Little Rock as America: Hoyt Fuller, Europe, and the Little Rock Racial Crisis of 1957

By Michael O. West

Historians have long recognized that the civil rights struggle, though centered in the South, was national in scope. More recent research has revealed the layered and varied international dimensions of the fight for African American freedom in the decades after World War II. The major actors in the civil rights drama—black activists, the federal government, segregationists in and out of government at various levels—were keenly aware that they were operating on a world stage and that their audiences consisted of more than just disinterested spectators. For their part, civil rights activists applauded the ongoing global anticolicnial struggles and took heart from the rise of new nation-states in Africa and Asia. As Martin Luther King Jr. noted in 1957, the year of the Little Rock crisis, “We have the privilege of noticing in our generation the great drama of freedom and independence as it unfolds in Asia and Africa. All of these things are in line with the unfolding work of Providence.”


My thanks to the wonderfully efficient archivists and other overseers of the Hoyt W. Fuller Collection, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. Sandra Jackson-Opoku and Laura Warren Hill offered most suggestive comments on previous drafts of the article. Sandra also provided useful information on Hoyt Fuller, her mentor. I benefited greatly from the very constructive criticisms and suggestions of three anonymous referees for this journal.

2 Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York, 2001), 52.

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firmly directed by the hand of Providence, the makers of U.S. foreign policy found that their attempts to court the emerging Third World nations amid the twin dramas of decolonization and the cold war were complicated, even stymied, by Jim Crow. The Soviet Union was only too eager to point out that racial segregation belied U.S. claims to champion freedom at home and abroad. Even the closest allies of the United States, most notably in western Europe, joined in condemning the treatment of African Americans.\(^3\) Through it all, the defenders of Jim Crow remained unmoved. Declaring the civil rights movement a communist-inspired or communist-directed attack on the southern way of life, indeed on American civilization generally, some segregationists launched their own “white Atlantic” foreign policy, finding allies in such places as apartheid South Africa, white-minority-ruled Rhodesia, and the fascist Portuguese colonial regimes in Africa.\(^4\) In this way, the African American struggle assumed a deep international cast at multiple levels.

African American expatriates were an important component of the internationalization of the black freedom struggle in the United States. From their various places of exile, they agitated against racial injustice back home. In the face of the anticommunist witch hunt that characterized the cold war, some black activists, especially those associated or identified with the communist movement, fled the United States on account of actual persecution, even prosecution, or the fear thereof. Not all African American expatriates, however, were motivated by fear


of political victimization. Some left the United States out of sheer despair and disgust. Even if the émigrés had not personally experienced violence, they were sickened by the viciousness of the defenders of Jim Crow.

Hoyt W. Fuller (1923–1981), a journalist, editor, writer, teacher, and doyen of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was among those who chose exile out of despair. Fuller moved to Europe from Chicago because he loathed the violence directed against African Americans in general and black political activists in particular, and he doubted the prospects for racial transformation in the United States, even amid the fervor of the civil rights movement.

Fuller’s expatriation was precipitated by the debacle at Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Even more than the yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, which was a watershed event of the modern civil rights movement, the Little Rock crisis boldly highlighted black resolve and its antipode, white reaction. At Little Rock, the segregationists ostentatiously threw down the gauntlet before the civil rights movement. “Massive resistance” to desegregation had long been bruited about, but Little Rock made it manifest. The Little Rock crisis, with all the attendant white violence and ugliness, raised much more ire in and outside the United States than had any single event in the civil rights movement up to that point. The salience of the Little Rock crisis in Europe, where Fuller had taken refuge, ensured that he could never bid farewell to the United States, an apparent aim of his exile. It soon became obvious to him that for many Europeans, “Little Rock . . . IS America.”

Like the Montgomery Bus Boycott before it, the Little Rock crisis came in the wake of the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The decision was handed down on Monday, May 17, 1954, which Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi

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7 Hoyt W. Fuller, “Paris,” p. 1 (emphasis in original), Folder 9, Box 49, Hoyt W. Fuller Collection (Archives and Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Ga.). All subsequent archival items are from this collection and are by Fuller.
christened “Black Monday,” if perhaps with a different meaning than the black people who may have offered a similar description. Seeking to assert their right to educational equality, which the Supreme Court had affirmed, nine black students turned up at Little Rock’s previously all-white Central High School at the beginning of the 1957–1958 school year. The Arkansas National Guard, backed up by a white supremacist mob, rudely denied the students entry to the school. Arkansas governor Orval E. Faubus had summoned both obstructionist forces—the National Guard and the mob—the one officially and the other unofficially. The governor, playing to the segregationist gallery, acted in open defiance of a federal court order. In so doing, he practically dragooned the executive branch of the federal government into reacting, if not to uphold the rights of African Americans then to defend the constitutional and legal principle of the supremacy of federal over state authority. Accordingly, President Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched troops to clear the mob and enroll the black students at the point of the bayonet. For one of the few times in the modern African American freedom struggle, the military might of the U.S. government was affirmatively deployed in support of the struggle of black people to assert their rights. All the while the venom, hatred, and violence of the segregationists, to say nothing of their contempt for the rule of law, were televised for all the world to see. It did not make for enjoyable viewing, in the United States or abroad.

The images coming out of Arkansas that year sickened Hoyt Fuller. He left the United States in 1957, which, he pointedly noted later, “was the year of Little Rock.” In the three years he spent abroad, Fuller traveled extensively in Europe, although he lived mainly in France and Spain. He also took time out of his European sojourn

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8 Woods, Black Struggle, Red Scare, 54.
to make a sentimental journey to Africa, about which he published a highly revealing, if curiously underappreciated, travelogue.\textsuperscript{11} If Fuller’s aim in leaving the United States was to escape Little Rock and what it symbolized, the oppression of African Americans, he was signally unsuccessful. Little Rock proved to be a ghost he could not exorcise. Everywhere he went in Europe, new friends and casual acquaintances alike wanted to engage him on Little Rock and the other obstacles to black liberation in the United States. Fuller’s papers include some gems that chronicle his Little Rock ordeal. These pieces, written by Fuller at the time, offer a window into the influence of the Little Rock crisis overseas as well as into an African American expatriate’s attempt to negotiate the treacherous shoals of the racial injustice he sought to leave behind.

