics, it also “Americanized” the black revolution that *Radio Free Dixie*’s broadcasts imagined. As the next chapter suggests, R. Williams attempted to create a revolution inspired from the historical legacies of United States independence and the outside world.
Chapter 4

“In the Spirit of ’76: Venceremos!!”

“He used to tell a story about George Washington going out fighting and then returning to Mount Vernon to live out his days as a gentleman farmer and he said ‘I [R. Williams] would like to have in our race somebody who struggled against the system and went to Mount Vernon.’ In fact, R. Williams often signed his broadcast editorials evoking the American Revolution of 1776 but also the victory of the Latin American revolutions: “Yes, in the spirit of ’76 let our battle cry be heard around the world—Liberty, Liberty, Liberty or death—Venceremos!!” The fact that Radio Free Dixie integrated both national and international revolutionary politics using the American Revolution and the popular battle cry of Latin America “Venceremos” (“We shall overcome”) illustrates the program’s tendency to move in-between borders; indeed, at times, it privileged national history over international influences. Yet, it also sought to borrow revolutionary strategies, particularly practices of self-defense, from the global South. This chapter will discuss how Radio Free Dixie couched self-defense within a national and international context via two main themes: 1.) self-defense as a successful strategy in both national and international politics; 2.) self-defense as the “American” way.

R. Williams frequently told listeners that it “was better to live just 30 seconds, walking upright in glorious dignity, then to live a thousand years crawling at the foot of our oppressors, dehumanized and banished from the race.” The United States American Revolution as well as international social movements like the Cuban Revolution of 1959 served as examples of anti-colonial movements that used armed rebellion for gaining independence from their colonial and imperial oppressors. R. Williams believed that the ideals of the American Revolution and those

that fell outside of the United States’ borders could be used for establishing a black revolution committed to fighting the internal colonization of black people living in the country. Yet at times, *Radio Free Dixie* also framed outside influences as ineffective. According to the Williamses, nonviolence represented a movement that did not fit the United States context.

As *Radio Free Dixie* re-appropriated both national and international revolutionary movements, it also underscored the role of state racism and repression in people’s everyday lives. To illustrate why self-defense served as the “American” way, *Radio Free Dixie* highlighted reports on police brutality and the practice of violence against civil rights activists and black communities. Racist and violent occurrences, therefore, justified the need for self-defense and self-determination among black citizens. R. Williams often called people to fight against white supremacist violence: “We must be willing to sacrifice, yes, we must be willing to die, yes, but we must also be willing to stain our hands with the blood of our cruel and savage oppressor.”

*Radio Free Dixie* framed self-defense as a nonviolent strategy precisely because it placed focus on protection, while defining the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement as an outside, hypocritical movement. The program asked why opponents of self-defense condemned “meeting violence with violence” when white racist people violently repressed and attacked black people. *Radio Free Dixie* illustrated the ineffectiveness of nonviolence by focusing on its contradictions. As public officials described self-defense strategies as violent and impractical, they also endorsed violence to export “democracy” around the world. The program, therefore, asked nonviolent proponents why they did not condemn state violence against other countries but denounced “violence” by black people. In fact, *Radio Free Dixie* stressed to its listeners that self-defense was not violent but a way to achieve self-determination (as the United States once realized).

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Radio Free Dixie’s promotions on self-defense, therefore, did more than just call for people to defend themselves and their communities. An analysis of the radio broadcasts shows that the radio program’s discourse of self-defense became central to a conversation about what was included in and excluded from the nation.\textsuperscript{402} Furthermore, its ideas of self-defense and self-determination did not only reflect an early transition to the Black Power Movement of the 1960s but it also reflected historical, national and international roots. As someone who saw himself as an internationalist, R. Williams drew on a variety of global struggles. He believed that “people shouldn’t be too extreme in either direction” and that they “should take the good from wherever [they] could find it.”\textsuperscript{403} Yet, he often highlighted the importance of adopting historical revolutionary roots specific to the United States and not those that came from elsewhere, including Mahatma Gandhi’s anti-colonial nonviolent movement in India. This story is about more than just promoting black revolution and self-defense; instead, the chapter highlights why Radio Free Dixie played an important role in re-imagining a revolution that ultimately included and excluded the rest.\textsuperscript{404}

Re-imagining the global and local: contentions in revolutionary politics

Following Louis Armstrong’s “Nobody knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” and M. Williams’ section on “Harlem Folklore” on August 30, 1962, R. Williams dedicated his editorial to

\textsuperscript{402} Self-defense strategies born from the American Revolution of 1776 were central to the nation (by right part of the United States’ history), while non-violence remained an “outside” influence that did not fit the United States context (thus, rendering it ineffective).

\textsuperscript{403} Robert F. Williams, interview by Night Call, CD. Robert F. Williams Papers housed in the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

\textsuperscript{404} Much of the histories on Robert F. Williams have discussed his role in promoting black revolution and self-defense in the United States. This story, however, argues that Radio Free Dixie did more than just promote black nationalist ideas. Historian Robin D. G. Kelley discusses how activists “imagined” a different world as they contributed to the various black social movements that occurred throughout the history of the United States This chapter, therefore, emphasizes that Radio Free Dixie re-imagined the revolution by integrating the national and international, further illustrating that self-defense went beyond a black nationalist approach.
commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. In an effort to place importance on the ideas of the Emancipation Proclamation, he announced “social change is the great generator of the force of liberation.” Social change, according to R. Williams, carried “in its wake great and painful upheaval” and cared very little for the selfish individual who conformed to the status quo.\footnote{Tyson, \textit{The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams}, microfilm, August 30, 1962, Reel 11.} Advertisements of R. William’s book \textit{Negroes with Guns} over \textit{Radio Free Dixie} further stressed the need for social change (in this case, an outcome of armed rebellion) in the United States. Carlos Moore’s news highlight section claimed that \textit{Negroes with Guns} would represent the black struggle just as Fidel Castro’s “history will absolve me” speech symbolized the Cuban liberation struggle of 1959. Here, two elements emphasized the need for a self-defense strategy based on both nationalism and transnationalism: 1.) United States history (i.e., Emancipation Proclamation) and 2.) Williams’ memoir, which Moore indicated would have a similar historical effect as Castro’s famous speech that followed the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

Exactly three months later, on November 30, 1962, R. Williams re-visited the tenets of the American Revolution: “Yes, the following words are indeed. We hold those truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness.”\footnote{Tyson, \textit{The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams}, microfilm, August 30, 1962, Reel 11.} Referring to Abraham Lincoln, he also suggested that black citizens follow “American” examples of liberty. Furthermore, he claimed that dignified individuals would actually prefer the words of Lincoln: “If by the mere force of numbers a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might, in any moral point of view, justify revolution.”\footnote{Ibid.} Not only did the American Revolution represent a historical tradition of using armed rebellion to resist colonial oppression, but so did Lincoln’s words in reference to the Civil War. The core values and ideals
of a long-celebrated hero in the United States (Abraham Lincoln) and the country’s anti-colonial history (the American Revolution of 1776), therefore, justified R. Williams’ calls to action.

Just as nonviolent proponents used the United States constitution to highlight the contradictions between the nation’s principles and its practices, so did Radio Free Dixie broadcasters. Except this time nonviolence would not be the answer to such inconsistencies. On March 8, 1963, he wrote that the “Afroamerican [had] suffered violent abuse and cruel dehumanization under the present government of the United States” and that they had “suffered these horrible injustices despite a constitution guaranteeing the human rights of all people.”

Even after the Civil War ensured liberty for slaves, black people continued to encounter racial injustices. Such actions by the state proved to R. Williams that a more forceful approach was needed. Underscoring the contradictions between the constitution and actual practices, he called people to militant action and not to nonviolent demonstrations. As much of the scholarship on the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement has illustrated, activists often attempted to use United States American ideals as a way to support resistance against Jim Crow and state racism. Radio Free Dixie contributed to a larger conversation that re-appropriated nationalist discourses by utilizing the country’s history and national foundation as a way to promote black rebellion and revolution.

The fact that the American Revolution failed to address racial equality, however, remained a problem. R. Williams, therefore, framed “their” revolution as the one that would correct the “insufficiencies” of the original one. Essentially, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements would “complete the process of the liberation of [their] homeland.” Radio Free Dixie called for a new version of the American Revolution of 1776, which initially “transferred

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409 Ibid.
410 Ibid.
the exploitation and oppression of [their] people to the hands of home grown tyrants and oppressors.” While the radio program sought to take some tenets from the “original” revolution, it also argued that the Civil Rights and Black Power movements would complete the process of liberation by bringing justice to black citizens. But despite the failures of the American Revolution, Williams saw it as an inspiration for civil rights freedom fighters: “Suppose the brave men of the U.S. Revolution had been intimidated by the strength of the British? The strength of freedom fighters must not be measured by quantity, but by quality, not by fear but by courage.”

The American Revolution represented incomplete revolutionary action, failing but also inspiring armed rebellion. Just as the constitution was incomplete but strategically utilized by black activists to justify the need for racial equality in the nation, the American Revolution also remained a nationalist symbol that would reach full circle with a movement that placed a similar focus on armed self-defense.

The historical legacy of United States independence, however, was not the only event that could inspire revolution. Not too far from the coast of the South was a country that resembled an entirely different political system also worth emulating. Referring to Cuba’s resistance against United States imperialism on May 3, 1963, R. Williams contended that the United States was preoccupied with enlisting black Americans to “hate” Cuba. He posed several questions about Cuba-United States relations: “Hating Cuba for what? Is it because Cuba is exercising her sovereign rights? Is it because Cuba refuses to segregate and jim crow her citizens on a racial basis?” He asked whether the United States government hated Cuba because of its equitable educational system or because of its refusal to establish a racist “representative democracy”

411 Ibid.
412 Ibid.
(which was prevalent in the U.S.). In contrast to mainstream perceptions about Fidel Castro, R. Williams refused to portray Castro as the enemy; instead, he argued that Governor Wallace of Alabama and the Kennedy administration should be feared and hated. The “Kennedy brothers” were the ones to “dispatch 500 FBI men to capture an innocent Freedom Fighter and official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people to surrender him to his lynch mob of the Ku Klux Klan.” Referring to himself, R. Williams recalled in his editorial that it was Fidel Castro who “offered him shelter from the savage racists of the USA.” Such a statement supported the idea that Castro’s island actually served as a haven for black people and not as the United States portrayed the country.

An analysis of Radio Free Dixie highlights several ways in which the radio program underscored the importance of a revolution based on a self-defense philosophy. First, R. Williams sought to differentiate United States racism and oppression from other nation-states’ policies. For example, Cuba represented a different type of system (following its armed rebellion that succeeded in overthrowing Fulgencio Batista in 1959) that was much more equitable, even while the United States framed it as oppressive toward its citizens. Therefore for R. Williams, self-defense could lead to racial egalitarianism. Second, he attempted to paint a picture for his listeners that imagined what a racially egalitarian society could look like. Third, he asked his listeners to consider where their battle lay: in Cuba or in the United States. For R. Williams, the battle for black Americans was in the United States and against the government, not one that fought for white supremacist policies overseas. Instead of helping the state export its racist policies abroad, he believed black Americans should join those oppressed nation-states in_

414 Ibid.
415 Ibid.
416 Ibid.
resisting the United States. Thus, such strategies reveal an ongoing conversation that illuminates how Radio Free Dixie couched self-defense within a transnational context.

In its early years of broadcasting, commemorations of the 26th of July movement (the organization that Fidel Castro and other revolutionary figures established on July 26, 1953 following the attack of Fort Moncada) in Cuba was one topic that Radio Free Dixie did not hesitate to praise. On July 26, 1963, R. Williams announced that the country had just witnessed a “great occasion”: the commemoration of the “glorious but solemn day when the forces of liberation set themselves to the task of sweeping the tyranny of Batistaism from the island of Cuba.” He described the event as solemn due to the tragic deaths of “gallant patriots” who had “set out to do what the cynics and detractors proclaimed to be impossible.” But the determination to be set free from oppression was an “invincible force.” While educating his listeners on the history of the 26th July movement, he also informed them that the world celebrated a victory that critics and opponents said would never occur. In fact, according to R. Williams, it was the mission of “the true revolutionary to do what nonrevolutionaries say cannot be done.”

Such revolutionaries tended to move forward to victory while opponents and observers spent time critiquing their actions and theorizing on why these actions would ultimately fail. Therefore as R. Williams spoke about the victory of the Cuban Revolution, he also indirectly referred to the nonviolent civil rights struggle in the United States. He referred to his own experiences and to debates about self-defense and nonviolence. For R. Williams, self-defense was the only viable solution to racism and “true” revolutionaries used the necessary strategies to achieve victory. For instance, he claimed that the “impossible task that lay ahead of the 26th July Movement 10 years ago [could] be compared to the oppressed Afroamerican’s struggle for liberation in the USA today.” Critics and cynics were just as vocal as those who endorsed

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418 Ibid.
Batista’s administration. These opponents consistently argued that black Americans in the United States would not defeat their oppressors, according to R. Williams. Thus, the “spirit of the 26th of July” was not just a “spirit” for Cuba. Now, it belonged to all of the “oppressed peoples of the world” and was encouragement for all who “would walk in human dignity” and be “free.”

In his dedication to the Cuban Revolution, R. Williams quoted Fidel Castro: “We were taught that the titan Maceo had said that liberty is not begged, it is won with the blade of a machete. We were taught that for the guidance of Cuba’s free citizens the apostle wrote in his Book of Gold: The man who conforms by obeying unjust laws and permits anybody to trample the country in which he was born, the man who mistreats his country, is not an honorable man.” He further contended that black people could learn from Cuba, the revolution and its dedication to the country. Yet, the quote that he borrowed from Castro presents a paradox. While R. Williams considered himself an internationalist and not a nationalist, per se, he often underscored nationalist sentiments. On one hand, he attempted to integrate and re-appropriate international revolutions for promoting black rebellion in the United States. But his discourse on the American Revolution and the reification of nationalism via the promises of a liberated nation underscores a tension in Radio Free Dixie’s discourse. The radio program as a transnational medium both globalized United States revolutionary politics while simultaneously locating its racial politics within national boundaries. Radio Free Dixie’s discourse intermeshed the global and local to an extent that both transcended and reinforced national and transnational boundaries.

Outside of Cuba, historical events such as the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Warsaw, Poland served as an example for fighting oppression in the United States. The largest Jewish revolt against Nazi Germany in German-occupied Poland during World War II served as an example and lesson to both the United States government and black protesters. On May 16, 1963, M. Williams read an editorial from the Washington Afro-American over the air. Quoting from the editorial, she spoke about the death of the Jewish people who had participated in a 27-day
“courageous fight for their lives/against the Nazis attempt at ‘final liquidation.’”^419 According to the broadcast, a commander of the Jewish rebellion directly spoke to the significance of self-defense: “How it is clear for us—what happened has by far surpassed all our expectations … the last wish of my life has come true. Jewish self-defense has become reality. Jewish resistance and vengeance have been transformed into acts. I am happy to have found myself among the first fighting Jews in the Ghetto.”^420

Because Radio Free Dixie often equated the treatment and lynching of black Americans in the United States to the extermination of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, the radio program also globalized the black struggle by extending it to non-black, oppressed communities. The historical existence of Jewish self-defense further supported the need for black self-defense in the United States, where the state also sought to use “Nazi-type” of practices against a marginalized group of people. An Afro-American editorial read on Radio Free Dixie explicitly linked the black struggle to the Jewish experience: “As a people likewise determined to be completely free, we can learn many lessons from the Warsaw Ghetto. But one rises above all others: No people, no race, no group can ever be truly free until they are prepared to die for that freedom. Only the Colored American’s acts can guarantee freedom, not the emptiness of his words.”^421 In another broadcast, M. Williams read from an editorial in the Afro-American Liberation, which used the Warsaw Uprising to promote urgency among black activists.^422 The editorial claimed that if all Jewish people had imitated the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, six million people would be not dead.^423 Black communities, according to Radio Free Dixie, should learn from this example, because they too would be exterminated like Jewish communities during World War II.

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^420 Ibid.
^421 Ibid.
^422 Ibid.
^423 Ibid.
R. Williams also frequently informed his listeners that the world recognized the black struggle in the United States as similar to Latin American, Asian, and African resistance. According to Radio Free Dixie, the March on Washington in 1963 would be one event that would bring international significance to the black struggle. Months before the actual march on August 28, he announced that such an event would inform the international world that black people would no longer starve “quietly from unemployment and substandard wages in slum ghettos.” As such, it was an opportunity to let the world know that they were tired of “police brutality, court frame-ups, segregation, jimbrow and all forms of dehumanization practiced by so-called Christians in the so-called Free World.” As civil rights protests spread throughout the South in the early years of the 1960s, R. Williams underscored the prevalence and urgency of social change in the United States. On August 9, 1963, he wrote that people were “gallantly marching against the odds of barbaric racist hordes and the brute force of the state.” Despite violent state repression and police brutality, protesters returned to the streets “day after day in increasing numbers.” R. Williams claimed that as people all over the world were struggling for “freedom,” black Americans were fighting as well.

It was important that black people living in the United States obtain their freedom like the rest of the world, “by fighting for it … by spilling blood.” Signing his broadcasts with a call to let their “battle cry be heard around the world,” R. Williams stressed the importance of joining the world to fight for what the United States constitution guaranteed them. On May 9, 1963, the radio program appealed to the “civilized peoples of the entire world to” go to the defense of

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424 Robert F. Williams, July 19, 1963, RFD, Reel 12, RFW Papers, housed in Bentley Historical Library.
425 Ibid.
427 Ibid.
mothers and their children experiencing police brutality in Birmingham, Alabama.\textsuperscript{429} The news highlights also demonstrated that rallies throughout the United States paralleled the world’s support of the black civil rights struggle. For example, on August 30, 1963 \textit{Radio Free Dixie} commented on the turnout of the March on Washington a few days earlier: “Over 200 thousand North Americans of whom the vast majority were Negroes, held a gigantic freedom rally at the Lincoln Monument. Peoples around the world made declarations in support of the rally for black liberation in the USA.”\textsuperscript{430} Brief news reports also highlighted worldwide rallies of support that had occurred simultaneously in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. People in Havana, Cuba, celebrated on the eve of the March on Washington in the city’s central park. China and Venezuela, according to \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, rallied in support for the Civil Rights Movement as well.\textsuperscript{431}

Because \textit{Radio Free Dixie} sought to tie the black struggle to a worldwide revolution against United States imperialism, it communicated to listeners the importance of both national and international solidarity. In 1963, the radio program painted the United States as a weak nation that could not afford to continue violent brutality against its black citizens primarily because the country was too involved in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{432} United States intervention, therefore, created a backlash that further helped the cause for civil rights in the U.S., as people worldwide saw the country as an enemy.\textsuperscript{433} R. Williams emphasized that they would win against the United States, because they had many supporters and “friends.”\textsuperscript{434} Raising the stakes of the Civil Rights Movement and moving toward a self-defense strategy was becoming more urgent in a struggle

\textsuperscript{431} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{434} Ibid.
that was bounded and unbounded by national borders. R. Williams indicated that the United States would have too much at stake if it increased violence against its own citizens. Such a strategy would lead to chaos within the nation, which, in turn, would cause an “outrage” in the world against United States imperialism.\textsuperscript{435} Therefore, \textit{Radio Free Dixie} highlighted the ways in which racial politics directly affected global issues but also how global events directly tied to the nationalization of the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. Simultaneously the radio program tied the nationalization of United States social movements to global politics by re-appropriating events like the Cuban Revolution, the Warsaw Uprising, and the United States American Revolution of 1776, suggesting that such moments of revolution could be used for armed black rebellion.

