

## Congresswoman Frances Payne Bolton and the Trip to Africa, 1955

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**Abstract:** This article considers the opportunities that emerged during the 1950s for American interests in Africa through consideration of a unique story, that of Congresswoman Frances Bolton and her trip to Africa in 1955. Frances Payne Bolton (b. 1885, d. 1977) heiress to the Payne family Standard Oil fortune, and one of United States' longest serving Congresswomen, made a significant though largely unrecognized contribution to shaping America's cold war perspectives and policies on Africa. Following the United States' development with Congolese uranium of the atomic bomb in the early 1940s, Americans intensified their commercial and political interests in Africa. They did so in the context of rising African nationalism and continent-wide struggles for liberation from European colonial powers. American leaders then found themselves in a deeply ambiguous position vis-à-vis Africa and Africans, caught as they were between paying deference to European paternalist interests in the continent and largely unfulfilled aspirations to deal with the looming civil rights movement on the domestic front. The principal focus of the article is a consideration of Bolton's remarkable and unprecedented three month tour of the African continent in 1955. During a critical period in African states' struggles to gain independence, Bolton was deeply engaged in cultivating America's growing interest in economic and political opportunities in post-colonial Africa. As chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, her 'Special Study Mission to Africa, South and East of the Sahara' included stops in twenty-four countries and meetings with African political leaders as well as colonial officials. Upon her return over the next year or so, Bolton penned a report of mission for Congress, and made a fascinating film chronicle – *Africa: Giant with a Future, 1955*. The article seeks to highlight significant facets of Bolton's trip, and its influence on how Americans in and outside of government perceived Africa.

### Introduction

Frances Payne Bolton (b. 1885, d. 1977), heiress to the Payne family Standard Oil fortune and one of the United States' longest serving congresswomen (1939-1960), made a significant, though largely unrecognized, contribution to shaping America's Cold War perspectives and policies on Africa.<sup>1</sup> During a critical period in the struggle for African states to gain

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independence, Bolton was deeply engaged in cultivating America's growing interest in economic and political opportunities in post-colonial Africa. Owing in part to her son Kenyon's work as a military intelligence officer for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and liaison to the Free French in Congo during WWII—he was likely involved in efforts to secure uranium for America's atomic bomb project—Frances took an abiding interest in the continent beginning from the mid-1940s.<sup>2</sup> By that time, she had used her deep pockets to assist in securing the congressional seat for Ohio's 22<sup>nd</sup> district left vacant by her husband, Chester, who died in late 1938. Thereafter, she served in several key foreign affairs posts in the Eisenhower and subsequent administrations. In 1946, when Republicans won a house majority, Bolton moved up to chair the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa in addition to chairing the Subcommittee on National and International Movements. The latter produced the *Report on the Strategy and Tactics of World Communism* and *Supplement I: One Hundred Years of Communism* and *Supplement II: Official Protests of the United States Government against Communist Policies or Actions, and Related Correspondence* which helped Bolton establish her cold warrior credentials.<sup>3</sup> She also promoted many enlightened and progressive measures and was often a champion of civil and equal rights for minorities and women.

While in Congress as a Representative for Ohio, Bolton played an important role in shaping America's transition from the Eisenhower administration's apparent indifference to the Kennedy administration's more deeply nuanced engagement with independent Africa and its leaders.<sup>4</sup> She began her more influential work on America's engagement with Africa in 1953 as Eisenhower's appointee to the United Nations (UN) where she spoke passionately about extending democracy and equal rights in various African cases, including the plight of Indian South Africans. Public interest in her involvement with Africa led many in the Washington D.C. press corps to dub her the "African Queen," an honorific reference to the then popular John Huston film of the same name and the later president of Niger, Hamani Diori referred to her as the "Godmother of Africa."<sup>5</sup> By 1958, arguably mostly through Bolton's efforts, the State Department finally established an Africa Bureau, and by 1964, she personally helped make possible the wildly popular Africa Pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

The principal focus of this article is a consideration of Bolton's remarkable and unprecedented three-month tour of the African continent in late 1955. This entirely self-funded expedition was a barn-storming tour-de force of American neo-imperial diplomacy. Her Committee on Foreign Affairs 'Special Study Mission to Africa, South and East of the Sahara' included stops in twenty-four countries and territories where she met with African political leaders as well as colonial officials heads of states, and significantly, key representatives of industry and commercial enterprises.<sup>6</sup> At the age of 70, accompanied by the physician Dr. Corrin Hodgson of the Mayo Clinic and Capt. Kenneth Elk of the U.S. Army Signal Corps (who was responsible for recording the trip in film and photographs), Bolton both conveyed American interests in the development of African regions and affirmed those on the ground who supported these interests. Upon her return, Bolton penned an extensive report of the mission for Congress, followed by a fascinating film chronicle—*Africa: Giant with a Future, 1955*.