Fuller’s flight from American apartheid was hardly unique.\textsuperscript{12} African Americans had been seeking refuge outside the United States since the days of slavery. In the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War, black refugees from the United States scattered across the globe, their destinations ranging from Canada to the Caribbean to Britain to West Africa, with a few venturing as far as Australia.\textsuperscript{13} In the postemancipation era, Liberia, which had been founded in the 1820s as a haven for free blacks from the United States, remained a focus of African American emigrationist aspirations, including for a small subset of sharecroppers and poor farmers groaning under the yoke of debt peonage and other forms of Jim Crow.\textsuperscript{14} By contrast, expatriates among the black intelligentsia

\textsuperscript{11} Hoyt W. Fuller, 	extit{Journey to Africa} (Chicago, 1971), esp. 19, 29, 79–80 (quotation on 80).


increasingly set their sights on Europe, especially in the twentieth century. An outflow of African American artists and writers after World War I was followed by another burst of black expatriation after World War II, the latter including such prominent figures as Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

By the time Fuller left the United States in 1957, the decolonization of the European empires in Africa had opened up new possibilities for blacks fleeing American apartheid, which was under scrutiny because of cold war politics. Ghana, the first of the new nation-states in sub-Saharan Africa, loomed especially large in the African American imagination. Among blacks from the United States who flocked to Ghana—then under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, a graduate of Lincoln University, a historically African American institution outside Philadelphia—were W. E. B. Du Bois, his wife Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Maya Angelou. Later, in his Black Power/Black Arts phase, Fuller became a self-described “Nkrumahist,” that is, a follower of the teachings of the Ghanaian leader. It is thus an open question why Fuller, who expatriated in the same year that Ghana became independent, did not go there. Instead, he spent his years in exile mainly in Spain and then in France, long a favorite destination of African American writers and artists (both Wright and Baldwin lived there). Fuller made only a side trip to the West African nation of Guinea, which defiantly proclaimed independence from France in 1958, thereby instantly gaining the adulation of partisans of African nationalism.

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17 For a broad overview of more than two centuries of African American odysseys to Africa, temporary and permanent, see James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York, 2006). Fuller, however, does not appear in Campbell’s narrative.


everywhere. As it happened, the Guinean sojourn became the subject of Fuller’s only book-length work.

Unlike some of his collaborators, Fuller has yet to receive the full biographical treatment his contributions warrant. Born in Atlanta, he migrated to Detroit while in high school. He was fleeing the potential consequences of a run-in with the police in the small community outside Atlanta to which his family had moved. Drafted into the segregated U.S. Army during World War II, he fought in Italy and briefly remained behind after the war to attend the University of Florence. Fuller returned in 1946 to the United States and continued his education at Detroit’s Wayne State University. On graduating from college in 1950, he worked as a journalist for various Detroit-based publications. It was also in the Motor City, including at his alma mater, that Fuller first forged many of the connections that would be crucial to his emergence as an arbiter of the Black Arts movement. His early mentors and interlocutors ran the spectrum of left-oriented black literary and political thought, including individuals previously associated with the New Negro movement and various communist-aligned cultural formations in the interwar and postwar years. Fuller later moved to Chicago, where he worked for Ebony magazine and where the black literary scene was, if anything, even more vibrant than in Detroit. He found the politics of the era, notably the unfolding civil rights struggle in his native South, more troubling. Fuller despaired about the prospects of full black citizenship rights in the United States. Accordingly, the crisis in Little Rock became something of a last straw. Amid the racist tension of that time, a confrontation with a white man on a street in Chicago convinced him he had to leave the United States.


23 Abdurahman, “Role of the Africana Writer in an Era of Struggle”; Harris, “Introduction: Hoyt W. Fuller.”

24 Fuller, Journey to Africa, 80.
In returning to Europe—although not to Italy, the European country he knew best from his wartime and immediate postwar experiences—Fuller experienced freedom from the daily slights and indignities of racial exclusion. To him, as to many African American expatriates before and after him, exile proved to be a balm, at least initially. Life outside the clutches of American apartheid allowed Fuller to appreciate and express his humanity in ways he previously had not been able to do. Still, he was unable to leave behind America’s legacy of racial injustice. Seemingly all his encounters, from the mundane to the sustained, came back to the status of African Americans, as epitomized by the Little Rock crisis. For him, Little Rock was indeed America.

Fuller felt deeply ambivalent about Europeans’ near-universal condemnation of the U.S. racial order and the situation in Little Rock. As a racial refugee from the United States, he welcomed exposure of the horrors inflicted on African Americans and the mockery such injustices made of American professions about upholding democratic principles, equality of opportunity, and the rule of law. At the same time, Fuller thought the European critique of Jim Crow smacked of both self-righteousness and a lack of introspection: it ignored Europe’s own historical and contemporary racism. Furthermore, the tone of the discussion surrounding Little Rock and related issues troubled Fuller. Many Europeans, he believed, showed condescension and pity, rather than the solidarity and sympathy African Americans desired most.

Fuller’s suspicion of European motives for denouncing racism in the United States led to an apparent contradiction. Although he had fled American apartheid, he began to offer spurious evidence showing progress in race relations in the United States and amelioration of the plight of African Americans. He did so, it seems, not so much to defend the United States as to vindicate his personal honor, what he called “my patronage-bruised ego,” by which he apparently referred to the moral and material support he received from Europeans and the consequent impact on his self-esteem.25 Fuller likely came to think that European condescension and pity were directed not just toward African Americans as a group but also toward him personally, a feeling that would have been exacerbated by his political status as an exile as well as his uncertain economic standing, which rendered him

partly dependent on newfound European friends and associates. The resulting sense of vulnerability apparently led him to romanticize the black state of affairs in the United States, since a people who were rising on the scale of American civilization would be less likely to elicit condescension and pity. As African Americans rose in social value, so too would Hoyt Fuller. Yet Fuller never quite explained why, if things at home were so good or if they were getting so much better, he was not there.

By his own account, Fuller had left the United States because of the crisis in Little Rock and all that it stood for. He wrote in his African travelogue, published in 1971, that Little Rock had represented “the hope-shattering spectacle of a powerful nation writhing willingly, like a sick and pathetic cur, in the throes of a self-induced malignancy.” From a vantage point in Chicago, he found that the “incessant assault upon Black humanity was terrible to bear.” Yet for Fuller the physical and psychic violation of the black body and soul was not the worst of it. “What thrust me deepest into despair,” he bemoaned, “was not the open defiance of the law and the calculated brutality of the whites, from whom I had never expected very much, but, rather the impotent wailing and apparent apathy of the blacks.” It was as if Fuller was conflating his own youthful flight from Georgia, dodging the expected retribution from a run-in with the police, with African American history at large. Despite the courage and bravery demonstrated by African Americans, most poignantly by the students at Central High, he imagined the African American experience to be marked by faint-heartedness and spinelessness. He found it difficult “not to label black people as ‘cowards’ for adjusting to the humiliations which they face[d] as a matter of course in America.” Fuller conceded, however, that theirs was pragmatic pusillanimity, based on a realistic assessment of the brute force they faced: “Black people understood their alternatives—acquiescence or annihilation.”