To further re-imagine both the globalization and localization of the Civil Rights Movement and the BPM, \textit{Radio Free Dixie} frequently informed listeners about protests and demonstrations occurring in their local and national communities. Of course, \textit{Radio Free Dixie} was one of many black radio stations that saw itself as an outlet for simply providing its listeners with information about the days and time of protests; however, it also sought to use these protests and news about violent breakouts, encounters with police brutality and state repression as a way to justify a self-defense strategy. Thus, the radio program focused on promoting a specific type of collective action among black people that called for them to “meet violence with violence.” For instance, not too long after the radio program launched, R. Williams accused the White Citizens Council, the Ku Klux Klan and the United States government for unleashing a campaign of violence against “peaceful advocates.”\textsuperscript{436} \textit{Radio Free Dixie’s} news highlights illustrated moments of political conflict but also instances where protests and demonstrations either led to violent

\textsuperscript{435} Ibid.
uprisings or toward the achievement of civil rights. Often signing off with “And so goes justice in the so-called free world of the racist USA,” the radio program used these brief highlights to not only point out recent news on the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement but also the gap between United States domestic and foreign policy.

To demonstrate that self-defense was a realistic goal (and not impractical or imagined), recent news highlighted examples where activists were organizing armed communities. M. Williams’ weekly “news items” frequently used editorials from around the world to comment on recent events regarding Monroe and other Southern cities that had begun to implement their own armed communities. For instance, on June 4, 1965, she reported on “Black Defense Guards” arming themselves in Bogalusa and Jonesboro, Louisiana. The editorial argued that the strategy had begun in Monroe, North Carolina, when Robert F. Williams organized a “Defense Guard.” It further acknowledged that his strategy was being emulated throughout the South. M. Williams’ report referred to the creation of a new armed self-defense group called The Deacons of Defense and Justice, an organization that would later seek R. Williams’ leadership while in exile.

Racist reports helped further support the idea that the only viable solution was to create more armed black communities. According to Radio Free Dixie, in 1963 state racism would culminate in the government’s Operation Black Jack, which was the “great racist Spring Offensive to put the uppity Negroes back in their places” by using “Ku Klux Klan violence aided by the Negro-hating, brutal police and their F.B.I running dog cohorts.” Even after the passing of the Civil Rights Movement Act, however, official state racism continued to plague black communities throughout the United States.

437 Ibid.
On February 1, 1965, the Williamses reported on a violent breakout in Georgia where a woman and child were beaten, black churches were burned, black farmers’ fences were destroyed, and wealthy black farmers chased from their homes.\textsuperscript{441} R. Williams’ editorial commented on black protesters’ attempts to register and vote in Georgia: “Two teenagers were murdered in Georgia by trigger-happy butchers, called cops, just for the thrill of killing defenseless Afroamericans. A mother of eight months pregnancy was beaten to the ground by savage policeman with billy clubs and kicked in her pregnant stomach until she lost consciousness.\textsuperscript{1200} Afroamericans of the Free World were arrested and manhandled …”\textsuperscript{442} In addition, the same broadcast commented on the “22,000” black residents of Mississippi who had been denied “government surplus food because” they were black people who insisted on “registering to vote in their so-called representative democracy.”\textsuperscript{443} According to Radio Free Dixie, Jet magazine reported on another lynching in Canton, Mississippi, in which a “castrated and mutilated body of 24-year-old Sylvester Maxwell, a Negro, had been found.”\textsuperscript{444} In editorials like these, R. Williams re-imagined the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement as rife with violence and state repression, especially throughout the South. Student protesters and Freedom Fighters, who were persecuted by Southern public officials, continued to request protection from Washington, but “got about as much response from this Cicero of the U.S. Justice Department as a hound dog baying at the moon.”\textsuperscript{445}

On January 18, 1965, M. Williams reported on a recent campaign that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had launched following Clyde Kennard’s sentencing to the “Mississippi chain gangs” for attempting to attend Mississippi Southern University. The same

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{442} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{443} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
broadcast reported on the arrest of several Muslims for selling newspapers on Christmas Day. Such news reports were simply brief highlights that further pointed out to listeners all of the ways in which activists and other citizens were implicated in the Civil Rights Movement. Those who could listen to the radio station would often hear short news clips that illustrated the difficulty but necessity of adopting a self-defense strategy. For instance, on March 15, 1963, Carlos Moore reported on United States black American leaders who were “beginning to voice increasing alarm, over the Kennedy’s Government’s admitted use of poisonous gases in Vietnam.”446 Black activists’ recognition of United States foreign policy and their willingness to speak back to such power further help support Radio Free Dixie’s overall goal to promote collective action and black rebellion.

Not only did Radio Free Dixie present news about state and mass violence over the air, but it also replayed documentaries that explored the effects of racism on black communities. On April 26, 1963, the radio program made a special tribute to the South by broadcasting a documentary about Albany, Georgia, that featured the “voices of people who struggled on the front line of the battle for freedom.”447 Two years later, on May 28, 1965, M. Williams announced over Radio Free Dixie a “special documentary entitled Blues in the Mississippi Night.” The documentary “described the social conditions that existed in the South from 1890 to 1940s.”448 Alan Lomax’s documentary, according to the broadcast, highlighted an era of the birth of blues, a genre that emotionally communicated black oppression: “This recording relates the story of a people brutally oppressed and dehumanized whose tears became a music that only the

heavy at heart can play, hear and understand. … This recording was made in England … and the identity of the artists remain anonymous …”

Anyone listening to Radio Free Dixie on this night may have heard the voices of “Memphis Slim,” “Big Bill Broonzy” and “Sonny Boy Williamson.” If they stayed tune throughout the hour, they may have become drawn to the voices and music that descriptively conveyed the plight of black people living in the South: “Well, I been to places that was levy camps, I’ve been to places where they have their dances, bell houses they call them and uh Negroes all be in there gambling. And they shoot a Negro down, you know what I mean. Some of them short guys be standing around the crap table and the crap table is high and he can’t get there and pull that dead man down there and stand on him and shooting dice.” The broadcasting of Blues in the Mississippi Night should not have surprised the person seeking to hear a glimpse of Radio Free Dixie. Instead, the documentary further illustrated an attempt by the radio program’s broadcasters to re-imagine the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement by placing black oppression and rebellion within a longer history of black struggle; such a strategy attempted to appeal to listeners, as Radio Free Dixie sought to use historical and current accounts of state repression to justify the call for direct action.

Our “American” Way: Self-defense not Non-violence

Radio Free Dixie’s airing of Blues in the Mississippi Night helped highlight the national plight of black people in the United States; such instances privileged the national over influences that appeared outside of United States borders. Throughout its lifespan, the radio program also highlighted other events that similarly placed focus on national

449 Ibid.  
450 Ibid.
boundaries. On January 11, 1963, after accusing the Kennedy administration of insufficiently dealing with the racist acts of the Ku Klux Klan, R. Williams announced that the “100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation” had reached a “stalemate.” Commenting on the March on Washington, he argued that the “racists” decided to “block the path of [their]…march toward freedom with the force of violence and hate.” As a result of developing events meant to block the actual March on Washington later that year, he encouraged people not to reduce “their method of struggle to the shameful level of an endurance contest.” Here, R. Williams referred to the Civil Rights Movement’s nonviolent strategy, emphasizing the importance of sacrifice and death. The broadcast contended that the “glory of Ghandi [sic]” would not work, since black people in the United States were not fighting “tea drinking Englishmen as [their] oppressors.” For R. Williams, non-violence as a strategy represented an international influence that did not fit well with United States politics.

Emphasizing the “American” tradition of resistance, R. Williams conveyed to his readers that they “shared the proud tradition of Valley Forge, Concord and Lexington.” As a result, their enemies “drank … corn liquor” and had “less compassion for the colored people than they [did] for common street dogs.” Such a broadcast painted Gandhi’s nonviolence philosophy as inefficient for fighting a violent and racist state. The establishment of the United States was built from bloodshed; thus, an American tradition of violence would be the only solution to fighting racism. Armed rebellion would be the necessary tool, a custom long associated with United States history, according to Radio Free Dixie. People listening to this broadcast at 11 p.m. on January 11, 1963, would have heard a message that called for a more nationalist approach rather than an internationalist one.

452 Ibid.
453 Ibid.
The contradictions of nonviolence within the nation further illustrated why this philosophy would not lead to racial justice. In a broadcast that aired on January 17, 1963, R. Williams’ editorial highlighted the inconsistency between general support for state violence and criticisms against mass armed black rebellion. In his broadcast, he accused proponents of nonviolence of insisting that it was a “mortal sin for colored people to defend themselves when attacked by savages” even when members of the “master race” brutally attacked “dark” children.454 Deconstructing the justification for nonviolence, R. Williams contended that those preachers who used the Bible to defend nonviolence were “phoney.”455 In another instance, on May 3, 1963, in his weekly editorial, he further elaborated on these inconsistencies: “Is it not true that even the so-called liberals and pseudo-leftists level more criticism at AfroAmericans who advocate self-defense than they do at the brutal savage oppressor of the AfroAmerican whose way of life is based on violence and terror to maintain the status-quo?”456 The fact that critics worried more about the rise of black nationalism and its main tenet of self-defense pointed to a prevalence of “white chauvinism,” according to the broadcast.457 R. Williams contended that critics were more concerned with practicing violence toward the “racist oppressor” than they were with black people becoming victims of brutal state repression and racism.

Killing other people of color overseas also presented a problem. According to Radio Free Dixie, critics legitimized state violence by condoning the Vietnam War: “Why are the nonviolent workshops being established only in AfroAmerican communities? Why aren’t the nonviolent people at work in Vietnam instead of in the Ku Klux Klan infested social jungle of

455 Ibid.
457 Ibid.
the Southland?" In several of his broadcasts, R. Williams asked his listeners to consider whether violence in Vietnam was just as immoral as self-defense. The United States, as a racist government, enforced its “imperialist will” and was not concerned with such contradictions; instead, it exported its racist practices throughout the world while “pleading impotence in protecting its black citizens at home.” While he did not publically announce any affiliation to black nationalism over the air, R. Williams believed they should “make the most of” being labeled as black nationalists.

In its later years, Radio Free Dixie continued to highlight the inconsistencies between United States foreign and domestic policy: “Now that massive violence has come to the world scene and is being sponsored by the great white father, we hear less and less talk about violence being immoral. We hear less and less talk about the immorality of those who condone violence…why?" The rising prevalence of the effects of the Vietnam War, according to Radio Free Dixie, underscored this important contradiction between nonviolence and self-defense. R. Williams announced that the “great pacifist preachers” did not condemn President Lyndon Johnson’s “war of aggression” against the Vietnamese people nor was the president denounced as being immoral (just as self-defense proponents were). Furthermore, he asked:

Why are the most famous advocates of nonviolence and love not in the vanguard of those peace-loving, rabbis, priests and ministers who march in protest to the Pentagon’s blood war-fare and violence? My brothers and sisters, how long is the patience of our brutally oppressed people? How long can we be deceived by cunning liberals and mercenary Uncle Toms?"

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460 Ibid.
461 Ibid.
For R. Williams, the answers to these questions not only undermined the philosophy of nonviolence, but it also evoked an answer that could only be addressed with a call to action. The broadcast did not hesitate to tell its listeners no one would give them “freedom” and justice. There would be no “freedom” without struggle or a “better life without sacrifice.” In fact, black extermination would only occur if nonviolence remained the only solution. He announced over air that “the most effective anti-lynch law and force for justice is the power of the gas bomb, the switchblade, the razor, the lye-can and the bullet.”

Furthermore, the achievements obtained by the nonviolent still did not signify a shift on national politics. Following the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, *Radio Free Dixie* had not given up on revealing the realities of United States domestic racism. In what *Radio Free Dixie* called the “year of revelation,” R. Williams highlighted that the radio program had labeled it as such because “they were convinced that this [was] the year when many things [would] truly be revealed.” The broadcasters of *Radio Free Dixie* believed that the “cloak of deception” would be “ripped from the true nature of contending forces in the world.” Not only would the violent and racist events of 1965 themselves reinforce the insufficiencies of non-violence as a form of resistance, but *Radio Free Dixie* also would continue to highlight the realities and inconsistencies of such a philosophy. Because black citizens had not achieved gains in voting rights by 1965, the launching of the Voting Rights campaign became another example that further illustrated the ongoing battle between state repression and mass rebellion: “The AfroAmerican is a constant victim of brutal and unmitigated police brutality. He is murdered, maimed and imprisoned for trying to register to vote in the so-called free elections of representative democracy.”

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462 Ibid.
464 Ibid.
Free Dixie saw it pertinent to point out that the movement still had a long way to go. Despite some progress toward racial integration and justice, R. Williams contended that black people were still a long way from “freedom and justice.” Yet, much of the mainstream media indicated that they were “no longer brutally oppressed in racist America.” The struggle for voters’ rights illustrated another story, one where the fight for civil rights would continue throughout the year of 1965.

The Watts Riots in California in 1965 helped spark the summer as one of the more violent incidents to date. On June 18, 1965, R. Williams commented on the importance of that summer: “The long hot summer is under way. Hundreds of freedom fights have already been arrested in Mississippi, Chicago and other places. In Mississippi, AfroAmericans are being arrested for trying to obtain the right to vote for their so-called representatives of racist America’s sham called representative democracy.” According to Radio Free Dixie, “kangaroo court frame-ups” were being staged throughout the “Social Jungle of Raceland.” Referring to the nonviolent movement and its proponents, R. Williams claimed that the United States government expected black people to love their “enemy oppressor” while it simultaneously exercised violence on the “freedom loving people who seek only peace, well-being and justice.” Such discourse undermined nonviolence as a political strategy, as he sought to point out that it was inefficient in bettering the lives of black Americans.

Those who supported such a tactic, including what R. Williams called the “liberal apologists for the system and their running dog Uncle Toms,” sought to convince black people

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468 Ibid.  
469 Ibid.
that “Mr. Charlie [had] a devine [sic] monopoly on the use of force and violence.”470 In fact, he contended, “Mr. Charlie” would murder even those who fought in the cause for justice with a nonviolent approach. Those individuals who were able to listen to the program would learn the truth about nonviolence and its proponents:

A few short months ago, all we could hear were the pious sounding hypocrites preaching the power of nonviolence and love. All we could hear were liberals and their … puppets condemning oppressed black people who spoke out for self-defense. Boot preachers fell to their knees in Selma pleading to black men not to protect their wives and mothers because such an act would be morally wrong.471

According to R. Williams, the pacifists who enjoyed the “support of the imperialist press and millions of dollars from the exploiters’ bank roll,” declared that violence was “outmoded.”472 Thus, such a broadcast accused nonviolent proponents of benefitting from the same system that oppressed their communities. The truth, according to Radio Free Dixie, highlighted that nonviolence did not resolve the violence black individuals and communities experienced, and that a movement inspired by Gandhi could not be applied to the United States precisely because they needed to fight on their own terms, in their own “American” way. The “American” way, of course needed to draw from the American Revolution because Gandhi’s nonviolent movement remain inefficient for dealing racism within a United States context.

The inefficiency of nonviolence was further highlighted in the radio program’s comments on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Not too long before Radio Free Dixie would stop airing permanently, R. Williams implied that the attainment of civil rights had not sufficiently changed the lives of black citizens: “Civil rights ain’t nothing but a payoff of token loot to house Nigras [sic] to ride herd over the rebels in the ghetto. … The great masses of our people are sliding

470 Ibid.
471 Ibid.
472 Ibid.
further down the economic scale. Brutality is on the increase. Poverty is on the increase…Integration is nothing but a whole lotta jive.”

According to R. Williams, civil rights simply allowed the government to appear to enforce justice by making promises and implementing small improvements to the justice system. Merely passing a civil rights bill, therefore, still maintained the mass oppression of black people who were still “Jim Crowed, brutalized, ghettoized, kangarooed, hated and despised.”

The appointment of black public officials did not dissuade R. Williams from commenting on the progress and failures of the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. On January 21, 1966, he continued to accuse the United States government of not doing enough to end black oppression. The radio program portrayed those black individuals who took public office as puppets on a stage of government manipulation. President Lyndon Johnson’s appointment of Robert C. Weaver as the first black cabinet member was a small step toward progress, according to Radio Free Dixie. Yet as the radio program highlighted, people had not “seen the last of wanton murder and terror directed against [their] defenseless people.” Thus, while people rejoiced over Weaver’s appointment, “the fact remained that the great masses of [their] people [were] no better off.”

Here, R. Williams continued to point out the contradictions of the United States’ domestic practices, which helped further undermine its image of a democratic society. While black people in the South continued to encounter state repression, Washington used its appointment of Weaver to re-present the United States as a democratic society.

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Radio Free Dixie’s commentary coincided with a re-emergence of black power and black nationalism; post-1965, the radio program’s messages aligned with political discourses emerging from black organizations. A return to a black nationalist discourse in the 1960s further coincided with Radio Free Dixie’s criticisms of racial integration. Because black communities continued to encounter state racism, R. Williams questioned ideas of separation and integration between white and non-white people living in the United States. For example, on April 9, 1965, R. Williams’ editorial asked how people could live in peace and “brotherhood” in neighborhoods that robbed and exploited its black residents. The editorial accused white liberals of “admonishing [them] to soothe the hearts of the raging violent beasts, but they never explain how this can be done.”

White liberals, according to R. Williams, had a choice not to live with racism, while black citizens possessed a “lifelong curse placed upon [them] by a devilish society.” Furthermore, he contended that those who chose to suffer with black individuals could not dominate black people’s thoughts and actions, nor could they conspire to take away their self-preservation and self-defense philosophies. Such broadcasts extended a historical conversation about self-determination, one of the central components of black nationalism.

Just as Marcus Garvey’s definition of self-determination called for a “race” that would make an effort to “adjust [their] own affairs,” Radio Free Dixie also called for a movement that was solely based on the needs of black Americans. Self-determination was in many ways inspired by the idea of the American Revolution, an event that succeeded in creating an independent United States. But it also prevailed in the ideas of other international revolutions that sought sovereignty from United States rule. Within this larger conversation about political strategy and social movement philosophies, Radio Free Dixie continued to pose self-defense as a nationalist

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478 Ibid.
479 Ibid.
project, even while simultaneously borrowing from international self-defense and anti-imperialist projects to argue for the necessity of meeting violence with violence.

Contentions in Revolutionary Politics

New transnational activism has been traced to global protests against economic institutions of the 1990s, including the Battle of Seattle and the Zapatistas movement against neoliberal economic policies. Such movements have raised questions about the role of “insiders” and “outsiders,” global and national borders and international influences on domestic policies. Of course, as these movements paralleled the growth of the Internet, digital media became heavily implicated in such politics. During the 1960s, Radio Free Dixie played a similar role. Its messages of self-defense, thus, places these more recent transnational activist projects within a longer history of global and national struggle. Such a story highlights how the radio program’s discourse of self-defense became central to a larger conversation about the contentions between the national and global, thus highlighting how activists continue to create national discourses about both local and transnational politics.

While the actual impact of Radio Free Dixie in mobilizing a black revolution in the United States was very little (although its political discourse did influence post-1965 black power activists), it is important to note how the production and construction of its political messages reveal historical conversations about activism. As Norman Fairclough points out, “languages can


481 Ibid

be regarded as amongst abstract social structures,” defining “certain potential, certain possibilities and excludes others.”\textsuperscript{483} Furthermore, he defines discourse as “ways of representing.” Social agents can often represent the material world and other social practices, according to Fairclough. *Radio Free Dixie*’s discourse is reflective of the ways in which activists themselves have understood and represented their locations within a transnational space that ultimately influenced the “domestication” of their international politics. Robert F. and Mabel R. Williams, thus, re-imagined (or re-represented) the black revolution as one that both integrated and excluded global revolutionary politics to “domesticate” a race-based self-defense movement in the United States. Similar to the post-1965 era and earlier historical moments of black activism in the United States, an internationalist discourse that sometimes focused on racial heritage, while at other times moved beyond African ancestry, had weaved its way into the national dialogue. Robert F. Williams’ aspirations of self-defense movements occurring elsewhere in the world—even those that predated the 1950s (i.e. Jewish defense against the Holocaust)—was one facet of a transnational discourse that maintained, not eradicated, national linkages.

