Moving Beyond "The Movement that Changed the World": Bringing the History of the Cold War into Civil Rights Museums

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Museums

Moving Beyond "The Movement that Changed the World": Bringing the History of the Cold War into Civil Rights Museums

Renee Romano

Abstract: A growing body of historical scholarship has demonstrated that the Cold War had a profound impact on the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The rise of newly independent nations in African and Asia, coupled with America's quest to lead the "free world" against the Soviet Union, made American racism an international liability and created conditions that fostered civil rights reforms at home. Yet the Cold War's influence on the movement is largely absent at the nation's leading civil rights museums. This article surveys the ways in which four civil rights museums present the relationship between the movement and the Cold War, and suggests some reasons that museums have yet to internationalize their history of the movement. The Cold War interpretation shows how foreign policy concerns and elite whites' self-interest both helped generate and limit civil rights reforms. This interpretation, however, stands at odd with the celebratory narrative of the movement as a triumph of democratic ideals that these museums present.

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> Museums play a major role in all kinds of issues, particularly in terms of having people understand what is significant about history and the way people perceive it. Most museums insist that all fifth graders or whatever come to their museum. Students see what's in there, and for the rest of their lives they think that is the way it is, unless they are lucky enough to take some other courses somewhere else or explore more on their own. If the museum does not show the whole picture, they are going to go through their entire lives with this perverted view of what this history is about.
>
> — Juanita Moore, first executive director of the National Civil Rights Museum, 1995[1]

Historical museums, Juanita Moore recognized in the 1995 interview quoted above, have both the power and the responsibility to educate their visitors about the past. A museum visit can provide a crucial history lesson; for those who do not go on to do advanced course work in history, a museum may in fact provide the most complex interpretation of a particular event that they are likely to encounter. The best museum exhibits—which include those at a growing number of major civil rights museums—provide a coherent historical overview and a compelling interpretation of the past. Although Moore may overstate the impact that museum visits have on fifth graders, she rightly notes that "museums can determine how you present history, particularly in the way that masses see it."[2]

Museums dedicated to documenting the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s do not have the problem of ignoring African American history that Moore was addressing in this interview. But they do face the enormous challenge of trying to represent a vital and complex history that addresses as much of the "whole picture" of the black freedom struggle as they can. That project has only become more complicated as historians have produced a rapidly growing body of scholarship in recent years that questions everything from the supposedly nonviolent nature of the movement to the periodization that suggests a movement began in the early 1950s and ended by 1970.[3] One of the most

1. Moore, quoted in Michael Honey and Juanita Moore, "Doing Public History at the National Civil Rights Museum: A Conversation with Juanita Moore," *The Public Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 75.

2. Moore, quoted in Honey and Moore, 74.

3. For just a few examples of recent scholarly work that questions accepted interpretations of the movement, see Emilye Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Clairborne County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007); J. Todd Moye, *Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past, *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–63.

exciting areas of this rich new scholarship explores the American civil rights struggle in a broader international context. A growing number of new works—often described as the Cold War/Civil Rights literature—focuses particularly on the question of how the ideological and political conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union influenced the course of the black freedom struggle. This scholarship is demonstrating that the "whole picture" of the struggle for civil rights and racial equality in the United States demands an understanding of the ways in which America's global status, the Cold War, and the decolonization of Africa affected the fight for black equality.

How are civil rights museums incorporating this new scholarship into their exhibits, if at all? And what is at stake in whether or not museums put their story of the modern black freedom struggle in a larger global context? Current exhibits at civil rights museums do not completely ignore the international context in which the modern black freedom struggle took place, but for the most part, they offer little interpretation of how Cold War foreign policy concerns influenced the course of the black freedom struggle or the white response to it. Civil rights museums, like all historical sites, have only limited space and resources to tell what is already a complex historical story. Yet the absence of more sustained narrative attention to the Cold War context of the black freedom struggle has serious consequences. Without the larger international context, civil rights sites cannot provide a full understanding of why the movement took place or why certain reforms could be passed (notably the destruction of legal segregation), while others stalled and faltered. Interpretations of the movement that ignore or downplay the Cold War context also pose the danger of extolling a form of American exceptionalism, where the United States is viewed only as force that acts on world rather than a nation that also reacts to international pressures.

Cold War/Civil Rights: A New Interpretation Emerges

The past ten years have witnessed the emergence of a new body of scholarship that explores the relationship between the post–World War II civil rights movement and the international environment created by the Cold War. The most influential and ambitious of these new works is Mary Dudziak's *Cold War, Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Recent books by Thomas Borstelmann, Brenda Gayle Plummer, Jonathan Rosenberg, and Azza Salama Layton also explore this topic.[4] These works, although they dif-

4. See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War, Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Poli-*

fer in scope and approach, all bring together what might be considered the two most important political events of the 1950s and 1960s: the Cold War and the civil rights movement.

