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John Torpey 00:00

Hi, my name is John Torpey, and I'm director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Welcome to International Horizons, a podcast to the Ralph Bunche Institute, that brings scholarly expertise to bear on our understanding of a wide range of international issues. Today we consider the United Nations on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its founding in 1945. And more specifically, we discuss the role of the namesake of our institute, Dr. Ralph Bunche, who was Undersecretary General of the UN and winner of the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize and his role in the creation and shaping of the United Nations in its early days. And we're fortunate to have with us today to discuss that, James TL Dandridge, II, a retired Senior Foreign Service Officer and US Army Pioneer Special Operations Officer who knew Ralph Bunche when he - that is Dandridge - was a student at Howard University in the 1940s. Mr. Dandridge is now Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Diplomacy Center Foundation for the Establishment of the National Museum of American Diplomacy. He's also Vice President of the Board of Directors - excuse me - Board of Governors and Trustees of Diplomats and Consular Officers Retired, better known as DCOR, from 2005 to 2015. He served as Chair of the Board of Directors for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Mr. Dandridge is also the 2008 recipient of the Director General's Cup for the Foreign Service for his promotion of the Foreign Service, both as a US diplomat and in retirement. And he retired from the US foreign service with the rank of Minister Counselor in July 1997. Jim Dandridge thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

James Dandridge II 02:08

You're quite welcome. Look forward to the exchange.

John Torpey 02:12

Likewise. Okay, so let's start right in. As I've already mentioned, you knew Ralph Bunche when you were a student at at Howard, and he was still a Professor of political science there. And before he made the contributions that won him a Nobel Prize. What were your impressions of him then?

James Dandridge II 02:32

Firstly, let me thank you for inviting me to participate in International Horizons here at CUNY on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. You know, I feel it's a very special privilege to come back here, albeit its virtual, a place where I met Dr. Benjamin Rivlin, Ralph Bunche's OSS Assistant. I also met some Dr. Brian Rickard, Bunche's colleague. That's an Undersecretary General of the UN, and also Dr. Larry Finkelstein, Bunche's Assistant at the Department of State. And he also went with Bunche to the UN trusteeship directorate that year. And we met later at Washington DC at the Library of Congress for the pre-luncheon at the Bill Greaves, PBS special Bunche documentary, and you know, at that time, we had a panel discussion the next morning, and we collectively decided that we were going to do everything possible to keep Bunche's legacy alive. And as it stands there, Brian and I am going to continue to carry the torch and I promise, which I salute to the vision of Ben, who established the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies. You know, actually, I'm reminded of Ben's hearing with me how his journey led to CUNY. When Ralph Bunche was departing, the OSS then asked him, Ralph, what do I do now? And then Bunche say to him, well, get a PhD and get involved in international relations. And as they say, the rest is history. And

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then now to your question, what were my impressions of Ralph Bunche when I was a student. You know, here I was a young student educated in Selma, Alabama, who thought that I knew it all. And on top of all this, I was going to the Hilltop - that's how we affectionately referred to Howard University. In those days, it were a place where we had the lords of black academia: professors Dorsey, John Hope Franklin, and the occasional lecture by Dr. Bunche, who at that time, actually, he was a Special Assistant to Dr. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard. And, of course, all this is why Bunche was changing the world as a government operative. And of course, I was in the process of burning the midnight oil trying to stay off of academic probation so I could be around when the grass turned green - that's what we referred to those of us who managed to keep the grades above level of probation. And I, along with the majority of my classmates, have always felt that we were among the best, because after all, we were led by the famous changer of world events, Dr. Ralph Bunche. And I felt a real pride that a man whom I look like could potentially make those kinds of changes. And there were other classmates who made changes later, one of which was Chloe Wofford, better known later as Toni Morrison. But, you know, John, I can say that Ralph Bunche really instilled a real sense of academic pride in all of us students at the Hilltop.

