

Dr. Bunche: He Transcended Race

By A. S. DOC YOUNG

When Secretary General U Thant opened the United Nations General Assembly on the Thursday afternoon of December 9, he was deeply enveloped in grief for his "incomparable friend and colleague," Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche, who had died in the early morning of that day.

Out of the fathomless depths of his grief, with love, and in truth, U Thant appraised Dr. Bunche as "an international institution in his own right, transcending both nationality and race in a way that is achieved by very few."

He went on to say that Dr. Bunche "was the most effective and best known of international civil servants, and his record of achievement as an individual member of the Secretariat was unsurpassed."

That was the first of many, many UN tributes paid Dr. Bunche by great leaders who represented numerous countries, races, colors, and political persuasions.

George Bush, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, said: "Though we Americans take pride in the fact that he was an American, he was truly a citizen of the world."

Outside the United Nations, tributes to Dr. Bunche were no less profound.

NONE MORE FAITHFUL

"No American has worked more faithfully, more persistently, or more effectively in the cause of peace in our generation," said U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers.

President Nixon said: "Dr. Bunche never relented in his persistence to advance the cause of brotherhood and cooperation among men and nations . . ."

Premier Golda Meir of Israel said: "There is hardly anybody outside of Israel who was so intimately connected with the State of Israel from its very emergence. His wisdom, objectivity, and ability are sadly needed in the troubled world of today."

They were speaking of a black man who had won the Nobel Peace Prize and America's highest civilian award, the Medal of Freedom.

They were speaking of a black man who had been orphaned at age 13, who had worked as a janitor in his youth after school, who had starred in football and basketball at UCLA, who had once stowed away on a ship in an effort to save the cost of a trip.

They were speaking of a black man who had been the Valedictorian of his class at Los Angeles' Thomas Jefferson High School where, then predominantly white, he was denied membership in the academic honor society.

They were speaking of the highest American figure in the United Nations, the most prominent Afro-American whose prominence was not derived primarily from specific battles on behalf of the race.

ALMOST GOT LYNCHED

They were speaking of a black man who once very nearly got himself lynched in the Deep South but who, many years later, returned South to participate in protest marches although, by that time, his health was bad.

They were speaking of a Man, a champion human being, a peerless competitor, a Man who epitomized pure courage by continuing his vital work until a few months ago . . . despite the fact that he suffered with a kidney ailment, heart disease, diabetes, and near blindness, causing him to be hospitalized frequently during the past year.

For the last time, he entered a hospital — New York Hospital — on Tuesday, December 7.

He died at 12:40 a.m., December 9. He was 67 years old. He was survived by his widow, Mrs. Ruth Harris Bunche; a son, Ralph, Jr.; a daughter, Joan; and three grand children. Another daughter, Mrs. Burton Pierce, died five years ago.

Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche was best known for the incredible work he did over a long, tedious, nerve-racking, mind-boggling period of 81 days as mediator of a bitter dispute between Jewish and Arab states in 1948, when the UN was a fledgling world body beset by turmoil, as it is today, in the Middle East.

The bitter dispute, and war, resulted from the partitioning of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. When an armistice was arranged in mid-1948, Dr. Bunche was acclaimed throughout the world, by Israelis and Arabs alike; and two years later, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

GREATER SATISFACTION

But Dr. Bunche was to say that he got greater satisfaction from work done later.

"The Peace Prize attracted all the attention," he said in an interview in 1969, "but I've had more satisfaction in the work I've done since. I have been in charge of the UN peace-keeping operations in various parts of the world — the Congo, the Middle East, Kashmir."

He spoke of his Suez operation as "the single most satisfying work I've ever done (because) for the first time we have found a way to use military men for peace instead of war."

Writing in the New York Times, Robert D. McFadden has said, "Dr. Bunche . . . lived in a world of diplomacy that was wracked with belligerence yet capable of great harmony. Its ultimate poles were war and peace, and between these he sought the balance of justice."