The Cold War, this literature demonstrates, influenced the domestic racial struggle in two vital ways, creating both challenges and possibilities for racial activists in the United States. On the one hand, the anti-communist fervor in the United States during the Cold War led to a backlash against progressive politics of all sorts. The communist label was used to great effect to discredit activists and to stifle organizing. Progressive organizations were forced to purge communists from their rolls and to narrow the range of their protests. Organizations could carve out space to demand narrowly defined civil rights—such as the right to vote—but they could no longer frame their battles as human rights campaigns designed to achieve economic equality.[5]

Yet while the Cold War and the accompanying anti-communist hysteria narrowed the acceptable parameters of political protest, it simultaneously provided new spaces for challenges to the racial status quo framed as a fight for legal equality and basic civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution. As the United States became involved in an ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union where it purported to be the leader of the "free world," domestic racism and state-sponsored segregation became a serious problem for the federal government. Legal segregation and the blatant discrimination against African Americans undercut the nation's ideological rhetoric about freedom and democracy, and became a major weapon in Soviet and Chinese propaganda campaigns against the United States. The desire of U.S. policymakers to win the hearts and minds of newly independent nations in Africa and Asia made domestic racism a liability in ways that it had never been before. American foreign policy elites openly recognized the problem that domestic racism posed to the nation's foreign policy agenda. As Dean Rusk, Secretary of State under President Kennedy, explained in 1961, "The biggest single burden that we carry on our backs in our foreign relations in the 1960s is the problem of racial discrimination here at home."[6]

The international context of the Cold War facilitated successful civil rights

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tics in the United States, 1941–1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

5. For more on how the anti-communism of the era influenced the fight for racial equality, see especially Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nikhil Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for American Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jeffrey Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948–1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

6. Cited in Pedro Sanjuan, head of the Special Services Section of the Office of Protocol, to Richard Fox, Oct. 26, 1961, reel 18, *Civil Rights During the Kennedy Administration, 1961–1963, Part I: The White House, Central Files and Staff Files and the President's Office Files* (19 reels microfilm, Stanford University Library).

protests in two key ways. First, the government's concern about how racism affected America's global reputation gave black activists important new tools in their fight for racial justice. In the 1940s and 1950s, Black activists sought to embarrass the United States in front of global institutions like the United Nations to force a change in domestic policies.[7] Robert Williams, the iconoclastic head of the Monroe, North Carolina branch of the NAACP, shrewdly sought to exploit Cold War concerns to further the racial struggle. When two young boys were sent to jail in Monroe, North Carolina in 1957 after innocently kissing a white girl on the cheek, Williams turned the incident into an international scandal and won the boys' release.[8] Williams clearly understood that shaming the U.S. government offered blacks a powerful weapon in their fight for equal rights. "If the U.S. government is so concerned about its image abroad," Williams insisted, "then let it create a society that will stand up under world scrutiny."[9] In the 1960s, the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality put added pressure on the federal government by protesting segregation in restaurants along Route 40, a much-traveled highway between New York and Washington that had been the site of several embarrassing incidents involving African diplomats. Campaign spokesperson Julius Hobson urged CORE to exploit the international liability argument by planning a state-wide Freedom Ride throughout Maryland: "The international implications of such a project would be tremendous and would serve to rally many individuals and organizations to CORE's support," Hobson argued.[10] Black activists adapted their protests to take advantage of America's sense of vulnerability in the international arena.

More than this, the Cold War context made the federal government somewhat more receptive to civil rights claims. Although federal officials did not embrace civil rights reforms with any great enthusiasm, concerns about America's international reputation pushed them toward intervening on the side of black protesters during dramatic civil rights showdowns. President Eisenhower sent in troops to support the desegregation of Central High in Little Rock in 1956 at least in part because of his concerns that the crisis was damaging America's international image. President Kennedy—who closely monitored worldwide press coverage of the 1961 Freedom Rides, the racial unrest at the University of Mississippi in 1962, and the protests in Birmingham in 1963—feared that blatant racism in the United States might lead independent nonwhite nations to ally themselves with the Soviet Union. Although Kennedy would have preferred to quietly manage racial conflict out

7. See particularly Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*.

8. Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), chap. 4.

9. Robert Williams quoted in Timothy B. Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History*, 85, no. 2 (September 1998): 554.

10. For more on this episode, see Renee Romano, "No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department and Civil Rights, 1961–1964," *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 546–79.

of the international spotlight, black activism and violent white resistance forced him to step in to protect black protestors and publicly endorse the fight against segregation.[11] With the world watching, the United States needed to at least try to live up to its rhetoric about democracy and equality.

In fact, Cold War related concerns sometimes led the government to take proactive steps to challenge segregation and discrimination. The federal government began filing briefs in support of lawsuits seeking to desegregate education in the late 1940s. The Truman administration supported the NAACP position in the *Brown* case because officials wanted a Supreme Court ruling that would make clear that state-supported segregation was not national policy.[12] In the 1960s, concerns about discrimination against nonwhite diplomats in the United States led the State Department to lobby for a Maryland desegregation law and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Department found it nearly impossible to protect nonwhite foreigners from the stigma of segregation without directly attacking the laws that denied black Americans equal rights.[13] The foreign policy dynamic fostered by the Cold War helped put the executive branch on the side of African American civil rights for the first time since Reconstruction.

The scholarship that puts the history of the civil rights movement in a larger international context offers important new ways for thinking about the changes that took place in the United States in the postwar period. The ideological conflict between the U.S. and the USSR helped shape the trajectory of the struggle, forcing activists to limit their broader goals of economic justice and universal human rights to a more "acceptable" civil rights agenda that focused on the right to vote and an end to legal segregation. Yet it also led the federal government to be more concerned about America's reputation around the world. Prodded by black activists who sought to exploit the nation's vulnerability to communist propaganda, the federal government became more willing to support limited reforms aimed at achieving basic legal equality. In short, as historian Thomas Borstelmann has written, "the far-reaching changes that swept through the American South in the second half of the twentieth century cannot be understood apart from the international context of the Cold War."[14]

11. Mary Dudziak discusses both of these episodes in her book, *Cold War, Civil Rights*. See also Dudziak, "Birmingham, Addis Ababa and the Image of America: International Influence on U.S. Civil Rights Policy during the Kennedy Years," in *Window on Freedom*, ed. Plummer; Dudziak, "The Little Rock Crisis and Foreign Affairs: Race, Resistance and the Image of American Democracy," *Southern California Law Review* 70, no. 6 (September 1997): 1641–1716.