While *Radio Free Dixie*’s broadcasts drew on broader “collectivities” (to establish collective identities in opposition to United States racism and imperialism), at the same time its construction of such an identity was largely intertwined with nationalist sentiments. Such discourse “connected [the] texts with their situational contexts.”\textsuperscript{484} In fact to see *Radio Free Dixie* within a transnational context, it can be noted that the “construction of a “global” collective identity comes up against the enduring attachments of national citizenries to their own countries, even as they opposed their policies.”\textsuperscript{485} R. Williams identified himself within a larger global movement against United States imperialism (which he saw as an extension of racism), but his

\textsuperscript{483} Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*, 24.
\textsuperscript{484} Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*, 27.
global identity “sat alongside traditional national and local identities.”

Radio Free Dixie’s promotions of self-defense and its attempt to ‘set the record straight’ for the nonviolent movement illustrated a need to globalize the Civil Rights Movement and BPM. The Williamses evoked certain international influences, specifically the Cuban Revolution, as a way to further re-imagine how revolutionary politics could lead to a racially egalitarian society. Yet, it also nationalized (or “domesticated”) United States racial politics and excluded some outside forces. Radio Free Dixie re-framed non-violence as an international force that did not fit the traditional American style of revolution. At times the Williamses and other people on the broadcasts advocated for a United States-centered revolution, one that included direct action similar to the American Revolution of 1776.

Radio Free Dixie’s self-defense philosophy, thus, moves beyond a discussion about whether the Williamses embraced a black nationalist or internationalist framework for mobilizing their listeners. Instead what such a story shows is that “we are witnessing to an increasing degree the formation of a broad spectrum of activists who face both inward and outward and combine domestic and transnational contention.” These formations did not just begin to appear in the 1990s, when activists in North America protested against the effects of neoliberalism in the global South. Nor are we only seeing these formations during the late 1960s and 1970s with the so-called “Third World Marxist” movement. From 1962 to 1966, Radio Free Dixie illustrated that not only activists in North America linked their struggles to those of the world, but also that North American activists in the global South wanted to link their struggle globally while maintaining national ties to the United States. In fact, as we will see in chapter five, R. Williams, in particular, would begin to critique the Cuban state through a specific North American lens that did not translate well in a country built on a raceless nationalist discourse.

486 Ibid.
487 Ibid.
R. Williams’ reflection on the limitations of transnational activism is indicative of recent academic claims that the “downward scale shift of transnational movements to the national level can produce great differences among their national branches.”488 *Radio Free Dixie* placed the transnational (self-defense as a successful international strategy) within the domestic (i.e. self-defense as an inherently United States tradition). This intersection of discourse (the transnational with national), while simultaneously exclusionary, highlights Bakhtin’s argument that “languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways.”489 Yet, as Bakhtin also suggests, “they [languages] all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.”490 In the case of *Radio Free Dixie*, its language represented a discourse or ideological perspective about the role of race and self-defense both in national and international spaces. As a result, the Williamses’ attempt to transnationalize the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement was limited because of the privileging of a national dialogue; however, the discourse of *Radio Free Dixie* itself was largely influenced by international events like the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Thus, as social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow asks: “Is transnational activism followed by a return to the old ways of doing things or are participants in ‘global’ events transformed by that participation in their local practice, thereby producing the ‘global in the local,’ that enthusiastic advocates of global civil society hope for?”491

An analysis of *Radio Free Dixie’s* conversations about self-defense suggests that transnational activism indeed is limited in its local and national impacts. Despite these limitations, this study simultaneously highlights how activists *imagined* the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement as nationalist social movement projects that were largely

488 Ibid.
490 Ibid, 292.
491 Tarrow, “The Dualities of Transnational Contention: “Two Activist Solitudes” or a New World Altogether.”
influenced by the discourse of global anti-imperial movements. Contentions between local, national, and global borders in contemporary arguments about globalization can be further understood by analyzing how Radio Free Dixie “talked” about or “represented” the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement as both national and transnational movements.

Tensions between local, national, and global cultural politics have recently become central to questions about the processes and effects of globalization (especially since the 1980s with the emergence of neoliberalism). Yet, the 1960s can be identified as a moment in which activists also engaged with questions regarding globalization. Scholars and historians have underscored the relationship between global politics and the United States Civil Rights Movement and BPM, mostly illustrating how these movements became part of a larger global movement against racism and imperialism.492 As Steve Spence indicates, the Civil Rights Movement “must be understood as a harbinger of cultural globalization … in its ambitions and its successes.”493 Scholarship suggests that the “inside” largely became part of the “outside” through worldwide protests and demonstrations of international support. Radio Free Dixie’s political discourse on self-defense adds another dimension to the history of the 1960s political environment in the United States. It helps illustrate how global events like the Cuban Revolution of 1959 contributed to the political discourse of the Civil Rights Black Power movements, highlighting how the “outside” also became part of the “inside.” Thus, a historical analysis of globalization and cultural politics does not always underscore United States imperialist projects as the driving forces; instead, this project primarily illustrates how international events influenced conversations about civil rights among black activists and journalists.

493 Ibid.
But such a discussion moves beyond the analysis of the relationship between activists and “federal Cold Warriors,” anti-communist propaganda and “shooting wars.”\textsuperscript{494} This discussion merits an analysis of local and global spaces. While \textit{Radio Free Dixie} did not focus on one locality, it did attempt to speak about United States racism as a national problem while United States imperialism was an extension of its national policy onto the global arena. Its locality was the state itself, even as it aired within a transnational context. Yet because the Williamses also spoke from an anti-colonial geographical space (i.e., Cuba), the historical and political context of Cuba became central to their political discourse on the United States. While it is important to note that activists within the United States had increasingly become aware of their international linkages—whether it was through kinship or political and cultural solidarity—this story suggests that the Civil Rights Movement’s and BPM’s political and cultural discourses also were largely influenced from an “outside” perspective, even one that had once served as an inside view. Thus, the transnational linkage between the Williamses, the United States, and Cuba became central to national discourses of state racism, repression, anti-racism and anti-imperialism.

Because \textit{Radio Free Dixie} did not engage with a class critique of 1960s globalization processes, the radio program largely focused on racializing its national discourse of social change. While outside forces like the Cuban Revolution were heavily anti-capitalist projects, the Williamses re-appropriated its meaning for promoting a race-based movement, not one inspired by class politics. The Cuban Revolution and its history of resistance, however, provided the Williamses with some inspiration about the promises of a socialist state in addressing the race problem. Yet, they did not engage with a discourse that focused on destroying capitalism (as the 1950s revolution had in Cuba); rather, they utilized the effects of the Cuban Revolution to talk about creating a black revolution that would eradicate racism in the United States.

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid.
But by 1964, the actual effects of the Cuban Revolution on the island had become much more complicated. As the Williamses encountered an increasingly difficult situation in Cuba, which they perceived as racially oppressive, they began to question who benefited from such a revolution. Such questions would be limited by their transnational context, one that still was largely influenced by their national identities as U.S.-Americans. Thus, the next chapter will address why *Radio Free Dixie* placed the discourse of Cuban race and class consciousness at the center of United States racial politics but also why the Williamses became disillusioned with Cuba’s revolutionary politics off-air. Furthermore, it will address the Williamses’ failure to engage with both countries’ specific historical contexts, thus illustrating how such a relationship ultimately signaled a shift in Cuba’s image as a racially egalitarian society.
Chapter 5

A Raceless Nation

Santiago, Cuba was the “fighting ground of the guerillas led by Fidel Castro himself, who liberated the island from a bloody, tyrant and installed for the first time in Cuba’s history, a truly democratic and revolutionary government of the people.”


When the Williamses arrived in Cuba in August 1961, the Cuban government provided the family with a car, gasoline and a home.\textsuperscript{495} While R. Williams was a guest on the island, Castro invited him to attend some of his public speeches and provided him with entrance to “every place.”\textsuperscript{496} Yet, as the revolution evolved throughout the early 1960s, Williams believed his relationship with government officials also changed: “… Some of the party people, I had some problems and the discussion of things in this country about blacks. They took the position that my position would drive a wedge between the white middle class and blacks if blacks used my method of self-defense. They said that Martin Luther King had the best position.”\textsuperscript{497}

Whether the Cuban government actually endorsed King’s nonviolent strategy over Williams’ self-defense philosophy is not evident without an analysis of primary sources from Cuba’s perspective. What scholarship on the Cuban Revolution has indicated is that Cuba’s foreign policy did challenge United States racial discriminatory practices at home. The government’s endorsement of African liberation movements on the continent was one of its foreign policy strategies. Its attempt to support the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power

\textsuperscript{496} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{497} Ibid.
Movement was another policy that included granting black activists with political asylum on the island. In an effort to discredit the so-called principles of liberty in the United States on October 5, 1965, Cuba’s official state newspaper *Granma* published a picture of the United States’ Statue of Liberty holding not a torch but a person wearing a Ku Klux Klan robe and a pointed hat.\(^4^9^\) The message was clear and similar to *Radio Free Dixie*’s political discourse. The United States is not free; rather, it is a repressive and racist state.

Cuba’s foreign policy did not stop some activists from criticizing the government’s problems with racial discrimination. Even before Carlos Moore published his controversial critique of the Castro administration in *Castro, the Blacks and Africa*, R. Williams and other black activists criticized the government for not doing enough to completely eliminate its racist practices. Any hint to a growing disillusionment with the Cuban government was avoided on air. Instead, *Radio Free Dixie* appeared to remain loyal to the ideas of the Cuban Revolution, even utilizing its revolutionary politics for promoting direct action and resistance against the United States government. Thus, while *Radio Free Dixie*’s broadcasts consistently praised the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the island’s history of rebellions against oppression and colonialism, it did not do so off-air.

Through interviews and other media outlets, it became clear that the Williamses had not been able to maintain their solidarity with the Cuban government, thus leading to their decision to move to China in 1966. These sources, on the other hand, also indicate that R. Williams may not have considered the specific historical context that allowed the Cuban government to declare the country as a raceless nation even when the practice of racism continued to affect Afro-Cubans (albeit to a much lesser extent than it had prior to 1959).\(^4^9^9\) But to understand a history that was

\(^4^9^8\) “la estatua de la libertad y la caricature revolucionaria,” *Granma*, October 5, 1965, 2.

\(^4^9^9\) While Mabel R. Williams played a large role in producing *Radio Free Dixie*, this chapter places emphasis on Robert F. Williams’ interpretations and arguments due to the substantial amount of primary sources available in his personal collection at the University of Michigan.
lost in the Williamses’ interpretation of Cuba’s politics requires a historical analysis of Cuba’s raceless discourse and its preoccupation with class struggle. This chapter, therefore, places Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts about Cuba within a larger history of race and class politics on the island.

First, this chapter provides a brief overview of race and class politics in Cuba to foreground and contextualize how and why Cuban officials reacted to R. Williams’ messages of black revolution. Following this historical overview is an analysis of Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts that specifically focus on Cuba’s national discourse about racelessness. The author argues that R. Williams reinforced Cuba’s conceptualization of race on the island. Yet off-air, his encounters and conflicts with Cuban government officials led him to believe that Cuba remained a racist state. Thus, the third section of this chapter explores these internal conflicts by drawing on R. Williams’ personal papers (e.g., letters, memos, legal documents and additional interviews). Such a discussion reveals how his initial perceptions about race on the island reinforced Cuba’s nationalist discourses about racelessness, while his personal experiences with government officials suggested otherwise. Thus, the author also argues that R. Williams imposed his own imaginings of what race should be in Cuba and not on how it actually worked. Therefore, the fourth section of this chapter demonstrates how R. Williams misinterpreted Cuba’s race and class politics due to his own conceptions and experiences of race in the United States. Overall, what this chapter seeks to do is place Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts within a larger discussion about race and class politics in Cuba and the United States to demonstrate how activists continue to resist and perpetuate national projects while simultaneously attempting to develop solidarity across borders.
A Brief History of Race and Class in Cuba

In the nineteenth century, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced numerous slave revolts, revolutions against colonial powers, the banning of the slave trade and gradual or immediate emancipation.\textsuperscript{500} War specifically had strengthened slaves’ bargaining positions (i.e., reduction of control, opportunity to gain freedom through military service, and enactments of gradual emancipation programs).\textsuperscript{501} Yet, independence came to Latin America much earlier than the Caribbean. Because Brazilians and Spanish-speaking Caribbean people experienced an intense period of growth and expansion, receiving thousands of more slaves, Cuba (like Brazil and Puerto Rico) had escaped warfare in the first half of the 1800s.\textsuperscript{502}

Not only did independence and emancipation come to Cuba in the later 1800s, but Cuba also experienced a different cultural makeup in comparison to the rest of Latin America. Unlike most of Latin America, Cuba’s social construction of race was not reflective of a three-tier or multiracial system. As was stated in chapter two, Cuba’s two-tier hierarchy (black and white) was similar to that of the United States, except that the boundary separating black and mulatto people from white was based on “visible” African ancestry, not the one-drop rule.\textsuperscript{503} The unique experiences of Afro-Cubans were primarily based on the societal constructions of race in Cuba. Their high voluntary military participation and Cuba’s early adoption of universal male suffrage in the early 1900s created a unique political environment compared to the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, as Afro-Cubans played essential roles for helping achieve victory against Spanish colonialists. Cuba, however, would not escape the conditions that caused Latin America

\textsuperscript{501} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{502} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{503} Aline Helg, \textit{Our Rightful share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality 1886-1912} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995). One drop rule refers to the idea that one drop of African blood identified an individual as black. This idea prevailed throughout the Jim Crow South in the United States and arguably continues to appear in today’s discourses about race.
years earlier to rebel against slavery and colonialism. Emancipation and independence, thus, came to Cuba during the latter half of the nineteenth century when figures like Afro-Cuban Antonio Maceo and white Cuban leader Jose Marti led the Cuban army together. Both Maceo and Marti played crucial roles in establishing a racial ideology that continues to pervade Cuban hegemony today.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, race and class conflicts largely shaped the Cuban nation. The construction of race influenced nationalist rhetoric pre and post-independence wars in Latin America and the Caribbean islands. In the late 1800s, the military participation of Afro-Cubans played an important role in creating a multiracial insurgency and nationalist rhetoric of antiracism. The thirty-year war—which included the Ten Years War (1868-1878), the Guerra Chiquita (1879-1880) and the War of Independence (1895-1898)—was “waged by an army unique in the history of the Atlantic world—the Liberation Army, a multiracial fighting force that was integrated at all ranks.” Afro-Cuban military soldier Antonio Maceo emerged in the late nineteenth century as a figure who would later symbolize Cuban independence and the beginning of a “raceless” nation. Maceo joined the revolutionary movement in 1868 as a common soldier and rose to the rank of general; by 1895, “he led the insurgent army across the entire territory of the island and won the allegiance of white and nonwhite men and women—a national, multiracial following that in the United States would have been rare in local contexts and unthinkable at the national level.”

Black military participation, therefore, illustrated how the first major trend of the late 1800s began constructing the nation with new racial ideologies. Maceo had declared that there

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505 Ibid, 3.
506 Ibid, 5.
were “no whites nor blacks, but only Cubans.” The conception of a raceless nation argued that there was no purpose in identifying or speaking of races. As Cuban elites struggled for power and representation, they had to recreate nationality, blackness and their places in the Cuban nation. Antiracism, as a result, became the foundation of the nation. This same rhetoric provided black soldiers with opportunities to speak of race and racism, as many argued that the transcendence of race had not yet occurred. Of course, the notion that the country was anti-racist also posed challenges for Afro-Cubans, as the ideology itself created an environment where activists could not speak out about racial discrimination in a country where racism did not exist.

Black soldiers, thus, pointed out that the construction of “racelessness” was a myth. While intellectuals and leaders had begun to develop a raceless ideology for the nation, the rise of black military leaders like Maceo generated fear among Spanish critics about the development of a black republic. Maceo’s presence, however, triggered the same sentiments that had emerged years earlier when the Aponte Rebellion of 1812 also led to fears of another Haitian Revolution (i.e., black rebellion that would translate into a black republic). Maceo responded by arguing that “perceptions of racial identity and racial attributes continued to determine the ways in which the island residents responded to the insurrection and to particular insurgent figures.” As he condemned those who rejected him because of race, he also used a “revolutionary language of freedom and equality.” Toward the end of the Ten Years War, Maceo had called for the immediate abolition of slavery and charged that Spain had backed away from its commitment to end the slave trade to Cuba. He attempted to portray himself and his followers as carriers of civilization and honor while Spain tolerated and preserved slavery. Maceo utilized the language of racelessness as an opportunity to fight for emancipation and equality while also critiquing those who did not uphold the basic tenets of a Cuban antiracist ideology.

507 Ibid.
508 Ibid, 59.
After the Ten Years War, it was Maceo who led black, mulatto, and white insurgents into the Guerra Chiquita for Cuban independence and emancipation. The Guerra Chiquita of 1879—which Spanish authorities called a race war—provided Afro-Cubans with another chance (after losing the Ten Years War to Spain) to fight for their freedom as a predominantly black rebellion. The Spanish not only called this conflict a race war, but also depicted soldiers as “black savages.” They sought to “remove the white element,” which was an attempt to win the “surrender of white insurgent leaders.” As a consequence to the prevalence of black participation in the second rebellion, a racial ideology that depicted soldiers of color as “militarily able” but politically subservient became central to Cuba’s public discourse on nationalism. Maceo’s leadership and black participation, thus, resulted in the continuation of racial discrimination on the island, even within a “raceless” nation.

During the thirty-year war, independence leader Jose Marti’s construction of “racelessness” also emerged as a symbol of the Cuban nation. In Cuba, the “mythification” of Jose Marti and the process of nation-building were intricately tied during and after the Cuban Independence War. In fact, “competing interpretations of Jose Marti represented different, conflicting interpretations of nation.” Marti became the key benchmark for expressions and debates of national sentiments during the first decades following the independence revolution. As race and class became salient features of political conflict in Cuba, Marti’s conception of “racelessness” became re-appropriated by various groups, as they sought to build the republic according to their own ideologies and interests.

510 Ibid, 78.
512 Ibid, 3.
Marti’s role in Cuba’s nation-building provides insight into how Cubans became contributors and participants in the building of a neocolonial society. By 1895, Cubans “had already developed a sense of themselves as ‘Cuban.’”514 While it has been argued that United States’ rule in the early 1900s largely changed Cuban society, Cubans maintained agency over how they would contribute to a growing independent nation. Cubans were committed to “nation building on conflicting terms rather than the subversion of nation-building by U.S. imperialism that formed the central axis of Cuba’s social and political development.”515 As a result, Cuban nationalists engaged, manipulated and legitimated the role of United States imperialists. Three different groups utilized the myth of Marti to construct opposing nationalisms while struggling to acquire and retain state power. Furthermore, efforts to maintain power invited United States neocolonial hegemony into all elements of society.516

Pro-imperialist nationalists—who were constitutive of white and formally educated middle-upper class “emigres”—called for a nation that was shaped by foreign investment, seeking to bring new technologies and cultural features of modernity to Cuban society. They argued for state-supported programs that assimilated the Cuban people into Euro and United States American standards of civilization. On the other hand, revolutionary nationalists utilized their experiences in military participation (both of white and color). These nationalists, including General-in-Chief Maximo Gomez and Maceo, called for social change through a top-down approach and interpreted Marti as one who promised to create a society of equals as long as Cuban people respected their leaders’ authority. In the third group, popular nationalists rooted their ideologies in the “social desires and models of democracy.”517 These nationalists included workers both in Cuba and the United States as well as former soldiers, women, and black civil

514 Guerra, The Myth of Jose Marti: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba, 8.
515 Ibid, 12.
516 Ibid.
517 Ibid, 17.
rights and labor activists. The result, therefore, was neocolonial hegemony rather than nation-state hegemony even as Cuba had won their independence in 1898.\textsuperscript{518} As class and race divisions facilitated the conflicts between all three groups, Cubans began to rely on United States imperialism to seek those demands that were ignored by their native leaders.\textsuperscript{519}

One leader who engaged with United States authorities on the island during the initial years of the republic to fight for citizenship and equality was veteran Evaristo Estenoz, who fought in the independence wars and became the leader of Partido Independiente de Color (PIC).\textsuperscript{520} During the early 1900s, Estenoz contributed to the larger conversation that Maceo had begun some years earlier. Afro-Cubans continued to play a historical importance in the “building of an independent Cuba and as agents of political and social change during the critical process of transition from a Spanish colony in the 1890s to a nation-state in the 1910s.”\textsuperscript{521} As a result, international authorities and ruling white Cubans utilized racist ideology together with a myth of racial equality “to subordinate and repress Afro-Cubans.”\textsuperscript{522} Yet while racial identity was imposed from above, Afro-Cubans also employed this ideology to mobilize. Thus, they argued that they were both black and Cuban.

