American Africans in Ghana
Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era

Kevin K. Gaines

The University of North Carolina Press
Chapel Hill
RICHARD WRIGHT
IN GHANA
Black Intellectuals and the Anticolonial
Critique of Western Culture

A the time of his return to the Gold Coast colony in 1953 to report on the nationalist movements led by Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, Richard Wright, like his friend George Padmore, was a staunch anticolonialist who nevertheless avoided a Marxist framework for interpreting human and social relations.1 In a development as crucial as his embrace of Marxism, Wright's previous exile to France had prompted him to situate the plight of the American Negro within the modern world. In his journal, Wright record a conversation with Gertrude Stein about his autobiographical novel Black Boy (1945) as a "quintessential modernist text...That exchange prompted an earnest statement of purpose: "When the feeling and fact of being a Negro is accepted fully into the consciousness of a Negro, there's something universal about it, something saving and informing, something that this is above being a Negro in America. Oh well I ever have the strength and courage to tell what I feel and think, and do I know it well enough to tell it?"2

Wright's self-exile from the United States and his subsequent travels were vital for his ability to tell such a story. Tackling the critical consensus that Wright's departure from the United States contributed to his literary decline, Paul Gilroy has affirmed the importance of exile for Wright's analysis of Western modernity from the perspective of black peoples.3 Against the restrictions of U.S. Cold War nationalism, Wright pursued a "saving and informing" linkage of African Americans to an anticolonial, unsinned world.

Wright added his voice to other anticolonial intellectuals inspired by a wider world of democratic struggle, extending his influence to U.S. debates on the relation of blacks to a nation reluctantly pursuing racial integration. Global exigencies had decisively redefined U.S. discussions of national and social affiliations. Accordingly, throughout the 1950s, Wright's advocacy of African independence, building on his earlier fiction exploring the repercussions of the poverty and exclusion that eroded "within African Americans' 15th in American integration" ideals, reflected the growing influence of decolonization. Instead of the inarticulate rage and nihilism of a Bigger Thomas, Wright and many other urban African Americans were increasingly drawn to a transnational culture of black modernity and a sense of a shared destiny with the rising "newblack anticolonial world. The protagonist of Wright's 1955 novel, The Outsider, Cross Damon, a self-destructive African American intellectual, overhears vaporous speculation in a Chicago bar that authorities are concealing the fact that the inhabitants of flying saucers are colored men from Mars: "They didn't want the world to know the rest of the universe is colored!" Wright made clear that this absurd scenario was rooted in an awareness that "most of the folks on this earth is colored" and in the knowledge of their subjugation under regimes of white supremacy. The "rejected laughter" of three "rejected men" opens Cross's utopian reverse: "Were there not somewhere in this world rebels with whom he could feel at home, men who were outsiders not because they had been born black and poor, but because they had thought their way through the many walls of illusion?"4

Cross is a lonely rebel doomed by hubris and his stubborn aloofness from such a community. Wright was not. His mobility along the routes of black modernity to Chicago from Mississippi, then across the ocean to exile in Paris and eventually to the Gold Coast, brought him in contact with a community of exiled black intellectuals. Along with fellow exiles George Padmore and C. L. R. James, Wright was engaged in theorizing the transformative significance of black and African peoples' struggles with Western oppression. Indeed, Wright's embrace of the condition of exile and particularly his travel writing on Africa provided a model for such West Indian writers as George Lamming and Edward Brathwaite. Lamming and Wright were key contributors as the First World Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, organized by Positive Africanism in Paris in 1956. There, both writers joined others who articulated African-descended peoples' struggles for political and cultural emancipation from Western dominance. The travel writings of Lamming and Brathwaite emulated yet revised Wright's impressions of Africa, and his discussion of Africa, anticolonialism, and black modernity is best understood...
as part of this group endeavor shared by such diverse contemporaries as Lattin, Braidwaike, and E. Franklin Frazier. Thus, Wright demands our attention for his contribution to a larger anticolonial critique of the West. But before turning to Wright's place in this anticolonial world, one must consider the vexing issues that have haunted the reception of Black Power.

Black Power Reconsidered

Wright's ambivalent account of Gold Coast nationalism and "African culture" frustrates the expectations raised by its prophetic title. Black Power (1954) appears to undermine Wright's avowed anti-imperialism with its problematic assertions about African culture. Wright's suspicion of the folk cultures of peoples of African descent places him at odds with major currents of black radical thought that regard African peoples' cultural resistance as an imaginative response to their subordination.* Wright's view of the backwardness of African peoples and cultures and his inability to question the era's prevailing teleology of modernization have clouded his legacy and hindered recognition of Black Power's importance for theorizing black radicalism and the transnational dynamics of black consciousness in relation to both Western culture and American nationhood.

In Black Power, Wright advanced a historical account of the making of black modernity and radical consciousness as the collective condition of mobility, both forced and elective, shaped Africans and people of African descent. Little in Black Power suggests the popular understanding of diaspora describing a state alienation resulting from a physical exile or displacement from an ancestral homeland. Modernity rather than diaspora formed the key concept in Black Power and Wright's other writings from that period. As the outcome of the sedimented legacies of slavery, exploitation, and labor migrations in which choice and compulsion were often indistinguishable, black modernity was a forward-looking concept within which Africa, romantically figured as an ancestral homeland, was utterly irrelevant. Wright engaged with the past of the slave trade and its centrality for Western modernity in the service of the colonizing anti-imperialist revolt of black peoples against the West, articulating broad aspirations to global political community, solidarity, and liberation.