John Torpey 05:49

Great. We, as professors, I think often don't realize what kind of impression we make on people, on students. And just, you know, I have no idea until maybe years later that we had this significance. So it's always interesting to hear what kind of experience people had with their teachers. And obviously, this was a profoundly influential one for you. I wanted to ask a little bit more about Bunche's academic path. You know, you've recently written an article for the Foreign Service Journal about Bunche. And you note that his academic work was particularly focused on the matters of colonialism and decolonization. And, of course, these became probably the most - among the most - significant problems in the post World War Two world. So I was wondering if you could say a little bit about how you approached the problem, and what influence do you think W.E.B. Du Bois had on his thinking?

James Dandridge II 06:50

Oh, okay. Well, that's a big question. Yeah, as you may recall, John, I made a point in emphasizing my version of what I think influenced Bunche's academic work throughout the matter of colonization and decolonization. And that a Foreign Service Journal article that you referred to, you know, personally, I think, you know, as I emphasized in that article, Bunche was a person of his time and he was definitely influenced by world events as he was growing up. And that kind of presumptively compared my own experiences growing up in Selma in the 30s, in the 40s, as a young black student, and I was aware of what was going on in Europe, I remember us real coverages of Kristallnacht, and I remember Hitler's move in Poland in 1939 and I even remember the Russian choir visited my church, the Brown Chapel AME Church, and even during the Second World War, as kids we kind of fantasized about, our next enemy would be the Russians. Imagine our presumptive ally against Germany would be our next enemy. I can see Bunche growing up in Los Angeles, and I can see him being aware of the Great War, when he was about 10 years old. That was as World War One was popularly known then, and I can see the subsequent impact on the mostly rural peoples of color being tossed around as wards of the new conquerors to be protected by the richer so-called civilized protectors until they can walk in their own feet. Now all of this was inherent in the League of Nations Article 22, which was transported from Woodrow Wilson's Article Five of his 14 points. Both of those dealt with the distribution of the colonies,

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which were finally dealt with in Bunche's post World War Two design of the Mandate, which were a part of the UN structure and the eventual decolonization of most of the world's colonized world. Now, Bunche's introduction of paths towards self-rule was actually that was a major structural base for this to happen. The plight of the American Negro - and I use the term that was the term du jour during Bunche's time - that the plight of the American Negro is not that different in Bunche's mind, you know, now he was able to envision the need to expand his own academic and eclectic life journey accordingly. Now, we all know the paths of his academic prowess and his achievements at every level. But through it all, and his excellence at every academic level, he never lost sight of the perils of the American Negro while following and focusing on the plights of people of color around the world. And Bunche constantly reminded himself and his academic colleagues of the need to be a part of the system and not apart from the solution. As he too experienced in addressing by the American experience. In this regards, it was pretty easy to understand that famous letter that we all refer to, that he wrote to, the then first Black Harvard PhD and at that time, Howard professor and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, that was in 1927, March 11, to be exact. In that letter, that was written during the month of his graduation from Southern California University, which is now known as UCLA, and after he had been informed that he had a scholarship to Harvard. And the middle of the letter, he wrote, the reason for this letter, I have been sufficiently old to think rationally, and to appreciate that there was a race problem in which I was necessarily involved. I have set as my goal, my ambition to service my group. In other words, he was offering and asking, at the same time, his service to work with the giant of the movement and offering his services while still achieving the - toward the - to the maximum end of his academic potential. But you know, at the same time, Bunche had an intellectually love-hate relationship, with W.E.B. DuBois. Bunche found this role with DuBois - he, how should I put it, he admired DuBois's academic activism. Bunche was much more, even in his academic achievements, he was much more international-oriented in solving the plight of all of the world's people of color. He felt that the American Negro was much too caste-oriented, which was limiting its own humanistic abilities. You know, I came across a letter from the Amsterdam News in New York, which was dated December the 11th, 1939. And this was a letter that was sent to Bunche by feature writer Marvel Cook, was his name, in anticipation of the New Year's of 1940 publication, and he asked Bunche to write a short statement on quote, "my New Year's wish for the Negro in 1940". So Bunche decided to format his article as his 10 wishes for the American Negro in the new year. And the first one read, quote, "that the Negro will become more internationally minded, less narrowly racial chauvinistic in his thinking". Now, and then, Bunche was a true academician. But he absolutely did not hold back on the assertions that he had made, which we experienced during his 1927 UCLA valedictorian address, we know of that addresses the fourth dimension of personality, where he say, "if we are to develop our personalities to their fullest, we must add a fourth dimension to this ordinary self. And that we may expand up and out from our narrow, immediate world". Now, in the end, with all due respect that Bunche had for the academician W.E.B. DuBois, you can sum up his reverse influence of DuBois in a 1936 speech that he made to the Young People's Forum in Philadelphia, where he referred to Dubois as - and this was pretty, this is pretty tough, pretty direct - as a tired, frustrated, ex-radical, whose racial chauvinism pitted black workers against white workers. So I think in response to your question, John, you see here in his evolving academic prowess, he was becoming much, much more interested in the larger global perspective of his strengths toward developing for the peoples of color, a billion people, if you please, a one third the size of the global map. So I think that that answers that part as far as what were the influences on Bunche of during this period. Well, that's fascinating. I mean, I'm interested, as you