In his career-long fight for peace and justice, Dr. Bunche brought to bear on every problem confronting him great intelligence, integrity, insight, kindness, humor, and deep compassion.

U Thant said Dr. Bunche "was an outstanding example of that new 20th Century breed of international officials who devote all their gifts and their very lives to the service of the community of mankind."

DIPLOMATIC SKILLS

Dr. Bunche was noted for his diplomatic skills. But he was by no means the stereotyped diplomatic namby-pamby. As McFadden said, "He could haggle, bicker, hair-split, and browbeat, if necessary."

In his role as a mediator of people's fights, he often "melted frigid atmosphere" with the force of his personality.

Certainly Dr. Bunche was clever, cunning. As mediator of the Israeli-Arab dispute in 1948, Dr. Bunche met separately with both sides for the purpose of ascertaining the kind of agenda to draw up, then he called the delegations together to approve the agenda.

The most important thing, he explained later, was to get both sides accustomed to taking formal action, and to signing something — just anything, he explained, that looked official.

He was, in this work, a master of timing. Once when an Arab delegate and an Israeli leader neared the breaking point in their relations, Dr. Bunche arranged a secret meeting between them, whereupon "they acted like long-lost brothers," Dr. Bunche said.

"Pretty soon, they started to speak Arabic and then they apologized to me because they knew I didn't



CONFERRING — Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, Palestine mediator, confers with Capt. Paul Leyder, Belgian observer, and John Reedman, political advisor to the Palestine Commission, over a huge map of the Holy Land speaking a Palestine armistice in 1948. UPI



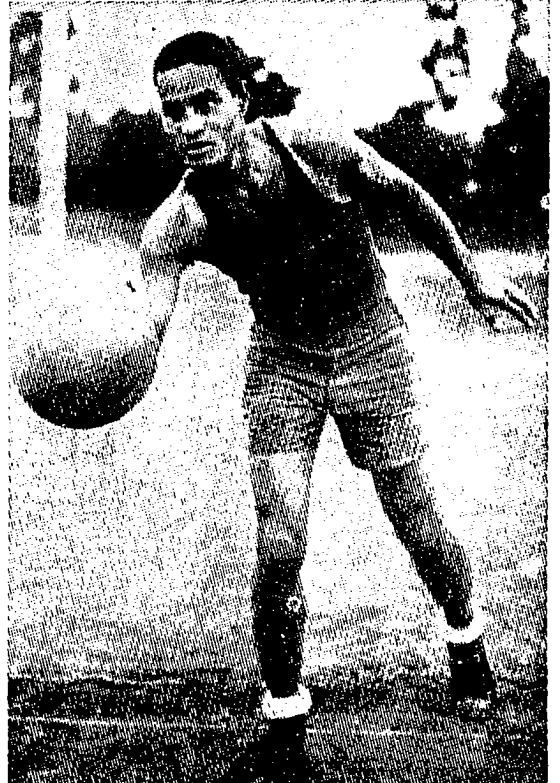
PEACE PRIZE — Dr. Bunche accepts the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize from Gunnar Jahn, president of the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament. At the ceremony he said, "May there be in our time a world of peace in which we, the people, may make full use of the possibilities which are in us, a world of freedom and equality among all men." UPI



FREEDOM TRAIL — Dr. Ralph Bunche, front row, along with Dr. Martin Luther King, Rev. Ralph Abernathy and Mrs. King, lead thousands of civil rights demonstrators out on the last leg of their Selma-to-Montgomery 50-mile march. UPI



CONVOCATION SPEAKER — Dr. Bunche returned to California in 1969 as convocation speaker at Compton College. U.S. Bowman Photo



ATHLETE — This photo, taken in 1927, shows Bunche as an outstanding member of the UCLA basketball team. UPI

speaking the language. I said, 'Hell, speak your Arabic. Don't bother about me.'

A PRIVATE MAN

Although great fame was thrust upon him, Dr. Bunche was a private sort of man, not a man to indulge himself in self-publicity, personal aggrandizement, nor in quest of political power.