Figure 1: The “Godmother of Africa”

This article seeks to highlight significant facets of Bolton’s trip, and its influence on how Americans inside and outside of government perceived and then started to open their eyes to development and investment possibilities in Africa. It also reveals the unique gendered approach Bolton took to the development question, with her emphasis on African women in nursing, leadership, and issues related to motherhood. Thus, this article explores a pivotal moment in American diplomatic foreign relations as they intersected with Africa at the onset of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement and emerging independent Africa.<sup>7</sup>

### **America and Africa in the Civil Rights Era**

Bolton was a significant exception to mainstream white American views of Africa. In the context of the Civil Rights era, the majority of white Americans, and even some African Americans, still relied on deeply prejudiced stereotypes of Africa. These were offered up by the likes of the sensationalist journalist Robert Ruark, who wrote melodramatic magazine articles in *Life* that emphasized ‘savage natives’ in Kenya and Tarzan movies. Coupled with the federal government’s focus on Europe and Latin America at the time, most Americans possessed only the most rudimentary, jaundiced understanding of the African societies and the continent’s diversity.<sup>8</sup> Bolton, however, had a personal appreciation for African people as well as for the commercial potential of the continent, including American interests in mining and agricultural enterprises. Bolton, therefore, sought to shape what she saw as the ill-informed and ambiguous American efforts to transform colonialism through development and democracy, or, as Fred Cooper has argued, to ‘internationalize imperialism’ with the United States at the forefront.<sup>9</sup> As importantly, Bolton was prepared to get on the ground in the continent and engage directly with Africans

In contrast to white America, most African American cultural and intellectual leaders had a far greater appreciation and nuanced understanding of anti-colonial movements dating back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a long-standing intellectual and cultural synthesis with Africa. Many prominent African Americans had travelled to various parts of Africa in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and provided insightful analyses of their experiences. Better-known among these were the academic Eslanda ‘Essie’ Robeson’s (wife of Paul Robeson) story of her and her son’s 1936 trip to South Africa, Kenya and Uganda in the critically acclaimed *African Journey* and Ralph Bunche’s 1937-38 trip to South Africa (though the latter was not written about until after Bolton’s trip).<sup>10</sup> More famously, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Max Yergan and the Council on African Affairs had highlighted African struggles for liberation since 1937. If, as Penny Von Eschen has argued, the language of anti-imperialism could be shared widely because it could mean different things to different people, then why did mainstream America pivot away from supporting Africans in their calls for more immediate and direct action toward decolonization? Was the specter of communism a greater threat to American values, and more importantly, capitalist interests than the political imperatives for self-determination, or was it more simply and insidiously the prevalent, virulent racism of America society? These were among the pressing political questions of the day.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as American society approached the painful and deeply divided Civil Rights era, African-American understanding of and appreciation for Africa seemed mostly lost on dominant culture or to foster greater fear and resentment. As James Meriwether has argued, even some leading African American mainstream newspapers decried what they saw as the ‘savage’ African violence of the ‘Mau Mau’ resistance.<sup>12</sup> Frances Bolton, however, appeared not only to appreciate Africa’s potential, she also recognized it would be a critical arena in the unfolding Cold War.

### **America and Africa in the Cold War**

Bolton’s engagement with Africa was unique for a white woman, and especially a Republican Congresswoman (there were only fifteen women in Congress in 1955) at a time when the U.S was only beginning to consider a policy for independent African states. President Eisenhower,



for example, was more concerned with ensuring that the colonial policies and interests of European NATO allies were respected than in courting African leaders seeking to gain independence. As of 1950, American policy for and in Africa was still an inchoate set of aspirational statements which paid full deference to European colonial interests, and seemed to embrace the standard line of a protracted gradual transfer of responsibility to a host of African dependent territories.<sup>13</sup> It would not be until the end of the Eisenhower administration, as civil rights tensions escalated and Ghana won independence, that the United States, with Bolton's influence, more seriously engaged with emergent independent Africa. Despite extensive trade, educational (including substantial Carnegie and Rockefeller funded academic research), military, and political relations between Americans and Africa spanning at least the previous one hundred years and a significant corpus of monographs, novels, travelogues, films and photo essays, much of 'middle America' remained blithely unaware of African societies, cultures, politics, geography or American interests there.<sup>14</sup>

The post-war federal government fared little better in its understandings and awareness of Africa, clouded as it was by its own problematic view on race relations. This left the United States vulnerable to Soviet propagandists who sought to embarrass the country over the persistent and growing problems of segregation and racism.<sup>15</sup> Washington was still struggling to formulate a comprehensive, rational policy toward Africa through the 1950s that could deal with the potential of emerging independent African states. As of 1950, Africa was to be included in the new Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs as part of a plan for a broader global reach from the State Department.<sup>16</sup> There was serious debate about whether U.S. support for Europe, and particularly the envisaged protracted and European-managed process of decolonization—as opposed to an alternative policy of open support for independence movements—would alienate emergent African states. Yet, until the end of the decade and the Kennedy administration, it seemed the die was cast in favor of support for the metropolises. The U.S. still lacked any great insights into African societies and so had to defer to the jaundiced European views. Frances Bolton, however, sought to initiate a new approach to Africa by making direct connections with Africans in the continent and by urging greater American government engagement with African leaders who were about to be caught up in the Cold War.