Acknowledging those choices, Fuller expressed understanding for what he saw as the African American aversion to collective suicide, and the resulting inward turn to self-improvement within the confines of American apartheid. He appreciated “the other side of that coin, the strength of love and wisdom which enabled the race to endure, the great power and beauty of the blood against an evil as monstrous as any ever faced by humankind. That knowledge could sustain me with

26 Fuller, Journey to Africa, 80.
Black people.” But enduring what they endured on a daily basis was something completely different. In his mid-thirties, Fuller considered himself “enough of a rebel and self-respecting man to be unable to play the game of survival on the accepted terms.” Fuller obviously was feeling his rebellious oats. Thus, “when one day on the streets of Chicago, I found myself on the mildest of provocation lashing out in physical fury at an arrogant Polack, I knew that my own safety demanded that I put distance between my country and me.”

Not for the first time—there was the flight from suburban Atlanta to Detroit—Fuller was about to become a modern-day maroon, this time outside the United States. Little Rock, however, cast a long shadow over his every move. “In the eight months I have been in Europe,” he wrote in 1958, “Little Rock, a city I have never seen, has dogged my trail like a bad conscience.” Incessant questioning about the city “beat upon my ears with the harsh persistence of a faultily grooved recording.” Everywhere Fuller was bombarded with the same comments and queries: “People from Sweden to Spain have found it necessary to tell me they think Little Rock ‘such a terrible thing,’ and have asked me to explain its meaning. . . . [T]he city [of Little Rock] has become a symbol, like the name of the late [crusading anticommunist] Senator [Joseph R.] McCarthy, in the minds of many people outside America. . . . Little Rock has become synonymous with racial discrimination.” In other words, Little Rock had become synonymous with America, and Fuller was constantly reminded of it. “But for the fact that all my conversations are actually conducted in English or French,” Fuller concluded warily, “I might be able to say I have heard Little Rock and American race prejudice abhorred in a dozen different languages.”

For many of his interlocutors, and for Europeans in general, Little Rock was a capstone rather than an isolated event. Fuller, who later became a noted promoter of the theater, observed that Europeans were “witnessing a new scene in an old play that never ceases to shock.” Before Little Rock there was the tangled case of the teenager Emmett Till, who was tortured to death in 1955 by white supremacists; they weighted down his small body and tossed it into a river, where an unsuspecting fisherman retrieved it days later. Europeans, Fuller

27 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 5–6.
wrote, “remember that the white men who committed the sickeningly savage murder of 15-year-old [sic] Emmett Till walked away from the Mississippi courtroom as free men and as heroes.” Fuller’s European interrogators remembered, too, the treatment meted out to those involved in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, including Martin Luther King Jr., who was arrested and beaten. In short, it was well known in Europe that U.S. segregationists “can deny equal rights and protection to Negroes . . . and that they have willed to do so at Little Rock.”

Broadly, Fuller’s Little Rock writings may be divided into two categories. The first consists of two essays, written in austere, even severe, prose and meditative and reflective in character. These essays—“Little Rock, Little Rock, Take It Away” and “Little Rock: A Challenge and a Warning”—overlap at points and form the core of this article. A second category of Fuller’s ruminations on Little Rock is made up of several other pieces that are lighter and more engaging and sometimes assume a form like storytelling. In some cases, they feature pseudonymous characters; in all cases, they recreate, verbatim, dialogues between Fuller and various individuals. These pieces, along with others from the Fuller papers, are used here to supplement the two primary essays. Fuller’s Little Rock writings assuredly were intended for a wide audience; however, there is no evidence that the pieces were published. For instance, the two serious essays were submitted to the Chicago Jewish Forum, a quarterly, and the New York Times, but both publications returned the submissions to Fuller.

There is no evidence that Fuller sought European outlets for his pieces. His intended audiences were Americans, to whom evidently he desired to hold up a looking glass.

Both of Fuller’s serious essays, along with one of his more engaging pieces, showcase an experience he had in early 1958 in Bern, Switzerland. His host in Bern goes unnamed in the essays (all the characters in the essays are anonymous), but in the more engaging piece he is called John Tesch, which is likely a pseudonym. Fuller introduced Tesch as holding “a very responsible job in the finance department of the canton of Bern, a governmental division roughly comparable to an American county.” Tesch had seen a good deal

32 “Submissions/Publications, 1958–1960,” Folder 35, Box 49. It is unclear which piece was sent to what publication. In both the text and the notes of this article, I have supplied the italics to Fuller’s references to journals and newspapers.
33 “Of Fondue and Faubus,” p. 3, March 1958, Folder 1, Box 49.
of the world. Among other things, he had worked for the United Nations, visited the United States, and interviewed African American military personnel in the newly integrated U.S. armed forces in Korea, with many of the black servicemen expressing apprehension about returning to civilian life in the United States. “Little Rock showed him why,” Fuller wrote. 34 Tesch invited Fuller to dinner at the apartment Tesch shared with his wife, Frau Tesch, a place Fuller described as “pin-neat, as one expects a Swiss home to be, and solidly and conservatively furnished.” Fuller deemed the main course, “a gorgeous cheese fondue” prepared by the pseudonymous Frau, altogether delightful. After dinner the men retired to the living room, apparently leaving Frau behind to clean up, presumably to keep a Swiss home as one expects it to be. Over cake, coffee, and brandy, John Tesch and Fuller talked “aimlessly, lightly touching on many topics.” This exchange, however, was just a dress rehearsal. As Fuller put it: “[S]omething vaguely grave and troubled in my friend’s demeanor warned me that our small talk was merely prelude, that he was holding in abeyance some subject he wished to discuss with seriousness. Finally he ventured to broach it. ‘I hope you don’t mind,’ he began apologetically, ‘but I would like to ask you a question. I would not ask it, but we think it is such a terrible thing . . .’ And then he said: ‘What is all the trouble at Little Rock?’ Abruptly, the bubble of my enchantment burst and I crashed to the floor of reality with a resounding thud.”35 On recovering, Fuller reflected that John Tesch’s query was at once emblematic and anomalous. Fuller had repeatedly been asked the same question since arriving in Europe. But whether or not he was swayed by Frau Tesch’s culinary wonders and personal service—Fuller described how she “smiled politely and refilled my coffee cup”—he credited her husband with more sincerity and goodwill than he did most of his other inquisitors. 36 “Discussing Little Rock with my Swiss friend proved far less problematical than most similar discussions,” Fuller wrote. 37

Most problematic of all for Fuller was the political purpose he believed the racial crisis in the United States had begun to serve in Europe. Europeans were uniformly skeptical of his assertion that, in brief, the “immediate conflict at Little Rock Central High School

34 “Little Rock, Little Rock, Take It Away,” 3.
35 ibid., 1–2.
36 “Of Fondue and Faubus,” 1.
is between two determined groups of citizens: whites who want to keep Negroes out of the school; and Negroes who want to exercise their legal right to go there.” From the European standpoint, this explanation did “not get at the rich red meat of the problem. It omits the moral question of the violence and the cruelty.” The European characterization of Little Rock as “terrible,” Fuller divined, “has a double edge: it is immoral because it is not humane; and it is immoral because it scorns the law.”38 John Tesch put it bluntly: “Even if we did not like Negroes, we are law-abiding people, and we would most certainly respect their rights as citizens.”39 Time and again, Fuller was assured that Europeans, whatever their personal prejudices, were committed to the rule of law and that Little Rock could never happen on their continent. It amounted, he said, to a proclamation of moral superiority over (white) Americans.

