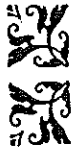


6

America & the Third World



A Dialogue of the Deaf

The first thesis of this chapter is that Americans are brilliant communicators but bad listeners. Out of this follows a second thesis. Because Americans can communicate effectively, humanity is becoming Americanized to some extent. Conversely, because Americans are bad listeners, their external relations are refusing to be humanized. In other words, the world is becoming Americanized culturally, but America is refusing to be humanized morally. Let us explore these propositions more fully.

The Iranian Revolution was an excellent illustration of this one-way traffic. It was as if American culture had switched on the amplifiers and loudspeakers towards Iran while Uncle Sam switched off his own hearing aid and turned a deaf ear to Islam. Iran was becoming Americanized and Westernized, but under protest. Uncle Sam did not hear the protest until it was too late.

We shall return to the issue of Islam and American foreign policy, but first let us examine the nature of American effectiveness in communication before we examine Uncle Sam's deaf ear.

Six Languages of American Policy

The means of communication at the disposal of the United States have to be distinguished from the actual messages transmitted. The United States uses a number of different languages in communicating with the world. One is the language of production. Because the American economy is the largest in the world, the United States can use producer power as a medium of protest or disapprobation. This is what President Jimmy Carter did when he imposed an embargo on grain sales to the Soviet Union over the issue of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The moral message of such an embargo was neutralized when the United States invaded Grenada four years later (1983) and intimidated Nicaragua (see Chapter 5). Once again the United States was thorough in communicating its own message of disapproval to the Soviet Union, but Uncle Sam fell far short of attentiveness in listening to the moral implications of US disapproval of the Soviet invasion of a small neighbour.

Another medium available to the United States for international communication

is the language of the consumer. Because the United States is, for a wide range of goods, the largest market in the world, Uncle Sam has considerable consumer power. When Idi Amin was in power in Uganda, the United States was sufficiently aroused morally to impose an embargo on the purchase of Ugandan coffee. But successive US governments have consistently refused to impose economic sanctions on the Republic of South Africa, a tyrannical system of far longer duration than the dictatorship of Idi Amin. Once again Uncle Sam was loud and clear in acting against a black tyrant, but seemed to be turning a deaf ear to demands for action against a white tyrant in Africa.

The third form of language available to the United States is the language of currency rather than goods, liquidity rather than commodity. Uncle Sam has immense power over the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the commercial banks of the Western world more generally. Because the Reagan administration has not really been listening attentively to the groans of the world's poor, the budget of the International Development Association has had to sustain a cut. The IDA often helps the poorest of the poor. Reducing its effectiveness is a singular instance of insensitivity. The purse power is being used against the destitute.

On the other hand, the United States has been known to authorize a large loan to the Republic of South Africa while resenting a loan to one of the world's largest concentrations of poor people, India. Once again the purse power is used as a medium of communicating American ideological messages while remaining supremely insensitive to the moral messages of the rest of the world.

The fourth form of language available to Uncle Sam is skill power, which relates to the genius of American technology. On the whole this language has been used more against the Second World (advanced socialist countries) than against the Third World (developing countries). Poland under martial law and the Soviet Union's gas pipeline, as well as periodic embargoes on the export of electronic technology, have been among the examples of technological sanctions by the United States.

With regard to the Third World, the United States tends to impose an embargo on the export of nuclear technology. A conspiracy of nuclear silence has been decided upon. In this case the United States has decided not to communicate with the Third World, although this silence is itself a loud vote of no confidence.

In the face of this conspiracy of nuclear secrecy, Pakistan, for one, seems to have embarked on a strategy of industrial espionage. The world cannot be divided between nuclear Brahmins and non-nuclear untouchables. Nuclear disarmament has to be universal or it is not tenable for long. The United States is busy proclaiming the message of nuclear monopoly by those who are already there, but Uncle Sam is not listening to the grievances of the nuclear have-nots. The United States does not even seem to be aware that a nuclear caste-system of the kind we have is intrinsically unstable. Nuclear proliferation cannot be stopped for much longer, if superpower nuclear disarmament is not achieved soon. Is Uncle Sam listening at all?