### **Planning the Study Mission to Africa**

Into the divide between mainstream white Americans' and African Americans' political and cultural interests stepped an unlikely advocate for a better understanding of Africa and Africans, Frances Bolton. While the grander political rhetoric swirled around the containment of communism, thought to be best served by the continuation of white-dominated rule in Africa, Frances Bolton's message to Congress through her special study mission to Africa appeared a more targeted and pragmatic expression of post-war American desire for a lion's share of the neo-imperialist resources and markets of the future. Her trip not only highlighted potential areas for American engagement with African states and development, it also revealed just how wide and deep were existing U.S. interests in mining, rubber and agriculture. As Bolton toured the continent and was hosted by various and sundry official and unofficial representatives of American enterprises and consulates, her trip clearly demonstrated the extent of an established U.S. presence in a number of important and strategic places.

The exact genesis of the 1955 trip is not entirely clear. Bolton noted that her work at the UN and on the Congressional Foreign Affairs Sub-committee on the Near East and Africa revealed the profound lack of American understanding of Africa and inspired her to gather the facts. On a more personal note as a woman and a mother, Bolton replied to the inquiry of the Queen Mother of the Tutsi, Rosalie Gicanda's as to the purpose of the trip by saying,

I have come these many miles because I believe it is important that women of opportunity and responsibility everywhere in the world should look into each other's faces and speak together. I believe that through such an approach to world problems, peace can be achieved. We who bear the world's children, once we know each other, can, if we will, exert a very potent influence upon the great future.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 2: Bolton with Tutsi Dancers

At Bolton's request, Eisenhower authorized the trip for the Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa in 1953, but owing to Bolton's appointment to the UN, and then an apparent inability or disinterest among other committee members, it was left to Bolton to forge ahead with the plans.<sup>18</sup> She intended that her "Special Study Mission to Africa, South and East of the Sahara," which culminated in a full 150-page report to Congress, be an extensive tour and fact-finding mission which would serve to provide: "a general impression of Africa..., the terrain, the climate, the health, the education, and the political situations." It would be an opportunity to "...talk with those in authority as well as the rank and file...to bring back as much information as possible...to visit all embassies, consulates general..."<sup>19</sup> An ulterior motive was likely the growing U.S. and Ohio demand for central African minerals, especially copper from Northern Rhodesia. In the end, it was primarily Frances, at the age of 70, who organized and funded the trip out of her own money, ostensibly to save the American taxpayer.

Bolton was already a fairly well-noted figure in the public's eye by the time of her trip. She had achieved some positive attention when she took over and then won in her own right, the Congressional seat held by her husband. Perhaps best-known is her work in developing the nursing profession following her service as a nurse during WWI, and her Bolton Act of 1943 which supported nursing education through an armed forces Nurses Cadet Corps, which she helped fund with \$5 million.<sup>20</sup> A fascinating case study of a powerful female political figure in

war-time America, she exhibited a curious and often paradoxical profile. A staunch isolationist prior to the onset of WW II, she moved rapidly thereafter to support the assertion of American nationalist interests overseas under a broader banner of internationalism. A social and political conservative who condemned the 'communist menace' overseas, she was rightly credited for opposing the tyranny of Joseph McCarthy. She also advocated for rights for African Americans and women, and insisted on being referred to as a congressman because she did the same work as her male counterparts.<sup>21</sup>

Bolton had an impressive command of public relations and appeared to enjoy the limelight, an important skill in the increasingly media conscious world of 1950s America. Her public patrician political persona was highlighted in a popular *Saturday Evening Post* article.<sup>22</sup> She also valued and was adept at the new and increasingly popular medium of television. *The Longines Chronoscope*, a television news journal interview series which ran between 1951 and 1955 featuring a range of important political figures such as John F. Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Earl Warren and even Joseph McCarthy, aired an episode on Bolton in October 1953.<sup>23</sup> She appeared in high society garb, replete with fur stole and drop diamond earrings, as she deftly deflected the gendered and paternalist questions of Edward Morgan and Don Hollenbeck of CBS News. She was able, nevertheless, to emphasize the importance of the United Nations, where she was then serving as U.S. ambassador and assigned to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee working on the trusteeship question. Of particular interest was the comment that her committee "had to deal with so many of the little countries that haven't gotten anywhere yet" and that the metropolitan powers were making efforts to "give opportunities" to people in trusteeship territories and that while they were not doing all they should, their efforts were "very impressive." She moreover opined that the processes for becoming independent states in these areas would be complicated and take a very long time. This seemed to square clearly with emerging American policies that favored supporting the lead role of colonizers in managing whatever processes of decolonization were to take place. She argued, however, that members of the committee and representatives from trusteeship territories very much wanted Americans to understand their point of view.