12. The NAACP adopted the strategy to topple segregation in schools that culminated in *Brown* in the 1930s. For more on the Truman administration's role in lobbying for the *Brown* decision, see Mary Dudziak, "Brown as a Cold War Case," *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 32–42.

13. Romano, "No Diplomatic Immunity."

14. Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 270.

The Cold War in Civil Rights Museums

The Cold War/Civil Rights argument has gained influence among historians of the civil rights struggle, but scholarly works are not the only, and perhaps not the most influential, interpreters of the history of the movement today. Over the last twenty years, that history has increasingly been told in movies, participant memoirs, Web sites, and especially museums.[15] Since 1990, at least fifteen museums dedicated to remembering and honoring the civil rights movement have opened their doors, and other museums are currently being constructed or planned. Indeed, most major sites of civil rights demonstrations now boast a museum to the movement.[16] The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is a multimillion dollar museum located across the street from Kelly Ingram Park, where police turned fire hoses and trained dogs loose on protestors in 1963. The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis is located in the old Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. There is now a Voting Rights Museum in Selma, a Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, a Central High Museum and Visitor's Center in Little Rock, and a *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site located in a former segregated elementary school in Topeka, Kansas.[17] The Woolworth's store where the first sit-in took place in 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina, may eventually become the International Civil Rights Center and Museum if the city can ever raise enough money to finish the project.[18] In addition, two new

15. There has been an outpouring of movie and television representations of the movement in the 1990s, with the release of films such as *A Long Walk Home, Mississippi Burning*, and *Boycott*. Web sites that depict the history of the movement range widely, from those associated with academic institutions (The Library of Congress, Duke University) to those maintained by movement participants (see for example the Web site of the Civil Rights Movement veterans at www.crmvet.org). For more on the significance of some of these recent representations, see Jennifer Fuller, "Debating the Present through the Past: Representations of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1990s," in Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 167–96.

16. Kevin Sacks, "Museums of a Movement," *New York Times*, June 28, 1998; Jim Auchmutey, "Tributes to a Cause: A Roundup of Museums and Monuments Commemorating the Movement that Changed the South—and the Nation," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 24, 1997; Shaila Dewan, "Civil Rights Battlegrounds Enter World of Tourism," *New York Times*, August 10, 2004; Glenn Eskew, "Memorializing the Movement: The Struggle to Build Civil Rights Museums in the South," in *Warm Ashes: Issues in Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Winfred B. Moore, Kyle S. Sinsi, and David H. White, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 363–72.

17. Analysis of civil rights museums is based primarily on my visits to these sites. I visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in 2002 and 2006; the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis in 2003 and 2006; and the Central High Museum and Visitor's Center in 2007. I have also toured the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute in Selma, Alabama, the Rosa Parks Library and Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia, and the planned museum to commemorate the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. Analysis of the *Brown v. Board of Education* historic site in Topeka, Kansas is based upon their Web site (http://www.nps.gov/brvb/), the script of the film shown onsite, and exhibit reviews.

18. Although planning for the museum began in 1993, organizers have not been able to raise enough money to finish the museum. City voters turned down two bonds to fund the museum, the last as recently as 2006. In November 2007, the city council voted to spend $750,000 in fed-

major civil rights museums are currently being planned in Atlanta, Georgia and in Jackson, Mississippi.[19]

It is particularly important to explore the messages that these museums convey about the civil rights movement. All of these existing or proposed sites make clear that one of their primary goals is to educate the public to "better understand the history and lessons of the American Civil Rights Movement," as the National Civil Rights Museum explains.[20] The lessons these museums choose to teach is vital, for as one scholar has noted, museums are "institutions of cultural memory, selecting, legitimating and interpreting the past for its visitors."[21] The many choices planners make about what events and people to include or exclude in the exhibit, what artifacts to display, and what framing devices to use can shape the ways in which visitors understand the past and think about the present. In crafting a particular version of the past, these museums are helping to construct an infrastructure of civic memory.

To what extent, if at all, are these museums that seek to document the history of the modern black freedom struggle presenting the influence of the Cold War on the civil rights movement? Do museums suggest either the ways in which the Cold War environment stifled radical politics or the ways in which the international environmental fostered the kinds of legal and civil reforms that became the hallmark of the movement? A survey of the exhibits at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI), the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis (NCRM), the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site, and the Central High School Museum and Visitor Center in Little Rock[22] suggests that, beyond making a few token references to the influence of the Cold War, civil rights museums thus far have not done much either to place the American civil rights movement in a broader international context or to link the racial changes of the civil rights era to the environment created by the Cold War.

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eral grant money on the museum. See Margaret Moffett Banks, "Johnson Receives 3% Pay Raise," November 21, 2007, Greensboro News-Record.com, http://www.news-record.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071121/NRSTAFF/71121004/-1/NEWS, accessed November 29, 2007.

19. Atlanta officials are raising money to build the Atlanta Center for Civil and Human Rights, a facility that will both commemorate the black freedom struggle in Atlanta, Georgia, and encourage dialogue and study of current struggles for civil and human rights. The state of Mississippi has just announced that its first major civil rights museum will be built on the campus of Tougaloo College in North Jackson.

20. NCRM History, http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/about/history.asp. See also BCRI Mission Statement, http://www.bcri.org/general_information/welcome.htm; Central High Museum and Visitor's Center Mission, http://www.centralhigh57.org/visitors.htm.

21. Alan Radley, "Boredom, Fascination and Mortality: Reflections upon the Experience of Museum Visiting," quoted in Bernard Armada, "Memorial Agon: An Interpretive Tour of the National Civil Rights Museum," *The Southern Communication Journal* 63 (Spring 1998): 235.