We have in fact already made the transition from skill power to weapon power. The latter is yet another language available to the United States. Central America — especially Nicaragua — is the latest arena where the United States has been flexing its military muscles as a mode of militant communication. Again Uncle Sam seems to be turning a deaf ear to the search for autonomy and social justice in the Third World. All that Uncle Sam is seeking to communicate is his own

predictable anti-Sovietism and anti-Castroism, while he switches off the hearing aid on Third World concerns.

The sixth language available to the United States is of course the English language — the most widely understood tongue in human history. English does not, of course, have the largest number of speakers in the world — Chinese outperforms English in number of individual speakers.

It was Great Britain, as we have seen, which helped to decide how many countries of the world adopted English as the main language of national business. But it is now mainly the United States which helps to decide how many more individuals choose to learn the English language. Once again the United States is better at using the available English language for transmitting the American message to the rest of the world than at using the language to listen to the whispers of the rest of humanity.

If the medium is the message, it is certainly difficult to disentangle American means of communication from American messages. We should at least attempt to be more explicit about some of the messages that the United States has been trying to communicate to the rest of the world.

Messages from America

One competing claim is between American capitalism and American democracy. On the whole, the United States has been much more successful in transmitting capitalism than in transmitting democracy. Capitalism is the doctrine of competitive economics, resulting in market forces. Liberal democracy is the doctrine of competitive politics, resulting in political pluralism.

The Carter administration decided to place emphasis on the export of liberal democracy, hence the special premium Carter put on human rights as an aspect of foreign policy. The Reagan administration has emphasized the export of capitalism, with a special premium on private enterprise and fair prices for farmers in American foreign policy.

When the United States consistently emphasizes the sanctity of human rights, that is probably good news for humanity. It could mean that US foreign policy is beginning to be humanized. When the United States stresses the sanctity of the profit motive, however, that is probably bad news for humanity, for it means the Americanization of the human race rather than the humanization of America.

When the United States genuinely tries to promote human rights, there is less American consolidation of repressive regimes in the Third World, though even Carter was insensitive to the oppressiveness of the Shah of Iran. When the United States is out to consolidate capitalism in the world, however, democracy and social justice are seldom priorities in Uncle Sam's calculations. Uncle Sam's hearing aid to the world is more firmly switched off when the main mission is exporting American capitalism than when the main goal is the spread of American democracy.

Capitalism and liberal democracy have not been the only messages that the US communication infrastructure has attempted to transmit to the rest of the world. Less deliberate but even more effective has been the transmission of American life-styles to the four corners of the globe. It is to these aspects that we must now turn.

In the Third World, the competition is partly within the Western tradition itself, with two forces struggling for international advantage. The rivalry is between

ancestral European culture and American cultural revisionism. Western Europe and the United States are in the grip of cultural competition for the soul of the Third World.

In terms of formal dress, Western Europe is winning. Indeed the European suit has become the most compelling symbol of Western cultural supremacy in the world. Every man has two dress cultures — his own and Western (the Western man has the two traditions fused into one). No one regards a Japanese in a Western suit, or an Arab in a Western tie, as a cultural incongruity. It is only when we see a Japanese in Arab regalia, or an Arab in Japanese dress, that we are shocked. The European suit, especially, has become truly universalized.

But in terms of casual dress, the picture is very different. The American genius for casual attire is prevailing. Casual bush shirts, t-shirts, denim jackets and trousers, and the like are capturing the imagination of the Third World. Time and again I receive requests from Africa for jeans and t-shirts as special gifts, especially from the new generation of Africans. African youth yearn for American jeans as Christmas gifts.

What is more, American tourists are helping to informalize the dress rules of tourist hotels and restaurants throughout the world. I have known restaurants which in European colonial days used to insist on jacket and tie for dinner, relax the rule in order to attract American tourists in the post-colonial era.