Paradoxically, Bolton seemed to uphold a paternalist view of most sub-Saharan African states in terms of requiring continued oversight from the colonial powers while she roundly condemned social and racial injustices. So, at the UN prior to the trip, on the one hand, she strongly recommended the continuation of trusteeship status for Togoland in the face of rising Ewe aspirations for independence. On the other hand, noting America's own struggle with race relations, she lamented the UN's inaction on addressing the unfair treatment of Indian South Africans.<sup>24</sup> Of particular interest are the ambiguities of Bolton's perspectives and reporting on her trip. While she evinced a profoundly optimistic, and at times very progressive tone, she also paid deference to Cold War concerns. Over the course of the tour, in addition to official diplomatic and courtesy calls on embassies and consulates, she made an effort to inspect "certain installations important to world peace" — a thinly veiled reference to key U.S. military installations, bases and ports. She later referred to the communications center at Kagnev Station in Ethiopia, where Americans had been advising Emperor Haile Selassie on strategic and political matters for some time, as one of "the most important radio facilities in the world [and] the greatest factor in [American] security in the whole area."<sup>25</sup>



### The Trip to Africa

The study mission was remarkable for its time: no other single American political representative had undertaken such an extensive political tour.<sup>26</sup> Over the course of ninety-nine days she and her retinue visited every region and made over fifty stops in twenty-four countries. Beginning in Dakar, they continued on to Abidjan, and then to Liberia, where she had an extensive visit with American businessmen and President Tubman, a valued Cold War ally. Other key sites included Gold Coast and Nigeria, as well as the UN Trusteeship Territories of Togoland and the Cameroons. She had already gained some familiarity with these latter territories, and affirmed the value of continuing their trusteeship status while serving as the U.S. Delegate to the United Nations in 1953. Of particular interest for this region, Bolton noted the value and effect of the United States Information Service in Nigeria. While she acknowledged that the Emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi I, regretted the service was not widely available in his region, she pointed out that “films concerning the President of the United States and his press conferences [were of interest to Nigerians because] the people were amazed that the Head of the United States was available for questioning by the press and as such was accessible to all people.”<sup>27</sup> Ironically, the popular independence leader and premier of the Eastern Region, Dr. Nnamdi ‘Zik’ Azikiwe, was in the U.S. during Bolton’s visit. His absence and the emphasis on the Emir in the subsequent film may have been a not-too-subtle nod to the British policies for continued indirect rule in Nigeria. Then it was on to Douala and Yaounde and an extensive arc through the Belgian Congo and Rwanda and Burundi before doubling back to Luanda. From there, the tour continued through central southern Africa including the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland before reaching South Africa.



Figures 3 and 4: Bolton with President Tubman & Bolton with Emir of Kano

In the context of the unfolding Civil Rights battles to come in the U.S., Bolton seemed keenly aware of race relations especially in the mining areas of central and southern Africa. This may have been, in part, because in 1944 her son Kenyon, then an OSS officer seconded to the Belgian colonial secret police, had reported on a major strike by Congolese miners in Katanga province and drawn attention to the wide-spread African grievances against mine corporations’ low wages and harsh labor practices.<sup>28</sup> During her tenure at the UN, Bolton had also sought to highlight the racist policies of South Africa and various mining companies. She nevertheless



seemed to believe that in Northern Rhodesia, efforts at 'racial partnership' were bearing fruit especially among workers at American mining companies in contrast to the persistence of a labor color bar maintained by South African mining companies operating there.<sup>29</sup> As the trip continued, Bolton stopped in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban, and made a point of addressing the problems of segregation and apartheid while also noting the significant rates of American investment in South Africa.

Bolton sought to connect her trip with significant emerging American political and commercial interests in the continent. She travelled through areas which would become increasingly sensitive for the Civil Rights movement in the coming decades such as South Africa, and to areas where there were already considerable American commercial interests such as the Firestone plantation in Liberia and the mining areas of central and southern Africa. From South Africa, the tour headed back north, through Mozambique, then to Southern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda. While in Northern Rhodesia, for example, Bolton stayed at the home of Safeli and Martha Chileshe. Safeli, was an elected African member of the colonial Representative Council, a leading figure in the Northern Rhodesia African Congress and later friend to Kenneth Kaunda (first president of Zambia, 1964-1991) who opposed the British colonial scheme to create a federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Although the U.S. eventually recognized the creation of the Federation, Bolton's visit with the Chileshees was suggestive of emerging American sensitivities to African concerns about how federation might affect race relations among whites and blacks in the region.<sup>30</sup> As with other countries, Bolton noted the ubiquitous use of migrant labor in Southern Rhodesia. While she observed what she felt was the slow progress of trade unionism in the region, and attributed this to labor migration, she did not appear to make the connection between socio-economic ills and the dislocations of this system. As with most of her commentary on the trip, Bolton tended to accept, if not fully affirm, the standard imperial perspectives on questions relating to independence and the 'readiness' of Africans to take this on. Such was the case at the stop in Kenya, where she affirmed the "rehabilitation" of 'Mau Mau' Kikuyu through the "pipeline camps," and the "communistic style of their Moscow-educated leader," Jomo Kenyatta.<sup>31</sup> As with her other writings about the trip intended for public and governmental audiences, Bolton emphasized "the tremendous efforts being made by the metropolitan countries to raise the standards of the many millions for whom they have taken the responsibility."<sup>32</sup> Even though she made an exception of South Africa as a place where race relations and apartheid had set the stage for the "deepest potentialities for trouble in the future," she nevertheless believed progress was being made in education and against disease despite the racially divided governmental ministries.<sup>33</sup> From Nairobi, the group ventured to Ethiopia, Sudan and finally Egypt, before returning to the U.S. Seen as critical for U.S. strategic and military interests in the Horn, these stops provided an opportunity to solidify good will with the decidedly un-democratic kingdom of Haile Selassie I. Indeed, at the emperor's personal request, on her return to Congress, Bolton delivered a special message of thanks and support to the 84<sup>th</sup> Session of Congress following on his address to that body the previous year.<sup>34</sup>