Fuller found the European moral wagging at the ugly Americans troubling. It left him, like Du Bois, with a sense of “two-ness,” a “double consciousness.”40 On the one hand, Fuller welcomed the censure of racial discrimination in the United States and applauded the comparative absence of petty apartheid in Europe. On the other hand, the finger-pointing elided Europe’s own racist colonial legacy, past and present, along with the continent’s tradition of internal racism, as evidenced by the recent liquidation of European Jewry and the ongoing discrimination against post–World War II immigrants from the colonies and ex-colonies. Most telling, though, Fuller resented what he perceived as condescension toward African Americans in the European condemnations of Little Rock and racial injustice in the United States more generally.

On the positive side, it seemed to Fuller that “the ideal of respect for human dignity is more deeply engrained in Europe than in America.”41 As far as he could determine, the “Algerians and Africans” living in France “go about their affairs with no fear of racial restrictions, even while the colons [the white French settlers] in Algeria conspire and finagle to suppress and control the native Moslems.”42

41 “Little Rock, Little Rock, Take It Away,” 3.
42 Ibid., 3–4. The reference here is to the war for Algerian independence, which was coming to a head at around the time Fuller was writing. He later developed an affinity for Algeria. Frantz Fanon, the Martinique native who was an ideologue of the Algerian revolution, became
Fuller also approvingly cited a British journalist who, after visiting nine European countries in the aftermath of the Little Rock crisis, reported that racial discrimination in the United States was a central reason for widespread anti-American sentiment in Europe. Fuller quoted the journalist as saying that in Holland, “a country entirely free from color prejudice,” Little Rock “seemed the very negation of those freedoms by which America professes to set such store.”

Referring to the U.S. secretary of state, Fuller commented wryly elsewhere that “[a]busing Mr. [John Foster] Dulles is a favorite European pastime.”

Fuller then turned a jaundiced eye on Europe’s own racial crucible. He credited the claim of many Americans, which he said was made most vociferously by southern segregationists, that “Europe’s moral superiority on the question of race relations is courtesy of history and geography.” According to this line of thought, Europeans, at home if not in the colonies, could afford to be nice to Negroes, or at least nicer than Euro-Americans, because there were so few black people resident in Europe. Fuller also indicted Europeans as “guilty of tragic tardiness in extending the concept of respect for human dignity to their colonial possessions.”

Imperialism and racial equality, he asserted, were just not compatible since “racialism [was] inherent in the idea of Empire.”

Finding evidence of moral blinkers closer to Europe’s shoreline, Fuller switched to a discussion of the Shoah. He mentioned a West German journalist who, he adjudged, “either did not remember Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz or else did not regret them, proudly boast[ing] that Germany was so free of racism compared with America that a large number of American Negroes had chosen to live there.” Like many other responses, this one apparently was made to Fuller’s typewriter rather than to his interlocutor. Fuller carefully noted that he had no desire to offend his hosts, even when faced with the “grotesque insularity of the proverbial stone caster,” a

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44 “Palma de Mallorca,” p. 2, 1958, Folder 8, Box 49. There are multiple documents in this folder on Palma de Mallorca. The one here cited begins, “I hope you don’t mind if I laugh at the West.”
category in which he clearly placed the unnamed German journalist. Nevertheless, Fuller was determined, in written if not in oral form, to “attach my own appendage to the inevitable discussion of Little Rock.” He wished to note that “in the West, where so many seem to have forgotten so soon the lessons of Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz, the phenomenon of Little Rock should be more than an occasion for smugness and moral posturing. It should instead be a challenge and a warning.”

Fuller also pointed to the so-called riots in 1958 in the Notting Hill section of London. White mobs attacked Caribbean immigrants, who fought back gallantly, giving as good as they got. On the heels of this outrage, British politicians and pundits demanded new restrictions, if not an outright ban, on nonwhite immigration. Fuller invoked the events in England to support his argument. “For, if fresh proof be needed,” he intoned gravely, “the recent riots in England demonstrate that the evil of racism is no exclusive national cancer in the body politic of America. Rather, it would seem to be a disease active in the bowels of Western Civilization.”

The black journalist and writer Vincent Roi Ottley, a native of New York City also transplanted to Chicago, had advanced a similar argument years earlier. Ottley mocked European claims to liberality on race. He asserted that the comparatively enlightened treatment accorded African American expatriates in Europe masked rampant racism in the European colonies and within Europe itself. Europe, Ottley concluded, offered “no green pastures” for African Americans, who were better off in the United States.

As an expatriate, Fuller could not go that far. Although content to see America’s dirty laundry aired in public and its claims of commitment to democracy derided, he also had suspicions and reservations. He questioned the motives of many of those rebuking the United States. “And while I, as an American Negro and erstwhile victim of the seemingly malignant bias of my countrymen, have no

51 Roi Ottley, No Green Pastures (New York, 1951). This was a reversal of Ottley’s previous position. As a war correspondent in Europe during World War II, he had praised European racial attitudes in comparison with those of white Americans. Like many others, however, Ottley apparently modified his views to suit the contingencies of U.S. cold war politics. See Mark A. Huddle, ed., Roi Ottley’s World War II: The Lost Diaries of an African American Journalist (Lawrence, Kans., 2011).
objections to the condemnation of racism,” Fuller declaimed, “I am more than a trifle discomforted at having it damned so often and so especially for my benefit.” He offered three reasons for his discomfort. First, the queries and damnations reminded him too much of why he had left the United States; it was rather like “having a nasty wound reopened just as scar tissue is growing over it.” Second, although Fuller characteristically sought to avoid giving offense, he found the constant querying wearisome: “since the simple rules of individual diplomacy demand that I attempt some intelligent reply, I am hard put to know where to begin in explaining all the ‘little rocks.’” Third, and “most annoying,” Fuller was “both suspicious and resentful of the motives of many solicitous and critical Europeans.” He was suspicious that many Europeans, “jealous of the wealth and power of ‘upstart’ America and of the easy affluency of its people, seize race prejudice as the Achilles’ heel on which to grind their axes.” Turning from suspicion to resentment, Fuller took umbrage at the “condescension implicit” in the expressions of many Europeans: “The ‘pity the poor things’ sentiments of a Helsinki lady who informed me that ‘we would not treat Negroes so cruelly in Finland’ are infuriatingly prevalent among Europeans.” As Fuller stated elsewhere, “That is, their attitude seems to say, ‘While we might have certain objections to Negroes, we would not treat them so cruelly.’” This, of course, was precisely the language of John Tesch, whom Fuller had singled out as being less problematic on the issue of the American racial saga than other Europeans were. Fuller would have had Europeans, instead of offering pity, to say of African Americans, “We understand their humiliation, and we share their suffering and their anguish.”