The first Afro-Cubans to collectively mobilize in 1902 were pro-Maso veterans of the Liberation Army. Estenoz, along with several other veterans from the Liberation Army, established the Comite de Accion de los Veteranos y Asociaciones de Color, which focused on addressing the economic conditions of people of color. The integration of Afro-Cuban claims with working-class demands, however, was unsuccessful. In 1905, as Estrada Palma was preparing for reelection, Afro-Cubans feared losing the few public jobs they had.\textsuperscript{523} In 1906, Jose

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{520} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{521} Helg, \textit{Our Rightful share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality 1886-1912}, 2.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{523} Ibid.
Miguel Gomez launched a Liberal rebellion to overthrow Palma’s government. Estenoz became one of the Afro-Cuban insurgents fighting for political representation in the government; they were defeated shortly after the rebellion had begun.

Despite previous failures, in 1908, Estenoz and several other leaders founded the Agrupacion Independiente de Color in Havana, which was later changed to PIC (after experiencing little change in the provincial and municipal elections where black candidates failed to get elected). The PIC primarily called for Afro-Cuban integration into society and government, not black separatism. 524 By 1910, many Afro-Cubans had joined the PIC, which demanded “full equality for Afro-Cubans, proportional representation in public service, and social reform.” 525 Furthermore, the class proximity between PIC’s leaders and rank and file singled out the party as the leaders advocated for proportional state employment for black people and an end to racial discrimination, demands that were shared among their followers. 526 Yet, these events and other similar incidents in the early 1900s led to rumors of black revolts in 1910 and 1912. Thus, the massacre of Afro-Cubans in 1912 when the PIC led mass protests against Cuban authorities, had resulted in a “racial minority without wealth, power and unity.” 527 Afro-Cubans no longer had the “means to win in a direct confrontation with the white majority and preferred more discreet strategies of struggle—notably, active participation in the incipient labor union and leftist political parties.” 528

The stories of Antonio Maceo, Jose Marti, and Evaristo Estenoz illustrate how both Afro-Cuban and white Cuban leaders played crucial roles in shaping past and contemporary debates about Cuban racial politics. These examples demonstrate that antiracism on the island primarily served as a myth long before the 1959 revolution. Furthermore, despite Cuban authorities’ claims

524 Ibid, 147.
525 Ibid, 3.
526 Ibid, 5.
527 Ibid, 246.
528 Ibid, 246.
of a “raceless” nation, racial and economic equality had not yet been realized. While these figures’ experiences and political and social backgrounds differed from one another, they shared common interests in constructing an ideal raceless nation in which race would not dictate the place of Afro-Cubans in society.

The year 1959, therefore, did not necessarily implement a new policy of anti-racism; but it did mark a significant shift in Cuban society. While Afro-Cubans succeeded in entering various areas of employment by the end of the 1950s, racial discrimination remained visible in social life where open racial segregation was common. Hotels, restaurants and social clubs, to name a few, openly discriminated against Afro-Cubans.529 These practices were often highlighted as part of Cuba’s nation-building project and were underscored in political discussions between Afro-Cubans and government officials. Historical events on the island, including independence, United States intervention, black rebellion and a succession of United States-backed presidents, had placed such injustices at the forefront of a conversation on Cuban nationalism. It was no surprise that on March 22, 1959, Castro spoke about racism, calling for the end of discrimination on the island and asking them to form a “new patria.”530 While Castro’s speech was seen as either a way to avoid a “civil war” between white and black members of the Rebel Army or to mobilize the support of Afro-Cubans, “discussions about race and the meanings of the revolution for Afro-Cubans began as early as January 1959.”531

Race, however, did not only become an issue when Castro spoke about it, but also when social and political leaders called attention to this problem within Cuba’s public spaces. As a result, political and social actors “exercised pressure on the government to adopt concrete

530 Ibid, 261.
531 Ibid, 261.
antidiscrimination measures.”532 Like the Communist Party in the United States, the Cuban
Communist Party took direct action by calling for effective policies against racial discrimination.
Afro-Cuban leaders Blas Roca, Nicolas Guillen and Salvador Aguero presented a public letter to
Manuel Urrutia, who at the time was president of the Party, highlighting sixteen measures that
should be added to the revolutionary government.533 The third measurement asked for an official
antidiscrimination policy and a plan for guaranteeing Afro-Cubans access to all jobs, armed
forces and state institutions.534 Roca, Guillen and Aguero also articulated their hopes of
eradicating racism through a post-1959 revolutionary political environment. As a result, Castro,
“attentive to the demands and needs of the popular sectors,” listened to Afro-Cubans, thus leading
him not only to speak about racism on the island but also to declare the island as a “raceless
nation.”535

While Castro did not adopt an official antidiscrimination law, he did promise that he
would improve public schools and implement a campaign that would challenge racism
publically.536 Castro’s speech did alarm various sectors of the Cuban population, as some
believed that any overt anti-discrimination efforts individually imposed unfair policies in areas
they considered the private sphere (i.e., social clubs). Efforts to integrate certain areas of society
were met with resistance. Yet, other groups took advantage of Castro’s politics—which
inextricably linked revolution and racism—and launched an antiracist campaign. But the
campaign was not overtly framed as a racial struggle.537 The gradual desegregation of public and
recreational facilities and policies that were couched in color-blind discourses provided Afro-
Cubans and the poorest in society (which was largely made up of black Cubans) with political,

532 Ibid.
533 Ibid.
534 Ibid.
535 Ibid, 263.
536 Ibid.
537 Ibid.
educational and social opportunities. Because integration efforts encountered resistance from
certain sectors of Cuban society, such efforts were not only strategized as color-blind approaches
but also were couched in the politics of class rather than race.\textsuperscript{538}

The revolution, therefore, carefully implemented steps toward the desegregation of most
social spaces and the racial integration of the public, but also it created a revolutionary discourse
that linked racism to imperialism. For Cubans and the Communist Party, racism was now
anticommunist and counterrevolutionary as well as anti-national. By 1962, the antidiscrimination
campaign led to several revolutionary authorities’ claiming that Cuba had eliminated racial
discrimination on the island. Furthermore, the Second Declaration of Havana declared that the
revolution had ‘eradicated discrimination because of race and sex.’ Castro himself surmised that
Cuba had eliminated both race and class privileges. Such an assertion, thus, became the dominant
discourse of the revolution: racism on the island no longer existed.\textsuperscript{539} This was the raceless
political and cultural environment that the Williamses encountered when they arrived on the
island during the early 1960s. After 1962, racism became a less viable topic within the public
sphere and more of a taboo in the years to follow. But this anti-racism discourse was not new. As
Antonio Maceo and Jose Marti helped established in the late 1800s and early 1900s, so did Cuban
government officials and Afro-Cuban leaders help further solidify a “raceless” discourse.

Of course, the building of the new “patria” was not completely reflected in the actual
practices of the country’s public and private spheres. As many criticisms have suggested, the
silencing of racism (and the re-introductions of some capitalist endeavors starting in the 1990s)
has led to a subtle continuation of racism both in public and private spaces. Yet, what this
nationalist effort highlights is that Afro-Cubans were just as involved as Cuban revolutionaries in
the building of a “raceless” discourse (historically prevalent in Cuban society). When the

\textsuperscript{538} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{539} Ibid.
Williamses officially entered Cuban society in 1961, they were in many ways arriving at the end and beginning of a significant historical period in Cuba, one that allowed the Cuban Revolution to be successfully connected to an anti-racist nation. The link between revolutionary politics and racism, however, was not lost on Radio Free Dixie. In fact, the radio program paralleled revolutionaries’ attempt to eliminate racial discourse from the public sphere by highlighting the country’s success with eradicating racism. Moreover, the “new” “raceless” nation would have to contend with its northern neighbor ninety miles away from its shores. Failing to implement a similar anti-racist society, the United States stood to learn some lessons from the revolution. Yet off-air, a different story emerged, one that undermined the historical significance of Cuba’s nationalist discourse of racelessness, and one that placed race and class in direct conflict with one another.

Revolution and Racelessness: What can we learn?

R. Williams often wrote in his letters that Radio Free Dixie was an independent program and not controlled by the Cuban state, thus he was careful about connecting the program to the Cuban government on air. But one strategy that the program did endorse was its constant references to Cuba as an integrated land. As Radio Free Dixie would come to a closing at midnight every Sunday, Tuesday and Friday, music hostess Jo Salas told its listeners: “You have been listening to Radio Free Dixie, coming to you from Havana, Cuba, free territory of the Americas, land where integration is an accomplished fact.”\(^{540}\) Cuba as an integrated state dominated much of the program’s broadcasts. Such admiration for the Cuban government and its

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citizens moved beyond the program’s introduction and closing; it also appeared in various editorials, mostly those aired by R. Williams.

On October 18, 1962, R. Williams’s initial admiration for Castro and his attempt to befriend African-descended people filled the airwaves of Radio Free Dixie. News about Castro’s courtship of Ahmed Ben Bella, the first leader of the independent nation Algeria, in the streets of Havana reached the ears of black Americans living in the United States. R. Williams announced that he had happily witnessed the “great historical occasion” of watching two “liberators” ride on the crowded streets of Havana:

Man, as the cats say down home, it was a sight for more eyes to see our boys Fidel and Ben Bella rolling along the boulevard and greeting the people just like regular home boys. Man, standing among what seemed to be an ocean of people, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for the Joes back home. Here, I was a refugee from the so-called democracy of the so-called free world and I felt the greatest spirit of freedom and brotherhood I had ever known in my life.541

To R. Williams, the crowd he had joined to watch Castro and Bella not only represented “every shade and hue” but also reflected how people looked just like people “back home.”542 The difference here was that everyone was the same, “no high and lowbrows.” The brothers and sisters made up “one race of people, one nation of people truly indivisible, with a national purpose.”543 Nostalgically, he recalled thinking that they were people with a common goal, one that included happiness and well-being.

Here, he reiterated the idea that the revolution had opened all doors to everyone regardless of skin color. The revolution was also significant in that while the Cuban people loved

542 Ibid.
543 Ibid.
everyone (as was evident by the idea that the revolution had opened those doors which were closed to sectors of the population prior to 1959), they would proactively defend the “working man’s revolution” through violence if necessary. According to R. Williams, Jim Crow no longer existed in Cuba but was prevalent in the United States Naval Base at Guantanamo. The continuation of United States colonialism on one part of the island meant that Guantanamo was the only section of Cuba where any hint of racism remained. Here, his perception of racism on the island was inextricably linked to United States colonialism and imperialism (an argument that scholars have made regarding United States interference in Cuba’s nation-building). Cuba symbolized liberty while the United States reflected oppression and racism. This critique also directly contrasted with the dominant ideology in the United States, which attempted to portray its own government as liberated while Cuba represented oppression.

In a recollection of a conversation with another person in the lobby of the hotel in which he lived, R. Williams further reinforced the importance of self-defense in revolution:

A few nights ago, I met a joker who handles so-called Free World business down here in the lobby of the hotel where I live, a hotel where Africans couldn’t even darken the door before the revolution. This defender … mentioned Radio Free Dixie … and said that I should advocate a policy of nonviolence like the other Negroes in the South. I asked since he didn’t believe in violence if he considers the American Revolution immoral and George Washington immoral … and he said ‘that’s different.’

His response to this anonymous hotel resident was that people were meant to die in liberation struggles and pointed out that proponents of nonviolence could not export violence only when convenient. But if the United States government was “fool enough to attack the socialist world, he’s going to get burnt real bad.” Even while R. Williams perceived self-defense as an old
United States American tradition, it also could be found in a country like Cuba, which had successfully fought off United States imperialism. Once again, *Radio Free Dixie* took advantage of the moment and joined the united front:

To our oppressed black brothers in North America, the staff of *Radio Free Dixie* pledges that we too will join the gallant people of Cuba...These people who have given the oppressed negroes of the USA their first free voice of liberty, we pledge with our Cuban brothers, in the name of all North Americans who are willing to die for AfroAmerican liberation, Patria o Muerte, Venceremos.\(^546\)

The fact that black activists like the Williamses had been given asylum and support in Cuba symbolized Cuba’s acceptance and willingness to support the black struggle in the United States. Such a step portrayed the United States as a state that endorsed the exact opposite; it merely forced its black citizens to escape the racist environment instead of granting black individuals full citizenship.

On October 25, 1962, R. Williams commemorated the July 26\(^{th}\) Movement, which played a crucial role in replacing Fulgencio Batista with Castro. His praises highlighted a contradiction between the image of Cuba in the United States and his actual experiences on the island: “Cat, can you imagine … here I am a dark refugee from so-called Free World democracy … a cat who flew the coop from a lynch mob in Dixie. … And your man was talking a whole lotta B.S. about us free folks being imprisoned on the island of Cuba.”\(^547\) He added that the people of Cuba were “free and happy” contrary to what “Mr. Charlie” would have them believe.

As an example that further illustrated Cuba as the only nation of the Americas free from racism, R. Williams introduced Juan Almedia over the air. Almedia was an Afro-Cuban

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revolutionary who played a prominent role in the Communist Party of Cuba and who eventually reached the position of Vice-President of the Cuban Council of State. Speaking to whom he presumed was a black audience, R. Williams asked his listeners if they knew of Almedia. His answer to the question implied that the “truth” about Cuba remained hidden from United States citizens: “I doubt you would know because Charlie doesn’t want you learn the facts of life.”\(^{548}\) In his broadcast, R. Williams noted that Almedia was a “young commander of the Cuban Army” and was a “dark child” who looked “just like some of the cats [Williams] used to serve with when [Williams] was a jar head in Charlie’s mess called Marine Corps.”\(^{549}\) Such a point illustrated that black men who fought for the United States army destroyed free racist societies like Cuba (albeit unknowingly) by helping white racists kill other black people.

His broadcasts often implied that the “fascist, racist compatriots,” including the Kennedys, did not want to inform the United States American people the truth about Cuba for it would reveal not only the government’s contradictions but also jeopardize its war against communism in Latin America and the Caribbean.\(^{550}\) On January 3, 1963, on the fourth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, R. Williams once again evoked the symbolism that the Cuban Revolution had on the island and in the United States. He recalled witnessing another celebration of the movement with visitors and guests from all over the world: “It is part of the invincible tide that is beginning to send shock waves against the ancient shores of oppression and anti-social reaction all over the world.”\(^{551}\) He recalled Castro’s speech, claiming that just and fair governments would not deny their citizens the right to hear or read “the words of this great

\(^{548}\) Ibid.
\(^{551}\) Ibid.
liberator.” Clearly implicating the United States, he also added that the governments that did oppress and tyrannize their citizens would “distort” and “repress” the words of Castro.

R. Williams surmised that “racists like Kennedy” and other dictators of Latin America feared the voice of Castro because such “truth” would further reveal the racist environments of those countries. This “truth” implicated the Kennedy administration’s domestic and foreign policy:

[Castro] dared repeat the words of John Kennedy. He wanted to make sure that the people of Cuba are aware of Kennedy’s threats against their revolution. … He wanted to make sure that they know how these men who murdered Cuban women and children, yes those men who rained death and destruction on helpless people were greeted and praised by Mr. Kennedy, the so-called representative of the people of the USA.\(^5\)

Castro, according to R. Williams, said that they laughed when Kennedy called Cubans a captive people. Furthermore, he announced that the world could be

rest assured that the racist press of the fascist USA will never reveal the fact that Kennedy, who has a representative of the Ku Klux Klan in the White House, a racist named Henry Hall Wilson, Jr. of the Klan town of Monroe, North Carolina, welcomed the invaders of Cuba, the mercenary killers of women and children as heroes to the United States while a black man William Worthy was arrested for returning to his native land from Cuba.\(^6\)

Here, R. Williams used Castro’s words as a way to further contrast the image of Cuba in the United States against the actual reality in Cuba.

As R. Williams stood in the crowd witnessing Castro’s historic speech in early January 1963, he made his own comparisons. He felt sorry for the “twenty-million captive black brothers”

\(^{5}\) Ibid.
\(^{6}\) Ibid.
in the United States. While he observed the crowd that had gathered to celebrate the revolution once again, he recalled a race riot that broke out in Washington one Thanksgiving day. Asking why racial integration could not happen without violence, he declared that only a “free” society could develop an “atmosphere of human dignity and mutual respect.” Cuba, thus, was not a land of “races.” It was a land of “Cubans with a sprinkling of refugees from persecution and oppression in the so-called free world.” He further claimed that a gathering in the Plaza of the Revolution the week before illustrated that there were no white Cubans or black Cubans. All were Cubans. In fact, those who did believe in classifying people into white or black were those whom Kennedy praised. He also compared the anniversary to the “empty memorial celebration like the ones usually held in racist Washington.” Describing the Cuban anniversary as an example of brotherhood, R. Williams framed the new Cuban society as a model for black people who desired racial equality.

But R. Williams’ observations, which were aired over Radio Free Dixie frequently, did more than just imagine a new raceless society inspired by the Cuban Revolution. The political discourse that emerged from the broadcasts, in many ways, contradicted his own thoughts about integration in the United States. While he praised racial integration in Cuba and defined the nation’s achievements as “real” accomplishments, he often endorsed a more separatist vision of race relations in the United States. In the United States, he did not believe the non-violent movement that fought for integration would lead to racial equality; instead, his broadcast messages implied that armed self-defense would create an integrated society, like the one in Cuba.

Cuba’s reaction and resistance to United States imperialism further demonstrated its potential to be an exemplary model for black people. R. Williams argued that “Fidel” made it

554 Ibid.
555 Ibid.
“plain that the Cuban people would rather die than submit to racist yankee captivity” and unlike the “AfroAmerican,” Cuba’s resistance against the United States was supported by “armed might.” He announced that he felt more secure as he witnessed the armed might of Cuba on parade,” because he knew that weapons would keep the “noble land free of the savage oppression” that black people endured in the “Jim Crowed USA.” Such people were not captive, they were armed and free. Speaking to the United States government, R. Williams highlighted one more important distinction between the United States and Cuba: “You wouldn’t dare arm so many people in Washington or Pittsburgh because you fear a race riot. You fear that the black captives may refuse to be treated as free world dogs any longer. Yes, AfroAmericans must take a cue from the Cubans [with] AfroAmericans and justice loving whites … [becoming] one.” Ironically, a couple of years following this broadcast, R. Williams would accuse the Cuban government of favoring the non-violent movement over armed black rebellion.

On Radio Free Dixie, however, he consistently referred to Cuba as an integrated society that remained a political threat to the institutionalization of racism in the United States. Once again highlighting United States hypocrisy in relation to its foreign policies toward Cuba, he announced that those who defended self-determination rights for racists in the United States, also claimed the right to force the “peaceful people of integrated Cuba” to simply obey the “will of the racist-thug politicians of Washington.” In fact, in its news highlights for the week, Radio Free Dixie pointed out that while the United States government said it wanted to “free” Cuba, what it actually meant was to “enslave Cuba again to Yankee Racism.” Just as Cuban leaders linked

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556 Ibid.
557 Ibid.
558 Ibid.
revolution to antiracism prior to and following 1959, R. Williams’ broadcasts followed the same trend; his focus inextricably connected the United States to racism and Cuba to anti-racism.