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probably figured out, because my background is really in sociology. And as you may know, there's a major sort of rethinking of the place of Dubois in, in the history of the discipline these days. And you know, I've always had this sense that Dubois and Bunche were, you know, not exactly on the same page about various things. They're both, you know, deeply intellectual figures, but I had the sense that Bunche was something more of an institutionalist. I mean, you talked before about how he thought that, you know, you can't be outside the system, because you're then outside the solution. So in that sense, that's the way it seemed to me in many ways, he really differed from DuBois, it was more of an intellectual critic. I mean, he was an institution builder, of course, with the NAACP and other institutions. But he wasn't as inclined, I guess, to go into existing institutions as Bunche was.

John Torpey 16:57

But in any case, speaking of institutions, I guess I wanted to ask you, you mentioned in the Foreign Service Journal article, also the fact that Bunche was involved in right drafting some of the, you know, original, the founding documents of the United Nations. Maybe you could say a little bit more about how you think he saw this institution, which of course hadn't existed, yet. There was had been a League of Nations, you know, that eventually fell apart. And the United Nations was an outgrowth of, you know, the alliance that defeated the Axis Powers during World War Two, who initially called themselves the United Nations. But how did he see this, this new institution? What did you think it could do for the world?

James Dandridge II 17:43

Well, I think is a great segue from both of our discussions there on Bunche's evolving developments, which were much more international. And as I suggested, the fact that he was influenced by being a man of his time, he was influenced by that war, that four year war that took five years to quit. And as a result of his role was as an ever evolving creator or inventor of the United Nations as it took on its multifaceted post World War Two challenges and problems. And before this gigantic role, being the principal architect of the UN's peacekeeping role for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize, he addressed the unfinished business of the fact that which you just referred to: the unfinished business of the League of Nations, which came after the many treaty negotiations that followed the First World War. And, of course, this whole issue of decolonization, this substantial sector of the world. You know, as I stated, John, in the Foreign Service Journal article, by the time that Bunche took his job at State Department in 1944, the official policy objective of the US was that trusteeships should be designed to deal with territory that had been under the League of Nations Mandate, and those that were taken from Axis powers because of the First World War. The American plan that Bunche found himself involved with as he was transferred from academia into becoming a government operative, and we're in the period of Bunche's going from the OSS and into the Department of State. The American plan did not allow for our small albeit not very effective proviso that ended up in the UN chapter 12, article 76, which is for the extension of the trusteeship system. The other territories placed under it voluntarily by the powers administering them. Of course, story does not end here. You know, there was no decision formula made to authorize the US delegation to introduce the draft that Bunche had so diligently drafted en route by train to San Francisco to the 1945 conference for the establishment of the United Nations Charter. The British had provided an opening, and the Australians took the initiative to save the day. UN chapter 11 is titled "Declaration Regarding Non-self Governing Territories". Now, this chapter is based actually on a weak draft on trusteeship that was made by the British delegation, and it was it was