Yet despite Wright's historical approach, many readers of Black Power have approached the book with assumptions of a romanticized diaspora/homeland binary. Viewed as a diaspora narrative of return to one's presumed ancestral homeland, Black Power raises expectations for romantic solidarity that the narrative thoroughly disappoints. This is not a matter of Wright's failure to critique conservative colonialist clichés. Wright's excoriation of British racism in the Gold Coast served as a coup de grâce for an image of empire left reeling at the end of his merciless assault throughout the text. However, many readers found such a critique undermined by Wright's refusal to provide vindicating truths about African culture. Nevertheless, the difficulties Wright's text poses for us are actually illuminating insofar as we read them as expressions of Wright's struggle to glean critical perspective and political solidarity across national and cultural boundaries. Wright's Black Power departs from the diasporic discourses of "return" to the ancestral homeland because it links—indeed, equates—the profound alienation, both material and spiritual, of the diaspora condition with colonialism's psychological devastation of Gold Coast Africans. It would have been strange if Wright had found himself "at home" in Africa. Wright's unsentimental account of the poverty and limited education of Gold Coast Africans provided little corroboration of the popular view that Africa offered a haven for diaspora blacks. Rather than a therapeutic "return," Wright's narrative suggested the necessity of a collective coming to terms with the extraordinary historical circumstances of forced migration and modernity that might overcome the racism and patriarchalism that denied self-knowledge and freedom to both Africans and people of African descent in the West.©

Migration to urban metropolises was far more salient to Wright than the pilgrimage to a mythic conception of an ancestral homeland. That "urban passage" paralleled the colony-to-metropole migrations of African nationalist leaders and African Caribbean writers in pursuit of literary, artistic, and political development. Like countless other African Americans, Wright escaped the brutality of southern Jim Crow by migrating to the city and later by fleeing the repressive U.S. racial climate for Paris. However, his commercial and artistic success—unprecedented for an African American writer—did not insulate him and his family (his wife, Ellen, was of East European Jewish background) from the hostile racial climate in the postwar United States. Upon Wright's departure from the Communist Party in protest of its wartime appeasement of Jim Crow practices, vindictive party members retaliated in part by joining racists who sought to block the Wrights' purchase of a Greenwich Village apartment. Wright seized the chance to leave behind these petty harassments, government surveillance, and the fear rooted in the constant threat of racist public encounters, accepting an invitation from the French Ministry of Culture. After some difficulty in obtaining a visa, Wright spent a year in France with his family as the honored guest of the govern-
ment, revealing in what then impressed him as the more humane social environment of Paris. After returning to the hostile states and occasional violent harassment of interracial couples and groups in the Village, Wright permanently moved his family to France.9

In London, Wright met Padmore. Kwame Nkrumah's friend and political advisor. Wright had for years harbored the desire to see Africa, though in Black Power he portrayed the trip as a more spontaneous idea.10 Padmore (along with his British common-law wife, Dorothy), Nkrumah, and Wright hoped the trip would give the Ghanaian liberation movement an American audience and help recruit members of the black diaspora for the task of national building. The similarity of Padmore's and Wright's experiences as former communists certainly contributed to their friendship. Padmore defended Black Power to a disapproving W. E. B. DuBois, pointing out that whatever its flaws, Wright had captured "the challenge of the battle for a more visible liberation." In 1955, Wright contributed an introduction to Padmore's Pan-Africanism or Communion?11

It is well worth deriving into the ambiguities and contradictions in Black Power's account of the drive toward self-government in the Gold Coast. Understandably, Wright's text is widely read and judged as problematic or even a failure. Chester Himes believed that the book constituted "a mistake."12 Yet, without justification, other critics have identified several problematic areas, including Wright's misguided application of modernization theory to Africa, what they perceive as his Western ethnocentric gaze, and his dubious generalizations about "African" distrust and the distortions of African personality bred by colonialism. These and Wright's rather numerous expressions of culture clash have fueled some readers about his identity confusion if not his social self-hatred. Finally, critics have seized on Wright's notorious injunction that Nkrumah overcome the inertia of traditional religion, colonization, and ethnic loyalties by "militarizing" Ghanaian society in the service of building a modern state. With the constant plagued by coup d'etat and kleptocratic military regimes, hindsight would permit some observers to assume Wright of a crypto-fascist and outright hostility to the cause of African freedom.13

At their harshest, these critical appraisals read history backward from the narrow standpoint of a postcolonial Africa subverted by military dictatorships and their Western sponsors. And in defense of Wright's ill-advised forays into cultural incorporation, he qualified many of his statements with a speculative tone, often accompanied by ellipses that marked the provisional nature of his claims, his outright admission of his limited understanding, or occasions on which Wright was satirizing his own earnestness.14 In a more serious vein, Wright was responding with understandable emotion not only to Ghanaian culture but also to the poverty, misery, and exploitation he witnessed. The notion that Wright was hostile to African freedom is not sustained by even the most cursory reading of Black Power. To be sure, Wright's objections to what he perceived as the irrationality, dependency, and inscrutability of many of the Ghanaians he encountered, who he naively generalized as "Africans" characteristics, tended to undercut the book's insights. And Wright is badly served by his numerous expressions of shock at female nudity, public urination, and what he perceived as homosexual behavior. Still, Wright's puritanism and foibles, however distracting, require contextualization rather than ad hominem condemnation and dismissal.