Figures 5 and 6: Bolton with Maasai & Bolton with Chileshe

### Filming Africa: *Giant with a Future*

In *Africa: Giant with a Future*, 1955 Bolton presented a remarkably professional, sensitive, and positive visual film record of the trip.<sup>35</sup> The film, of course, did not offer any more or less of a candid portrayal of Africa and Africans than other images of the day.<sup>36</sup> Scenes appeared to have been clearly staged with a view to emphasizing both Bolton's presence (see images) as well as the power and authority of colonizers and, where possible, the American presence. It was, nevertheless, exceptionally affirming of the dignity and humanity of many Africans, elite and commoner alike. In her opening remarks to the film, Bolton wonders at the incredible natural diversity and vast scope of the continent as well as the diversity of people and emphasizes the role of women, the importance of education and healthcare, and vitality of American trade interests and opportunities in Africa. In a clear affirmation of the emerging American support for an attenuated process of European-guided decolonization, Bolton also makes frequent reference to all the invaluable supports that colonial governments provide for the welfare and 'upliftment' of Africans. What is perhaps most extraordinary about the film are the frequent shots of the close physical contact Bolton has with Africans. During a time when American anxieties about race relations and so-called miscegenation were acute, Bolton appears to make a bold, positive visual statement about the normalcy of familiarity and intimacy among whites and blacks. This feature of the film, and many other of her efforts to promote equality and recognition of Africans and African Americans, contrasted sharply with mainstream media and film depictions of blacks.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the film, Bolton is shown out among people and their activities, including everything from agricultural and cattle-herding work to meetings with mothers and children, school classes, and hospital settings. She appears comfortable and completely at ease with people on the ground, enjoying the hospitality of and dining in the gracious homes of African hosts. The film shows her in close proximity to and in physical contact with commoners and chiefs, workers and official elite alike as she shares in routine social activities such as shopping and dining, shaking hands, and hugging. In one scene, she cuddles and soothes a Rwandan infant; in another she warmly hugs family friends, the parents of a Nigerian youth she hosted on a study trip to Cleveland. These images of Bolton and Africans socializing and consulting contrasted markedly with the brutal realities of segregationist America in the 1950s and the

increasing range of images on television and newspapers depicting the rigid, demeaning and increasingly violent relations between black and whites.<sup>38</sup> They also countered the increasingly negative perceptions of Kenyans caught up in the British suppression of 'Mau Mau' resistance portrayed in newsreels and popular cinema.<sup>39</sup> Ever mindful of her own district in Ohio, Bolton took advantage of post and telegraph to keep up with her usual regular weekly newsletter to her constituents and had staffers send updates out from her letters home about the trip. Later collected in a booklet, her newsletter reports from Africa read like a cross between a tantalizing travel brochure and an informational primer on Ohioan and American business interests on the continent.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 7: Bolton Embraces a Friend

Bolton sought to portray a balanced image of Africa and Africans, noting the many challenges for development, as well as how progressive and modernizing Africans were. The film devotes as much time to shots of modern, planned urban buildings and space as it does to rural natural settings, and very little attention is paid to flora or fauna beyond productive pastoral or plant products such as cattle, goats, rubber trees and fruits. Significantly, Bolton pointed to the example of West African boatbuilding to show that while many Africans still use “primitive ways” of construction, at the same time, many others use modern tools; and that while some still followed traditional ways, others are “rapidly adjusting to the sophistication of the big city.” From images of various natural settings, the film shifts to the urban setting of Dakar and appears to highlight some of the impressive modern, western-style architecture, and especially the industrial and port facilities. In perhaps a not too subtle attempt at family-related public relations and product placement, an Esso (derived from ‘S’ & ‘O’ for ‘Standard Oil’) Corporation oil bunker facility features prominently in the shot of the harbor. She then praises the French colonial government for technological and infrastructural improvements, as well as the planned implementation of the *Loi Cadre* reforms aimed at the ‘Africanization’ of French West Africa.

The trip also took her to Monrovia, and the film makes much of the important and long-standing connections between America and Liberia. President William Tubman is described as a close friend of the United States and a “determined foe of communism.” Bolton notes the many ‘Point Four’ (part of U.S. President Harry Truman’s post-war assistance plan for



developing nations) investment and aid projects in the country as well as the considerable investment and operations of the notorious Firestone Rubber Corporation's Harbel plantation which is depicted as a benevolent provider of jobs and family housing.<sup>41</sup> She goes on to urge further American investments in roads, hospitals and schools as a means of supporting the considerable iron-ore mining operations in Liberia that shipped ores direct to industry in Cleveland, her home town and part of her congressional district.