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for a reason, obviously, and then that reason coincided with the stronger American draft that Bunche had worked on. And this draft was using that very language of the League of Nations - that was from article 22 of the League of Nations. But, you know, the Australians have been working on colonial issues also during the war. That's the Second World War. And actually, their views were much closer, to those of Bunche's draft. So took advantage of the opportunity, knowing that the US delegation had not made a decision about introducing such a draft. So he just passed it informally to his Australian opposite. And said, "Here, take it. It's already done, go for it". So the Australians took it and they drew on it. And they introduced an amendment to the British proposal and thus, Article 73 of the Charter. Now, John, as you know, my article focuses primarily on this period during Bunche's assignment to the Department of State, but there were other significant UN creations that were made as a post World War Two challenges of providing. Now, one of the most significant post World War Two challenges was peacekeeping, for which there is absolutely no provision that was made in the founding UN document nowhere. Nowhere in the original UN Charter is peacekeeping mentioned. Yet that's become the mainstay of the United Nations. And it's led to one of the most significant ongoing contributions to humanity, since the inception of the United Nations. Around Bunche played this signature role in conflict resolution through mediation, and the use of military forces for the support of peacekeeping efforts globally. From Israel, and its four Arab neighbors in 1948, you know, there's been more than 70 UN peacekeeping operations. Now all of this, in spite of the fact that nowhere in the UN Charter is deterring peacekeeping to be found. Yet, Ralph Bunche is credited for the development and the establishment of the UN's most high profile role, international peacekeeping. So I guess in the end, you can say that although peacekeeping as a UN mission, is found nowhere in the United Nations Charter, it probably lies somewhere between chapters six and seven, the Security Council's responsibility to investigate and mediate disputes, chapter six, an authorization to use the military, among many other means to resolve disputes, which you could find in chapter seven.

John Torpey 24:15

That's great. And that's a perfect segue for your part, to my next question, which really has to do with his Nobel Prize. He won the Nobel Prize in 1950, for his involvement in the early days of the Israeli Arab dispute, and I guess I wonder, you know, what you could tell us about how he saw the problem, how he approached it, and you know what he might think about it today?

James Dandridge II 24:46

Well, there's no doubt, John, that Bunche's mediation of the first armistice - and I'm going to stop right there - Bunche's preferred reference he liked mediation over peace agreement. In a way it stands out probably as the most diplomatic achievement in the annals of conflict resolution in my opinion. This was a situation that I actually say it has its roots in thousands of years of monitoring conflict. You know, of the many miracles performed by Bunche, this one took him completely out of his comfort zone. Here after a lifetime of study, preparation, and dedication, he finally stumbled into the change from within that appeared impossible, finishing the work of post World War One and League of Nations puzzle. Now, he finds himself finally ensconced in a position of academic and practical exhilaration over institutionalizing a process within which finally, the newly established world organization, the UN, would lead to the liberalization of a billion people of color, half the world's population, one third the size of the world map to the final solution of the mandate system benefits of self governing populations. And then the top all this off, he was occupying the UN chair as the Director of the UN Trusteeship to monitor the successful