More sympathetic appraisals of Black Power and its author have noted this tendency to diminish the author's legacy. For Diawaré, Black Power establishes Wright as an exemplary and prophetic advocate of modernity at the dawn of Africa's independence. Noting the decline and lingering poverty of African states, Diawaré regards Wright's prescription of modernity rather than traditional religion as the path to authentic freedom for Africa as relevant today as it was during the 1950s. While acknowledging the book's flaws, Diawaré insists that "Black Power may unsettle many readers, but one thing is certain: Wright was for Africa."15

For some critics, the "stent to which Wright was, in fact, "for Afr"a" is compromised by his reliance on what emerged as the West's modernization theory (let alone his advocacy of militarization) as a framework for his discussions of the relations among culture, decolonization, and development. It would be misguided, however, to claim that his use of the language of modernization and development suggested a complicity with Western power. Wright is better understood as a Marxist advocate before a skeptical Marxist than not racist, Western public on behalf of anticolonialism, nationalism, and a notion of development predicated on redistributive justice.16 I believe that this agenda also informs Wright's preoccupation with transatlantic claims of a racial mystique, rejecting "Negritude" as a basis for a community of opposition. This rejection of "Negritude" is evident in both Black Power and his earlier novel, The Outsider, an agenda that by so means constituted a denial of the persistence of racism in American and Western institutions and ideologies. Yet to fully comprehend Wright's understanding of modernization, it
is helpful to regard both that term and militarization historically, from the perspective of anticolonial movements, marking as well the circumstances through which peoples of African descent encountered the Western world. Perhaps Wright's view of the necessity of black peoples' confrontation with putatively Western tenets of reason, secularism, and individual freedom lay behind his rejection of a racial sentimentality that refused to acknowledge the benefits of modernity. Wright saw himself as the beneficiary of a black experience of Western modernity whose secular, rational character would give rise to universalist anticolonial struggles. In light of this pivotal moment of African-descended peoples' confrontation with the Western world through forced and voluntary labor migrations and anticolonial struggles, Wright's invocation of "militarization" is less ominous. Well before it was possible to speak of "militarization" as a project of centralized nation building, military service was a major catalyst for black modernity in that it acquainted black peoples with the wider world and facilitated contact with other African-descended peoples. Modernizing experiences of war and mobility, although decidedly not of black peoples' making, provided them with a historical framework for understanding the meaning of their lives. During World War II, the military service of African colonial and New World blacks under conditions of segregation and colonialism fostered a pan-African critique of the West that politicized African-descended peoples the world over. With the accelerating collapse of European empires and the heightened rights consciousness of African, West Indian, and African American soldiers who believed that military participation entitled them to full citizenship, militarism could also have positive connotations, enabling struggles for freedom.17

In this connection, Diawara's discussion of Wright's recommendation for the "militarization" of African society takes on different connotations. Diawara invokes the experience of a Senegalese scholar who fought for the French resistance against the Nazis. For his generation of Africans, to militarize had positive, anticolonial connotations, signifying equalization and empowerment. Ironically, that empowerment occurred within the rubric of service to colonial and segregationist regimes. Nevertheless, militarization was synonymous with the idea of "the modern" as a term of aspiration, desire, and positive value. In addition to the interactions between African-descended peoples from different parts of the world, military service provided technical skills that could be put to later use on behalf of Africa. Among the more important members of the African diaspora expatriate community in Nkrumah's Ghana were technicians trained in the U.S. military who lent their skills to building the new nation's infrastructure. In addition, Ghanaian ex-servicemen (many of whom served with British forces in Burma) played a significant role in the struggle for national independence. In 1948, three ex-servicemen were gunned down by British troops at a peaceful demonstration protesting the high prices of import goods. Mass anger and rioting in protest of the killings provided the catalyst for the mobilization of Nkrumah's nationalistic movement.

Despite Wright's criticism of the moral and religious hypocracy exhibited in the West's conquest of Africans and native peoples, he identified himself as a man of the West. Yet even as he championed what were widely consid-
ered to be the virtues of Western modernity—secularism, scientific method, reason, individual rights, and artistic freedom—Wright was at pains to disassociate himself from the West's tendentious anticommunism. While the Cold War continued to exert a shadowy influence over his activities, toward the end of his life it became less salient in his analysis of the challenges facing Ghana and other emergent African states. By then Wright believed that communism posed less of a threat to African independence than did the combined forces of the exploitation of tribal identities by the colonial powers, corruption, and the antagonism of Western powers to authentic political and economic emancipation.18

Wright's trip to the Gold Coast would allow him to witness firsthand a democratic movement that would sharpen his conception of the revolutionary potential of peoples of African descent. The optimism of Black Power is muted by Wright's uneasiness at those things of Ghanaian culture and society that he perceived as obstacles to the Ghanaian independence movement and African freedom. In other words, while Wright hoped to feel at home politically in the Gold Coast, as a self-described man of the West he harbored a deep suspicion of traditional culture as a barrier to the modern consciousness required for the struggle for independence. Wright identified the anthropological project of interpreting Akan culture so thoroughly with British imperialism that any consideration of an autonomous realm of culture mediated by colonialism was anathema to him.19 Wright's criticism was directed not so much toward African culture per se as toward the hybrid of Akan tradition and the missionaries' Christian imperialism. This hybrid culture represented to Wright Gold Coast Africans' psychological adaptation to oppression. Against the dead hand of traditional culture, Wright foregrounded the memory of the slave trade and simultaneous historical formation of the black diaspora and the Western world. Wright also expressed reservations.
about the nationalist movement's ambiguous embrace of modernity. Although he expressed dismay regarding Africans' participation in the slave trade, Wright was unequivocal about the West's hypocrisy in orchestrating the slave trade, a critique that was intended to undermine the West's contemporary claims of moral authority as the leader of the "Free World."

Wright began his book with a historical overview of the slave trade and the European settlement of the Americas. Seeking to dispel the fog of Western racism, Wright assessed the economic origins of enslavement. "Slavery was not put into practice because of racial theories; racial theories sprang up in the wake of slavery, to justify it. It was impossible to milk the limited population of Europe of enough convicts and indentured white servants to cultivate, on a large and paying scale, colonial sugar, cotton, and tobacco plantations. Either they had to find a labor force or abandon the colonies, and Europe's eyes turned to Africa, where the supply of human beings seemed inexhaustible." Wright concluded from his brief visit to Liverpool and his reading of history that "the foundations of the city were built of human flesh and blood."