R. Williams’ broadcasts also denied the fact that Cuba was a threat to a just society in the United States. On the contrary, he underscored that Cuba rightfully was a threat to the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow. In an effort to show solidarity, he also implied that Cubans were not the only threat to national security. Rather, the state would have to count the “oppressed AfroAmericans among those forces constituting a threat to U.S. security.”561 R. Williams sent a warning to both his followers and opponents: Just as Cuba had rightfully fought off the United States, so would black citizens. On May 3, 1963, he argued that the United States preoccupied itself with enlisting black Americans in a campaign to “hate” Cuba. The reasons for the campaign, according to Radio Free Dixie, resulted from Cuba’s determination to exercise its sovereign rights, its refusal to “segregate and Jim Crow her citizens,” universal access to education and its opposition to a “racist representative democracy.” R. Williams’ broadcasts demonstrate how the radio program portrayed Castro not as the enemy but as a friend to the struggle. In contrast to mainstream public opinion in the United States, Cuba actually represented the “just” society. Politicians in Washington, on the contrary, were the enemies.

On July 26, 1963, R. Williams urged his followers to learn from the Cuban Revolution. He asked them: “What do you think the outcome would have been if the great Fidel Castro had advocated a policy of nonviolence and love towards the bloody tyrant Batista? What do you think the outcome would have been if Fidel had advocated a negotiated victory of liberation against such a bloody and oppressive beast?”562 He told his listeners that they were witnessing a great day in Cuba where people from all over the world saw for themselves the truth about the “Yankee

562 Robert F. Williams, August 30, 1963, RFD, Reel 12, RFD, RFW Papers, housed in Bentley Historical Library.
conspiracy of lies” that slandered “a noble people and a noble revolution.”\textsuperscript{563} Adopting an integrationist perspective, R. Williams portrayed the commemoration in Cuba as one where “all races, all colors” gathered in a land liberated from racial discrimination. The island’s success with “true” integration was what caused United States hatred, according to \textit{Radio Free Dixie}. Thus, the “racist segregationists” would not be able to defeat an integrated society with twenty million black Americans fighting in the “freedom movement.” Integration was real in Cuba; in the United States, it merely remained an illusion and a lie. Furthermore, United States American integration represented hypocrisy, while true Cuban integration correctly represented racial egalitarianism.

How the broadcasters of \textit{Radio Free Dixie} perceived the history of racial politics on the island before and after the revolution of 1959 reflected in the program’s portrayal of Cuba as a truly integrated land. The radio program linked the island’s racist past with United States imperialism, while the country’s future was heavily intertwined with an anti-United States discourse. To become a truly integrated society, Cuba had to eradicate the United States-backed political system that had controlled the island since the early 1900s. For instance, on August 30, 1963, M. Williams read an article over the air about a women’s visit to Cuba. The writer argued that before 1959, “there was cruel racial discrimination and exploitation … in Cuba before the 1959 revolution.”\textsuperscript{564} She describes some of Cuba (prior to 1959) as a country with “sprawling homes” and locked liquor cabinets that were meant to prevent “servants from pilfering.”\textsuperscript{565} During her tour, “Afro-Cubans reminded [her] that before the revolution they would not have been permitted to sit in this park, this café, to sleep and eat in the luxurious hotels, drink at the bars and go to the theaters where we now sat and talked for hours.”\textsuperscript{566} Making sure to highlight that Afro-Cubans now occupied an important space in the \textit{new} Cuba, the writer said that she

\textsuperscript{563} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{566} Ibid.
listened to an Afro-Cuban explain Russian and Chinese factory machinery after returning from a year of study in “Czechoslovakia” and her experience of being “seen as a human being” and not “just a Negro.” In the article, the writer expressed that it took her time to finally see that Cuba actually was a raceless nation and not a racist nation like the United States:

These faces spoke of all Cubans having Negro blood as Fidel Castro had pointed out a few years ago in a speech to the people, of this societies’ absolute need for the Afro Cuban’s contribution which has always been so great from the slave uprisings in 1868 through the time of the black revolutionary hero, Antonio Maceo, down through the poor and the black fighters with Fidel Castro in the mountains of Oriente.

The fact that Afro-Cubans were involved with the revolution of 1959 was an ongoing reflection of the island’s relationship to its African heritage and ancestry. R. Williams’ broadcasts demonstrate that he was indeed aware of the historical legacy of Afro-Cubans’ involvement in the Ten Years War for Cuban independence during the late 1800s. Before Radio Free Dixie went off air for good in 1966, R. Williams dedicated a special broadcast to Maceo. As he puts it, the subject of Maceo points to the “glory of great” becoming “immortal as it transcends the bounds of age and country.” Therefore, even though United States imperialism helped shape the country’s racist discriminatory practices, according to R. Williams, the existence of Antonio Maceo also helps explain the possibility of the 1959 revolution. Here, R. Williams educated his listeners:

“Maceo was a great champion of the rights of all men, but because he was a Negro, he was doubly affected by racism imperialism.” Announcing that he was an oppressed “Afro-American” who was forced into exile in “free Cuba,” he compared himself to Maceo and portrayed Maceo as a symbol to which black individuals should exemplify. He said, “Maceo was

567 Ibid.
568 Ibid.
570 Ibid.
a realist who faced the reality of what needed to be done to eradicate the sufferings and brutal oppression of the exploited and oppressed Cuban people.”

Maceo served as an exemplary figure who fought for the rights of all men. R. Williams quoted from Maceo (in a speech he made to the armed forces on October 29, 1896) to demonstrate how he won the hearts of both white and black Cubans: “Whatever sacrifices we may perform in the struggle for freedom, and whatever destiny we may face, no matter how rough it may be, it would be preferable to the dishonor of being governed by selfish people who do not care about their country. I think like many other honorable Cubans.” Even the Spanish government’s attempts to assassinate Maceo demonstrated the threat that he posed to colonialism. Maceo’s name, therefore, was “synonymous with rebellion” as he was a “tireless and dedicated warrior who symbolized the dreams and aspirations of the disinherited masses.” The Spanish government’s attempt to silence Maceo was much like the United States government’s persecutions against R. Williams but also Cuba itself. Maceo’s decision to fight in the independence revolution “gave honor to the fight against Spain” and “put a stop to all insurrections against the cause of liberty.” In his broadcast, R. Williams further described Maceo’s victorious battle scenes with Spanish soldiers, portraying him a relentless hero determined to destroy the colonial system.

Celebrating Maceo’s role in Cuba’s nation-building process, R. Williams admitted that Maceo was significant to him because the “pall of oppression still [hung] over many lands.” R. Williams’ broadcast used the example of Maceo to further promote his ideas of self-defense and the importance of revolution, but it also reflected a history that paralleled his own experiences in the United States and in Cuba. The importance of using Maceo to mobilize black Americans,

571 Ibid.
572 Ibid.
573 Ibid.
perhaps, underscores the ways in which Radio Free Dixie often placed Cuban race and revolutionary politics at the core of civil rights struggles in the United States.

On October 8, 1964, Radio Free Dixie quoted from a speech by Fidel Castro that sought to counter the dominant image of Cuba in the United States. In his speech, Castro told his audience that the government invited United States American journalists to learn the “truth” about the revolution:

We have nothing to hide, so let them see the reality and tell the truth, those who want to write objectively, they can see why the people are with the revolution, what it is that cements the support of the people to the revolution. They can tell that we have solved our problems, and among other things, that here nothing happens like what occurs in New York, South Carolina, Miami, all those places where the Ku Klux Klan is on the prowl.574

Like Radio Free Dixie’s usual broadcasts, Castro’s speech served to compare both countries’ racial politics. He portrayed Cuba as the integrated and more benevolent, anti-racist society, while depicting the United States in the same way that the Williamses did on air, as a racist country. Castro furthermore emphasized that Cuba no longer had “racial problems” and that racism left with the imperialists.575

Castro’s speech helped delegitimize the idea that racial discrimination would be eliminated with legislation—an emphasis found within the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. He argued that the “problem of discrimination [was] not a matter of laws, since … there was a constitution that said…that all discrimination based on race or sex is illegal and punishable by law.”576 Yet, as Castro pointed out, women and men were discriminated against because of their gender and/or race regardless of the country’s constitution. But after the revolution, there were no

“white gangs” persecuting black communities and that they lived together as brothers who enjoyed equal rights. Further condemning white racism, he added that as a boy he watched Tarzan movies and saw a white man who was always stronger and intelligent while the black individual was “uncivilized.” According to Castro’s speech, these images clearly created a “kind of mentality” that reinforced racial superiority. The airing of this speech over Radio Free Dixie accomplished one main goal of the radio program. It helped further discredit any United States criticisms of Cuba and support earlier sentiments that portrayed Cuba as an integrated and liberated society.

Another indictment of “so-called” U.S.-American “freedom” focused on the country’s travel embargo against Cuba. The program underscored the fact that such a legislation existed only proved the hypocrisy of the United States. Approximately a year later, M. Williams shared some of the letters that were sent to R. Williams while living in Cuba: “Radio Free Dixie takes pleasure in rendering excerpts from some of the many personal letters received by Robert F. Williams.”577 Letter writers often expressed a desire to visit Cuba and disappointment for not being able to see the island because of United States legislation (which the Williamses saw as another form of repression). These letters reflected an earlier twentieth-century phenomenon in which black citizens engaged with the idea of exodus, searching for a new home free of racism. The United States embargo merely operated as one more reason why black Americans should flee to Cuba.

For instance, one letter writer from Los Angeles, California, asked the Williamses to offer employment possibilities with Radio Free Dixie, citing newspaper experience and education. Another writer from Columbus, Ohio, asked to obtain information regarding a trip to

A writer from Los Angeles, California, asked the Williamses to send information about locations in Cuba and other Latin American places where black people could make “new homes for development.”\(^{579}\) Writing from Oklahoma, another letter writer told the Williamses that living in the U.S. reminded that person of “Hitler’s fascist idealism of murdering the peoples right to live [sic].”\(^{580}\) A former NAACP member who met R. Williams while he still lived in the U.S. also expressed a desire to move to Cuba and became a “Cuban” while another writer from Mexico who was “victim of political persecution,” sought to flee to Cuba. \textit{Radio Free Dixie’s} decision to share these letters aligned not necessarily with the overall goal of discrediting the United States American image of Cuba (like it did in other instances), but it served more to delegitimize the United States government’s ideas of “freedom” and “liberty.” They also told a story of \textit{imagined} exodus, where black communities consistently found themselves searching for a world free of racism outside of the United States. Only this time, instead of crossing the Atlantic to arrive in Liberia, black Americans \textit{imagined} fleeing to Cuba, ninety miles away from the shores of Florida.

By 1964, however, such praises of Cuba became less frequent. Perhaps, as the Williamses began to encounter more resistance from the Cuban government, they felt less compelled to express enthusiasm for the 1959 revolution. But \textit{Radio Free Dixie} did remain committed in some sense to presenting Cuba as an integrated land via other hosts. Musical hostess Jo Salas continued to refer to the island as a “free” country. Then in July 1964, M. Williams reported on an editorial from another radio program owned by the Advanced Leadership Goal, a black organization based in Detroit, Michigan. The editorial argued that the United States intensified its anti-Cuban government activities with a raid on a Cuban sugar mill. In the editorial, the writer asked whether the United States sought to help overthrow Fidel Castro

\(^{578}\) Ibid.
\(^{579}\) Ibid.
\(^{580}\) Ibid.
in order to “return the segregated beaches and hotels.” Furthermore, the writer recalled earlier arguments made by R. Williams by asking whether Cuban women would have to succumb to prostitution again and force Cuban children to work in the sugar-cane field. It further suggested that Cuba should resist such a future: “It should be resisted by all of us. If the United States can send aid and do business with communist Poland and communist Yugoslavia, certainly we can at least let Cuba be in peace.”

While such an article revisited Radio Free Dixie’s earlier goal in highlighting the success of the 1959 revolution, it also presented another argument: “Some listening may wonder why the Goal show devotes time to Castro’s Cuba. Don’t we know they are communists? Of course, we do and we, of course, are not communists.” However, according to the editorial, justice was “justice” and right was “right.” Furthermore, if they were “to be quiet as Cuba [was] being oppressed out of fear of being called commie-lovers, we’d be no better than they.” The argument that the Goal was not communist, but believed in self-determination and justice aligned with R. Williams’ arguments not on Radio Free Dixie, but off-air.

“I’m not a Communist, I’m a Nationalist”

During his time in Cuba, R. Williams received many letters expressing support for the liberation of black Americans but also for his decision to live in Cuba, the raceless country of the Western Hemisphere. From Mexico City, one person wrote: “I love Cuba and pray for her daily – that she build up a model state where all can work and use their talents, and present a hope to all

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582 Ibid.
583 Ibid.
584 Ibid.
Latin America.”585 Not only did his personal letters to United States residents indicate some support for the Cuban Revolution, but leaders throughout the government in turn attempted to show solidarity for the black struggle in the United States.586 In early May 1962, R. Williams received a letter from two Cuban leaders in the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Ensenanza (National Union of Workers of Education). In their letter, the writers indicated that they perceived him as a brother in the struggle for vindication for the black “race,” under the umbrella of imperialism. In an effort to build solidarity, they recognized R. Williams as someone who would not be kept from fighting for humanity. Similarly in another letter from the Association of the Rebel Youth, Cuban leaders wrote to R. Williams as a representative of black North Americans, sending him a message that they believed would only reach the United States American population through Williams. In their message, the call for solidarity is clear: “Along with the separation where the dominant class in the United States has subjected the North American workers, they have fomented an inhuman division. … This division between black and white, which the United States has arrived at the extreme of wanting to create two big groups … humans and the black people.”587

During the earlier part of his time in Cuba, R. Williams’ responses suggested he too supported the island’s revolution. But he made sure to remind people that he did not support the Cuban Revolution because it was a socialist movement per se. Instead, he admitted that he agreed with the ideas of the revolution from a human rights perspective. On April 24, 1963, R. Williams wrote a letter to a resident of Connecticut, Paul Basch, from his home in the Hotel Capri in Havana. In his letter, Williams explained comments that he made in Studies on the Left (a journal

published between 1959 and 1967 in Madison, Wisconsin) regarding “Communists” and other “liberals” who opposed self-defense and portrayed the black struggle as a “secondary” one in which black people would have to be “patient and long suffering.”\textsuperscript{588} Here, R. Williams defended his criticisms against communism while reinforcing the idea that his support for Cuba was not due to any political motivations but to its “humanitarian aspects.” The country’s humanitarian practices were evident in that “Cuba was the only country of this hemisphere humane enough to give a Negro asylum from a racist lynch mob and savage kangaroo justice.”\textsuperscript{589} Such a statement foreshadowed his future comments regarding the relationship between race and communism.

While Williams clearly began his radio career in Cuba in support of the country’s revolution, he would eventually leave the island disappointed by his experiences with some of Cuba’s public officials. This disillusionment with the Cuban government prevailed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, even after his return to the United States. When Senator Strom Thurmond asked Williams whether he had joined the Communist Party any time during his life in 1970 (in a hearing for the United States Senate Committee), R. Williams quickly rejected the notion: “No. No. I have never.” Did he consider himself a Communist, asked Senator Thurmond. Not surprisingly, Williams decided to take a different approach: “Oh, no. No. I consider myself a black nationalist.”\textsuperscript{590} Once again, Senator Thurmond asked him if he believed in the policies of the Communist Party. Here, R. Williams wavered a little: “No. Not—I believe in some of the policies, but I do not believe in all of the policies of the Communists because they have some


\textsuperscript{589} Ibid.

things that I think are favorable and they have some things that are not favorable.”591 When Senator Thurmond then asked whether R. Williams worked with the Communist Party in Cuba or in “Red China” to conspire against the United States, he acknowledged that he wasn’t sure: “Well, not that I know of, because I was having trouble out of the Communists. When I was in Cuba I was probably having more trouble out of the Communists than the United States was having.”592

In the 2005 documentary *Negroes with Guns*, R. Williams’ biographer Timothy B. Tyson reiterated the idea that R. Williams was not a communist, and stated that he was “more of a pawn than a player in the Cold War.” In an interview of R. Williams in 1968, he referred to his decision to leave Cuba in 1966: “As an individual they treated me quite well in Cuba but with some of the party people I had some problem. They took the position that my position would drive between the white working class and the blacks. Then I had to leave Cuba.”593 According to R. Williams, one of the reasons why the Communist Party did not support his philosophy of self-defense was because they believed that Martin Luther King’s nonviolent movement would “bring the workers together” and that once “white workers became free they would automatically free the black workers.”594 These suspicions were further highlighted in a news article when an Associated Press writer quoted R. Williams’ assertion that the only racial problem he had in Cuba was from white North American leaders who lived on the island.595

But in his 1968 interview with journalist Robert C. Cohen, R. Williams pointed out that a few Cuban leaders, including the director of the Dirrecion General de Inteligencia (Intelligence Directorate) Manuel Pineiro Losada, had tried to “sabotage the African American struggle.”

591 Ibid.
592 Ibid.
594 Ibid.
Pineiro and other revolutionary leaders were “pretending to be a part of the people… and great leftists and Marxists” while “all the time sabotaging what [he] was doing.” In addition, he argued that such figures sought to make his struggle “ineffective” and his “stay uncomfortable in Cuba.”596 In the years following his departure from Cuba, R. Williams came to believe that he was sabotaged due to infiltration within Cuban intelligence agencies: “Pineiro was also one of the intelligence officials and he was either being misled, being fed misinformation, uh, [or] he was working directly for the United States and for the CIA.”597

While R. Williams and other black activists clearly believed that the Cuban Revolution had ended some racist practices, they also pointed out that racism in both private and public spaces continued to affect Afro-Cubans on the island: “I think they would say, ‘I have nothing against black people but I wouldn’t want my daughter to marry one.’”598 R. Williams not only believed that racist discrimination continued to influence Afro-Cuban citizens’ experiences but also that they affected his chances of promoting a black revolution in the United States. When he began Radio Free Dixie in 1962, Castro supported the program, as it fit well with the government’s foreign policy of endorsing liberation struggles throughout the world. Radio Free Dixie “was no exception.”599 Cuba became a place where R. Williams could “freely work.”600 But some party officials did not approve of the radio program; thus Castro “himself [had] to intervene in this” and “took the position that [R. Williams] was a freedom fighter from the United States and that as a black American [he] knew more about what the propaganda should be than anybody” else.601

596 Robert F. Williams, Let it Burn, interview with Robert C. Cohen, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHw5OfsP7-M.
597 Ibid.
599 Robert F. Williams, Let it Burn, interview with Robert C. Cohen, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHw5OfsP7-M.
600 Ibid.
601 Ibid.
Journalist Richard Gibson, who served as R. Williams’ representative in London, wrote several letters to R. Williams. In his letters, Gibson indicated that both the Communist Party in the United States and “Russian Soviets” wanted to get rid of R. Williams. In a letter written to R. Williams in 1964, black activist Julian Mayfield asked him to confirm whether Gibson’s story about R. Williams’ encounter with Russian officials in the airport of Moscow (following his visit to Peking, China) was correct. 602 Apparently, “Rob was told … that he was to return to Cuba via Prague.” R. Williams knew that the plane to Prague would stop in Canada where “he would certainly be arrested.” 603 When the “Russians” said that there was nothing that could be done and that the “Moscow-Havana” plane was full, two Cubans offered to give the Williamses their seats. 604 When he boarded the plane, he noticed that it was half-full and, according to Gibson, when the two Cubans landed in Canada, they were “met by RCMP’s and FBI agents looking for Rob and Mabel.” 605 But Gibson also believed that some friends of Cuba living in Europe also were not to be trusted in regards to R. Williams’ work in Cuba. 606 In 1964, therefore, it was becoming clear to R. Williams that he would be facing challenges from members of the CPUSA in Cuba, as he believed they were “pestering the Cubans to remove [him] from the radio [and] ban the Crusader.” 607 He added that black people were losing “phony” friends because of their “revolutionary militancy.” 608

By mid-1965, R. Williams began writing to various people about his plans to move out of Cuba due to what he believed was the infiltration of the Communist Party of the United States

603 Ibid.
604 Ibid.
605 Ibid.
608 Ibid.
and CIA in Cuba. On August 2, 1965, he expressed that there was “quite a bit of friction between the Canadian and U.S. Communist Parties” in Cuba “concerning the Afro-American struggle,” as the Party believed the black struggle was a secondary one that should fall underneath the direction of the white working class.609 On the same day, he wrote another letter acknowledging his attempts to move to Canada before being told that he may not be granted protection.