22. I focus on the Birmingham and Memphis museums because they are the largest and most ambitious of all the civil rights sites. I chose to examine the museums in Little Rock and Topeka because the Cold War/Civil Rights literature has developed a particularly strong case that the *Brown* decision and the crisis that followed it in Little Rock cannot be fully understood outside of the context of the Cold War.

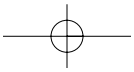
Anti-Communism

Although scholars have documented the many ways in which charges of communism became a tool to discredit civil rights activists during the Cold War years, none of these four museums makes a sustained argument about the challenges this political environment created for those seeking to change the racial status quo. The BCRI has only one artifact—a picture of organizer Hosea Hudson that notes that Hudson was blackballed for being a Communist—that even suggests the ways in which anticommunism may have affected the movement.

The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis does the most in this regard, as several of their exhibits contain artifacts that document the red-baiting of activists that was common in the 1950s and 1960s. One case there holds copies of letters describing Martin Luther King, Jr. as a communist and the Highlander Folk School as a communist training center. The museum includes a reprint of a Congressional Record from 1967 where Congressman John Ashbrook claimed that Martin Luther King had done more to help the Communist Party than anyone else in the decade. The exhibit also displays a picture of the well-known 1960s billboard showing King sitting in a training class at Highlander Folk School under the heading "Martin Luther King at Communist Training School." A later display contains bumper stickers about the 1962 integration crisis at the University of Mississippi that clearly demonstrate the ways in which any support for integration became labeled as communist. One reads, "The Castro brothers have moved into the White House," while another declares, "Kennedy's Hungary (Battle at Ole Miss)."

Yet neither the audioguide nor the written text accompanying the exhibit comment on any of these items. Given this complete lack of interpretive framing, these artifacts may have little meaning for those visitors unaware of the history of the Cold War. Standing on their own, these few artifacts fail to convey the significance of the anticommunist attacks on civil rights activists.[23] These attacks forced black activists to retreat from critiques of colonialism and economic inequalities and to pursue the seemingly less radical goals of civil and voting rights. Civil rights museums could do much more with their existing artifacts to make clear that red-baiting influenced the form that the movement eventually took and narrowed the political options available to activists. Given that many scholars believe that continuing racial inequalities today stem in part from the limited nature of the civil rights reforms of the 1950s and 1960s, museums here miss the opportunity to raise complex and

23. Moreover, another item showcased at the Memphis museum—a letter from J. Edgar Hoover saying that the government has no authority to investigate Highlander because no federal law has been broken there—serves to mask the ways in which the federal government was actively involved in red-baiting movement leaders like King.



important questions about the parameters of acceptable protest in the American political system and the legacies of the movement today.[24]

Cold War Pressures for Reform

Like the scattershot treatment of the anticommunism of the era, the museums also do not offer any coherent interpretation about the ways in which the Cold War context created an environment that was favorable to civil rights reform. The closest they come to an argument about the Cold War is their oft-repeated recognition that other nations were paying attention to the movement and what was happening in the United States. Designers of the exhibits at the BCRI wanted the section on the protests in Birmingham to bring in the international context in which the freedom struggle took place, and thus the display on the 1963 protests bears the title, "Birmingham: The World Is Watching."[25] Yet little else on display at the BCRI makes clear why the world was watching, or indeed, why it might matter if it did. The National Civil Rights Museum exhibits also stress that civil rights protest garnered international attention. "The nation and the world watched" the 1957 showdown in Little Rock, Arkansas, one display reads, while another states that reporters from as "far away as England and India" covered Martin Luther King's 1956 trial for violating the Alabama antiboycott law during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The NCRM also displays one object that directly addresses the influence of the Cold War on the movement: an editorial cartoon about the 1961 Freedom Rides. The cartoon, titled "The Most Uncomfortable Rider on the Bus," depicts a man labeled "US position in the world" barely hanging on to the top of a moving bus. This rich source could potentially serve as a site for further argument about the extent to which maintaining America's image abroad influenced the domestic policy decisions of federal actors. But without any further commentary, the cartoon becomes an artifact without an interpretive frame.

Similarly, the entrance to the exhibits at what had until recently been the Little Rock Central High School Museum (it is now being turned into an education center), reads, "Little Rock: The Whole World Is Watching Us." But the exhibit itself focuses primarily on a day-by-day recounting of the crisis and

24. For more on this, see Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize* and Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*. For a review and critique of the way much of this scholarship blames the NAACP for embracing Cold War liberalism, see Manfred Berg, "Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anticommunism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 2007): 75–96.

25. Glenn Eskew discusses the original plans of the exhibit designer, Richard Rabinowitz, in his essay, "The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the New Ideology of Racial Tolerance" in Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 28–66. See especially pp. 47–52.

of the experience of the Little Rock Nine. The exhibit makes almost no reference to the Cold War, even though the Little Rock desegregation crisis became a front-page story throughout the international media and the Soviet Union and China capitalized on the crisis in their propaganda. When President Eisenhower decided to send in federal troops to enforce integration, he told the American people that the nation's enemies were "gloating" over the incident. "It would be difficult to exaggerate the harm" that the defiance of federal law in Arkansas had done "to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety of our nation and the world," Eisenhower said in his September 24, 1957 televised address.[26] A careful visitor to the Central High Museum might hear Eisenhower speak these words, since the president's address plays on a loop on a television there. But almost nothing else in the exhibit—and no interpretative text at all—describes how the Cold War context influenced the federal reaction to the crisis in Little Rock.[27]

Why So Little Cold War?