Wright noted the presence of many Africans in Western dress at London's Eton College, where he had caught a train to Liverpool to sail to Ghana. He sensed that he and those other Africans were retraining in reverse well-worn historical paths of forced migration: Liverpool "was the city that had been the center and focal point of the slave trade. . . . Sufficient to say that the British did not originate this trading in human flesh whose enormous profits laid the foundations upon which had been reared modern industrial England." While that infamous distinction had fallen to the Portuguese, England had developed the slave trade into a system whose functioning in some manner would touch more than half of the human race with its bloody but profitable agitations—the consequences of which would endure for more than four hundred years.

Wright's descriptions of his arrival in Africa at the port of Takoradi and his trip by bus to the Ghanaian capital, Accra, invoked historical memory as the antidote to the shock he expressed at the poverty and difference of African life. Indeed, this theme of enslavement was framed by a Ghanaian's innocent query about Wright's untraceable African ancestors and Wright's resentment at his inability to answer the question. Wright's narrative suggests an utter lack of preparation for the alienation he experienced. "The kaleidoscope of sea, jungle, nudity, mud huts, and crowded market places induced in me a conflict deeper than I was aware of; a protest against what I saw and felt." Wright's protest was not against Africa or its people but against "the unver-

ted feeling engendered by the strangeness of a completely different order of life." Summed by the "absolute otherness and inaccessibility" of this new world, Wright could not be altogether free of racial preconceptions in his perception of such difference. His reaction was, however, a vicarious rebuttal to the idea of "Negritude and other romantic visions of Africa. At such moments, Wright's narrative shifted to the familiar terrain of racial knowledge, which offered a more valid basis for human identification. As the bus passed Elmina, Cape Coast, and Anomabu on its seaside route, these "historic Gold Coast place names . . . stirred me to a memory of dark and bloody events of long ago." These were the beaches across which "hundreds of thousands of black men, women and children had been marched, starved and chained, down to the waiting ships to be carried across the ocean to be slaves in the New World."

Having begun with an account of the slave trade's European origins, Wright concluded his narrative with his visit to the slave castles, the sites of the genesis of the African diaspora and of Western industrialism and modernity. There, the American-born Wright confronted the physical monuments of the slave trade, the stark fastnesses lining the western coast of Africa, where Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, France, and England battled for control of the lucrative trade. Wright wrote movingly of the castles where captive Africans had been imprisoned before being forced onto the ships that carried them to the Americas as human commodities. "I was told that the same iron bolts which secured the doors to keep the slaves imprisoned were the ones that my fingers now touched." He invited his readers to contemplate along with him the tangible memory of the horror and suffering of the captives, a memory that dwelled in the dungeons of the castles. With powerful and poetic imagery, Wright burshted the memory of enslavement, subjecting the legend among Ghanaians of the existence of gold treasure within the walls of the castles to an inversion that recalled the human suffering that preceded and produced the West's vast wealth and industrial revolution.

If there is any treasure hidden in these vast walls, I'm sure that it has a stench that outshines gold—a tiny, pear-shaped tear that formed on the cheek of some black woman swept away from her children, a tear that gleams here still, caught in the feeble rays of the dungeon's light—a tiny tear that violets at the sound of approaching footsteps, but reappears when all is quiet, hanging there on that black cheek, unnoticed, unap-
Writing from Ghana in a state of bewilderment and exasperation, Wright related to the Padmore the difficulties he encountered in obtaining the political knowledge he had sought. He had hoped that the Convention People's Party nationalists would serve as guides and translators and would take him into their confidence as a political ally, but he found the nationalist leaders uncommunicative and reserved. Instead of writing a report on the political situation, Wright was thus compelled to concentrate on the life of the people despite his lack of knowledge of their Akan languages. He described a trip with Nkrumah through Accra as "inspiring. In Black Power, Wright praised the nationalists' "streamlined, modern political organization" and marveled at the enthusiastic response of crowds of Ghanaians as Nkrumah's motorcade passed. "They shouted a greeting to the Prime Minister in a tone of voice compounded of passion, exhortation, and contained joy: free-dooomi! Free-dooomi!" Wright believed that these Africans demonstrated a deeper comprehension of the meaning of freedom than did the West. "At a time when the Western world grew embarrassed at the sound of the word 'freedom,' these people knew that it meant the right to shape their own destiny as they wished."24

Later, at a women's political rally, Wright was astonished by the synthesis of Christian and Akan prayers and rituals that preceded pro--Convention People's Party speeches in both English and tribal languages. Wright was deeply impressed with Nkrumah and his party's fusion of religion with modern politics. Nkrumah had understood the need for a religious basis for the mass political mobilization that Wright believed would fill the void in the people's lives created by the missionaries' assaults on indigenous culture. On further reflection, he claimed that only a native African such as Nkrumah could have accomplished this blend of Christianity, religion, nationalism, and socialism. Wright regarded Nkrumah's nationalism as the unintentional outcome of British colonial education. This dubious claim, possibly intended to foster Western audiences' identification with Gold Coast nationalism, glossed over the complexity of Nkrumah's formation, which owed as much to such paragons of black modernity as Aggrey, Garvey, Padmore, and Du Bois.25

Wright was struck by the cosmopolitan spirit of black modernity when he added that Nkrumah and the Gold Coast nationalists were the product of another synthesis that the British had hardly anticipated—of Marxism and a "racial and class solidarity derived from the American Negro's proud and defensive nationalism." Wright admired Nkrumah's organizational acumen, which Wright claimed far outstripped the Soviet Union's attempts to gain influence in Africa with ideas that were "backward" compared to those of the Convention People's Party. But if Marxism had been a factor, its relevance to the Gold Coast situation was limited, as the Convention People's Party had sought to address the alienating effects of colonialism and modernity:

"Black of all it was something much deeper and more potent than the mere influence of Marxist thought. . . . [T]he twentieth century was throwing up these mass patterns of behavior out of the compulsive nakedness of men's disinterested lives. These men were not being so much guided as they were being provoked by elements deep in their own personalities, elements which they could not have ignored even if they had tried. The greed of British businessmen and the fumbling efforts of missionaries had made an unwonting contribution by shattering the traditional tribal culture that had once given meaning to these people's lives, and now there burned in these black hearts a hunger to regain control over their lives. . . . White [colonizers] could never realize how taunting were their efforts to save Africans when their racial codes forbade their sharing the lives of these Africans."26

Wright was impressed but remained torn about whether this synthesis of politics and religion ("politics plus," as he referred to it) could effectively produce industrial and technical mastery.

Wright's uneasiness at the tensions between tradition and modernity in Gold Coast nationalism suffused his account of his reaction to Nkrumah's use of a quasi-religious oath through which women at the rally swore their allegiance to the Convention People's Party and its leader. An astonished Wright regarded this deployment of charismatic authority as radically out of step with the modern politics of the twentieth century, let alone an emancipatory project. Just as troubling was Nkrumah's refusal to share with Wright the text of the oath. There was a sinister undertone to Wright's retelling of the incident, as Nkrumah, in response to a request for a copy of the oath, silently looked off into the distance and "slowly, seemingly absent-mindedly," pocketed the slip of paper containing the oath. Wright struggled to reconcile the contrariety of religious authoritarianism within a modernist political movement. His uneasiness at Nkrumah's tendency toward self-glorification was present in light of the subsequent cult of personality promulgated by the Ghanaian leader.27
modernity. Wright remained skeptical of admonitions from Britshers that juj, the magic of fetish priests, was not some mere superstition to be dismissed out of hand. But Wright wondered why the Africans had not used such supernatural power to defend themselves against the colonizers and why it had taken a Westernized African to lead the fight for freedom.  

Wright was keenly and presciently attuned to the problems Nkrumah faced. "Who would come to handle the work of administration when self-government came? Would Nkrumah have to impose a dictatorship until he could educate a new generation of young men who could work with him? Such speculations pervaded Wright's account of Nkrumah's "Motion of Destiny" speech before the Legislative Assembly petitioning for self-government, the landmark event Wright had come to witness. Ironically, because the country's best-trained men were members of the opposition to the Convention People's Party, Nkrumah was compelled to rely on British administrators and civil servants: "In coming power Nkrumah had to import more Britshers to serve in technical capacities than had ever been in the Gold Coast." Wright believed that without the expatriates, not only the business of government but Nkrumah's promises of social reforms in health, education, and housing for the masses would have been deferred. Still, Wright was justified in his concern that the British were dictating the pace and terms of the transition to self-government. And he prefigured the incipient analysis of neocolonialism in observing that "the mining, timber, and mercantile interests, all foreign," were unfazed by the petition and had "their own ideas about what was happening."  

Wright believed that colonialism had warped human relationships and communication between Africans and Europeans caught in its web. The deracinated Gold Coast petit bourgeoisie that resisted the popular movement for freedom was a product of colonialism. But colonialism also produced conditions from which some hope might be salvaged. Colonial economies and forced labor created Africans but also brought them closer with labor organization and what generally constituted "the most progressive and dynamic aspects of the Western world." The future, Wright hoped, resided with these young nationalists who were impressed by the techniques of Western industrial production.  

Wright would reaffirm this notion of colonialism as a modernizing process in a paper, "Tradition and Industrialization," given at the 1965 Congress of Negro and African Writers in Paris. This thesis, along with Wright's equally controversial claim that traditional culture was complicit in colonial sub-
66

during Wright's Gold Coast sojourn. 7 Wright subsequently remained a con-
sistent advocate of African independence, a position that obliged him to pursue
an unmitigated reclusion of the movement's internal contradictions and
weaknesses.

The class, cultural, and political contradictions within Ghanaian society
were no doubt what Nkrumah had in mind when he remarked to Wright that
the "ideological development here is not very high." 8 Nkrumah's reliance on
expatriates thus held tremendous significance. In this context, Wright's re-
flections on the psychological distance between Africans and Westerners
were trenchant. He had discerned the most crucial challenge that Nkrumah's
emancipatory project faced: Had the ratio between expatriates and Africans
within Nkrumah's movement and government been more equitable, the equa-
tion of black diaspora and European "strangers" might have been less salient
as a potential source of conflict. As it was, despite their impassioned sup-
port for African independence, the foreign status of Wright, Padmore, and
others—including notably Nkrumah's state-press general, Labour Member of
Parliament Geoffrey Bing—represented an internal cleavage within Gha-
nanian politics.