He was easy to meet, quick to respond to letters, meticulous (as I can testify) about returning telephone calls. He was a good conversationalist, a man who enjoyed a drink and a good story.

He never lost his love of sports, being a familiar figure at World Series games and other athletic events. When he was unable to attend athletic events in which he was interested, it was not unusual for him to have UN aides "smuggle" scores to him while he was in meeting or conference dealing with important world affairs.

Outwardly, Dr. Bunche seemed calm, unflappable. He was soft-spoken. But chain-smoking was for long a sign of inner tensions.

(In 1955, I was a member of the Ebony Magazine staff. In November of that year, as I recall, we published the 10th anniversary edition of Ebony with an excellent photograph of Dr. Bunche on the cover. He was holding a cigarette in his hand. No sooner had he seen that issue of Ebony than he lodged a complaint: He had joined an anti-smoking group, he said, and quit smoking. The color photograph, he said, embarrassed him now.)

Ralph Johnson Bunche was born in Detroit on August 7, 1904, the son of Fred Bunche, a barber; and Mrs. Olive Agnes Johnson Bunche, a lady with musical inclinations who, according to her son, kept their home "bubbling over with ideas and opinions."

In 1915, Mrs. Bunche gave birth to a daughter, Grace, and developed rheumatic fever. In search of a hot, dry climate, the family moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. But Mrs. Bunche didn't have long to live. And three months after she died, Mr. Bunche also died, leaving Ralph an orphan at age 13.

He and his sister were now left in the care of their maternal grandmother, Mrs. Lucy Taylor Johnson, a small but strong-willed woman who brought them to Los Angeles and enrolled them in public school here.

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Initially on arrival here, they ran into housing discrimination. On discovering that they were black, the owner of the house they had rented sought to bar them from it. But Mrs. Johnson broke into the home and they lived there for the period for which they had paid rent. Then they moved.

At the 30th Street Intermediary School, the principal advised Ralph Bunche to enroll in a commercial training course. But Mrs. Johnson objected, saying: "My grandson is going to college."

(It is noteworthy that, even today, insensitive, bigoted counselors not infrequently still try to channel black kids into courses beneath their capabilities and/or ambitions.)

Ralph Bunche was a brilliant student. In 1922, he was the Valedictorian of his class at then-predominately-white Thomas Jefferson High School. But because he was black, he was not permitted membership in the academic honor society. Thirty years later, school officials tried to make amends, much to Dr. Bunche's amusement.

WORKED AS JANITOR

During his high school years, Ralph Bunche worked as a janitor and carpet-layer to help support the family. He continued in this work after graduation but, on Mrs. Johnson's insistence, he accepted an academic scholarship to UCLA, where he starred in football and basketball, but suffered a knee injury which gave him trouble for the rest of his life.

While in UCLA, Ralph Bunche worked summers on ships, beginning this work, ironically, after he had been caught stowing away while trying to save the cost of transportation to a Reserve Officers Training Corps summer camp.

He liked the work so much he did it for three summers.

In 1927, Ralph Bunche graduated from UCLA with a Bachelor of Arts degree and Phi Beta Kappa honors. He went on to Harvard University, earning his M.A. degree in 1928 and a Doctorate in government and international relations in 1934.

Ralph Bunche also studied at Northwestern University, the London School of Economics, and — yes! — the University of Capetown.

HOWARD FACULTY

In 1928, meanwhile, he joined the faculty of Howard University in Washington, meeting there Miss Ruth Harris of Montgomery, Alabama, who was one of his students. They were married on June 23, 1930, and moved to Harvard.

From 1938 to 1940, Dr. Bunche collaborated with Gunnar Myrdal in research on "An American Dilemma." While doing research in Alabama, they angered whites by asking questions about interracial sex. Dr. Bunche probably would have been lynched if the angry whites had caught him.

Because of his knee injury and an impairment to his hearing caused by a mastoid operation, Dr. Bunche was rejected for World War II military service. But he joined the War Department as an analyst of African and Far Eastern affairs, quickly rising to a position of importance in Strategic Services.