Several factors might explain the general lack of coverage of the Cold War at civil rights museums. First, and most simply, it may be that there has not been time for the Cold War/Civil Rights interpretation to filter down to museum displays. Full-length works drawing out the connection between the Cold War and the civil rights movement have only appeared relatively recently. Although important articles on the topic have been available since the late 1980s and 1990s, most books on the subject were published in the last seven years.[28] Even before the publication of these works, however, many earlier scholars noted the connections between the racial changes in the postwar period and the Cold War. As early as 1965 political scientists Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson argued that the Cold War was influencing the restructuring of American race relations.[29] Harvard Sitkoff's 1981 survey of the civil rights struggle noted the high costs of racism during the Cold War years. "The new prominence of the United States as a world power further presaged black advancement," Sitkoff argued. Jack Bloom's important 1987 study, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*, also noted that the international situa-

26. Transcript of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1957 Address on Little Rock, Arkansas, September 24, 1957, available online at http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6335/.

27. A very observant visitor might notice the tantalizing newspaper headline "Mob Law Rules Little Rock, Russian Schoolroom Told" that appears among a changing video montage of newspapers, but the headline appears very briefly and again without any explanatory context.

28. Two important works that laid the foundations of the argument that the Cold War influenced the civil rights movement were available nearly twenty years ago. See Mary Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (November 1988): 61–120; Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988).

29. Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson, "The American Dilemma in a Changing World," *Daedalus* 94, no. 4 (Fall 1965): 1055–85.

tion created by the Cold War "weakened the ties of the federal government with Southern racism" and "put extraordinary new pressures on the United States to develop an acceptable racial policy."[30] Nevertheless, as the scholarly literature in this area becomes more extensive, the Cold War/Civil Rights interpretation may slowly enter into museums as they update their exhibits.

The general lack of attention to the international context in museums may also result from the limits of interpretive space and time. The biggest civil rights museums seek to present complex and lengthy histories in relatively small spaces. The National Civil Rights Museum begins its exhibit in 1619 with the arrival of Africans in the colonies and proceeds to trace the history of white oppression and black resistance from the seventeenth century forward. Many organizations, individuals, and movements receive at least cursory attention, including slave revolts, the abolitionist movement, the Reconstruction era, northern migration, Ida B. Wells, the Niagara Movement, Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association, Father Divine, and the Nation of Islam. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute tells a somewhat more local story; the introductory film focuses on the history of Birmingham, and when the screen rises, visitors are invited to enter a display on segregation in Birmingham from the 1920s through the 1950s. The museum emphasizes not only the racism blacks faced, but also the community that they built in Birmingham during the Jim Crow era. These exhibits cover all of the major movement events, from the Montgomery Bus boycott through the Selma march. Along the way, visitors can pick up copies of artifacts from Birmingham, such as a booklet of Birmingham's racial segregation ordinances. These museums are already packed with history and they may simply not have space or time to add in a more complex understanding of the international arena.

At some of the smaller sites, the scanty coverage of the Cold War may be due to a lack of professional interpretation and differences of opinion in the community about the content of the exhibit. The community planning committee that designed the exhibits for the Little Rock Central High site, for example, decided to focus narrowly on the 1957 Little Rock crisis and to avoid overarching historical interpretation. An independent historian on the committee found that most of the other people involved did not have a good understanding of the political, legal, or social issues that led to a crisis in Little Rock.[31] Perhaps as a result, the exhibit makes almost no mention of the Cold War context. Interpretation at the Central High Site may well be changing, however, since the National Park Service has constructed a new visitor's center, which opened very recently. The new National Park Service pamphlet

30. Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 16; Jack Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2, 85.

31. Johanna Miller Lewis, "Build a Museum and They Will Come: The Creation of the Central High Museum and Visitor Center," *The Public Historian* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 32.

about the site notes that Eisenhower sent troops "partly because during the Cold War battle for the moral high ground the nation was embarrassed by scenes casting American society in negative light."[32] It is not clear, however, that this interpretation will make it out of the pamphlet and onto the walls of the museum.

These museums' common desire to focus on the efficacy of grassroots struggle and the role that local people played in the struggle for racial justice may also contribute to the limited treatment of the international arena. Although nearly all of the museums present to some extent a "Great Man" theory of history, with reasonable emphasis being placed on national leaders like King and the traditional narrative of national events (Montgomery to Birmingham to Selma), most also present a counter-narrative that shifts attention away from national legislation and well-known leaders to local activists and regular people. In Birmingham, interactive exhibits allow for museum visitors to hear multiple perspectives about the movement from the everyday people who participated in the Birmingham campaign. Several of the museums exhibit life-size figures of marchers that invite visitors to imagine themselves in the midst of civil rights protest and to identify with the local people who struggled.[33] The Central High Site focuses much of its attention on the stories and experiences of the nine high school students who desegregated Central High, while the *Brown v. Board of* Education historic site emphasizes the courage of the plaintiffs who challenged segregation in the courts, as well as the stories of black students in a "Hall of Courage." This attention to heroes of the movement and grassroots struggle is not incompatible with an interpretation that also explores the importance of the Cold War in shaping the word in which this struggle took place, but it does tend to draw attention away from the national and international arena in favor of the local.

Challenging a Triumphal Narrative

None of these reasons, however, fully explains why the coverage of global politics and its impact on the domestic United States is so fragmented at these historic sites. A more compelling, and more troubling, explanation stems from

32. "Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Arkansas," National Park Service Pamphlet.