The drumbeat of “moral posturing” seemed to turn the exiled Fuller, on the run from racism in the United States, into something of an American nationalist. Thrown on the defensive, he marshaled reputed facts and figures attesting to racial progress back home:

I admit the facts of Little Rock and the feudal intransigence of the Deep South, but I also turn the coin of American race relations.

53 Ibid., 5.
in the South have begun or completed desegregation of students, and that eight of these districts are in Arkansas. I recall what I had almost forgotten myself—that in many cities of the North and South there are communities where Negroes and whites live as neighbors in perfect harmony. I cite the enlightened trend in interracial living as exemplified by Chicago’s Lake Meadows middle-income housing development. And I describe how, in the large cities of the North, the two races work side by side without friction in government, many private industries, and all public institutions.

Such statistics do not negate the ugly reality of Little Rock. Nor are they intended to. But they help to salve my patronage-bruised ego, and I hope they serve to bring the American racial picture into clearer focus.55

Such presentations were unpersuasive, not least because Fuller was playing fast and loose with the evidence. His two main essays on the subject are at odds, the one contradicting the other. Seemingly acting as a U.S. goodwill ambassador at large, a role played more formally by others such as the jazzman Louis Armstrong, Fuller was in full opposition to what he described as the “endless sniping at America through the race prejudice scapegoat.”56 In the process, he admitted “citing such vague and possibly erroneous statistical claims as that the income of American Negroes exceeds that of all Canada, and repeating the Southern Education Reporting Service’s periodic summaries of the number of school districts which have begun compliance with the desegregation decision.” Against the “determined chauvinism” of the Europeans, Fuller posited a starry-eyed American optimism that was quite removed from the African American reality he had known, experienced, and fled. “I have,” he continued in the rose-colored vein, “worn dog-eared a copy of Life International which featured handsome portraits of Thurgood Marshall, Ralph Bunche, Langston Hughes, Percy Julian, and others, under the heading, ‘America’s Newest Leaders.’”57 This kind of crude propaganda, Fuller repeated, was a “rather desperate flipping of the coin of American race relations,” which he hoped would bring the U.S. “racial picture into clearer focus.” However, contrary to the essay in which he expressed the hope that his misrepresentations would “help to salve my patronage-bruised ego,” he asserted in the second manuscript that the upbeat statements were, “unhappily, no help in assuaging my patronage-bruised ego.”58

55 Ibid.
Fuller’s “patronage-bruised ego” was causing him to dissimulate and distort U.S. conditions to spruce up the image of the very country whose racism had driven him to seek refuge in Europe. It is unclear exactly what Fuller meant by “patronage-bruised ego,” a formulation that goes undefined in his Little Rock writings. The phrase seems, however, to have had a complex meaning: moral and material, political and economic. Fuller would have known something of patronage; his adopted erstwhile hometown of Chicago had long been a center of patronage politics in the United States.59 Above all, patronage politics requires that the client at all times strive to please the patron. As an exile in Europe, Fuller apparently saw himself as a sort of client, as evidenced by his references about the need for “tact” and his assertions about not “intending to offend” when expressing his disagreements with Europeans.60 He spoke with the self-censored tongue of one who felt he was living on sufferance. That said, Fuller was also gentlemanly, his life-altering outburst against the “arrogant Polack” in Chicago notwithstanding.61 Indeed, Fuller desired to be tactful and diplomatic and to avoid offending the citizens of the countries he visited or resided in. That some of those citizens offered him various courtesies would only have reinforced his desire to show solicitude.

This tendency was stronger because Fuller’s clientage was not just moral and political; it extended to the realm of material support and economic sustenance. With no apparent steady source of income, he seems to have been somewhat reliant on the kindness of friends and acquaintances. It is perhaps a measure of his parsimonious existence that he wrote about how, “in an extravagant mood, I splurged on a cafe-con-leche while chatting with an American acquaintance at a sidewalk cafe.”62 In the island town of Palma de Mallorca, Spain, where he settled down “for a few months to work on some short stories and a play,” largely because of the “pleasant climate and

59 Dianne M. Pinderhughes, Race and Ethnicity in Chicago Politics: A Reexamination of Pluralist Theory (Urbana, 1987).
61 One literary protégé’s description of Fuller as gentlemanly is from author’s telephone interview with Sandra Jackson-Opoku (speaking from Chicago), April 16, 2009. In a subsequent e-mail, Jackson-Opoku describes Mr. Fuller, as she invariably calls him, as “cultured and refined, an epicure and bon vivant, very neat and tidy, orderly and controlled, a smart (if somewhat conservative) dresser, with a fastidiousness that bordered on fussiness.” Jackson-Opoku to author, April 22, 2009.
comparatively low prices,” he literally counted pennies as he made purchases ranging from bus rides to milk to aftershave.63 To pay his way, Fuller turned to freelance journalism. By his own account, however, he did not achieve much success in marketing his literary productions, which ranged from nonfiction to fiction, the serious (like the Little Rock essays) to the silly (like “Sigrid,” a short story about a tall Swedish blonde who disdainfully forsook the advances of every “soft, tame and over-civilized” suitor in Palma de Mallorca for the erotic embrace of a denizen of the “caves of a gypsy encampment,” a “real man . . . a bold, wild thing. A tiger!”).64 Needless to say, Fuller knew that such depictions of primitive virility mimicked the sexual stereotypes that historically animated much of the racist violence, including lynchings, directed at black men like himself in the United States. That he resorted to such writing speaks painfully to his desperation. The stories appealed frankly to the sexual and racial fantasies and fears of white American men, the primary audience for publications like For Men Only and Male and Men in Action, the fanciful, adventure-driven pulp magazines to which he tried (unsuccessfully) to sell at least one “Sigrid”-like story.65 Fuller also inquired if the editors of those magazines were “interested in photos and articles on skin diving and bullfighting, and what your rate of payment is for such material.”66 Evidently they had no such interest. Viewed from either the literary or the political angle, this hour was not Hoyt Fuller’s finest.