In 1944, he moved into the State Department, becoming head of the Division of Dependent Area Affairs, which dealt with colonial problems. When World War II ended, Dr. Bunche already was an important figure in the planning for the United Nations.

He helped lay the foundation for the UN at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944. The next year, he was in San Francisco, drawing up the trusteeship sections of the UN Charter. In 1946, he was a member of the UN delegation to the first General Assembly in London.

ON 'LOAN' TO UN

Later in 1946, he went "on loan" to the UN at the request of Secretary General Trygve Lie. In 1947, he quit the State Department to join the permanent Secretariat of the fledgling UN.

"In the Secretariat," McFadden recalls, "he directed the operations of the Trusteeship Division and set out the guiding principles under which numerous territories achieved statehood. His expertise on African affairs and the problems of emerging African nations was broad and acquired first-hand."

In 1948, he was in Jerusalem when the UN Security Council's chief mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden, was assassinated by Jewish terrorists.

As the Director of the UN Secretariat's Trusteeship Division, Dr. Bunche, 44 years of age, was thrust into the role of chief mediator. With the skills for which he is now justly famed, Dr. Bunche effected an agreement between the Arabs and Israelis.

In 1949, Dr. Bunche was offered the post of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State but turned it down because, "Frankly," he said, "there's too much Jim Crow

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Dr. Ralph Bunche Transcended Race In Search of Peace

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in Washington for me. I wouldn't take my kids back there."

Dr. Bunche was now committed for life to work at the UN. He was, by 1955, Under Secretary and, in 1957, he became Under Secretary for Special Political Affairs, working closely with Dag Hammarskjöld. Among his assignments was the UN program for peaceful usage of atomic energy and research on the effects of radiation.

During his remaining years, Dr. Bunche accepted many assignments of great importance to the world:

- In 1956, after the UN halted the British-French-Israeli invasion of the Suez area, he organized and directed the deployment of a 6,000-man neutral force that acted as a buffer between the belligerents.

- In 1960, he directed a peace-keeping force in the Congo.

- In 1964, he was placed in charge of troops which stood between the Cypriots of Greek and Turk-

ish origin.

Until his retirement last June, Dr. Bunche was Under-Secretary General for Special Political Affairs, holding forth in a 38th-floor office in the UN Secretariat Building in New York City.

.... DROVE TO WORK

Despite his high position, Dr. Bunche drove daily from his home in Kew Gardens, Queens, until his eyesight began to fail.

Although Dr. Bunche was concerned primarily with world problems, he maintained a keen interest in community affairs as well.

This was proven during the winter of 1968-69 when he wrote a blistering letter to New York Mayor John Lindsay, complaining about the lethargy of city workers charged with the responsibility of efficient snow-removal.

Dr. Bunche was a man who loved the theater and the opera and liked to welcome stars to his office.

He earned innumerable awards, including some 50 honorary degrees. He was an Oberlin College trustee, a member of the Harvard University Board of Overseers, president of the American Political Science Association, a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Although his primary career was not directly involved with the Afro-American fight for full-fledged citizenship, Dr. Bunche was deeply interested in it, deeply committed to it.

He never forgot that he was black. He paid his dues in many ways.

WALKED PICKET LINES

He walked an NAACP picket line as early as 1937 — long, long before, of course, picket lines and protest marches became a daily television staple.

For 22 years, he was an active member of the NAACP Board of Directors.

Despite his failing health, he participated in

marches on Selma and Montgomery in 1965.

"I have a number of very strong biases," Dr. Bunche said. "I have a deep-seated bias against hate and intolerance.

"I have a bias against racial and religious bigotry.

"I have a bias against war, a bias for peace.

"I have a bias which leads me to believe in the essential goodness of my fellow man, which leads me to believe that no problem of human relations is ever insoluble . . ."

During the past year, Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche became seriously ill.

In June, a month after he was hospitalized, he retired from the United Nations.

U Thant did not immediately announce Dr. Bunche's retirement because he hoped Dr. Bunche would recover and return to his work.

But he never did.