On the issue of food, the American genius is in fast food — while Western Europe continues to prevail in formal cuisine and formal dinner in the Western tradition. The hamburger revolution has begun to penetrate Africa. Some African cities already have at least one Kentucky Fried Chicken and one American-style pizzeria. American impatience and preoccupation with speed are part of this triumph of quick food. 'Let's cruise, baby! Time is up!' When you do not have time to spare, eat American! But when you have a whole evening for indulgence, by all means eat French!

Then there is the rivalry of drinks between Western Europe and the United States. At least in the Third World, Europe still rules supreme in alcoholic drinks. French wine, Scotch whisky, and Czech and German beer are truly triumphant. Their American equivalents are decidedly poor seconds or thirds in popularity.

But where America has communicated effectively, is in the field of soft drinks. I personally was selling Coca-Cola at the Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education in Kenya back in the 1950s. There is no real European equivalent to either Coke or Pepsi. We have been witnessing the coca-colonization of the world, symbolic of a much wider process of the Americanization of humanity.

Another field of competition is the printed word. In the world of fiction and art, Europe is still triumphant. In the field of science and society, however, the United States has been establishing a lead. Great American novels and plays are almost unknown in, say, Africa. But in the natural sciences, the applied sciences, and the social sciences, the American impact is clear and unmistakable.

At the more popular level, there is the triumph of American news magazines — especially *Time* and *Newsweek*. This triumph extends to imitation. Several news magazines about the Third World based in London were modelled on *Time* and *Newsweek* in format. These American magazines have become the most imitated in the history of journalism.

On the other hand, American newspapers have less influence among African and Asian elites than do European newspapers. There are a number of reasons for this. First, American newspapers are less national even in their own countries

than are European papers at home. Second, the best American papers (like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*) are much more bulky and difficult to export than are their European equivalents. Third, American newspapers have a reputation for being more insular and parochial in their news coverage than are their European counterparts. Fourth, a high proportion of Asian and African students studying in, say, Britain are more likely to be reading *The Times* or *The Guardian* regularly than their counterparts studying in the United States are likely to be reading the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. British papers cost the same all over Britain. *Le Monde* costs the same all over France. But the *New York Times* is too expensive for students in most of 'these United States'. The presumptive Third World elites studying in the United States are therefore less likely to cultivate a taste for American newspapers than are their equivalents in Britain and France for British or French national newspapers, a taste which can become an abiding interest.

In the field of education in Asia and Africa, the American impact is greater on the tertiary level (colleges and universities) than on the secondary and primary levels. In English-speaking Africa the American idea of semester-long courses is beginning to catch on. Term papers are beginning to count towards the final grade, instead of the grade being based entirely on the final examination. And the American title of Associate Professor has replaced the old British rank of Reader in most former British colonies.

In music, the American impact is restricted to the popular variety of Western sounds, while Europeans continue to lead in classical Western strands. Michael Jackson has already become a world figure and not just an American legend. Third World lovers of Western classical music, on the other hand, are unlikely to know much about either American composers or American performers in this field.

In technology the United States is particularly victorious. Both American varieties of domesticated technology and American successes in high technology have exerted considerable influence on the rest of the world. American home gadgets — from dishwashers to air conditioners — have become part of the elite life-style of the world. And American experience in space and satellite, and indeed in civil aviation, have given the United States an edge in the competition for advanced technology in the global market-place.

In the field of computers the United States seems to be ahead of parts of Europe. The rest of the world, apart from Japan, is only just beginning to be computerized, and American salesmen appear to be stealing a march over the Europeans.

In film and television the United States continues to maintain high international visibility in spite of the decline of Hollywood. American soap operas like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* have wide audiences from Mombasa to Munich, from Singapore to San Juan (any San Juan!). Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans await next week's exploits of J.R. in *Dallas* with great interest. But J.R. himself epitomizes America — for J.R. is a great communicator but a bad listener!