Bereft of funds, Fuller depended to varying extents on those around him—little wonder he felt like a client, and that the reliance on his patrons bruised his ego. Ultimately, his dilemma could be traced to the degraded position of black people in American society. Fuller believed that such degradation in turn led Europeans, for all their inveighing against American apartheid, to look down on African Americans. As a representative of the despised caste, Fuller thought he too was being stigmatized. Accordingly, he seemed to have experienced that “peculiar sensation” about which Du Bois spoke in his most lyrical work, that “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by

63 Fuller to Percival L. Prattis, May 22, 1958, Folder 8, Box 49 (quotations); “Notes (Palma de Mallorca),” Folder 35, Box 48.
64 “Sigrid,” Folder 34, Box 49.
65 “The Swedish Sphinx,” Folder 38, Box 49.
66 Fuller to Editors, For Men Only, May 9, 1958, Folder 38, Box 49.
the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” 67

The contempt and pity, Fuller appeared to think, would be mitigated in proportion to the success of African Americans in breaking down racial barriers in U.S. society. If that were not quite so, or even not nearly so, then Fuller would still publicly proclaim it to be so. As an African American refugee, his sense of self-worth hinged on such an affirmation. It was therapy for his “patronage-bruised ego.”

With the Little Rock crisis serving as a template, Fuller found no shortage of Europeans who were eager to damn the United States, sometimes with considerable vigor and flair. For example, consider the “aging Dutch gentleman,” a former planter in Indonesia, who, along with most of the resident colonialists, was expelled from that country after it became independent of Holland in 1949. 68 Now retired, he was apparently one of the “habitual idlers” whom Fuller reported as populating Palma de Mallorca. They enjoyed its relatively cheap, balmy, and unhurried life, though likely in less impeccable circumstances than Fuller, who would have considered himself part of the island community’s “colony of writers and artists who . . . proceed soberly and seriously to produce for what they fervently hope will be posterity.” 69 Fuller reported that the old Dutch retiree at one point “attacked American race prejudice with such vehemence that I feared, seeing his face grow maroon, he would have a fit of apoplexy.” Fuller recorded the fuming man saying, “‘And now they won’t let Negro children in the schools. . . . And they call that a democracy!’” 70 This statement, on Fuller’s experience, was representative of the general European sentiment, even if it was not always stated so passionately.

Mercifully for Fuller, not everyone who abhorred racism in the United States felt compelled to share their views with him; a few people spared him the “endless sniping” at American apartheid. Two such individuals went further and attempted to shield him from the unpleasant news coming from the other side of the Atlantic. Fuller’s “sympathetic censors,” as he called them, ran a beauty salon in Palma de Mallorca, mainly for foreign tourists. 71 The unidentified partner to whom Fuller was closer became one of his

67 Du Bois, Souls of Black Folk, 3.
69 Fuller to Prattis, May 22, 1958.
71 “The Sympathetic Censors,” Folder 39, Box 49.
first acquaintances on the island. She also became acquainted with his privation and offered to help by supplying him with newspapers. “Knowing that I had limited funds,” as Fuller delicately put it, “she would kindly save for me the American (Paris edition of *Herald Tribune*), English and French papers which she bought daily for the convenience of her patrons.” Occasionally, Fuller noticed that the papers, which he received after the salon closed at the end of the day, came with “neatly scissored empty space[s].” Assuming this to be the handiwork of salon clients, and since the “sense of an article was rarely affected by the missing print,” he “thought little of it.”

But then it happened again: another desired article turned up missing. This time Fuller was in a restaurant, presumably of the cheaper sort previously described, when he espied an Englishman reading a paper with an article entitled, “U.S. POOL CLOSED AFTER NEGROES TAKE SWIM.” On obtaining his stack of newspapers that evening, Fuller hurriedly searched for the story, only to discover “a perfectly cut oblong space” where it had been. He was both disappointed and curious. He wondered who “among the female idlers in the beauty salon cared enough—pro or con—about racial discrimination in America to want to clip that story.” Although his “curiosity was whetted,” Fuller did not take up the matter with the salon operator because, with typical inconsistency, he considered the “matter of no importance” even after admitting to being disappointed that the article he was looking for had been clipped out of the paper. In any case, Fuller further consoled himself that the hairdresser “had better things to do than watch clients with the newspapers.”

Fuller was not able to keep his curiosity in check much longer. Subsequently, he was sitting at a sidewalk cafe when a front-page story in his acquaintance’s *Herald Tribune* caught his attention. It screamed, “SPAT ON NEGRO, BOY NOT GUILTY,” and notably, it had a Little Rock dateline. The story was the latest installment in the case of Curtis Stover, a white high school senior who spat on a young black woman during graduation ceremonies at Central High in May 1958. Stover was charged with disturbing the peace, but

the court dismissed the case, exonerating him both legally and morally. “I don’t hold the boy personally responsible,” the judge told Stover’s mother. “I blame Dwight Eisenhower for the whole thing. I live near the school and I feel like I live in Poland.”\(^75\) Fuller, who described himself as having the “time-consuming but compulsive habit of reading any periodical I can get my hands on,” was not about to miss out on this juicy bit of news, not this time.\(^76\) “I took no chance on the story being clipped from the beauty salon’s paper,” he noted, “and read it on the spot.” And well he did, for the neat and nimble fingers with the scissors were at it again:

Sure enough, when I got my bundle of papers, the Little Rock story was missing. This time my curiosity overrode my tact and I explained to my friend what had happened in the two cases and asked if she had any idea who had cut the articles, and why. The lady blushed, and her embarrassment told me she knew all about it. Reluctantly she told me. She said that, each evening before I came to get the papers, she and her partner went through them hurriedly and scissored any article that had to do with racial brutality or discrimination in America. “We thought the stories would make you feel bad,” she explained.\(^77\)

Although considering the sympathetic censors “misguided,” Fuller also found their gesture “touching.” It may not, however, have been totally unwarranted. Fuller’s aversion to openly confronting the wounds created by American apartheid, or else his discomfort with attempts by others to do so, could well have been communicated to his salon-operator friend by his words or body language. Perhaps she even heard about it on the island grapevine. Seemingly oblivious to these possibilities, Fuller told the lady “that I appreciated her sympathetic censoring but that whatever damage could be perpetrated by my knowledge of such incidents had been done long before I crossed the Atlantic.”\(^78\)

Other acquaintances, such as Olaf Andersen, made sure that Fuller did not forget such incidents. Andersen was a retired Swedish industrialist living in Palma de Mallorca, presumably settled into the life of the habitual idler. Under the pseudonym Gunnar Olafson, he wound up at the center of one of Fuller’s more engaging pieces. The wizened Andersen, described by Fuller as “very old, probably in his eighties,” was “younger in spirit and outlook than many of the men now

\(^76\) “The Sympathetic Censors,” 1.
\(^77\) “Little Rock, Little Rock, Take It Away,” 8.
\(^78\) \textit{Ibid}., 9.
directing—or misdirecting—the destiny of the world.” Fuller encountered him at a local bodega, where he could be found every morning after hobbling there with the aid of a cane from his home two blocks away, “as he has been doing for the past seven years.” Basking in the morning sun, with a glass of beer as his only consistent companion, the jolly Andersen held court, taking on old-timers and newcomers alike and pontificating on a wide array of subjects. His favorite diversion was “twitting the British whom he calls ‘the most pompous asses on the face of the earth,’ and the Americans, to him ‘a noisy bunch of professional delinquents.’”