Black Power was far too modest in its criticisms of virtually every segment
of Ghanaian society to be received in that country. Still, Wright was disappoin-
ted at not receiving an invitation to Ghana's 1957 independence
celebrations. At the request of the Ghanaian government, Padmore worked
to establish Nkrumah's Bureau of African Affairs, which oversaw Ghana's
attempts to forge political unity on the continent and to provide assistance
for ongoing anticolonial struggles. Wright followed developments in Ghana
through correspondence with the Padmores. According to Dorothy Pad-
more, her husband, who died suddenly in October 1959, had encountered
peny obstructions from resentful Ghanaian officials but at the time of his
death was beginning to gain recognition in Ghana and throughout Africa for
his contributions to Africa, particularly in the critical area of international
affairs. 0

The year 1960, widely touted as the Year of Africa, with more than thirty
nations slated to gain independence, ended with the political stalemate of
the Congo Crisis. Wright was financially strained, chronically ill, and demoral-
ized by publishers' rejections and incessant political pressure and surveil-
lance. He had absorbed a series of setbacks over the past few years. He
contemplated another book on Africa but was unable to secure funding from
the American Society of African Culture (AMASC) and other sources for a
trip through West Africa. After a prolonged application process, Eng-
land had denied him a residency visa that he had fully expected to receive.
Hearing that Padmore was in London being treated for liver disease, Wright,
himself weakened by amoebic dysentery, briefly visited Britain in September
1959 but was detained by British immigration authorities. Wright attributed
his difficulties with the British home office to racism and suspected the
instigation of U.S. authorities. Paris had ceased to be a haven, as U.S.
government intelligence agencies had thoroughly infiltrated the black expatriate
community with informants. The mobility so essential to Wright was wholly
compromised by the state control he had sought to escape through exile.

From early 1959, when George Padmore was still alive, to October 1960,
when unrest in the Congo dominated headlines, Wright angled for an invita-
tion to Ghana. From there, he planned to visit Africa and report on the
political situation in hopes of countering anti-African pro-paganista in the
West. Dorothy Padmore, who had remained in Ghana to take a government
position and work on her late husband's biography, discouraged Wright on
several grounds. She feared that Western powers would interfere, keeping
him out of Africa. Moreover, she confided, Ghanaian officials lacked an
"appreciation of your efforts and your motives." 11

Wright's efforts to return to Africa did not succeed. Dorothy Padmore's
letters to Wright from Ghana report a flurry of disappointment at what were
already the emerging signs of corruption, mismeasurement, capitulation, and a
tendency to appease potential opponents through bribery. She realized that
a major threat to true independence resided with the African petit bour-
geoisie as instruments of economic imperialism and wanted her new preface
to the French translation of her husband's Post-Africanism or Colonialism? to
make it known that Africans must close ranks. Of course, this was the thesis
of Fanner's The Wretched of the Earth, an expose of neocolonialism in part
occasioned by the debacle of Patrice Lumumba's assassination in the Congo.
Dorothy Padmore's explanation for anti-African coverage in the Western
press, the threat posed to U.S. and Western interests by the "potential influ-
ence of the African viewpoint on international affairs," might have served
equally well in placing Wright's political travails in perspective. 12

In his November 1960 Paris speech, "The Negro Intellectual and the Artist
in the U.S. Today," Wright noted the vested interests of the U.S. government
and its philanthropic and cultural apparatuses in controlling black intellectu-
al discourse and stifling dissent. Wright's analysis echoed that of Dorothy

RICHARD WRIGHT IN GHANA

RICHARD WRIGHT IN GHANA
A preoccupation with the idiosyncratic nature of black power obscures the broader project of black intellectuals who believed that Afro-modernity offered the best hope of transforming Western culture. Although the writings of George Lamming and E. Franklin Frazier diverged from Wright's view that traditional culture posed obstacles to authentic liberation, all three men shared a fundamental solidarity with African liberation movements. Like Wright, both Lamming and Frazier reflected on African Americans' and West Indian blacks' relationship to emergent African nations. Lamming, who visited Ghana in the year after independence, found it an exhilarating place. In its implicit rebuttal to Wright's belief in Western culture as a modernizing influence, Lamming's enthusiasm for Ghana highlighted his view that black peoples in the United States and the Caribbean remained too afflicted with a colonized consciousness to claim the spirit of modernity he witnessed in the new Africa. Lamming revealed in the self-confidence of Ghanaians who had emerged from colonialism. Their rapid expansion of a national infrastructure of roads, schools, harbors, and hospitals made Lamming all too aware of the absence of such a self-determining spirit in the West Indies.

Frazier no doubt felt a similar enthusiasm at the example of Ghana—he donated his library to the University of Ghana at Legon. But, as with Lamming, the platitude with which Ghana and Africa were redefining the terms of human freedom prompted Frazier to make an inquisitive comparison with the status of American blacks. During 1952, the year that saw Ghana's independence and the resistance of white mobs to federally mandated school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, Frazier published Black Bourgeoisie, an indictment of an apolitical, materialistic black middle class that he saw as eager to sacrifice its historical and cultural identity in exchange for its newly gained freedoms. A year later, Frazier again played the contrarian, this time as part of AMSAC's attempt to foster dialogue between African and African American intellectuals. While generally supportive of AMSAC's vision of cultural exchange, Frazier provocatively claimed that African Americans were ideologically and materially unfit to make any meaningful contribution toward the development of African societies.

Extending his assault on the black elite to a theoretical challenge to civil rights orthodoxy, Frazier remained convinced that the southern civil rights movement could not remedy the dislocation of a substantial segment of
the northern urban African American population. At the suggestion of an African intellectual in the aftermath of the turmoil in the Congo, Frazier penned his essay "The Failure of the Negro Intellectual" in the year before his death in 1962. Here, Frazier distinguished the necessary economic and social integration of blacks into American life from the question of assimilation or cultural identity. While welcoming integration in the socioeconomic sense, Frazier rejected assimilation, which he believed amounted to a complete identification with the majority society and culture. Recalling the congresses of Negro writers held in Paris in 1936 and Rome in 1950, Frazier held that African American intellectuals lagged behind African intellectuals in their willingness to engage "the impact of Western civilization on the traditional culture of the Negro peoples." This was symptomatic of the larger problem Frazier addressed in Black Bourgeoisie, an anti-intellectual black middle class "that would slough off everything that is reminiscent of its Negro origin and its Negro folk background." If African intellectuals did not shrink from the question of the impact of the colonial experience on African personality, such was distressingly not the case with African American intellectuals. Instead of reflecting on the impact of slavery and segregation on African American consciousness, they preferred to discuss "superficial" matters such as the group's material standard of living or the degree to which it enjoyed civil rights. Frazier could have been referring to the speech of James Ivey, a member of the Afro-American delegation to the 1956 Paris congress.48