Becoming desperate to leave Cuba, he wrote in a letter that his situation was similar to his experience in Monroe: “Only this time the trouble stems from the USCP and their ‘experts’ here. These racist reds are resolutely against the idea of blacks resorting to self-defense against white terrorists. They insist that this is bad for the class struggle and only Martin Luther King’s philosophy can lead to unity of the black and white working class.”610 Furthermore, he wrote that these leaders insisted that self-defense came from “political immaturity, reactionaries, counter-revolutionaries and black nationalists,” and that these were serious charges in a “socialist society.” Perhaps because of his growing concerns and a feeling that he should leave Cuba before it was too late, R. Williams requested to speak with Fidel Castro on August 16, 1965, in a letter written to Srita. Celia Sanchez at the Palacio Presidencial in Habana, Cuba.611

In a letter to R. Williams on September 1965, Gibson responded to his concerns, stating that those “white men” who waved “red flags” were “even more reactionary … than LBJ.”612 A month later, he responded to Gibson, writing that he could not offer him any good news, as “things [were] at a standstill.”613 He accused the “Cubans” of not “lifting a finger” to help the cause as they were preoccupied with supporting King’s nonviolent movement. By this time, R.

610 Ibid.
Williams began to feel like he was wasting his time: “The Cubans have done what the Yankees could never do, that is to make me feel that there is no place in the Communist camp for the Negro … If we cannot fight for own people and our own cause, there is no reason to fight at all.” As R. Williams felt the situation was getting worse, his growing concerns became more urgent in his letters to Gibson. In an undated letter, R. Williams indicated that the situation was worse and, as a result, he was seeking a friend’s help with obtaining a visa to leave Cuba and to enter “Britain, France or any other place” where Gibson would have contacts. In February 1966, Gibson wrote to R. Williams concerning an official invitation from the Student Association of the University of Lund for R. Williams to visit Sweden. Approximately a month later, R. Williams wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Relations regarding this invitation: “In-as-much as the Cuban Government is a supporter of all people who struggle for liberty, I urgently request full and speedy assistance in this most essential matter.” But it was not until five months later that the Williamses would arrive in China.

In 1966, Gibson began to express his own concerns about R. Williams’ ability to impact the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement from Cuba. On August, 20, 1966, Gibson wrote to Williams, who now lived in China with his family, regarding the selling of Radio Free Dixie transcripts in the United States and Europe. Assuming that R. Williams was in a better place, he wrote, “I am certain you can assert your leadership much more effectively now that the Cuban and other revisionists cannot sabotage your efforts.” Here, Gibson agreed that R.

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614 Ibid.
Williams’ move to China was the “best damned thing that has happened to the Movement in years!”

Carlos Moore’s divergence from Cuba’s revolutionary politics following his exile from the island in 1963 also became the subject of Gibson’s letters: “Carlos has turned into a full-fledged black fascist. For a while, he tried to pretend he was pro-Chinese, but he is dropping that mask too now. Behind all that super black nationalism, I’m sure we’ll find a white boss in Washington, one day.” In fact, by this time, Carlos Moore had also begun to share the same sentiments about the Cuban Revolution that R. Williams expressed in his personal letters. Moore accused the Cuban government of taking advantage of race to gain international support: “… the comrades are known to have made deals throughout their history. ‘Give me this, and I’ll give you that…’ And since Los Angeles flared up again last week, and things are getting hotter, the Man is more and more worried of the internal situation that could be created, and is in the making at home.” On June 9, 1965, Moore wrote to R. Williams concerning Radio Free Dixie, admitting that he had a lot of “things” he wanted to say, “things concerning nasty rumors and dirty foul commentaries,” but would wait until he received a response from R. Williams. In Moore’s response to Gibson’s commentaries about Moore’s betrayal to the Cuban Revolution, he accused Gibson of working for the “Man.” Toward the end of his letter, Moore wrote: “I hope time will allow us yet to meet again; this time on the much richer and truer ground of mother Africa.”

By 1966, R. Williams became increasingly sympathetic to Moore’s feelings about the revolution. He felt he could no longer be effective in Cuba, as he discovered that some Party

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619 Ibid.
623 Ibid.
leaders were not interested in eliminating the “oppressive conditions in the United States.” Instead, he believed that these leaders sought to create the image of revolutionaries but not do anything toward the liberation of black Americans. Furthermore, R. Williams believed that the Cuban government was trying to reach an agreement with the United States regarding Cuban exiles; thus, they did not want his propaganda to “antagonize” the United States government.\footnote{Robert F. Williams, \textit{Let it Burn}, interview with Robert C. Cohen, \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHw5OfsP7-M}.} His work as a black nationalist, therefore, continued to be jeopardized the longer he remained on the island. Such experiences, of course, influenced his growing critique of socialism: “I could have remained in Cuba as a socialist Uncle Tom, but I don’t see any difference in being a socialist Uncle Tom and being an Uncle Tom in capitalist and racist America, and I’m not cut out to be an Uncle Tom no matter who it’s for.”\footnote{Ibid.} Despite his concerns over the Cubans who wanted to sabotage his chances of mobilizing a black revolution in the United States, R. Williams later seemed to confine his criticisms to Cuban officials who worked for the government. According to his various public statements made after he left Cuba, it was clear that he perceived Castro as separate from those whom he believed wanted to limit his impact: “Castro is an honest sincere man. He believes in poor people, in the underdog. He was always friendly and he always looked out for me.”\footnote{Tyson, \textit{The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams}, microfilm.} During his second exile (in China), R. Williams found the courage to share with the world and Castro, in particular, his criticisms of the government and its practices. In a public letter dedicated to Castro, he expressed his gratitude to the Cuban people and asserted that he would always be a friend to the Cuban Revolution:

In fact, this is the very reason that I take the liberty to write you this letter from my second exile. The reason that I bother to bring these matters to your attention, or later to
the attention of the public if necessary, is because I find it impossible to believe that Commandante Vallejo Peniero and others close around you have fully, truthfully and faithfully informed you of these ignominious experiences that I encountered while living in Cuba.627

Of course, his gratitude was limited to those he believed were influential in helping him promote his cause. R. Williams listed his grievances with the Cuban government. First, he admitted that while the Cuban government allowed him to air Radio Free Dixie using Radio Progreso’s facility, it did not grant him access to Radio Habana (a short wave radio station owned and operated by the government), which would have provided Radio Free Dixie with a greater reach throughout the world. Apparently, because Radio Habana was the “official voice of the Cuban government” they were not willing to directly identify with the black struggle in the United States, so they denied his request to use Radio Havana. R. Williams, thus, accused the government of not allowing him to “reach the great masses” all over the United States, “especially the West Coast where there was a heavy concentration of [his] fellow workers and followers.”628 R. Williams believed that they would have reached Latin America, Africa and other non-white corners of the world through Radio Habana; thus, his inability to air from this radio station impacted the effectiveness of his political activism.

According to R. Williams, Peniero told him that he would receive a $200 monthly stipend for subscribing to newspapers and magazines, and to buy phonograph records for him to have the “latest music from the United States to use on Radio Free Dixie to increase [their] listening audience.” Yet, R. Williams claimed that he never received the money nor did he receive any publications.629 As personal letters have indicated and as R. Williams claimed in his open letter to

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628 Ibid.
629 Ibid.
Castro, eventually supporters from the United States would send him donations, records and newspaper articles for him to use on Radio Free Dixie. Many of the listeners and supporters of Radio Free Dixie “donated musical recordings” popular among black Americans. Yet, R. Williams accused the government of intervening with his mail as there was some evidence that he never received certain tapes or publications from the letter writers who claimed they mailed him materials for the radio program. Later, he apparently discovered that these materials were being sent to the Foreign Ministry where officials allowed “mercenaries, thieves and pirates to practice piracy against [their] struggle.” For R. Williams, the fact that he did not always receive his mail “crippled” the broadcast by keeping them behind so that they “could not keep up with the news.”

But for him, it was not only that they did not want him to succeed in mobilizing a black revolution, but it was that they too, just as the capitalists, were racist. R. Williams highlighted that other United States Americans on the island were able to use the Foreign Ministry and receive their materials (that had nothing to do with “struggle”) easily. Furthermore, when he asked Peniero’s office to allow M. Williams to travel to Canada, he was denied even when other United States citizens were able to travel back and forth freely: “I later discovered that this was just a plot to try to wreck our struggle and to crush our organization, and was done in conjunction with forces inside the U.S., including the U.S. Communist Party which was opposed to our method of struggle and which advocated a policy of nonviolence in support of Rev. Martin Luther King.”

In addition, R. Williams argued that the power of Radio Free Dixie had been reduced after it had become successful and noted throughout the world. Thus, following its wide reach was a period where people inside the United States could not hear the broadcast. The Havana “transmission

630 Ibid.
631 Ibid.
632 Ibid.
633 Ibid.
was so weak that sometimes they could not even hear it in Florida."\textsuperscript{634} For R. Williams, these practices protected United States racism and imperialism from “being exposed for its brutal racist crimes against the Afro-American people.”\textsuperscript{635}

Such accusations explicitly contrasted with \textit{Radio Free Dixie}'s broadcasts on Cuba. \textit{Radio Free Dixie} often illustrated that Cuba’s “true” racial integration further underscored the prevalence of U.S. racism (as it represented the exact opposite of Cuban society). Yet, off-air and years later, R. Williams argued that the Cuban government’s interference in his work actually failed to expose United States racism and imperialism. He believed that U.S.-Amercians living in Cuba were at the center of these events, pulling the strings. According to R. Williams, they were the first ones who suggested that \textit{Radio Free Dixie} be closed.

R. Williams also believed the government’s actions affected other parts of his work, including the circulation of his publication the \textit{Crusader} and black tourism to the island. According to R. Williams, many black activists were barred from entering Cuba once they arrived in Prague, being forced to return to the United States and exhausting their funds. As a result, any financial funds that would further support the black struggle were being wasted through travel. Those activists who were in Mexico and wanted to establish communication links with the Williamses in Cuba also encountered difficulty with Cuban officials, especially the Foreign Ministry. R. Williams asserted that the only Cuban official who genuinely supported the struggle was “Commandante Che Guevara,” who believed in the necessity of revolutionary struggle.\textsuperscript{636}

R. Williams’ experiences may illuminate some of the issues Cuba continued to have with race. His criticisms, however, failed to consider the multiple factors involved that may have influenced the government’s responses and actions toward the Williamses’ presence in Cuba and the airing of \textit{Radio Free Dixie}. In fact, before 1959, as cultural relationships between Afro-

\textsuperscript{634} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{635} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{636} Ibid.
Cubans and black Americans developed, the presence of black Americans on the island was often directly linked to United States imperialism. Furthermore, as this chapter has demonstrated, Cuba’s ongoing struggle with racism was often couched in the language of class, a major ideological distinction between the United States and Cuban black struggles.

**Historicizing Race and Class: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Trans/National Effort**

The Williamses’ position within the Cuban state and its intentions of airing a radio program committed to the black struggle for equal citizenship and human rights within the United States highlights a shift in the historical relationship between Afro-Cubans, black Americans, and the United States and Cuban governments. Long before 1959, black Americans and Afro-Cubans exchanged cultural and political ambitions by creating transnational organizations and social clubs dedicated to overcoming racial inferiority, discrimination and marginalization in both countries. Not too long after North Americans began exploring the promises of the island in 1901—establishing Cuba as a protectorate nation following the Cuba’s independence from Spain—Afro-Cuban and black American elites launched a cultural movement that would last until the rise of Fidel Castro. Politics, journalism, literature, popular culture and baseball contributed to a growing transnational black community. Furthermore, several black American leaders like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass would influence the political, social and economic mobilization of Afro-Cubans on the island.

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As Cuba’s close proximity and its myth of racial democracy led many black Americans to perceive the island as a “prospective site for large-scale emigration.” Those who imagined the Cuban state as an alternative racial haven urged others to escape racist America and bring their “North American” skills to help “develop” the largely poor and black Cuban nation. Elites justified United States imperialism by characterizing Cuba as a “black nation” that lacked the ability to develop an independent and “progressive” civilization. While many black Americans and Cubans did not support such programs, the establishment of clubs like the Afro-American Cuban Emigration Committee illustrated that some United States Americans “could ally themselves as race brothers while possessing both North American chauvinism and a belief in capitalism at the same time.”

Ironically, they lacked capital and status on their own land.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois offers a compelling description of the black experience in America. One of his intellectual contributions included the notion of “double consciousness.” Du Bois contended that African-Americans yearned to experience their national identity within an environment in which they faced a persistent and violent racism. Furthermore, double consciousness also referred to the tendency for black Americans to see and measure themselves only through the eyes of white Americans. In his reflection on the black experience in the United States, W.E.B. Du Bois writes about the process of freedom: “In the midst, then, of the larger problem of Negro education sprang up the more practical question of work, the inevitable economic quandary that faces a people in the transition from slavery to freedom, and especially those who make that change amid hate and prejudice, lawlessness and ruthless competition.”

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Afro-Cubans found themselves facing similar problems as they sought to adjust to an emerging society that continued its unjust and unequal racist practices. But the ways in which they fought for civil rights at home in many ways differed from and resembled black Americans’ struggle for equal citizenship. Afro-Cubans established, reinforced and resisted hegemonic ideologies that defined the nation as racially democratic. Cuba’s colonial “heritage that recognized *miscegenation* and *mestizaje* provided a different mode of action than black Americans who lived for most of their history under a segregated United States system.”641 While black nationalism in the United States reflected a need for black Americans to promote ideas of racial solidarity, economic self-sufficiency and self-determination, for Afro-Cubans, nationalism consisted of reinforcing a racelessness ideology that called for all Cubans to unite in the hopes of establishing sovereignty.642 Of course, as many scholars have pointed out, Cuba’s nationalist discourse of racelessness or anti-racism did not necessarily reflect the realities of society. Before 1959, to fight for freedom, citizenship and racial equality in the independent nation, Afro-Cubans developed numerous political organizations and black fraternities.643 It was in this environment that Cubans would resist U.S.-American imperialist endeavors, but welcome black Americans

642 Ibid.  
643 Following independence, Afro-Cubans faced numerous barriers as they attempted to enter Cuba’s private and public spheres. The large participation of Afro-Cubans in the independence war played an important role in helping them fight for their freedom, citizenship and racial equality. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Cuban and American authorities had implemented several policies that sought to “whiten” the nation—as they feared that the island would become another Haiti. For example, between 1898 and 1901, thousands of European immigrants went to the island to work, which displaced many of the Cuban peasants who were largely African descended people. The historiography on Cuban racial politics alone has produced an important dialogue that illustrates how Afro-Cubans mobilized and struggled for their rights as Cubans. See Aline Helg, *Our Rightful share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alejandro De La Fuente, *A Nation for All* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Lillian Guerra, “From Revolution to Involution in the Early Cuban Republic: Conflicts over Race, Class, and Nation, 1902-1906,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 132-162.
individually, thus generating a movement that would seek to unite them based on a common racial identity.\textsuperscript{644}

By the 1960s such a cultural movement was bound to disappear as Castro utilized state policies to internationalize blackness. Thus, once the new Cuban government took over in 1959, United States imperialism ceased to be at the center of the relationship between Afro-Cubans and black Americans.\textsuperscript{645} But this chapter illustrates that there was a shift rather than an absence. The July 26\textsuperscript{th} movement’s victory in placing Castro as the country’s new Prime Minister and Castro’s decision to make issues of race a significant component of his foreign policy led to a renewed relationship that shifted the focus from United States imperialism to the internal colonization of black people in the United States. Therefore, imperialism was no longer the driving force that shaped the relationship between Afro-Cubans and black Americans. Rather, 1959 shifted United States-Cuba relations as well as black Americans’ connections to Cuban society. This time, Castro’s victory placed the Cuban Revolution at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement in the United States. The existence of \textit{Radio Free Dixie}, therefore, emphasizes this historical moment by illustrating how the Cuban Revolution became central to the discourse of black power, civil/human rights and anti-United States imperialism. But the ways in which the Cuban Revolution contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement did not necessarily illustrate solidarity; instead, a conversation about the role of race and class politics emerged. Thus, the Cuban Revolution was essential in shaping a dialogue about the intersections and divisions between race and class.

In 1959, Afro-Cuban leader Juan Rene Betancourt—one of several activists who fought racial discrimination on the island—celebrated the Cuban Revolution in an editorial published in the \textit{Crisis}, the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

\textsuperscript{644} Guridy, \textit{Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and Black Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow.}
\textsuperscript{645} Ibid.
Yet, his vision of the “Negro movement,” a program that sought to provide Afro-Cubans with first-class citizenship, would eventually clash with the agendas and policies of the new administration. The 1960s, then, marks a new beginning for black transnationalism between Cuba and the United States. In the early years of the revolution, Castro attempted to fight racial discrimination primarily through class-based initiatives, restructuring the educational system and desegregating public spaces. In addition, Afro-Cubans joined the Cuban state by creating an anti-racist campaign on the island, further helping redefine the nationalist discourse of racelessness. Of course, the conditions of Afro-Cubans did begin improving, as they received more employment opportunities (in the public sector), and access to education and health.

As a consequence, by 1962 the new Cuban government became less willing to continue an overt anti-racist campaign, as the improvement of Afro-Cubans’ status increased, thus making racism a taboo subject. To uphold the notion of racelessness, it also prohibited Afro-Cubans from creating separate black political organizations on the island. The new administration declared that the socialist revolution had eliminated all racial discrimination and prejudice; therefore, there was no need for additional separate, race-based movements. For the new Cuban government, class unity would be far more important than racial solidarity precisely because both white and black Cuban leaders believed that economic equality inevitably solved the race problem. Yet, historians illustrate that the institutionalized Black Power Movement in Cuba ultimately failed to completely erase long-held beliefs and notions of black inferiority, a racial ideology that had been

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646 In 1959, Fidel Castro along with Ernesto Che Guevara and other several other guerilla fighters won the Cuban Revolution by overthrowing the U.S.-supported dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. The victory launched a new era for Cubans, as Castro began restructuring the political and economic system to deliver an ideal system that would eliminate class inequalities.


648 Ibid.

649 Ibid.
culturally instilled among Latin Americans and Caribbean people centuries before under European colonialism.650

Because these realities emerged within a context in which race was inseparable from a nationalist discourse (as racism was unpatriotic), the Williamses became more familiar with the imaginings of the Cuban Revolution and its ideas of racelessness, but not the country’s actual history with racial inequality. Thus, the Williamses’ actual experiences, following Cuba’s anti-racist campaign, may have come as a surprise. While Radio Free Dixie indeed reinforced the nationalist discourse of racelessness, off-air he was beginning to think that the country had not eliminated racism, specifically from certain government officials whom he believed supported a non-violent Civil Rights Movement in hopes of integrating white and black workers. In many ways, in his criticisms of the Cuban government, Williams reacted based on how he imagined race should work in Cuba and not how it actually worked. In Cuba, racism had been declared illegal, and R. Williams’ broadcasts certainly agreed with the idea that the nation was anti-racist. His “ways of representing” race in Cuba, therefore, was largely influenced by Radio Free Dixie’s representations and discourses of race in the United States.