Fuller reported having numerous discussions with Andersen on race and politics in the United States and the world. Andersen welcomed what he believed to be the rising tide of color worldwide, as evidenced by the collapse of the European empires, the increasing assertiveness of the non-Western nations, and the comeuppance for the West, which had “divided the world into white and non-white, superior and inferior.” Fuller made a composite account of his conversations with Andersen, or what he called a “telescoping of several talks,” and sought unsuccessfully to sell it to the Pittsburgh Courier, the venerable African American weekly newspaper. The piece was a pithy summary of Fuller’s European sojourn up to May 1958, when it was written:

Mr. Olafson regarded me silently for a moment. Then he asked: “How do you like Europe?”

I told him I like it fine.

“Why?”

“Well . . .” I hemmed and hawed. “Well, it’s pleasant here. There’re many interesting things to do and see . . .”

“Rubbish!” he interrupted, discounting my answer with a wave of his bony hand. “There’re just as many interesting things to see and do in America, and I’m sure you haven’t seen or done them all. You’re not old enough. No, you like Europe because you feel better here, because you can go where you want to and do as you like. You’re a human being here. Isn’t that so?”

He had snatched the frills away, but he was essentially right. I admitted it.

Still taking aim at the facade of adventure in which Fuller tried to wrap his exile, Andersen exposed the contradictions between the stated ideals of the United States and its breach of those ideals where people of African descent were concerned. In 1944 the Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal—Andersen’s countryman and a possible

79 “Palma de Mallorca,” 2.
80 Ibid., 3.
81 Ibid., 2 (ellipses in original).
inspiration for the pseudonym Gunnar Olafson—had famously identified that inconsistency as the most profound political and social conundrum in the U.S. experience. Myrdal dubbed the problem “an American dilemma” and argued that it was essentially a moral issue, which is how Fuller reported that Europeans regarded Little Rock and American apartheid more broadly.82 Andersen, pressing his point, as apparently he was inclined to do, closed in on the American dilemma. He noted that in Spain, then under the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, who had come to power in the 1930s with the aid of Adolf Hitler’s Germany and Benito Mussolini’s Italy, Fuller enjoyed greater civic freedom than he did in the United States, the sweet land of liberty. “Did you ever think of the irony of your situation?” Andersen put it to Fuller. “Here in Spain, in a country run by a dictator and a despot, you have more freedom than you ever had back home in your democracy. Isn’t that ironic?” Fuller sheepishly conceded the point.83 But never mind, Andersen soothingly announced. Seemingly riffing on Oswald Spengler, the German historian who predicted the end of worldwide Western and white hegemony after World War I, Anderson declared that the days of racist tyranny were numbered:

Mr. Olafson reached over and tapped my arm, winking slyly. “Well, cheer up, my boy, it’s almost over.”

“What’s almost over?” I asked him.

He grinned and picked up one of several newspapers on the table. It was a London daily. He leaned over and showed me the headlines. They read: SIX KILLED IN BEIRUT CAFE BLAST; STATE OF EMERGENCY IN FRANCE OVER ALGERIAN SITUATION; REBELS MAKE GAINS IN INDONESIAN CONFLICT; NIXON STONED IN CARACAS.

Then he folded the English newspaper and spread open a copy of the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune. The headline, SOVIETS LAUNCH SPUTNIK WEIGHING TON AND A HALF, was emblazoned across the front page.

“The Western world is in serious trouble,” Mr. Olafson cackled. “All the sins of the West have been coming home to roost for the past few decades, and it’s almost over now. Retribution is at hand.”84

Fuller did not want to hear it. Andersen’s words of comfort seemed instead to further bruise Fuller’s ego. The open sea, not vengeance, was

83 “Palma de Mallorca,” 2.
on his mind. “It was a grim conversation,” Fuller confirmed. “The morn-
ing was clear and sunny, and I would rather have been swimming.”

The “telescopied” version of the running Fuller/Andersen dialogue, no doubt leavened by a certain amount of literary license, is the snappiest abridgment of Fuller’s European encounter with the politics of American apartheid. Little Rock’s challenge and warning, as Fuller styled it, were asserted in a discursive nutshell, with a mixture of pathos, irony, and mockery thrown in for good measure. One can hear echoes of the dialogue in Fuller’s concluding musings on the larger meaning of the Little Rock and global crises; however, unlike the old Swede, who applauded the anti-Western revolt in the Third World, Fuller viewed such a prospect with dismay:

Even the most insular white supremacist cannot fail to hear the thunder of social revolution. With the great masses of non-white peoples shaking off their torpor and speaking out at last in a firm, awakened voice, the danger is imminent that—in bitter rejection of what they believe to be inimical to their interests—they will turn their backs on the West and all its greatness.

Perhaps the time is near when the concept of the equality of all men under the law can find more ready universal acceptance. If this is not possible, then the portents would seem to point toward a new world so un-brave as to demand the segregation of its peoples according to their race and color. And, with the odds so heavy against them, this cannot be a happy prospect for the white minority.

Fuller’s own trajectory was different. Eventually, he returned to the United States, a decision likely driven by both push and pull factors. After spending the first part of his European sojourn mainly in Spain, where he wrote his pieces on Little Rock, Fuller moved on to France. His “patronage-bruised ego” evidently survived the relocation. As in Spain, his financial situation in France remained precarious, with the inability to fully support himself having serious consequences for his sense of self. Fuller’s hand-to-mouth existence contrasted sharply with the settled and comfortable lifestyles in France of not only prominent black literary exiles from the United States such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin but also lesser-known African American expatriates like the cartoonist Oliver W. Harrington, creator of Bootsie.