For Frazier, echoing Wright's conclusions in his final address in Paris, the myopia of African American intellectuals was explained—though not justified—by the political constraints of the Cold War and the limits of post-war American democracy. To reinforce his view that the gradual integration of blacks was "bought at the price of abject conformity of thinking," Frazier referenced the recent volume of poetry by Langston Hughes, Ask Your Mama, the poet's insouciant declaration of militant black internationalism. In Frazier's eyes, Hughes claimed that the African visitor to America found that in the American social supermarket, blacks for sale ranged from intellectuals to entertainers.49 African American intellectuals, according to Frazier, had cut themselves off from the crucial questions facing the group, foremost among them the impact of urbanization on blacks. Frazier sounded the alarm at the emerging cleavage between a growing black middle class and an increasingly demoralized black proletariat. Contrary to some observers' fearful predictions, Frazier believed that these disillusioned, uneducated masses would shun the Communist Party, instead joining nationalistic or racial religious sects or cults. Frazier could not only see the cheers for the sit-in movement.

Thank goodness that African American youth had risen against segregation and a complacent older generation of African American leadership. With their goals limited to integration, the students ironically echoed the myopia of Negro intellectuals. They were merely deferring an inevitable confrontation with economic inequality in U.S. society.

With the exception of Hughes and a handful of others, black writers and intellectuals had flown from their heritage, neglecting heroic rebels against slavery and disowning such dissenters as Du Bois and Robeson. In language reminiscent of Aimé Césaire's "Return to My Native Land," Frazier emphasized the African American intellectual's "failure to dig down into the experience of the Negro and bring about a transvaluation of that experience so that the Negro could have a new self-image or conception of himself." Frazier reiterated his view that the American Negro had little to contribute to Africa, but the African, in achieving freedom, might save the American Negro's soul "in providing him with a new identification... and a new sense of personal dignity."50

Frazier's scathing dismissals of black intellectuals may obscure the main target of his critique—that is, an American political culture that forced black leaders to banish issues of economic democracy, pacifism, and African anticolonialism from their political vocabularies on pain of prosecution (Du Bois) or internal exile (Robeson). Nevertheless, Frazier's mercurial criticism of black American mandarins—particularly those selected to represent the United States abroad at the congresses in Paris and Rome—were both influential for and influenced by such writers as Lamming.

While the organized Left historically had provided support to anticolonial struggles, the project of Frazier, Wright, Lamming, and other anticolonial black intellectuals and activists (including, among others, Césaire, Padmore, Fanon, and the Trinidad-born Claudia Jones) was in many respects analogous to the nonaligned movement. Nonalignment as a global political formation was launched by the 1955 conference of Afro-Asian nations held in Bandung, Indonesia, at which newly self-governing and emergent nations declared their independence from both the United States and the Soviet Union, insisting on a neutral path to the development of their societies. The political resolve behind nonalignment was reinforced in part by the solidarity of nonwhite nations with shared histories of colonial racism. Accordingly, U.S. foreign policy makers sought to win over the nonaligned or "uncommitted" nations by supporting desegregation to counter international criticism of African racism.51

While Lamming and other anticolonial spokespersons were unwilling to
tate sides in the Cold War, they could not remain above the fray. Even as they sought neutralist alternatives to dominant Cold War narratives, they invari-ably confronted the American Leviathan. For these African and African diasporal intellectuals, the image of Africa casting off almost a century of European colonial rule signaled new prospects for human freedom. An inter-rogation of dominant American perceptions was central to this project, rooted in the conviction that struggles against systems of colonialism and U.S. ra-cial segregation were synonymous with the democratization of metropolitan centers of power.

Lamming's collection of essays, The Pleasures of Exile (1960), elaborated his conception of the simultaneous gift and burden of writers of African descent, the task James Baldwin called "the necessity to remake the world in their own image..." to change this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world, and defend themselves, held by other peo-ples." The book, based in part on visits to West Africa and the United States during the 1950s, was as much a manifesto rooted in anti-colonial liberation struggles as it was Richard Wright's work. Lamming's reflections on travel, migration, and exile chronicled the transformations wrought by West Indian expatriate writers in London and New York during the 1950s of thou-sands of black West Indian colonialns to the "mother country." Whether or not The Pleasures of Exile had a place in Frazier's library, the sociologist probably would have endorsed Lamming's examination of the impact of Western cul-ture on the self-conception of colonialized blacks. At the same time, the black presence in Britain was redefining metropolitan culture. Lamming's visit to Angolohole West Africa and in particular Ghana induced an attempt to recall his earliest ideas, the "fragments of rumour and fantasy" about the continent retrieved from the memory of his colonial education. Lamming was energized by Ghana's humble of modern nation building and "ancient communal living," and he remarked on the ubiquitous construction and monumets of state (including the statue of Nkrumah outside Parliament House, with its inscription, "Seek ye first the political Kingdom") alongside the splendor of fashionable African dress, tenacious vegetation, and the "declining magic of chieftaincy." It is this amalgamation of the various styles of living, this feeling of ambiguity toward the future, that gives the country its special quality of excitement." A democratic sense of confidence marked Ghana as a place where two elderly Ashanti women in traditional dress could stop into a popular hood in Kumasi for drinks, fully expecting to be welcomed alongside their younger, more urbanized fellow citizens.