In Gold Coast, Bolton is shown meeting with Sir Charles Arden-Clarke (the soon-to-be outgoing governor) followed by a rural paramount chief in the colonial administration, as opposed to Kwame Nkrumah—though she did meet with him privately—perhaps to highlight the British role in the decolonization process and the continued role of chiefly authority. The importance to America, especially for the sensitive nature of domestic race relations, of Ghana's move to independence was not lost on her. In the report of the trip, Bolton notes how the then upcoming election to determine who would lead the independent government "is being watched by every country in Africa as well as by American Negroes, many of whose forbears came from this region."<sup>42</sup> She then emphasizes the significant trade Britain had through Accra, and especially the wide range of imports going into the growing markets of West Africa. Bolton is seen walking among shoppers and merchants and she comments, with emphasis, that the bustling central markets were run by African women. Ironically, the film shows children in the midst of plentiful market vegetables and seafood while Bolton's voice-over ascribes the challenges of apparent malnutrition to African ignorance of a balanced diet inclusive of protein, rather than the real culprit of economic inequality.



Figure 8: Bolton in Accra Market

Bolton praises the leadership of the Emir of Kano in the next segment which shows him in full, majestic regalia while also noting the importance and vitality of Islam in West Africa. She also points out the importance of Kano for over a thousand years as a major trade center while extolling the virtues of Islamic trade networks. Also, in Nigeria, the film highlights the challenges of the need for healthcare and education in the "war on poverty and disease." In the spirit of her internationalist outlook, Bolton explains how the various local African governments working with the World Health Organization and UNICEF have been successful: "Thanks to



world cooperation and modern medicine tragic [victims of diseases such as yaws] will get well."<sup>43</sup>

A significant feature of the film is the treatment of the Congo region. Consistent with a time before environmental impact was a consideration, Bolton depicts the natural resources of the area, including valuable tropical wood and timber, as almost limitless and the growth of exports, up to a quarter of which were destined for the United States, as a positive factor in development. Ignoring the notorious history of the Belgian colonial regime, the film seems to suggest that disease among Africans was of their own making. She notes in a somewhat patronizing though empathetic way that efforts by the Belgians to bring in young doctors and establish hospitals was addressing the crisis and helping teach Africans "how to care for themselves and each other" as well as to understand "the need for a balanced diet" and that through government, missionaries and private food centers, "the African is learning how to eat" and "mothers were being taught to give milk to their children."

These occasional paternalistic, or rather maternalistic, images and rhetoric are in contrast to Bolton's glowing praise and the film's positive images of African women. In addition to praise for mothers and market, she makes special mention of the Queen of the Tutsi, Rosalie Gicanda, as a powerful female figure with "rare understanding and dignity, tall and commanding yet gentle." Bolton remarks that "one can appreciate why the king, Mutara III Rudahigwa [ruled 1931-1959], turns to her in vital matters."<sup>44</sup> The Rwandan footage includes a demonstration of the King's royal ballet by Ntore dancers, a dance which would soon be mimicked in the west as the ever-popular 'Wah Watusi.' Women are shown throughout the film in a range of positive images, as industrious in domestic and agricultural work, but also as nurses—a key concern of Bolton, who lobbied successfully during the war years for the federal government support of nursing training through the armed services as well as establishing the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing at Case Western Reserve University.

In yet another pointedly ironic twist for the intended audience of white middle-America, Bolton comments on the racial dissention that plagued South Africa, where apartheid had recently become government policy. She explains how this policy meant "fear, tension and unhappiness for everyone" and surmises that it "really must be a very expensive way to run a country." Yet, in a passage that could have been taken directly from a South African government policy statement, Bolton argues in the film that 'detrribalization' was one of the biggest problems facing the people of Africa. In reference to wide-spread labor migration to cities and mines, Bolton comments, without reference to policies and wages that prevented family unity, that when men are away in these jobs for long periods, "their horizons are broadened, but at the same time, their ties with their tribes and their families are loosened...the women are left behind both literally and culturally."

In closing remarks, Bolton stresses how the continent is in a new phase of questing for dynamic growth and development. Interestingly, there is little reference to broader strategic interests in Africa other than trade and brief mention of Ethiopian troops standing side-by-side with American soldiers and performing well in the Korean conflict. She imagines that Americans feel they have much to give to Africa, but that there is much that can be learned from it as well. In a more pragmatic vein suggestive of the demographic importance of Africans to come, Bolton observed that "220 million uncommitted people can swing the balance of world

power in either direction.” The film is, in sum, a hopeful positive message that contrasts greatly with the standard images and myths of a ‘dark continent’ without history or future. Bolton encourages all Americans to learn more about Africa, stating “it would be good if more and more Americans learned more and more about Africa,” and the contributions it can make to the “development of man from the continent that God kept in reserve.”