85 “Palma de Mallorca,” 4.
86 “Little Rock: A Challenge and a Warning,” 5–6. Perhaps Fuller shaped these ideas in light of his intended audience, the readers of the Chicago Jewish Forum and/or the New York Times.
87 Fabre, Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright, 294–301; Leeming, James Baldwin; Oliver W. Harrington, Why I Left America and Other Essays, edited by M. Thomas Inge (Jackson, Miss., 1993), 26–34, 58–59.
African American exiles in the new African states, most notably Ghana, also fared better than Fuller did in Europe. The aged W. E. B. Du Bois was treated as an honored guest of the Ghanaian state, while his wife Shirley Graham Du Bois became head of Ghanaian television and a key presidential adviser. Other members of the African American expatriate community in Ghana, such as the emerging writer Maya Angelou and the peripatetic radical Julian Mayfield, worked in journalism. Still others, like Victoria “Vicki” Garvin, who roomed with Maya Angelou for a while, found work teaching. African Americans who took refuge in Africa also appeared, on the whole, to be more radical than those who went to Europe. European-based African Americans like Richard Wright, for all his communist apostasy, and James Baldwin, who was never a partisan of the radical Left, fiercely denounced the U.S. racial order. However, their counterparts in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa often went further, denouncing not just the racial injustice suffered by African Americans but also U.S. capitalism, imperialism, and militarism. For sure, there were exceptions: not all African Americans resident in Africa opposed the U.S. government or its social system. One such dissenter was Pauli Murray, an African American who taught law at the University of Ghana. Identifying proudly as an unhyphenated American, Murray clashed with the Nkrumah regime over its suppression of internal opposition and, more ominously, its criticism of U.S. policy in the Congo following the murder of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. Murray soon left Ghana, to the relief of the government and likely also most of her fellow African American expatriates.

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Hoyt Fuller, by political choice, was no Pauli Murray. He no doubt would have spurned individuals like Murray and her black fellow American and friend Edith Sampson, who had a history of downplaying before overseas audiences the injustice suffered by black people in the United States. Still, Fuller’s “patronage-bruised ego” was driving him toward a similarly dubious apologia of the African American condition. He left the United States disgusted with both white supremacy and what he imagined to be the cowardice of black people in acquiescing to it, but he ended up minimizing the plight of African Americans and even fabricating information about their progress. To himself, Fuller justified the contradiction as a way of soothing the dishonor that he felt attended his partial dependence on new friends and associates. Whatever the rationalization, he found himself in an untenable situation, and he must have sorely wanted an escape. His professional and financial failure in Europe pushed him toward ending his exile.

At the same time, things were looking up at home, where several factors likely conspired to pull Fuller back to the land of his birth. Employment prospects and professional opportunities were more promising in the United States, where he was a known quantity and had many contacts. Political considerations probably also played a role in Fuller’s decision to repatriate. By 1961, the year he returned home, the African American freedom struggle had deepened and widened. The civil rights movement was making increasing inroads throughout the South, while everywhere in the country black radical and black nationalist ideas and formations were gaining traction. These changes were a prelude to the era of Black Power, which provided the indispensable foundation for the Black Arts movement, in which Fuller assumed such a
crucial function. Taken together, the events of the early 1960s likely allayed, if not entirely laid to rest, whatever doubts Fuller harbored about the will and ability of African Americans to confront racial subjugation.

In 1961 Fuller became editor of *Negro Digest*, a literary monthly that he transformed into an unofficial organ of the Black Arts movement. Through the pages of *Negro Digest* (later renamed *Black World*), Fuller gave a prominent public voice to a great many of the leading figures in African American arts, letters, and politics, the old along with the new. The literary scholar James Edward Smethurst has posited that at its zenith Fuller’s journal “had perhaps the largest readership of any serious cultural journal in the United States.” Without it, Smethurst argues, “the articulation of the Black Arts movement as a national phenomenon would have been far different and more limited.”

Like Black Power, the Black Arts movement was deeply internationalist, seeking to connect with the Third World and especially with peoples and communities of African descent around the globe. Accordingly, Fuller oversaw changing the journal’s title from *Negro Digest* to *Black World*, a transformation that at once discarded the old racial eponym “Negro” in favor of the more fashionable “Black” and signified the movement’s increasing turn to black internationalism. As was the case for others in the movement, Fuller’s pan-African sensibilities were not new. His African travelogue, based on the trip to Guinea that he took while in exile, demonstrates his deep appreciation of African culture as well as solidarity with African nation-building. This position decisively sets Fuller apart from Richard Wright, whose account of his sojourn to late colonial Ghana paints a forbidding land of strange cultures and even stranger peoples. To Wright, Ghana was “a land of pathos.” The Black Arts movement, with Fuller as its veritable dean, rejected all notions of a pitiful Africa.

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Paradoxically, Fuller’s exile began with an assumption of a pitiful black America. For the southern-born Fuller, the Little Rock crisis of 1957 was a condensation of the African American experience: it was but the latest, if pointed, example of black folk being cowed by white terror, the fear of which had sent a teenage Fuller fleeing from Georgia. In Fuller’s estimation, Little Rock illustrated the submission to white rule, albeit driven by an instinct for self-preservation, that was the leading theme in his life as a youngster and by extension, it apparently seemed to him, African American history as a whole. Declaring that as a self-respecting black man he could no longer tolerate such an affront, Fuller left the United States. But the United States, and especially the Little Rock crisis, never left him. The Europeans he encountered during his exile ensured as much. To them, Little Rock had become a metaphor for the United States, and few missed the opportunity to so inform him. In turn, Fuller concluded that the European aversion to American apartheid, often stated so flamboyantly, disguised a subtle and unstated loathing of African Americans as a whole. Fuller’s European interlocutors seemed to regard African Americans as a people of pathos. As a representative of the group, Fuller took the matter personally. These exchanges, combined with his financial precariousness and a consequent partial dependence on some of the very individuals he felt secretly disdained African Americans, produced the apparently debilitating condition he called his “patronage-bruised ego.” From all indications, exile did not prove to be as pleasurable as Fuller had anticipated or claimed, as the old Swede Olaf Andersen/Gunnar Olafson so poignantly reminded him. Meanwhile, the growing black political awakening back in the United States disproved Fuller’s notions of an African American acquiescence to white supremacy and likely beckoned him homeward. Such were the ramifications for Hoyt Fuller of the Little Rock crisis and what came in its wake.

Fuller’s story, in turn, has broader implications. Through the personal experience of this African American exile, we gain a unique insight into the global impact of the fight for black freedom in the United States and most notably the Little Rock crisis. Accompanying Fuller on his journeys across Europe, from Finland in the north to Spain in the south in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, indeed even as events were still unfolding, one encounters a series of reactions by individual Europeans that stand out for their similarity. The drumbeat of opprobrium heaped on the United
States for its racism was such that even Fuller confessed to tire of hearing it, especially from people whose motives he did not always trust and whose moral authority he questioned. Still, the searing indictment, in which from all indications the majority of ordinary people in Europe (and elsewhere) concurred, had an impact. Conveyed by various means to U.S. officials, such sentiments influenced civil rights policy at the federal level and perhaps beyond. That international opinion was on their side and that they were marching in lockstep with the rest of freedom-seeking humanity gave a boon to African American activists. The Little Rock crisis, as experienced by Hoyt Fuller, illustrated fundamental aspects of the black freedom struggle in the United States. In time, Fuller himself came full circle, returning to Atlanta after the most febrile period of his deanship of the Black Arts movement. The place of his birth also became the place of his death, the homecoming having been made possible by the black freedom struggle and the reconstruction of southern history that it wrought.