33. Armada, "Memorial Agon," 236. A children's guide to the Memphis museum makes this argument explicit, summing up the experience of visitors who end their museum tour outside of the perfectly maintained room where Martin Luther King was killed: "As Mahalia Jackson sings, visitors remember all that they have felt and seen during their tour of the National Civil Rights Museum. And suddenly everything comes together. We begin to understand that the civil rights movement in the United States was a struggle fought by everyday people like you and me. They were not rich, famous, or exceptional—just bold and determined to fight for freedom. The National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel recreates their struggle, and we are left to carry the torch." Alice Faye Duncan, *The National Civil Rights Museum Celebrates Everyday People* (Mahwah, N.J.: Troll Medallion, 2002), 11.

the challenges the Cold War/Civil Rights interpretation poses to the historical narrative of the movement that is prevalent at all of these museums. Civil rights museums for the most part tell a triumphal story of political and social transformation.[34] Their exhibits emphasize the movement's success in ending legal segregation and opening up the political system to African Americans. At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, for example, the election of blacks to local and state offices is presented as the culmination of the movement and evidence that the modern black freedom struggle successfully expanded American democracy. The BCRI's main exhibit ends with a series of "milestones" markers that commemorate the growing participation by African Americans in the political process in Birmingham and the state of Alabama. Markers celebrate the elections of the first African Americans to Birmingham's city council and to the state legislature, and the appointment of the first black to the Alabama Supreme Court. A "civil rights timeline" put out by the BCRI begins in 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and ends in 1991 with the appointment of the first black police chief in Birmingham. Along the way, the handout highlights the election of blacks to local and state offices in Alabama, including that of Birmingham's first black mayor in 1979.[35] Here these very concrete and local events signify the broader transformations of the American political landscape wrought by the movement.

As the narrative arc at the BCRI suggests, civil rights museums typically portray the movement as a successful struggle by everyday people to expand democracy and to help the nation live up to its founding ideals. Visitors to the NCRM start their tour by watching a film that explicitly frames the movement as fulfilling the promises of the nation's founding documents. The viewer first hears an excerpt from Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream Speech* where King describes the Constitution and Declaration of Independence as "promissory notes" that were to guarantee all Americans equal rights. The film then cuts to the Declaration of Independence with narration that explains that America's grand experiment with democracy could never be achieved until all Americans were treated equally under the law. In what becomes a teleological argument about the virtues of the American form of government and the nation's seemingly preordained march toward equality for all, the film sug-

34. Scholars who have discussed the celebratory narrative at civil rights movement include Owen Dwyer and Glenn Eskew. See Owen J. Dwyer, III, "Memorial Landscapes Dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2000; Dwyer, Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape," in Romano and Raiford, eds., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 5–27; Glenn Eskew, "Memorializing the Movement: The Struggle to Build Civil Rights Museums in the South," 357–79; Glenn Eskew, "Selling the Civil Rights Movement: Montgomery, Alabama since the 1960s," in *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways and Consumer Culture in the American South,* ed. Anthony J. Stanonis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 175–201; Eskew, "The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the New Ideology of Tolerance," in Romano and Raiford, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 28–66.

35. Angie Fisher-Hall, "Civil Rights Timeline," Birmingham Civil Rights Institute/Archives Department, 1993. Included in the packet of materials, "Inspired by the Past, A Vision for the Future."

gests that the promises in the nation's founding documents provided ammunition for blacks to use in their struggle to be free.[36] The final display at the museum—a plaque inscribed with the Thomas Jefferson quote, "A little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government"—nicely sums up the museum's overall interpretation that the movement is best understood as the most recent step in the inevitable realization of a more perfect democracy.[37] The exhibit at the Central High Museum, like that at the NCRM, begins with the Declaration of Independence. The first text the visitor encounters positions the movement within a celebratory narrative of the expansion of democracy: "Central stands today as a concrete symbol of the Constitution's guarantee of equal rights under the law." This progressive version of history suggests that black protesters were able to topple segregation in large part because of the inherent virtues of American democratic institutions.

The progressive narrative presented at key civil rights museums is in fact uncannily similar to the storyline the United States government tried to sell abroad during the Cold War. In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States government developed a particular story about race and American democracy in response to the challenges posed by the Cold War. The government narrative extolled American moral superiority and insisted that progress was being made in the arena of civil rights. American propaganda emphasized that the while the democratic form of government was not perfect, it allowed for the greatest possibility of achieving social justice.[38] Today's civil rights museums focus more on the black activism that led to the expansion of American democracy than the federal government did back in the 1960s, but, like that government propaganda, they suggest that America's foundational beliefs and democratic institutions enabled the success of a moral challenge for racial justice.

This narrative thrust stands in direct contrast to the interpretation of the Cold War/Civil Rights scholarship. That work instead insists that many of the racial changes of the 1950s and 1960s garnered government support not because of some growing moral conviction that racism was wrong or of the natural and inevitable expansion of American democracy, but because of the more pragmatic fear of how continued racial discrimination would affect American

36. The film "America's Civil Rights Stories" is played daily at the National Civil Rights Museum.

37. One corollary of the celebratory narrative is that few of these civil rights sites discuss current racial problems. As geographer Owen Dwyer notes, "among many of the largest civil rights museums treatment of *contemporary* racism and racial politics is conspicuously absent." At the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, differences of opinion about the museum's interpretive bent have led to a major schism between the current museum chairman, Pitt Hyde, and original museum founder, D'Army Bailey. Bailey criticizes the museum for being a "Graceland of civil rights" rather than a catalyst for social change and racial justice. See Owen Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Museum: Place, Memory, and Conflict," *Professional Geographer* 52, no. 4 (November 2000): 666; Beryl Lieff Benderly, "Making the Most of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Life and Death at the Expanded Civil Rights Museum," *Preservation* (January/February 2003), 35.