American television programmes feature on the screens of the world, but the world's television programmes seldom feature on American screens, except on the highly specialized channels of what Americans call 'public' broadcasting. By the measurement of number of viewers, these are the least public of the channels except for those purveying pornography!

American high art in painting is much more obscure than European high culture of the brush. In much of the world, names like Rembrandt, Michelangelo and Picasso have no American equivalents.

On the other hand, is there a European equivalent of Walt Disney? American genius is revealed more starkly in cartoons than in an art gallery. Once again the United States is Europe's follower in the high art of painting, but the United States is absolute leader in the popular art of cartoon.

In most areas of life, American genius lies in the popular art form rather than the elite speciality, in mass involvement rather than aristocratic cultivation. As we indicated, American jazz is better known than classical music, American news magazines better known than novels, American casual dress more appreciated than European formal dress, American fast food more admired than formal cuisine, American soft drinks more toasted than American alcoholic beverages, American soap operas more appreciated than American television documentaries, and so on down the line. Alexis de Tocqueville would feel abundantly vindicated. After all, America was the West's first mass democracy. Why should its popular culture not be its main claim to global immortality?

The only flaw in the argument is that America is insensitive to the popular culture of the rest of the world. This collective genius of popular communication is retarded as a collective listener. The world has learned to dance to the music of the United States. But America has yet to listen to the concert of the world.

What are the underlying forces behind this paradox of the American condition? Why is America effective as a communicator but inattentive as a listener? Why is the world getting Americanized while America is refusing to be humanized?

Part of the answer lies in a third paradox. American democracy was born out of religious toleration coupled with racial intolerance. It is to this third paradox that we must now turn.

Religious Freedom and Racial Bigotry

While it is indeed true that the Pilgrim Fathers turned out to be greater zealots than the religious persecutors they had escaped from in Europe, the longer term trend in American history has indeed been towards greater religious toleration. By the time the American constitution was being drawn up, the United States was already ahead of Europe in seeking to divorce the state from the church. The new constitution dissuaded its legislature from making laws which would infringe on freedom of worship or enhance the political status of one denomination over others. The secular state in Western history was at hand.

That same America which was learning to be more religiously tolerant than Europe was at the same time learning to be less racially tolerant than Europe. In one way, Europe had locked America into precisely that racial situation. It was Europe's trans-Atlantic slave trade, destined for its American colonies, which had set the stage for racism in the Western hemisphere.

By the time America was engaged in creating a non-religious state, it had lost its capacity for creating a non-racial society. The principle of 'separate but equal' was a licence for a racist society; the principle of 'separating church from state' was a confirmation of a secular state. It was a contest between God and genes. American democracy sought to keep God out of politics but to retain genes within the political process. American democracy was both more secular and less racial than its European counterparts.

American democracy itself was born out of at least two forces: American secularism and the American frontier. Secularism taught Americans the virtues of

tolerance and the frontier taught them the virtues of individualism. Liberal democracy in America is a fusion of social toleration and rugged individualism. Social toleration was an extension of secularism, rugged individualism an extension of the frontier. American political culture may indeed rest on this basic duality across time and space.

Among American political figures Abraham Lincoln continues to be widely regarded as a symbol of Christian compassion and democratic sensibilities. His religious piety turned him against slavery, but Lincoln's racial prejudices turned him also against anything approaching equality between whites and blacks. Abraham Lincoln was himself a dramatic fusion of America's spiritual vision and racial blinkers, of America's religious virtue and ethnic vice. In that very contradiction Lincoln was once again a symbol of his country's torment.

In his speech on 18 September 1858, in Charleston, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln made it abundantly clear that he was for emancipating 'the Negro' but not for embracing him. Lincoln said 'yes' to Negro freedom but 'No' to Negro equality:

I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife [cheers and laughter]. . . . I will to the very last stand by the law of this state, which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes. . . . I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favour of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races [applause] — that I am not nor ever have been in favour of making voters or jurors of negroes; nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people.¹

The American dilemma continues to be the contradiction between high moral purpose and racial prejudice, between democratic ideals and ethnic exclusivity. The dilemma has been part of America's incapacity to respond to the wider world, part of the phenomenon of Uncle Sam's deaf ear.