Williams’ experiences and relationship with Cuba, in fact, was part of a longer history of United States-based black visions and imaginings of how race worked in Cuba and the Caribbean. Before 1959, black Americans also saw Cuba and other Caribbean nations as racial democracies. In their local and national locations, overt racism, public and private racial segregation, racial repression and marginalization shaped their everyday experiences. On the outside, countries like Cuba, Jamaica and Brazil (where explicit racist discourses were less common) became havens and symbolized what their own worlds could resemble. Their imaginations, however, were not

necessarily accurate, as race formation had taken a more integrative approach for a longer period in the Caribbean than in the United States. For Cuba, it was important for Afro-Cubans and white Cubans to unite to fight Spanish colonialism; thus, to help build an independent Cuban nation, they created a discourse of Cuban nationality (not black or white). While the existence of separate black organizations and political parties before 1959 demonstrated a need to address inequality through a race-based lens, its anti-racist strategy largely consisted of re-producing a racelessness discourse. Through “social reintegration, whites and blacks had to accommodate one another free of conflict.”\textsuperscript{651} But Williams’ conception of U.S.-American black-white relations did not necessarily fit within the Cuban context. Bakhtin’s analysis of language is helpful here, as it is clear that one language juxtaposed the other. R. Williams’ language of race and class diverged from Cuba’s construction of identity politics, thus pointing to the socio-historical differences between R. Williams and Cuban officials. Arguably in his criticisms, R. Williams also failed to consider Afro-Cubans’ agency in demanding that the state address racial inequality in the early years of the revolution and the state’s history of placing class struggle at the forefront of the Cuban nation (to resist colonial and imperial rule but also to address racial injustices).

Of course, Williams’ experience in Cuba does not negate the fact that while the Cuban Revolution did improve the lives of Afro-Cubans on the island, it did not completely eradicate racism in certain public and private spaces. But what his experiences and the broadcasts of \textit{Radio Free Dixie} do demonstrate were the misinterpretations that emerged within a transnational context. In Brazil, the presence of U.S.-American black journalists influenced Afro-Brazilians’ response to push away “from denunciations of Brazilian racism and toward professions of loyalty to the Brazilian nation.”\textsuperscript{652} Afro-Brazilians’ responses came from a need to challenge black Americans’ criticisms of racism in Brazil. Therefore, while Afro-Brazilians attempted to

\textsuperscript{652} Micol Siegel, \textit{Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and The United States} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 188.
demonstrate solidarity with black Americans, they “imagined a transnational diasporic community without losing sight of its important internal differences.” In the case of Cuba, Radio Free Dixie challenged racism in the United States as much as Cubans themselves (some Afro-Cubans like Carlos Moore also criticized the Cuban government for not doing enough to eliminate racism on the island), but off-air, he became critical of racism in Cuba as much as he was of the United States. Yet, as the history of Cuban race and class politics demonstrates, racism is not always replicated in the same manner; thus, R. Williams’ criticisms reflected a similar problem that black journalists from the United States encountered in Brazil.

But R. Williams’ interpretations of how race actually did work in Cuba were based primarily on his own experiences as a black American living on the island. The differences or juxtapositions between his experiences and imaginings of Cuba raise questions about his decision in placing issues of race before class struggle while still on the island. In Cuba, the revolution couched the anti-racist campaign within a language of class, as they “insisted racism was a class problem and that through further education it could be eliminated without creating animosity.” When Afro-Cubans did attempt to organize based on race, other Afro-Cubans criticized them as they saw such actions as counterproductive, arguing for an integrative approach rather than a separate one. Thus, Cuba supported liberation movements in Africa, not necessarily because they were black revolutions, but as historical moments that sought to overthrow colonial rule.

By the 1950s, the Communist Party in the United States, which had played a crucial role in a longer Civil Rights Movement since the 1920s, had come under heavy government surveillance and repression, and faced increasing internal conflicts. Therefore, R. Williams’ experiences—unlike many of the Afro-Caribbean activists who played significant roles in the labor movements of the early and mid-1900s—did not arise from a class-based movement.

653 Ibid.
655 Ibid.
Instead, his experiences were largely shaped by his encounters with what he believed was a white supremacist government, not necessarily a white capitalist state. In fact, as chapter three demonstrated, his attempts to address the problems of United States imperialism often returned to the issues of racism, not capitalism. Thus, the Cuban government adopted an approach to R. Williams’ political messages of armed black revolutionary politics that unsurprisingly reflected a long debate about nationalism, race and class on the island. In fact, Radio Free Dixie did not stray too far from Jose Antonio Aponte’s book of drawings that depicted black soldiers defeating white slaver owners and planters during the early 1800s.656

R. Williams’ criticisms and re-affirmations of the Cuban Revolution both off-air and on-air, thus, highlight an important trend in historical transnational activities. Many scholars have recently celebrated and analyzed how contemporary forms of transnational activism have become accelerated because of new media technologies that have helped reduce the presence of national borders. Thus, communications scholars will often frame transnational activism as phenomena that involve fewer borders. A historical analysis of Radio Free Dixie, however, suggests that older media outlets also attempted to do the same: establish solidarity movements across national borders to resist nation-states’ repression of citizens. What transnational media and activism often do is quite the opposite from making borders obsolete: “Transnational subjects overflow and challenge national borders not in blithe disregard for those borders but because nation-states so profoundly, even violently, constrain them.”657 It is important to add that transnational media, like

656 Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Aponte’s book also included sketches included portraits of Haitian revolutionary leaders such as Henri Christophe, Touissant L’Overture, Jean Francois and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Colonial officials in Cuba believed Aponte used the book as a blueprint for revolution. The book, according to officials, illustrated and explained his plans for the rebellion. Childs’ analysis places the rebellion within a local setting and a larger context of the Atlantic world. The book provides a narrative on how Cuban authorities, free people of color and slaves were directly and indirectly linked to global trends of slavery and how the Aponte Rebellion of 1812 was re-appropriated by the revolutionaries during Cuban Revolution of 1959.

Radio Free Dixie, have often reinforced national borders even while they attempt to transcend them, especially during moments of conflict. R. Williams’ conflicts in Cuba reflected his own United States American identity (a discourse specifically contextualized within the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, and Cold War politics), even while he attempted to resist nationalist and racist practices through his re-appropriation of international revolutionary strategies.
Chapter 6
The Homecoming

In his concluding chapter of his biography on Robert F. Williams, Timothy Tyson briefly discusses the role *Radio Free Dixie* played in Williams’ life as well as the larger Cold War era. He writes,

“the story of Robert Williams’ years abroad—in Cuba in the years following the Cuban Revolution, in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, China during the Cultural Revolution, to say nothing of his travels in Africa—would make an interesting book itself,” but such “work would be more about the many sided international complexities of the Cold War than about Williams himself or the African American struggle.”[^658]

Yet, as this dissertation attempts to demonstrate, this story *is* about the African American struggle and much more. Chapter five provided insight into the conditions that led Williams to leave Cuba and arrive in China in 1966, where he would live until 1969. After the closing of *Radio Free Dixie* and his arrival in China, Williams spent the next three years planning his return to the United States. While Williams’ three-year period in China is out of the scope of this dissertation, it is important to give some insight into his last few years abroad and his return to the United States.

In a speech to the Chicago-based United States China Friendship Association (USCPFA), Williams said he had the “fortunate experience of living [in China] during the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” and returned as an invited guest, from May 8 to August 15, 1969.

Some paragraphs later, he added that he was one of the “few foreigners living there who declined to actively participate in the Cultural Revolution,” even while he believed that “there were subversive forces working inside” the government. His arrival in China coincided during the emergence of a group of Communist Party leaders, called the Gang of Four. According to historical accounts, the group controlled the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution (a communist movement that took place between 1966 and 1976 and was initially led by Mao Zedong, who called upon the youth of China to mobilize against government elites). The Gang of Four were labeled as “counter-revolutionary forces” of the Cultural Revolution and later blamed by the Chinese government for ensuing societal chaos (a period of turmoil in which many political factions emerged) and for allegedly promoting a coup d’état in October 1976 (a month following the death of Mao Zedong).

In his speech, Williams recalled his experiences in China during the ten-year period of political turmoil. In an effort to encourage the United States government to form a friendship with the Chinese government, he claimed that he disagreed with the methods by which the “old cadre” was being discredited. He stated that he “exhalted” what he thought to be “good” and criticized what he thought to be “bad”: “Some Chinese leaders tolerated my criticism on the basis of their philosophy that friends need not always agree on everything. They can disagree and still remain friends. I declined to take sides with tendencies.” In fact, he added that if he stayed in China under the Gang of Four, he would have encountered “serious trouble,” as he feared “grave threats to the welfare and stability of the Chinese people.”

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659 Robert F. Williams, Chicago USCPFA Speech, no date given, Box 12, Robert F. Williams Papers housed in the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.
660 Ibid.
661 Ibid.
662 Ibid.
663 Ibid.
Both the Communist Party in China and Cuba allowed Williams considerable freedom as a “foreigner,” but China also supported his ideas of armed rebellion in the United States. Years later, Mabel R. Williams recalled the irony of their experiences as “Americans” abroad. The Chinese were very helpful, and the Cubans were very helpful and the Vietnamese were very helpful in Cuba for us to make the transition from Cuba to China. We had been invited to China after Chairman Mao made his famous statement calling on the people of the world to support the African-American in their struggle against racial discrimination. We had been invited to China on their National Day and they had rallies in support of our struggle. Rob and I used to laugh about the fact that we had to leave America to be recognized as Americans because every time we were introduced, we were introduced as representatives of the American people.\(^{664}\)

In China, Robert F. Williams continued to criticize United States foreign policy, particularly the Vietnam War, through his publication *The Crusader*. In 1968, he also wrote and distributed “Listen Brother,” an anti-war pamphlet addressed to black soldiers fighting in Vietnam.\(^{665}\) But eventually, they felt that “there was beginning to be more and more pressure to try to choose sides between the struggling groups that were going on and once again Rob decided that it was not time for him to be involved in internal politics of [that] country.” His struggle was not in China; it was in the United States.\(^{666}\)

Despite China’s benevolent treatment of Williams, by the late 1960s, he believed it was time for him to return home. While it is not clear why Williams returned to the United States in 1969 (after a brief visit to Tanzania), a few accounts may provide some indication as to why after eight years of exile, he decided it was time. A special news report to the *New York Times*

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\(^{665}\) Ibid.

\(^{666}\) Ibid.
indicated that Williams returned because reports from the Peace Committee Compound suggested that race relations in the United States were changing. But Williams began to contemplate his return home even before he left Cuba. He indicated that he wished to return to the United States to “live a normal life, like anyone else.” But when a Canadian diplomat, with whom he contacted to receive help for relocating to Canada (before he decided to move to China), advised him to announce to the United States government that he would work with “Reverend King’s people,” rather than continue promoting self-defense, Williams replied he was not a pacifist. But Williams admitted that he wanted to return to the United States, as he “learned a great deal during the four years of [his] exile which could be of use to [his] brothers and sisters back home.” Furthermore, the idea of being able to offer first-hand observations of the latest developments in their “struggle” also appealed to him. But Williams refused to denounce the Chinese government, another condition that the Canadian diplomat communicated to Williams, leading to his inability to return home immediately. Approximately four years later, however, he would return to the United States.

Williams’ arrival in the United States, however, was met with some criticism and tension between North Carolina and the federal government. In a news story published in The Enquirer-Journal of Monroe, North Carolina, Jesse Helms (the policeman and politician whom Williams once collided with in the 1940s and 1950s while still living in Monroe and who was at the time of this publication the Executive Vice President of WRAL-TV in Raleigh, North Carolina), wrote:

[the $20,000] flight from London to return the black militant, Robert Williams, to the United States has made clear that it did so only at the urging of high officials of the U.S.
government…and even though no acknowledgement has been made, it is unlikely that
this special luxury flight was financed by the taxpayers of the country.\textsuperscript{668}

Helms added that the right action was to have ensured that Williams could not return to the
United States. But if the United States government wanted Williams back, he declared that the
local government of Monroe, North Carolina should think twice before having “this militant and
his violent camp” returned to the state. Despite Helms’ protests, the local government attempted
to extradite Williams under the kidnapping charges that forced him to flee the country
approximately ten years earlier. Thus, when Williams arrived in the United States in 1969, he did
not return to his hometown; instead, he relocated to Detroit, Michigan, where he would begin
working for the United States government to help “normalize” relations between the United
States and China. Simultaneously, he fought extradition to North Carolina for the next six years.
In addition, before the United States government could officially pardon Williams (for the
kidnapping charges that the Federal Bureau of Investigation attempted to indict him with in the
late 1950s) was requested to give a testimonial in front of the United States Senate Committee.
Here, Williams gave an account of his life before exile, his time during Cuba and China, and the
reasons for returning home.

By 1974, the charges against Williams were dropped, and while some accounts suggest
that he continued to struggle for the black community, it is arguably more accurate to describe
Williams’ return as the beginning of a shift in his politics. Williams would no longer associate
himself with the radical black organizations he once advocated for; this time, he began working
with Richard Nixon’s administration, and became a consultant for the University of Michigan on
United States-China relations. In 1977, the Williamses and other local activists of Baldwin,
Michigan established the People’s Association for Human Rights where he would fight on behalf

\textsuperscript{668} Tyson, The Black Power Movement Part 2, The Papers of Robert F. Williams, no date given, microfilm,
Reel 14.
of county residents. In 1996, at the age of 71, Robert F. Williams, the longtime self-defense advocate passed away.

We were able to survive, having built networks of people who have really the true interest of the people at heart all over the world. And I think that there still is that element of people who are out there working and that we all constitute a real power. But we don’t know it.669

A Transnational Medium

The idea that Radio Free Dixie “was good for nationalist propaganda” points to the contentions that are highlighted in the previous chapters. Just as radio before the 1950s helped to create imagined communities, where political and cultural dialogues were personalized to individuals listening to radio in their private homes, Radio Free Dixie served as a similar political and cultural tool. It brought the voices of those who were hopeful and suffering to the ears of U.S.-American citizens throughout the North and South. In his 1970 testimonial before the United States Senate Committee, R. Williams described his purposes for airing Radio Free Dixie: “My purpose was to throw some light on the problems of our people in the States, also to try to inspire our people and to inspire them to resist oppression and injustice.” As interested listeners and broadcasters mailed each other music records, news articles and editorials, they also attempted to address the political turmoil that many black people living in the United States experienced prior to and during the 1960s.

This dissertation has not only discussed the historical development of radio and transnational media throughout the Americas as well as the significance of Radio Free Dixie, it

669 Williams, Robert F. Williams, Self-Respect, Self-Defense & Self-Determination: An Audio Documentary as told by Mabel Williams.
also underscores the interconnections between the local and global during a time of intense political turmoil. The Williamses’ negotiations with their national identities (as U.S.-American citizens) in Cuba and their initial alliances with Fidel Castro also highlights the contradictions that would emerge shortly after the launching of *Radio Free Dixie*. Indeed, Robert F. Williams’ political commentary, Mabel R. Williams’ reading of news reports and editorials, and Moore’s news highlights served to promote a black nationalist agenda. But a dialogue on black nationalism was not the only outcome of *Radio Free Dixie*. Robert F. Williams’ statement that *Radio Free Dixie* served as a nationalist tool only highlights one aspect of the radio program. Because the program also was positioned within a transnational context, particularly in relation to Cuba, negotiations between nationalism and transnationalism inevitably influenced the production of the radio program’s messages and outcomes. Such an analysis reveals how the Williamses operated within a Cold War context that linked the Cuban Revolution to the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, where the concepts of racism, imperialism and socialism were simultaneously integrated and separate. As a result, the author argues that the existence of a transnational medium like *Radio Free Dixie* points to a need to de-center United States American nationalist discourses about black media and, race and class politics.

The story of black struggle in Cuba and the United States illustrates how moments of solidarity and division have occurred simultaneously within transnational social movements. Chandra Talpade Mohanty underscores the importance of being “attentive to borders while learning to transcend them.” She contends that social justice should work across divisions and “lines of demarcation.” Yet, history illustrates that activists’ calls for solidarity in different parts of the world have often been jeopardized by diverging interests and political ideologies specific to national borders. Moreover, activists have continued to encounter challenges in

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671 Ibid.
transcending cultural, political and ideological struggles in their calls for solidarity. This dissertation, therefore, positioned Radio Free Dixie as a case study to provide insight on three main points: 1.) how activists have succeeded and failed in transnationalizing their struggles, negotiating national identities within transnational locations; 2.) the role of communicative technologies, such as Radio Free Dixie, in generating but also miscommunicating trans/national activism; 3.) the Cuban Revolution’s direct relationship to domestic race and class politics in the United States.

**Misunderstandings and Misinterpretations: Negotiating Borders**

First, the broadcasters’ messages of black participation in United States military projects during the 1960s highlights the ways in which Radio Free Dixie indirectly re-framed and re-presented the “double-v” campaign. The radio program often called for a focus on the local, and a disengagement from the global. But while Radio Free Dixie attempted to break the ties between local and global concerns, it simultaneously linked United States imperialism to racism, thus globalizing the local and localizing the global. Essentially imperialism was no coincidence, as racist domestic policies in the United States were also reflective in the country’s foreign affairs. Radio Free Dixie, therefore, served as a transnational tool that tied the Williamses and other broadcasters to multiple locations and movements, including the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, the Cuban Revolution, the growing anti-war movement, Cold War politics, and the various liberation movements occurring throughout the rest of Latin America, Africa and Asia. Yet, while Radio Free Dixie called for solidarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements, it failed to discuss any aspects related to class, thus racializing imperialism. Chapters four and five, however, illustrate that his racialization of imperialism should not be surprising. In fact, it was Robert F. Williams’ United States American identity and experiences that influenced how he would frame a
global anti-imperialist movement as one that focused on race, regardless of the class politics that were largely imbedded within these various international liberation movements.

The negotiations between nationalism and internationalism were further prevalent in the program’s promotions of a self-defense philosophy. Chapter four expanded upon the messages of self-defense, but with a focus on how such a strategy was framed as both a national and international ideology; such an analysis further illustrates how Radio Free Dixie’s discourse represented self-defense as a viable solution, while excluding nonviolence from the United States’ national discourse on revolution. Some scholars have described Radio Free Dixie as a tool that primarily promoted self-defense (a main tenet of black nationalism). But that chapter’s analysis extends the conversation further by arguing that self-defense promotions did more than just advocate for arming black people. Instead, such language provides insight into how the Williamses negotiated their national identities while located in a transnational context that essentially allowed them to continue a fight that was not welcomed within their own nation-state (i.e., the United States).

The United States American tradition of revolution (e.g., the American Revolution of 1776) served as a lesson to learn from, as its history proved that only armed rebellion could succeed in “freeing” the oppressed and colonized. Yet, events like the Cuban Revolution, historical Jewish uprisings, African liberation movements and the Cultural Revolution in China also pointed to the necessity of self-defense. On the other hand, non-violence represented the non-American way of achieving liberation; instead, it was an international influence (i.e. a tradition only efficient in India) that was both hypocritical and inefficient within a United States context. A conversation on how Radio Free Dixie re-framed and re-imagined self-defense, thus, highlights the contentions that have been found in more recent transnational activism. Transnational media like Radio Free Dixie, therefore, historicize recent scholarship on transnational media and activism by illustrating how this program during the 1960s complicated issues of global
solidarity, as borders were not less pronounced but even more so within an environment filled with contradictions. In an attempt to globalize the Civil Rights Movement and BPM, the Williamses localized black struggles in the United States by reproducing and reinforcing the same ideology it criticized.