### **Bolton’s Continuing Advocacy for an American Understanding of Africa**

Following the trip, Bolton continued to work assiduously for a greater understanding of and engagement with Africa, though clearly within the accepted Cold War framework of deferring to metropolitan powers in all matters of decolonization. Still, she did advocate, without reference to colonial politics, seeking opportunities for as many bilateral relations in business, education and healthcare and general development as newly independent African states requested.<sup>45</sup> Among her most noted achievements in this regard were that on her urging, CIA director Allen Dulles agreed that “the United States [should] have a really senior representation for Independence Day in Ghana (now The Gold Coast)...Vice President and Secretary of State [were] being requested to make this [trip].”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Vice President Richard Nixon as well as Bolton herself and others attended Ghanaian independence festivities as part of a celebrated ‘goodwill tour’ of just three weeks and seven countries that paled in comparison to Bolton’s 1955 continental tour. Perhaps the most important recommendation to be fulfilled, however, was Bolton’s insistence that a new, separate Bureau for Africa be established at the State Department, though this effort has erroneously been attributed to Nixon and Ralph Bunche.<sup>47</sup> Immediately after her return, moreover, she pressed for and was granted—despite Dulles’s efforts to discourage her—the opportunity to provide a lecture for the CIA’s Office of Training course on ‘Africa and the United States’ thus continuing her efforts to inform and shape opinions about Africa.<sup>48</sup>

These efforts spanned both the corridors of power and popular culture. After meetings with high-ranking South African officials in Johannesburg during her trip, Bolton denounced through her committee report that nation’s system of apartheid, which she described as “contrary to the universal law of evolution.” The South African foreign minister, Eric Louw, claimed that Bolton, and her committee colleague, Senator Theodore Green of Rhode Island, had ostensibly threatened that the U.S. would intervene in South Africa if the country did not grant racial equality and in so doing, delivered a “distorted picture” of apartheid. Louw added, “A more flagrant intrusion into the political affairs of another country... would be difficult to imagine.”<sup>49</sup> By 1964, Bolton had expanded her work to include the promotion of African cultures at the New York World’s Fair. With a personal investment of \$550,000, Bolton made it possible for the Africa Pavilion to open and showcase the work of many sub-Saharan African artists, architects and cultural performers and to bring over participants who would otherwise not have been able to afford to attend.<sup>50</sup> This hugely successful event exceeded expectations, and Bolton more than made a return on her investment. Such was her reputation that by 1967, Diori Hamani, the autocratic first president of Niger and ally of the U.S., referred to Bolton as “the godmother of Africa” for her interest in the continent.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Clearly a remarkable woman and politician, Frances Bolton was an important interlocutor for Africans and Americans during critical period in independent Africa's emergence into a troubled Cold War world. She embarked on what perhaps started as a personal quest to gain a better understanding of the 'dark' continent, and parlayed it into a major State Department initiative which laid the groundwork for future U.S. - Africa relations. In so doing she was able not only to provide trenchant arguments for the importance of Africa to American interests, both political and commercial, but also to point the way to a more flexible internationalist stance in foreign relations. Certainly, her work is suggestive that even staunch anti-communists could see a path forward which embraced engagement rather than isolation in the Cold War, a path that leaders in the developing world were clearly interested in promoting as well. Perhaps most importantly, she provided white-dominated 'middle America' with an opportunity to see Africans, and by extension African Americans, as fully human, with a history and range of sophisticated cultures and achievements worthy of respect and appreciation.

How these and other efforts to raise awareness of Africa and new opportunities for America there played out before her death in 1977 are the subject of further enquiry. It is difficult to gauge the full impact of her public relations efforts such as the film, *Africa. Giant with a Future*. Who actually saw the film beyond State Department functionaries and some CIA trainees, for example, is not clear but merits further investigation. Given the struggles the Kennedy Administration had with integrating African nations and statesmen into the Washington D.C. culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s, it would be worth considering what role she may have played in shaping those relationships. Similarly, further exploration of her financial support and work in making possible the Africa Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in New York City would, no doubt, yield even more fascinating perspectives on the way Americans viewed Africa and Africans. Her effort to support the extremely popular African contingent there, seems significant at a time during and just after the Kennedy era, when at least some of the sorts of engagements she supported with Africa were gaining traction. It also raises critical and unresolved questions as to why America turned away from the possibilities of more open and fair relations with African states even within the context of an intensifying Cold War. Finally, it would be critical to consider her work as a woman at the intersection of gender and international politics in this period.

Still, Frances Payne Bolton played a significant role in highlighting not only the important resources that Americans could develop in Africa but also in portraying Africans and Africa in a far more positive way than did mainstream politics and the media in the 1950s. While she did still cling to some of the racist and paternalist views of the old colonizers, seeking to 'uplift' Africans and prepare them for 'civilization,' she did also seek to engage with individual Africans as human beings who had important contributions to offer the world, and that Africa was a significant natural resource for global development. The limits of her efforts, however, belie, tragically, the deeply rooted American sense of xenophobia and racism. Her work, therefore, provides something of a partial but compelling counter-narrative to the predominant ways Americans would continue to view Africa into the present. Although her approach and understanding fell far short of the sophisticated and deeper ways that African Americans appreciated Africa, and there is no evidence she served as a bridge to their understanding, it

was something of a positive exception to mainstream views. As such, it remains a tantalizing episode in American relations with Africa.