If America is religiously liberal but racially bigoted, how does the contradiction manifest itself in foreign policy? An answer might be sought in comparing a country with which mainstream America shares religion with another with which it shares race.

In reality there are no neat examples, but from a black point of view, a comparison between the status of Liberia and the status of Israel in American foreign policy can be moderately suggestive. With the Liberian political and social establishment, mainstream America shares the Christian religion but differs in race. With the Ashkenazim Israeli political and social establishment, mainstream America shares a European ancestry but differs in religion. It can be argued that Israel is closer to America racially than religiously; arguably also, Liberia is closer to America religiously than racially. Which type of closeness to America counts for more? In short, is religion or race the salient issue in American foreign policy?

Comparing Israel with Liberia

At one level the comparison of Liberia and Israel is simplistic. Are the Jews really a race or are they a multiracial religious community? We know that Hitler regarded the Jews as a race — with appalling consequences. Surely Hitler was hardly the best judge on either racial or religious issues.

Shakespeare before Hitler also regarded the Jews as, in part, a race. Shakespeare gave Shylock racial as well as religious traits. And yet more important is whether

the Jews themselves in the twentieth century regard themselves as a race. Do Israelis regard themselves as racially superior to their Arab neighbours?

The evidence is very inconclusive. If the Jews were indeed a race, they at least contradict the assumption that race is the same thing as colour. The Jews are, at the most, a multi-pigmented race, a rainbow race. The range is from black Jews, the Falasha of Africa, and brown Jews, the Sephardim of Asia and North Africa, to white Jews, the Ashkenazim of Europe. Historical studies suggest that the Jews were, in ancient times, a mixture of peoples of various ethnic origins united by a common religion, Judaism, and that in the Jewish diaspora over the past two thousand years, the Jews have intermixed with local peoples wherever they settled. Arthur Koestler, in his book *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976), even went as far as to claim that many of the Jews of eastern Europe were descended from the Khazars, a people of Turkish stock, who became converted to Judaism in about AD 740. Most of the evidence indicates that the Jews are a *people*, not a *race*.

From the point of view of this essay, it is not the facts about Israelis which matter: it is the image of Israel in the United States. It is arguable that the only Jews that white America has directly known are white Jews. Do the great majority of Americans assume that all Jews are white? That is more than just possible and may be a factor in white America's favourable attitude to Israel.

It is because of these considerations that one litmus test of the contrast between the racial factor and the religious factor in US foreign policy may lie in a comparison between US policy towards Israel and US policy towards Liberia.

Liberia was a child of the aftermath of slavery, a resettlement of some of the survivors of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Israel was a child of the aftermath of the Nazi holocaust, a resettlement of the survivors of European persecution and gas chambers.

Liberia was born out of the spirit of black Zionism, a hunger for a return to the ancestral Holy Land. Liberia is, in part, inhabited by descendants of those who were emancipated from Western slavery. Israel is partially inhabited by those who were emancipated from Western racism.

Liberia was for more than a century regarded as black Africa's only republic. Israel has for less than half a century been regarded as the Middle East's only liberal democracy.

The American conscience has reluctantly been bothered about Liberia. After all, the first rulers of Africa's 'first republic' were themselves ex-slaves liberated from American bondage. Even Abraham Lincoln was convinced that blacks and whites did not really 'belong' to the same Republic, and he supported the American Colonization Society in its efforts to repatriate blacks back to Africa. Lincoln argued:

I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and the black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.²

Lincoln was saying this after the creation of Liberia in his own lifetime and after its independence. American conscience over the Jewish condition under the Nazis was less direct than American conscience over Americo-Liberians had been, or should have been, a century earlier.

Why is it then that in less than 60 years the United States has spent many times more dollars on the state of Israel than the United States has spent on the Republic of Liberia in more than 140 years of Liberia's independence?