38. Dudziak, *Cold War, Civil Rights*, 13.

foreign policy. It also suggests that the changes in American racial practices were due more to a form of "interest convergence" between black activists and white elites than to the innate virtues of democracy. Critical legal race theorist Derrick Bell argues, for example, that whites support advances for blacks only when such advances promote whites' self-interest. The *Brown* decision, he contends, came about because whites in important policy positions wanted a desegregation decision, in part because it would "provide immediate credibility to America's struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world people." Political scientists Philip Klinker and Rogers Smith carry this idea even further, arguing that the status of blacks in the United States has only improved during or shortly after large-scale wars that American leaders argue are necessary to protect the nation's ideals of democracy and equality. At those times, black protest movements can take advantage of the wartime rhetoric to push for domestic reforms. Only three moments in American history—the periods after the Revolutionary War, after the Civil War, and after World War II and the Cold War—meet these criteria. And once these factors diminish, racial progress stagnates or even backslides.[39] The Cold War/Civil Rights scholarship makes clear that moral claims are not enough to achieve racial justice, and that the ideals of equality that are supposed to underlie our democratic system do not in themselves lead to the success of egalitarian social movements.

These insights, however, cannot be easily reconciled with the celebratory narrative of most civil rights museums. The Brown Historic Site, which is run by the National Park Service, perhaps most clearly demonstrates the ways in which a triumphal narrative of the greatness of American democracy conflicts with an interpretation that considers the role international forces played in compelling domestic reforms. New scholarship has carefully outlined a myriad of ways in which the *Brown* decision was influenced by the 1950s Cold War context. The U.S. Justice Department's amicus curiae briefs in the *Brown* case made clear that the federal government needed a desegregation ruling because segregation impeded America's foreign policy. Both the American and international media painted the decision as a blow to the Soviet Union, which would no longer be able to so easily propagandize about American racism to African and Asian nations. The NAACP went out of its way to document how the *Brown* decision improved America's standing around the world, and the U.S. government publicized the decision widely. *Brown*, legal scholar Mary Dudziak argues, "was the product of converging domestic and international developments, rather than an inevitable product of legal progress."[40]

39. Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, et al. (New York: The New Press, 1996): 20–28; Philip A. Klinker with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3–5.

40. See Mary Dudziak, "*Brown* as a Cold War Case," *Journal of American History*, June 2004, http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.1/dudziak.html (accessed November 30, 2007),

Yet at the Brown historic site, there is little to inform the visitor of this history. The twenty-five–minute introductory film shown at the Brown Historic Site (tellingly entitled, "Race and the American Creed") contains no mention of the ways in which the Supreme Court, governmental actors, or black activists fighting segregation might have been influenced by, or sought to exploit, foreign policy concerns. The film does talk about World War II as a turning point in American race relations, but it emphasizes that racial progress "had a lot to do with changing people's minds about race."[41] Changing people's minds contributed to civil rights reforms of course, but it is only one part of a much more complex story. The historical views of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence, and Research, the group that was instrumental in working with the National Park Service to found the Brown historic site, suggest the interpretive bent of the museum:

> The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown* began a critical chapter in the maturation of our democracy. It reaffirmed the sovereign power of the people in the United States in the protection of their natural rights from arbitrary limits and restrictions imposed by state and local governments. These rights are recognized in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. . . . [T] he *Brown v. Board of Education* victory brought this country one step closer to living up to its democratic ideas.[42]

The Smithsonian Museum of American History put forth a similar interpretation of *Brown* in its exhibit, "Separate is Not Equal: *Brown v. Board of Education*," which was up at the museum from May 2004 to May 2005. According to the Smithsonian exhibit, the *Brown* decision "was a watershed in the evolution of American democracy." Although neither the historic site in Kansas nor the Smithsonian exhibit argues that equality in education has been fully achieved, both view the decision as evidence, as the Smithsonian argues, of "the resilience of our democratic institutions."[43]

The Movement that Changed the World

These civil rights museums do make an argument about the relationship between the movement and the larger world, but it is a very different one

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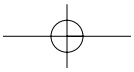
para. 19; Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41 (November 1988): 61–120.

41. From script of film, "Race and the American Creed," shown at the Brown Historic Site. The author wishes to thank the curators for providing her with a copy of the script.

42. "*Brown v. Board of Education*: About the Case," available online at http://brownvboard.org/summary/index.php (accessed November 20, 2007). This same quote is reproduced by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in their curriculum guide on *Brown*. See http://www.bcri.org/education_programs/curriculum_guide/bvbproject1.htm/ (accessed November 20, 2007).

43. Web site of the "Separate is Not Equal: Brown v. Board of Education" exhibit, Smithsonian Museum of American History, www.americanhistory.si.edu/brown/exhibition/index.html (Accessed February 1, 2006).



than that put forth by the Cold War/civil rights literature. Rather than explaining how Cold War politics shaped the course of the civil rights movement, their interpretation instead emphasizes that the American movement helped generate a worldwide struggle for human rights. In Birmingham, the entire museum narrative builds to a final display that focuses on the impact of the movement on the individuals from around the world who are struggling for freedom.[44] In Memphis, the annex across the street from the main museum details worldwide struggles for social justice and the ways in which the civil rights movement provided a model of nonviolent change to people the world over. The museum defines its own mission as assisting the public "in understanding the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement and its impact and influence on the human rights movement worldwide."[45] Museums currently being planned share this interpretive bent. The proposed museum in Greensboro—tellingly named the International Civil Rights Center and Museum—plans an exhibit entitled "The Changed World" that will focus on nonviolent protests for social justice around the globe, while one of the key topics in a proposed exhibit at Atlanta's future Center for Civil Rights is "Human rights movements influenced by Atlanta and Georgia."[46] These sites, as geographer Owen Dwyer notes in his study of civil rights museums, present the movement "as a precursor to transnational efforts to increase access to free speech, freedom of religion, and the end of political violence and torture."[47]