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transition for the prize. Now, out of seemingly nowhere, he found himself in the midst of a new maze, and a newly created post World War Two problem, the movement of Jewish refugees from Europe back to Palestine, to join the already permanent Jewish Arab Palestinian inhabitants that had been peaceful residents for thousands of years. Now, I'm not going to go into religious implications of this large return of religious refugees, which follows the creation of the UN Special Commission on Palestine. But here, of course, lies a part of Bunche's old geographic responsibility, which was a territory under the British Mandate, which Bunche's UN of his head responsibilities as well as Bunche's own academic preparation. So Bunche is pulled back into play this time as the Assistant Mediator to Swedish Count Bernadotte to negotiate a truce between Egyptian and Israeli military forces and the occupation of the Negev. Now without going into the extensive tactical details, as you know Count Bernadotte was assassinated and actually Bunche escaped assassination by staying behind to take care of last minute business with plans to join Bernadotte next day. Fortunately, Bunche escaped assassination. Bunche withdrew from the area, leaving behind Israeli and Egyptian forces facing off and the Negev. The Egyptians had not informed their publics of the situation. In fact, Egyptians were leaving with the impression with their publics that they had advantage in the Negev, and the Israelis were now in favored territory with no plans to leave or surrendering. The Middle East Arab neighbors of Transjordan, Libya, and Syria was standing ready to assist the Egyptian Brotherhood in the Negev. This was the dilemma faced by the new acting - again Bunche's preferred title, he did not want to be called the Mediator - the details of the truce negotiations were mediated by Bunche in Rhodes in what I would consider classic diplomacy, that is, personal and institutional in action. And I think we can go back here again to your earlier reference on these sociological aspects of Bunche's earlier academic preparations, over and above the other studies that that he had done in addition to political science. And so, we see Bunche's ever evolving creation, and taking advantage of the totality of his academic preparations outside of the areas in which we more commonly attributed to him as being a political scientist, but yet he would and, I think that you as a sociologist would agree with me, that he was also a sociologist par excellence. But this both and it enabled him to negotiate the most difficult of diplomatic powers and challenges in the reestablishment of a world order. And so you asked me as a second part of that question, how would I look at this today? And I would say, my answer is that it would be just as messy, probably without the clean resolution that Bunche accomplished.

John Torpey 30:28

Yes, it remains a complicated part of the world, there seem to have been some improvements in the recent past. But we'll have to see whether the region, you know, finds the peace that it has long, sought so unsuccessfully. So my last question is one that has a sort of personal side, I mean, outside of our offices at the Ralph Bunche Institute at the CUNY Graduate Center, there hangs a large, probably five feet long blow up, I guess, of a photograph of Ralph Bunche, marching with Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, the recently deceased John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy, and other icons of the civil rights movement. And you've already kind of addressed this in passing, but I'd be interested if you could say a little bit more about how he saw the relationship between his international diplomatic work and his involvement and participation in the civil rights movement.

James Dandridge II 31:28

Yes, you're right, I have addressed this in passing because this was Bunche. This was the man that I described earlier, when I was talking about his academic influences in his own academic development,

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who considered the larger problem and not just the smaller part of the problem. And in this case, where again, as I mentioned, before, a billion people, one third the size of the global map, and here a Bunche saw racial injustice problems in America, as a part of the continuum of global racial injustices. He saw the basis was the same, wherever it was encountered, whether it was in the Congo, or whether it was in Mississippi. And in his early academic writings, he condemned Article 22 of the League of Nations as a hypocritical approach, subjugating peoples of color not to protect and train them, but for pure economic greed that resolved itself into the logic category of racism. And actually Bunche saw no difference in the plight of the American to grow in this larger global perspective. He gained activist weight, through the transferral of his status from academican to government agent and reciprocal activation on engagement in racial injustice problems back home. You know, the historian John Hope Franklin categorized Bunche as a new category of leadership: local, national, and international. And I would only add that he was a complete package.

John Torpey 33:23

Yes, he was the complete package. And I mean, notwithstanding whatever tensions there may have been in their views of the world, I mean, I think, you know, there is a way in which he was carrying out a vision that W.E.B. DuBois also shared at certain times. I mean, he did make this famous comment about the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line, you know, in the Americas and Africa, in the islands of the sea (I forgot exactly how he puts it). But, you know, he's basically saying this is a worldwide problem. So we're very pleased to have to say at the Ralph Bunche Institute to be able to in some small way carry forward the legacy of this important thinker and international diplomat and to work at an institute that bears his name. So we are most grateful to you, Jim Dandridge, for taking the time to talk to us today about Ralph Bunche, and about the origins of the United Nations. That's it for today's episode of International Horizons. Thank you again, for taking the time. I also want to thank Hristo Vojnov for his technical assistance. This is John Torpey, saying, thanks for joining us, and we look forward to having you with us again for the next episode of International Horizons. Thanks very much.