The answer cannot be because Israel is a longer-standing obligation! Liberia as an American obligation is more than a century older than Israel as an American duty.

The answer to the disproportion in American generosity cannot be because Israel has been more hospitable to American private investment than Liberia. On the contrary, we know that American investment in Liberian rubber and partial American investment in Liberian ore is greater than any American investment in proportion in Israeli industry.

The answer to the disproportion in American generosity between Israel and Liberia could not really be because of comparative proximity to the American system of government. Until the Master Sergeant Doe revolution in Liberia as recently as the 1980s, Liberia's problem was that it was too much of an imitation of the American political system, an aping of the American ethos. Liberia was imitating the United States a whole century before Israel was even born. Liberia was a vanguard of American republicanism in the 'dark continent'.

Surely the answer to the disproportion in American generosity towards Israel and Liberia could not lie in the fact that a close American alliance with Liberia was likely to be more damaging to American interests in Africa than a close American alliance with Israel could be to American concerns in the Middle East. Quite the contrary. US links with Liberia have been regionally cost-free whereas the links between the United States and Israel militarily have always included an element of uncertainty and risk with regard to American interests in the Arab world.

Certainly the answer to the comparative disproportion in American generosity towards Israel and Liberia could not be that Israel was necessarily closer to the United States linguistically than Liberia. It is true that English is virtually the second language of Israel. But English is the first language of Liberia's business.

The rationale for the difference in generosity towards Israel and Liberia cannot be because Israel is already more closely integrated with the American economy than is Liberia. The role of Firestone Rubber in Liberia is only one aspect. While the Israelis have been debating whether or not to dollarize their own currency, Liberia's only currency is the US dollar. That may seem generous enough on the part of the United States. And yet there is no Liberian equivalent for the present US-Israeli plans to integrate their economies much more deeply within the coming decade. From an economic point of view Liberia is out in the cold while Israel is being beckoned further into the US economy.

Why then has this difference in generosity persisted? Two residual reasons remain as to why the United States continues to pour billions of dollars into Israel and contributes only a pittance to Liberia. One factor is strategy, and the other is race. The first is the fact that US strategic interests in the Middle East are much more important than in West Africa. On the other hand, the United States has always had client Arab states in the region and has never given them the scale of economic support given to Israel even before Arab petto-wealth. Second, United States uncritical support for Israel has sometimes endangered rather than protected its vital interests in the region. Third, American strategic interests in the Middle East are less vital than those of the NATO allies in Western Europe who depend even more on Middle East oil and on trade east of Suez. Yet Western Europe has turned an ear to the Middle East which has been less deaf than Uncle Sam's. Western Europe has been prepared to entertain the idea of an independent Palestinian state under certain conditions, while the United States remains part of the Rejectionist Front on that issue, alongside Israel itself and Libya.³

The mystery persists. Could the issue of race be at all relevant? Is it at least conceivable that white Americans feel closer to Israelis than they do to Liberians because when all is said and done, Israel is European-led while Liberians are totally black? Could it also be that the lobbying group in defence of Israel's interests in America are overwhelmingly white and influential while the lobbying groups for African countries like Liberia are either non-existent or black, with little influence?

Is it conceivable that, when all is said and done, racial solidarity between the ruling establishments of Israel and America is more politically salient than religious solidarity has been between the rulers of Liberia and Uncle Sam for the last hundred and forty years?

The Marshall Plan and the Hiroshima Legacy

This is part of a wider pattern in American history. The most generous things white Americans have done have been to fellow white people. The meanest things white Americans have done have been to non-whites. American generosity reached its apex with the Marshall Plan. American meanness has ranged from genocide against native Americans to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, from lynching 'Niggers' to the war in Vietnam.

Strictly confining the argument to the twentieth century, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Vietnam amount to the worst episodes in American policy. The victims were Asians. The most glorious episode in American policy this century was Marshall Aid. The beneficiaries were Europeans.