The narrative presented at civil rights museums suggests that the movement helped fulfill the promises of American democracy in a way that enabled the United States to serve as a model for others around the world. Although there is no question that the civil rights movement has served as a powerful example for activists around the globe, the choice of nearly all of these museums to stress the movement's positive impact in the international arena serves to reinforce their celebratory narrative. This storyline, which emphasizes the redemptive possibilities of American democracy and the positive influence of America on the world, does not mesh well with the claim that the United States government was receptive to black activism primarily because of Cold War concerns, or that the movement succeeded in ending

44. Dwyer, "Memorial Landscapes Dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement," 111.

45. See film shown at the Memphis Museum annex, "We Want to be Free: The International Struggle for Human Rights"; "About The Museum," home page for the National Civil Rights Museum, http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/about/about.asp (accessed February 5, 2006). Similarly, the *Brown v. Board* Foundation that works with the National Park Service on the historic site in Topeka argues that the decision "laid the foundation for shaping future national and international policies regarding human rights" and "inspired and galvanized human rights struggles across the country and around the world." "*Brown v Board of Education*, About the Case" http://brownvboard.org/summary/ (accessed November 20, 2007).

46. Brochure for the International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina. Printed by the Greensboro Area Convention and Visitors Bureau; Web site for the Center for Civil and Human Rights, http://www.cchrpartnership.org/About/ThePlan/tabid/1525/Default.aspx (accessed November 25, 2008).

47. Dwyer, "Memorial Landscapes Dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement," 139–41. Quote from p. 140.

legal segregation in part because of international pressure. The interpretations put forth in Cold War/Civil Rights literature are far less romantic and idealized than the popular view that civil rights activists successfully ended legal segregation by appealing to America's democratic traditions or whites' sense of morality. As a result, coming to grips with the importance of international pressure in changing the American racial system demands rethinking the largely celebratory narrative of these museums in ways that could open a conversation about the kinds of conditions that foster or hinder activism and the struggle for racial and social justice.

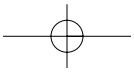
Moving Beyond the "Movement that Changed the World"

Civil Rights museums are far more comfortable depicting the struggle, in the words of the National Civil Rights Museum as "The Movement that Changed the World" than they are exploring how the world changed or affected the movement. But for institutions that seek to educate new generations about the fight for racial equality in this country, there is more at stake here than simply keeping up with the latest in civil rights historiography. The Cold War interpretation offers, first, a more nuanced understanding of how and why the racial status quo changed in United States in the 1950s and 1960s. The international context of the Cold War era played a vital role both in shaping the trajectory of civil rights reform and in creating an environment that helped produce the legalistic successes that museums now tout. Neither the relatively limited nature of civil rights reforms, nor the willingness of the nation to embrace those reforms (albeit reluctantly), can be explained without reference to the Cold War.

By doing more to explore the civil rights movement in a global context, museums can also play a vital role in moving American history beyond its traditional provincialism. In its 2000 *La Pietra Report*, the Organization of American Historians challenged practitioners of U.S. history to internationalize their study of the American past. "Historical inquiry must be more sensitive to the relevance of historical processes larger than the nation," the OAH charged. By looking beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, histories can better explore the scale and networks of historical transformation.[48] Highlighting the complex interactions between domestic politics and global affairs during the civil rights era presents museums with a way to move beyond a common form of American exceptionalism that depicts the United States as influencing the rest of the world rather than being influenced by other nations.

There are a plethora of artifacts that could be used to tell this more complex story. Exhibits could feature United States Information Agency reports

48. Thomas Bender, Director, *The La Pietra Report: A Report to the Profession* (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2000), 3. Available online at http://www.oah.org/activities/lapietra/final.html (accessed November 20, 2007).



on the negative worldwide press coverage of racial violence or State Department estimates on the damage done to the United States' image in the worldwide arena by the dramatic and widely publicized racial crises.[49] Eisenhower's Little Rock speech, as well as nearly every speech John or Robert Kennedy gave on civil rights in the early 1960s, described civil rights reform as a matter of compelling international urgency. Transcripts of these speeches, and often audio or even television recordings, are widely available. Yet, in truth, the real challenge is not in finding more documents that would enable exhibitors to offer different interpretations. Indeed, speeches, editorial cartoons, and government documents that could be used to show the influence of the Cold War are already in civil rights exhibits. The real challenge for museums is to use these artifacts to tell new stories about the ways in which civil rights movement was influenced by the Cold War.

Museums can, and should, embrace this challenge to rethink the traditional narratives they employ to interpret United States history. If museums seek, as Juanita Moore argues they should, to tell as much of the "whole" historical story as they can, then they must do more to explore phenomena like the American civil rights movement in its international context. The story of the black freedom struggle, in particular, begs for a broadened analysis, since that struggle was so thoroughly part of the international history of the twentieth century.[50] This means more than showcasing how the American movement helped transform the world, a view that the *La Pietra* report suggests falls into the trap of "making world history a mere extension of a triumphalist narrative of the American experience."[51] Moving beyond the narrative of "The Movement that Changed the World" would require that civil rights museums explore the movement as a historical event that requires a multifaceted explanation, and not simply as a cause for national or racial celebration.

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49. Reports of this type can be found easily in the papers of the Kennedy administrations. See for example, "Worldwide Reactions to Racial Incidents in Alabama," United States Information Agency, Office of Research and Analysis, May 29, 1961, reel 4, Kennedy Administration Files; and Donald Wilson to John F. Kennedy, "Summary of Foreign Reaction to Racial Tension in Birmingham, Alabama," May 17, 1963, reel 18, Kennedy Administration Files.

50. Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land*, 233.

51. *La Pietra Report*, accessed online.