While on the surface more upbeat than Wright's account of the Gold Coast before independence, Lamming's celebratory on his introduction to Ghana's equipoise of ancient and modern cultures yielded to more sobering reflections on the clash of the old and new. The uncertain future of Ghana's experiment was poignantly evoked in Lamming's account of two young men, part of Accra's substantial population of unemployed persons with only an elementary school education, who proudly enshrined at a taxi stand the confrontation between the hero and villain of the previous night's Hollywood Western. Carried away by the images and action, the youth immo-rationating the film's protagonist broke his rival's nose, bloodied his own shirt, and landed both men in police custody. Lamming imagined the youths be-fore a magistrate, unable to explain themselves as they faced the penalty of a legal system blind to the truth of the moment—or spirit possession by cine-marre fantasy—that brought them to court. Their tragedy would be private, mourned by relatives: "society will not notice their absence from this corner." Lamming struck a cautionary note about the fate of such young men similar to that voiced by Frazier in his prediction of a persistent class inequality among African Americans: "Vagrants, free and defenseless as the birds, they are learning to travel from moment to moment, from accident to acci-dent. Their desires may grow as lawless as the escholoid gangsters they dramatize; for their energy is great, but their hands are idle." Reckoning his trip to Nigeria, Lamming employed his subservient anti-colonial reading of Shakespeare's Tempest to describe British officials' desperate efforts to justify their increasingly unwelcome presence in West Africa. In Pleasures, Lamming frequently invoked The Tempest to figure the altered balance of power between the colonizer and the colonized, sym-bolized by Prospero and his oppressive magic and Caliban, his rebellious former slave, who has appropriated the "gifts" of Prospero's language—that is, Westernization—as a weapon against foreign rule. Traversing Nigeria as the guest of Africans and West Indian expatriates, Lamming mused about the assistance bestowed on him by strangers. Why did one Nigerian take the trouble to host Lamming, a stranger, and to talk at length with Lamming about his country and its politics? Because this Nigerian was married to a West Indian woman? Lamming concluded that the man "was simply con-cerned about the future of the African continent, and in particular Nigeria. He had a ... moral stake in the future of colonial territories. The West Indies was his concern, and Nigeria was mine. Hence the spontaneity..." the sort of hospitality, Lamming ironically observed, that had gotten poor Caliban in such trouble. The solidarity Lamming experienced was born of an im-pasioned anti-colonialism, a bond reinforced in some cases by marriage be-

RICHARD WRIGHT IN GHANA

RICHARD WRIGHT IN GHANA
as C. L. R. James, destined as Ellis Island during the anticolonial witch hunts of the early 1950s."

Lamming recalled the exhilaration of his first days in New York City, of endless nighttime walkst "through the ethereal illumination of Broadway... American nights of pure magic: the repetition of small bars, the sound of jazz... a rhythm of imperative which seemed to impose a surface of energy on everything." After a few weeks, Lamming moved from his downtown hotel to Harlem. He soon met "that group of American Negroes, where the Nigerian, 'doesn't doctor for money', his research centered on combating a blood disease that claimed the lives of Nigerian infants. As if to demonstrate the unmarked coexistence of traditional living and modern aspirations, Alex introduced Lamming to his polyglot extended family. Alex's father, a chief, and Lamming discussed at length the son's function and how he had been wise to support his son's education and medical training, "but now he is worried." He sees "all sorts of little people spring up in politics and private practice, and he wonders why his son should turn so much less than these men... it seems a strange providence which allows such things to happen." In Lamming's view, the old man had chosen wisely but had been overtaken by unforeseen social changes. Still, Lamming realized that both father and son were united in the same enterprise of modernity as service to the nation and its people. Presently, Lamming argued that this enterprise would endure "if Nigeria can learn one basic fact... that there is absolutely no connection between value and price. Alex can sell his services at any price, but no man can buy the meaning of the old Chief's decision."

The moral ingenuity Lamming derived from his conversation with Alex's father became a veritas later in the essay in Lamming's depiction of anti-intellectual and status-obsessed African Americans that he encountered on his sojourn in the United States. This was nothing, however, like the scrutiny Lamming endured while entering the country on the sails of a Guggenheim fellowship. He lost himself above any suspicion of subversive affiliations, any of political parties. Yet after a lengthy Customs interrogation, his credentials and publisher's letters disquieted by his inquisitor, Lamming was submitted to a loyalty oath, his release coming after only he swore that he would never overthrow the U.S. government.

As Lamming had assumed new and terrifying responsibilities, he remarked, finaly his "to breathe the air which had often haunted [his] childhood." Lamming described a native of the abridged citizenship and political baress most visited on African American intellectuals and such resident aliens...
Projecting the African Personality

Nkrumah, the Ex-patriates, and Postindependence Ghana, 1957–1960

Writing from Accra soon after the independence celebrations, George Padmore commiserated with W.E.B. Du Bois, sharing the distress felt throughout Ghanaian and African governmental circles at his absence. African reporters, Padmore informed Du Bois, had challenged U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon on the decision to deny Du Bois a visa. The reporters had made it clear that he "would be a more welcome visitor to the country than the Vice President." If U.S. officials had hoped to isolate Du Bois, the octogenarian was still very much in the loop among Ghanaian leaders. Padmore apprised Du Bois of plans to convene two conferences in Ghana as soon as possible. The first would consist of prime ministers and foreign ministers of independent African states—Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Ghana—to discuss the creation of an African community within the Asian-African Bandung grouping. The other would convene representatives of all political organizations in non-self-governing territories struggling to gain independence along the lines of what he generously termed "our Pan-African idea."

With these pan-African conferences held in Accra—the first Conference of Independent African States held in April 1958 and the All African People’s Conference held the following December—Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah laid down the framework for African leadership within the nonaligned movement of new Asian and African states that sought to pose an alternative, a "Third Force," to the bipolar Cold War vision of global order. These