Race-consciousness in the United States has sometimes affected American strategists' choice of military guinea-pigs, the nuclear and chemical victims of American strategy. Race-consciousness has also affected America's choice of the white economic beneficiaries of the Marshall Plan.

Harry S. Truman was the American president who presided over both the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the launching of the Marshall Plan. It was in June 1947 that General George Marshall, Secretary of State, proposed a European Recovery Plan which came to play a fundamental role in the rejuvenation and reconstruction of a Europe devastated by World War II.

The United States spent nearly 20 billion dollars as part of the European reconstruction. Would the United States Congress ever vote for anything near such sums of money, bearing in mind the alteration in the value of the dollar today, to rescue non-white societies? Africa in the 1990s needs a rescue operation at least the size of the Marshall Plan. Yet in 1983 the United States forced the International Development Association of the World Bank to cut down its budget for the poorest of the poor, rather than increase it.

And was the Israeli assault on Beirut in 1982 an Arab equivalent of Hiroshima, another experimental ground for new American weapons? In the words of an American reporter, 'The arsenal of weapons, unleashed in a way that has not been seen since the Vietnam war, clearly horrified those who saw the results first hand. . . . The use of cluster bombs and white phosphorous shells, a vicious weapon, was widespread.'⁴

Bombs were dropped over Chatila and Boirj el Brajneh, 'bombs never previously seen over such heavily residential districts, projectiles that streaked from the aircraft and exploded at 50 foot intervals in the skies in clouds of smoke, apparently spraying smaller bombs in a wider arc around.'⁵

Once again Israel becomes one of the meeting points between the honourable American legacy of the Marshall Plan and the dishonourable American legacy of Hiroshima. The Jewish state has become the *de facto* continuation of the Marshall Programme. Like Western Europe, the Jews were devastated by the horrors of Nazism and World War II. The United States has already spent more on the State of Israel than it spent on the whole of the entire Marshall Programme. American foreign aid to Israel has become the perpetual Marshall Plan.

No one outside the Arab world would begrudge the Jewish state such sums — but for the stark contrast between support for Israel and Uncle Sam's lack of interest in either domestic blacks or the wider world of non-whites. While the Reagan administration has been cutting down support for welfare programmes with black beneficiaries within the United States, the same administration has been increasing support for a Jewish community outside the United States. A foreign country with a population of less than four million has been getting more of Uncle Sam's attention than an American minority of 30 million people.

Does Uncle Sam want to hear any of this? Is the issue of racism still 'radical nonsense' in some American circles? Is a critical examination of Israel one of the most taboo of all subjects in New York? In short, is Uncle Sam about to switch off his hearing aid once again to avoid unpleasant subjects? Some forms of censorship try to prevent unwelcome opinions from being uttered. Uncle Sam has perfected a special censorship of his own to prevent himself from hearing world voices which would make him uncomfortable. Some are born deaf, some become deaf, and others inflict deafness upon themselves.

On Marx and Muhammad

The messages that the United States has been least prepared to listen to are those of Marxism, on one side, and Islam, on the other. In the Third World the Marxist opposition to the United States concerns the issue of America's economic imperialism; Islam's reservations about the United States concern the issue of America's cultural imperialism. Third World Marxists do not want their economies to be controlled or exploited by the West. Third World Muslims do not want their culture to be 'prostituted' by the West. To Third World Marxists, Marx is pitched against Uncle Sam in a struggle for economic resources. To Third World Muslims, Muhammad confronts Uncle Sam in a struggle for human salvation.

If you put on Uncle Sam's spectacles, the two struggles may appear different. The struggle against Marxism is strategic and religious. The struggle against Islam is racial and religious. The struggle against Marxism is an East—West divide; the struggle against 'Islamic fundamentalism' is a North—South divide. The struggle against Marxism is primarily a civil war of white against non-white. The struggle against 'Islamic fundamentalism' is a racial war of white against non-white.