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### Image Credits

Figure 1: Frances Payne Bolton, 'The Godmother of Africa, 1955'. Photo and permission courtesy of the Cleveland Press Collection, Michael Schwartz Collection, Cleveland State University.

Figure 2-8: Still images reproduced from *Reaching Out For Liberty and Light –The Life of Frances Payne Bolton* Telos Productions, 2000. Images and permission courtesy of the Payne Family Fund and Telos Productions.

### Notes

- 1 Her uncle, Oliver Hazard Payne, a trustee of Standard Oil established a vast trust fund for her, and she preferred to be referred to as 'congressman'. See Loth 1957.
- 2 Williams 2016 and for Kenyon's work with the secret police in Congo, including his reporting on the major strike in the Belgian Congolese mines in 1944, see Higginson 1989 pp. 196 and 202.
- 3 *United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Report Subcommittee No. 5, National and International Movements.*
- 4 Muehlenbeck 2012.
- 5 Weller 1955; Cleveland Press Collection 1955.
- 6 *House Report No. 307 of the 85th Congress, 1st Session 1957.*
- 7 Muehlenbeck 2012.
- 8 Cowan 2015, ch. 4; Granqvist 2017; Horne 2009; Landau and Kaspin, 2002; Meriwether 2002; Ruark 1955; Goldberg 2018.
- 9 See Cooper 2002 and Roberts 1987.
- 10 See Robeson 1945; Edgar 1992; De Roche 2011, p. 274; Roberts 1987.
- 11 Von Eschen 1996 and 2013.
- 12 Meriwether 2002, ch. 4.
- 13 Meriwether 2002, pp. 124ff.
- 14 For a splendid review of the literature on these relations up to 1987 see: Roberts 1987; De Roche 2011, pp. 299-335.
- 15 Dudziak 2011; Borstelmann 2003.
- 16 Kent 2005, pp. 195-220.
- 17 Loth 1957, p.287.



- 18 Bolton 1956.
- 19 Bolton 1955, pp. 9-11.
- 20 Bolton 1948.
- 21 DeRoche 2010, pp. 34-7.
- 22 *Saturday Evening Post* 1953, 81-4.
- 23 For a video of the show see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=436Q7DmxP3Y>  
And for details of the show, see <https://www.archives.gov/research/guides/catalog-tv-interviews-1951-to-1955.html>
- 24 U.S. Department of State Bulletin 29, 1953, pp. 728-730 and 876-7.
- 25 Lefebvre 1991, p. 102.
- 26 Teddy Roosevelt rampaged through East Africa on a Smithsonian-sponsored hunting trip where he and his companions slaughtered over 11,000 animals. He emphasized the natural 'savage' beauty of Africa in his chronicle of the trip See Roosevelt. See also the Smithsonian online exhibit at: <https://naturalhistory.si.edu/onehundredyears/expeditions/SI-Roosevelt-Expedition.html> President Dwight Franklin Delano Roosevelt made brief stops in Gambia and Liberia on his way to and from Morocco for secret peace negotiations to end WW II. See <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/roosevelt-franklin-d>.
- 27 *Report of the Special Study Mission* 1957, p. 33.
- 28 Higginson 1989, pp. 196 and 202.
- 29 As Andrew DeRoche, perhaps the only historian so far to have given serious scholarly attention to Bolton and her trip to Africa, has noted, Bolton was a vociferous critic of South African policies. See DeRoche 2011 and *Report of the Special Study Mission* 1957, pp. 58-59.
- 30 De Roche 2011.
- 31 *Report of the Special Mission*.1957, p. 78.
- 32 Bolton 1956, pp.121-27.
- 33 See *Report of the Special Mission* 1957, p. 89; Bolton 1956, p. 125.
- 34 See the text of the message in *Report of the Special Mission* 1957 , p. 88. For the emperor's visit in 1954, see Vestal 2011.
- 35 U.S. National Archives ARC 46358.
- 36 For broader discussions about film and still images of Africa cf. Bickford-Smith et al. 2006; Geetha Ganapathy-Doré et al. 2013.
- 37Cowan 2015.
- 38 Hale 1998.
- 39 See for example the films, *Simba*, *The Mark of Mau Mau* (1955); *Mau Mau* (1955); and *Something of Value* (1957).
- 40 Bolton 1956.
- 41 Von Eschen 1997, p. 39. For a critique of Firestone see Hayman et al. 1943; Sundiata 2003.
- 42 Bolton 1956.
- 43 Bolton 1955.
- 44 For the colonial construction of the imposing figure of Tutsi Queen Mother, see Beyene 2014.

- 45 CIA Confidential Memo, Deputy Director to Director of Central Intelligence, 14 Jan. 1957. CIA files 2011.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Garland 2008.
- 48 Memo from J Walker to CIA Director Allen Dulles, 13 Aug. 1958. Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, open files, No. 45, 10-6411.
- 49 Hunt 1957.
- 50 Bolton ended up getting a return of her investment and profiting some hundreds of thousands of dollars from attendance receipts that far exceeded expectations. See *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 June 1964; and NP 1963.
- 51 *Pittsburgh Press*, 7 October 1967.

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