Because national borders became more important within Radio Free Dixie’s political and cultural discourse, its conversation on the Cuban Revolution revealed another complex story where the program’s broadcasters found themselves negotiating two different race and class legacies. Ultimately, however, such negotiations failed to appease the Williamses and the Cuban government (their decision to move to China in 1966 reflected growing conflicts between the family and Cuban officials). Previous histories demonstrate that radio jamming by the United States and Cuban censorship of Radio Free Dixie negatively influenced its effectiveness. The researcher does not doubt that censorship impacted the program’s reach, but what chapter five argues is that misinterpretations of the role of race and class in Cuba are what led to the demise of Radio Free Dixie. The history of race and class politics in Cuba illustrates a narrative in which a raceless construction has always been at the forefront of the Cuban nation since its independence in the early 1900s, following the Cuban Independence Wars. While United States imperialism (including both the government and white and black social actors) shaped the country in its early years of independence, after 1959 it ceased to do so. Furthermore, even before the revolution of 1959, class struggle was always at the forefront of rebellion, not only in Cuba but in much of Latin America and the Caribbean. Racial democracy discourses served to minimize the debate on race, and focused on class solidarity. Radio Free Dixie, in many ways, reproduced these messages of racelessness, as Cuba initially served as an exemplary model for black people who sought to escape a violent and racist environment in the United States, as some believed the country had

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achieved full integration. But what we see in the Williamses communication off-air is that such praises turned into criticisms. The family began to encounter problems with officials who R. Williams believed wanted to sabotage his chances for developing an armed black rebellion.

Chapter five, furthermore, argues that Robert F. Williams’ insisted on seeing racism in Cuba just as he saw it in the United States, as his considerations did not take into account Cuba’s specific history with revolutionary politics. Arguably, Williams’ perceptions and impositions of race in Cuba reflected an imperialist worldview. The United States largely influenced not only how Latin American and Caribbean countries established and maintained free market-based political and economic structures, but also how the enforcement of liberal and neoliberal systems resulted in specific consequences for those countries’ citizens. But imperialism not only occurs through economic and political means as Williams often demonstrated in his radio broadcasts. Just as black journalists from the United States attempted to define racism in Brazil within an imperialist framework, so did Williams in Cuba. This is not to say that R. Williams was an imperialist who sought to extend United States’ interests. The author also does not attempt to argue that the Williamses’ black experiences were completely different from Afro-Cubans, since clearly both countries participated in helping shape transnational black politics in the Atlantic world long before 1959. But transnational efforts have not always done away with nationalism, as Radio Free Dixie indicates. Instead, in the case of Radio Free Dixie, transnationalism reinforced nationalist borders. In fact, even as Robert F. Williams critiqued the United States and portrayed it as an imperialist and racist state, he often was bounded by its cultural and political past.

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673 Source.
Some histories on the relationship between black activists in the United States and Cubans have argued that the new Cuban government of 1959 implemented state policies that eliminated future exchanges between black social actors in the United States and Cuba. Other research analyzes different factions within Cuba, arguing that while the “Guevaraist” group supported black revolution, the more traditional leftist members of the government believed that a separate black rebellion was anti-Cuban; such implications have portrayed the Cuban government as merely racist. Indeed, the practices of racelessness did not result in the complete elimination of racism (as the discourse itself has helped to maintain racism in certain public and private sectors). But couching the 1959 campaign of anti-racism within a class critique was essential for helping Afro-Cubans obtain statuses that were not available prior to the revolution. Thus, the polarized conversation that portrays Cuba as either completely racist or anti-racist does not reflect the agency that Afro-Cubans had in helping create an anti-racist campaign and the state’s long history with class struggle. Therefore, the narrative about the Cuban Revolution, one in which Robert F. Williams helped contribute to, has not reflected the actual realities of the Cuban state, which was neither simply racist nor raceless.

In Cuba, anti-racism has always been linked to revolution (even while not completely attainable), while racism was equal to United States imperialism (an argument R. Williams also made over the airwaves). The reality was that for Afro-Cubans, previous historical repercussions (before 1959) for mobilizing via separate black movements taught them lessons of their own. Class struggle was much more strategic in Cuba, where race struggle via a separatist environment was more common in the United States (particularly before the 1960s). Not until more recently

677 The violent repercussions against black rebels dates back to slavery on the island, with the Aponte Rebellion of 1812 marking a significant moment of black rebellion in Cuba’s history.
has the United States called for a multi-cultural approach for nation-building. Williams’ identity, therefore, prevented him from being able to truly create a solidarity movement with Cubans, thus leading to his own frustrations with the government and his decision to move. His own misinterpretations prevented him from understanding the role of class and blackness on the island. As a result, his transnational location did not easily translate into a transnational movement that would help bring black revolutionary politics home.

When Trinidadian-born C.L.R. James wrote a letter to Williams in the 1960s, his story about independence in the Caribbean highlighted a reality that was in some ways similar but also different from the United States. Here, James described his nation-state, Trinidad and Tobago, as an island that had gained independence from the British, but one that remained tied to colonial rule:

That is independence, Caribbean style. Everything belongs to somebody else, to somebody who lives outside the island, somebody else who draws the profits. As I have written recently: there is no neo-colonialism in the Caribbean territory, it is the same old colonialism that has been there for the last 300 years and it is stronger today, since independence, than it ever was before.

James’ letter provides further insight into the notion that Williams’ interpretations of imperialism as an extension of racism failed to account for the consequences of United States economic rule in the Caribbean. Thus, resistance to imperial economic rule on any Caribbean island (or Latin

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678 Just as racial democracy myths in Latin America and the Caribbean have obscured actual racist practices, so has a multi-cultural approach in the U.S. proved to be just as difficult in highlighting ongoing racial discrimination in contemporary society. For more on racism and multiculturalism, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Thinking Through Race and Racism,” *Contemporary Sociology* 38 (2009); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “The Sweet Enchantment of Color-Blind Racism in Obamerica,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634 (March 2011).

679 Letter from C.L.R. James to Robert F. Williams, date unknown, RFW Papers
America as well) has had to place class struggle at the forefront, a component missing from Williams’ critiques.

But while Williams and the Cuban government were not able to create a long-lasting movement of black solidarity, what the Cuban Revolution did was help frame a debate about race and class (or lack thereof) on *Radio Free Dixie*. The program, furthermore, became central to political discourses on the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement in the United States. Much of the scholarship on United States-Latin American relations (at least in the United States) has focused on how United States rule has influenced its southern neighbors. Instead, what this dissertation illustrates is that a country like Cuba actually influenced United States politics as much as United States imperialism influenced the island before 1959 via a specific medium, radio. While the “circulation of ideas, tactics and philosophies of black civil rights struggles in the United States or anywhere else is helpful for the continued circulation of debates about the relation between power and culture in the transnational black public sphere,” it also is important to understand how international discourses in turn helped shape the ideas and strategies of black struggles in the United States.680 This dissertation contributes to an ongoing conversation about global flows in the transatlantic. Just as the United States has largely influenced the global South through various media technologies (radio being one of those), so has the South influenced North American politics, particularly in relation to race and class. Such an analysis de-centers the United States in studies that analyze United States American politics, history, and media. Instead, it places more focus on how the Caribbean has contributed to a Black Atlantic conversation about race and class struggle during a pivotal moment in history that links Cold War politics to the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora.

Lessons in the Trans/National Effort: Just a Dead Microphone?

In 1989, Afro-Cuban exile Carlos Moore accused Fidel Castro of being a racist and using race primarily for furthering his foreign and domestic policy goals in his 1989 book *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa*. In 1990, Afro-Cuban journalist and poet Pedro Perez Sarduy responded to Moore’s criticisms of the Cuban government in “An Open letter to Carlos Moore.” Sarduy criticized Moore’s condemnation of Castro’s politics, claiming that he was proud to be black in a country “in revolution with a leader of Iberian ancestry who had launched Operation Carlota, in one of the hardest terrains on the African continent, an operation that was to shatter South Africa’s effort to prevent the consolidation of Angolan independence.”

To further challenge Moore’s arguments about racism in Cuba, Sarduy charged that Cuba’s problems were not similar to what he saw in “train stations, bus terminals, subways, streets, schools and neighborhoods of US cities.” He also wrote that the “poor, the sick, the neglected, those who haven’t found that ‘American dream,’ in their great majority black [were] humiliated by a system that convinced them of their own inferiority, assimilated them into the very philosophy that scorns them.” Sarduy argued that Cuba had left the racist politics of the pre-Castro era in 1959, while the United States maintained the oppression of its black citizens in the 1990s. Robert F. Williams echoed this comparison years earlier, in a letter he wrote on March 22, 1964. Like Sarduy, Williams observed that Cuba was doing “quite well on the race problem, [as] they never did have a race problem as intense as that in the U.S.”

Black activists and journalists like Sarduy and the Williamses (at least initially) openly supported the Cuban Revolution as a movement that endorsed black liberation abroad. But they

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682 Ibid.

683 Ibid, 5-6.

684 Robert F. Williams to Clyde (no last name), March 22, 1964, RFD, reel 1
would not be the only ones to celebrate the Cuban government’s support for black struggles worldwide. In fact, during the 1970s, Caribbean radical Walter Rodney and black American activist Stokely Carmichael (also known as Kwame Ture) declared that Castro, in fact, was the “blackest man” in the Americas. Rodney and Ture’s celebration of Fidel Castro’s socialist revolution once again connected Caribbean radicalism to United States civil rights struggles. Consequently, when it came to the Cuban Revolution, black activists called for both unity and division.

The historical study of *Radio Free Dixie* further provides insight into the past, present and future, highlighting how rebellion, revolution and social movements operated in the past and continue to influence today’s neoliberal social, economic and political environment. Therefore, this dissertation has implications for understanding the importance of movements that continue to address issues of racism and economic inequality in historical and contemporary political spheres. As the history of black exodus and struggles for citizenship equality demonstrates, black activists across the black Atlantic world have long debated the ideologies of black nationalism, socialism and integrationism. The ways in which the conversation entered the twentieth-century began with Garveyism and continued long after Robert F. Williams returned to the United States. Williams’ accomplishments in the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s would largely influence black activists who established organizations, including the Black Panther Party and the Revolutionary Action Movement, that would once again re-conceptualize race and class politics during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Furthermore, the fact that *Radio Free Dixie* remains a distant but close memory in the minds of those inspired by Williams illustrates the importance that alternative media played for those who hoped to spread their political messages of struggle and victory. The fact that Williams once believed the program was a “dead microphone” undermines its actual historical importance.

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as a medium that contributed to conversations lasting long after its existence. *Radio Free Dixie*’s political messages embodied one element of a larger conversation about the potential solutions to the race problem in the United States and abroad. For some, black economic empowerment, not socialism, was the answer; for other intellectuals and activists, an expanded Marxist critique of racism was pertinent for solving racial and economic inequalities. But *Radio Free Dixie* also served as a transnational form of communication that underscored the ways in which United States history has largely been impacted by global flows, a fact largely missing from United States-based historical accounts on media and struggle in the nation.

The story of *Radio Free Dixie*, therefore, raises several questions about the implications of transnational media and activism years after the demise of the Black Power Movement in the 1970s. The latter part of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century introduced newer forms of communications, placing radio (a medium that was once revolutionary due to its ability to bring news and entertainment to households faster) within Cold War history. In the 1990s, while radio still played an important role in society, its reputation for bringing modernity, revolution and social change to listeners became history (along with the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of a changing political and economic landscape in Cuba). Today, while activists continue to use the traditional forms of communication (i.e. print media, radio and television), they also have proactively adopted a more recent medium that has introduced newer and faster ways to reach people in distant corners of the world. Of course, what activists fight for today may differ from earlier movements, but as historical analyses of social movements demonstrate, today’s global concerns are often reflections of our pasts.

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686 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1967). Fanon claimed that black radicals and intellectuals had to “stretch” Marxism to include discussions about racism when addressing the oppression of black people. Figures like Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver and Angela Davis found comfort in Cuba but would return to the U.S. with different experiences.
While a black Civil Rights Movement or Black Power Movement is not necessarily at the heart of politics in today’s struggles, race and class politics continue to shape the debate on global concerns, particularly the consequences of neoliberal globalization. The integration of the financial market, culture and politics has led to an increasing globalized economy where free trade, deregulation, privatization and limited government intervention have shaped the neoliberal era of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed, a new civil rights movement has emerged, one that is tackling the prison industrial complex, voters’ rights, and economic inequality, to name a few. For these new civil rights activists, the Internet has become central for organizing around contemporary race, gender and class issues.

While factors like imperialism and migration during the early 1900s certainly helped establish a more global community, the latter half of the twentieth century saw a growing interdependent relationship occur between nation-states in which the international and domestic became increasingly blurred. But just as United States imperialism dictated global politics in the early to mid-1900s, neoliberalism and the rise of multinational corporations have also created a global backlash as some have asserted that globalization has a particularly negative connotation: “It is primarily an economic force, emanating from the West, that imposes an unjust, unequal, and environmentally harmful capitalist system on the world to the detriment of local cultures and democratic self-control.” As social geographer David Harvey suggests, neoliberalism and globalization is not about the reduction of nation-state borders. Rather, it is about certain elite interests being maintained over others, thus contributing to an uneven global economic structure. Therefore, just as transnationalism during the 1960s reinforced nationalist discourses, so has globalization in the twenty-first century.

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It is in this environment that activists have heavily used the Internet to resist neoliberalism, thus creating anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal movements since the widespread use of the Internet started in the 1990s. Some scholars have argued that new media, in comparison to traditional forms of communication (i.e., radio, print media and television) have accelerated the revolutionary potential for ordinary people as the opportunities and threats for the existing institutional structures have broadened. In *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, Clay Shirky argues that new media technologies (e-mail, instant messages, and webpages) are “manifestations of a more fundamental shift” in which collective action has been taken outside of traditional institutions. Furthermore, the traditional costs and barriers of communicating to larger audiences and creating solidarity networks have become minimal, thus resulting in an incredibly easier way to link people via blogs, wikis, and other social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Scholarship has pointed out that newer forms of media have reduced the importance of physical borders, as Internet users and activists can easily reach people around the world via social media technologies without having to physically organize. Yet, there may be a few reasons why we should be skeptical about praising the reach and power of the Internet as so many factors influence whether Internet users will participate in today’s social movements. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that users merely use social media to communicate with those who share similar backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. Thus, borders may still be as relevant in the digital age. Access to digital space continues to present challenges to activists and users who want to influence people living in distant locations. As corporations and governments also use these newer forms of media (as the United States, Soviet Union and Cuba did with radio in the 1900s) to promote their own political and economic interests, activists continue to be surveilled and

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690 Ibid, 20.
repressed. As hacktivist organizations like Anonymous persistently illustrate through their own forms of resistance, it may not necessarily be the FBI COINTEL Program of the mid-1900s sabotaging activists’ chances; global surveillance via the Internet (and other communicative ways) is making it just as easy to interfere with activists’ abilities to foster social change.

What an analysis on *Radio Free Dixie* demonstrates is that media (whether new or old) has implications for understanding how we define the national or transnational. Today, scholars define media globalization as a process that blurs the domestic with international forces. The current economic integration that is resulting from growing interdependence between sovereign countries, however, does not necessarily mean borders are no longer important. Debates on immigration around the world demonstrate that borders, which keep people in and out, continue to remain important for maintaining oppressive national discourses. But the earlier consequences of globalization in the mid-1900s demonstrates that questions about what is included and excluded from nationalist discourses remain prevalent. The Internet, just as other forms of media, can often reinforce national borders, even when some movements and common interests seem to move across them. *Radio Free Dixie* illustrates that while the transnational is important for mobilizing a great number of people for a local and global cause, national discourses (whether we consider these dialogues as oppressive or liberating) continue to interfere with activists’ abilities to establish solidarity across languages, cultures, borders and historical legacies of racism and classism.

The story of *Radio Free Dixie* in many ways attempts to begin a conversation on how scholars can bridge media history with contemporary scholarship on global media and activism. Thus, the narrative of *Radio Free Dixie* not only has practical implications for understanding how activists can embrace and transcend difference to establish solidarity across borders, but it also points to how contemporary media continue to share with and diverge from more traditional forms of communication. The Internet, therefore, has introduced similar ideas to the
contemporary world that radio did in the early 1900s. Both contemporary and historical scholarship, therefore, could benefit from a more cohesive narrative that analyzes the differences, similarities, affordances and patterns between older and newer media outlets. How do these different technologies shape how we perceive social change in today’s global landscape, and how are these technologies influenced by various actors as they seek to use media for their own interests? Furthermore, how do the activists of today’s new civil rights movements use media in ways that may be shaped by or diverge from historical trends? How do today’s activists find themselves in a similar position as Robert F. Williams in the 1960s, who attempted to negotiate his national identity within a transnational location?

Today, some continue to comment on China’s historical move to support a figure like Williams. For instance, on November 11, 2008 (just a few days after President Barack Obama became the first African American to win the United States presidency), Chinese blogger Quanyao Qin depicted Williams as the other “black president” that China once supported; here, Qin re-invoked the legitimacy of historical black leaders like Williams, while delegitimizing the symbolic leadership of President Obama.691 This blog post interestingly suggests a continuation of support for radical black activism by Chinese actors and, in many ways, reinforces a historical trend (albeit one contested) that divided black activism into two camps: the integrationist, non-violent strand and the black nationalist position. Of course, scholars since then have problematized these dichotomies, but the fact that a Chinese blogger invoked Williams following the presidency of Obama suggests more work is needed regarding Williams’ time in China. A small but growing body of literature has begun to address Afro-Asian politics. Williams’ relationship with the Chinese government during a strenuous political moment in China may

provide some insight into the historical relationships that have occurred across the Asian continent and the Atlantic world.

But any future research also should seek to include a more inclusive analysis of Radio Free Dixie using Cuban-based primary sources. The existing narrative of Radio Free Dixie poses one challenge for which scholars have yet to find a solution. Perspectives from the Cuban government or any concession that Radio Free Dixie existed in Cuba remains scarce. Thus, finding primary sources from Cuba regarding the radio station has been extremely difficult. Part of this difficulty includes being able to travel to Cuba for research, due to United States foreign policy toward Cuba. Other challenges include getting access to information in Cuba regarding a radio station that may be controversial within Cuba’s public spaces (since Robert F. Williams left Cuba after clashing with public officials and accusing them of racism). Despite these challenges, any future research should attempt to include Cuban sources in an effort to more holistically understand the relationship between United States and Cuban race and class politics.

Despite such limitations, this dissertation adds to knowledge about the relationship between transnational media and social movements within the United States. But knowledge about the internationalization of United States history, particularly its connection to Cuba, also highlights the importance of media in Cuba. The launching of Radio Free Dixie in Cuba in 1962 raises questions about contemporary politics in Cuba regarding media and social change. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Cuba has undergone slow and incremental changes. During the 1990s, as the Cuban government began to experience several political, economic and cultural changes, it also sought to adopt the Internet to primarily serve state interests (similar to the ways in which the United States adopted the Internet in the 1980s). As a result, the government’s decision to regulate citizens’ access to the Internet, a decision that aligned with its uses of traditional media, met criticisms from various United States actors. The conversation on Cuban politics, therefore, has been a polarized one since 1959, where criticisms reflect either an anti-
Castro argument or a non-critical pro-Cuban government approach. In fact, scholarship (especially within the communications field) has consistently relied upon simplistic, Cold-War rhetoric, instead of holistically addressing the challenges, failures and successes of the revolution. Future research, therefore, should not assume that the Internet should and will bring United States -based notions of social change to the island (or anywhere else). Instead, scholars should focus on what another revolution or more immediate reforms would bring and whether such changes would invite United States hegemony to the island once again (as was the case prior to 1959). How scholars should enter this conversation is with a goal that does not impose more United States-centered perspectives, but one that will place Cuba within its own specific historical, cultural and political context.
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