In other words, Uncle Sam sees all manifestations of Marxism in the Third World as being mere extensions of America's confrontation with the Soviet Union, East against West and white against white. There is an assumption of sanity and stability in East—West relations, but an assumption of fanaticism and instability in relations with the world of Islam.

Islam is basically an Afro-Asian religion. Virtually all Muslim countries are either African or Asian. To that extent Islam is a religion of non-white people. Indeed, that is precisely why Islam has sometimes fascinated black Americans,

from Malcolm X to the boxer Muhammad Ali. From the white side, the crusade against Islamic fundamentalism is partly a struggle against the forces of non-white assertiveness and challenge.

Uncle Sam refuses to hear that Marxism in the Third World, far from being an extension of East—West tensions, is in fact a manifestation of North—South unease. People in the Southern hemisphere go Marxist not because they are anti-Christian or even anti-capitalist but because they are primarily anti-imperialist. Scratch a Third World Marxist and you will find a Third World nationalist. The ultimate hostility is not to capitalism as a method of production but to imperialism as a method of domination. Certainly in Africa, the local bourgeoisie are much less threatening than American workers. The cleavages are not really between classes nationally but between power blocs internationally. Third World Marxists are anti-American more because America is a world power controlling their economies than because America has a capitalist mode of production.

America has to be similarly discriminating in listening to messages from the world of Islam. Clearly the Iranian revolution was not anti-Christian but anti-Western. The chief focus of hostility was not against the Vatican but against Washington, not against the crucifix but against the star-spangled banner. The Iranian emotions were religious, but the target was secular. This was no ancient crusade involving Saladin and Richard the Lion Heart. It was a modern crusade involving the muezzin from the minaret and the disc jockey, involving the Ayatollah and the pop singer.

In a curious way, Marxism and Islam have been in alliance in trying to prevent the Americanization of the world, but they have parted company in any effort to humanize America. Marxism has attempted to prevent further American penetration into the world economy by raising the clarion call of resistance by the workers and the underprivileged. Islam has tried to rally resistance to America's cultural imperialism by citing the vision of Third World authenticity and cultural dignity. Marxism and Islam have made more progress in preventing the Americanization of humanity than in fostering the humanization of America. No one has yet found out how to operate Uncle Sam's hearing aid.

Conclusion

This chapter started with the thesis that Americans were brilliant communicators but bad listeners. We moved on to the related thesis that the world is closer to the Americanization of humanity than to the humanization of America. These theses are somewhat exaggerated, but there is enough in them to demand Uncle Sam's attentiveness.

We have used the image of Uncle Sam's hearing aid to emphasize the issue of volition in communication. Hearing aids can be switched on or off, worn or not worn. In the case of the United States it has been a case of readiness to listen or not. We have put forward the proposition that in the twentieth century America has been much more prepared to proclaim than to respond, much more prepared to articulate than to listen.

We have put forward part of the explanation. The United States has been religiously liberal but racially bigoted. This has affected American reaction to Marxism and Islam as Uncle Sam's biggest challenges. What should be remembered is that Uncle Sam regards Marxism as an East—West divide involving

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relations between white and white, while Islam emerges as a North-South confrontation between whites and non-whites.

Underlying it all is the continuing tension between religion and race in the complex and tormented nature of the American soul. *Quo vadis, America?* We hear you, America! Do you hear us?

Notes

1. See Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York, 1962), and Louis Ruchames (ed.), *Racial Thought in America: From the Puritans to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: The Universal Library, Grosset and Dunlap, 1969), pp. 380-382. Cf. Lerone Bennett, Jr., 'Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?' *Ebony*, February 198, pp. 35-42, and Herbert Mitgang, 'Was Lincoln Just a Honkie?' *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 February 1968, pp. 35, 100-107.
2. See Louis Ruchames, *Racial Thought in America*, p. 381.
3. For a stimulating new definition of 'Rejectionism' consult Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), especially pp. 39-53.
4. Charles Power, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1982.
5. Robert Fisk, *The Times* (London), 31 August 1982.