

EPISODE 480

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[00:00:00] AH: Well, I was thinking a good way to start would be for each of you just to give us five minutes on each of the figures. Tell our listeners a little bit more about who they are, why their story interest you, and anything else that is significant that you would like to share with our listeners. We're going to start off with Kaia who's speaking about Harriet Tubman. Then we're moving on to Reuben, who is speaking about Ralph Bunche. And finally, Mel Gamble, who is speaking about Willie Merkerson Jr. So, Kaia, tell us a little bit more about Harriet Tubman.

[00:00:37] KS: All right, so thank you so much for having me. Harriet Tubman is the patron saint to me of America. She is so revered and so celebrated, and almost has become a mythical like character. So, we're going to bring some humaneness to her, but also just talk about how dope she is.

So, before she gets into the Union Army and she joins us Union Army, she has been living for about 12 or 13 years as a self-emancipated woman, meaning that she escaped slavery, and she also has traveled anywhere between 9 to 13 times, back down to the Maryland area in order to free about 75 of her family members. Another thing is that, this is for those who are almost middle age, she was 40 when she was recruited to join the Union Army. Her stories of her travels down south had gained so much attention that she was personally recruited by a Massachusetts governor, Governor John Andrew, in order to join the Union Army.

So, what we know is that the Civil War is the bloodiest war, is known as the bloodiest war in American history. And so initially, it was only white men who fought but what happened because there was so much carnage going on, and then you had other issues. Some people did not want to fight. You had people escaping the war, they needed more bodies to fight. So initially, there were nurses, there were male nurses and only a male exclusive army, or military that they had to not only recruit black people, that they also have to recruit women. Harriet Tubman is one of these first women to be recruited.

So, the Massachusetts governor, John Andrew sits her down to do this. When she got down – actually, before she got down there, they redirected her to New York because they weren't allowing black people to enter into these military camps. But the carnage had gotten so deep that they had to send her down. When she got down there, she saw that it was so bad. The encampments were infested with disease. A lot of the soldiers were not tended to. A lot of be enslaved, did not eat. There was malaria. There was typhoid. There were all of these things. So, she immediately went into action.

So, sometime during this, she has been – people are like, “What is she doing?” Even though she's a nurse, so she's serving as a nurse. But sometime during her serving as a nurse, as well as helping enslaved people learn how to start businesses in Buford, South Carolina in the area, General David Hunter asked her to actually do what she came to do, that scout and be a spy.

So, a lot of people, I think fictionalized Harriet Tubman as being this lone wolf. No, when she goes down to South Carolina, she is in a network that is expansive from Canada, all the way down into the deep south, that is mostly black people, even though there are white abolitionists. So, she uses this knitted network that she has cultivated well over a decade. And she uses that in order to establish relationships locally to tell the Union Army about rebel encampments, about ammunition spots, about entry points, waterways that they didn't know about that escapes, lays with us in order to get out, that native people knew about. So, she was feeding all this information.

Now, when that information proved to be very successful and helpful, General David Hunter said, “Let Harriet Tubman do whatever she wants.” So, she was one of the few people, man or woman, who could travel back and forth because she also was a queen of the skies. She disguised herself as a farmer. She disguised herself as an enslaved woman and she also disguised herself as a man. So, she had these molds because she was very small in stature. A lot of people mistake her for being this large woman. She was about five feet. She was very small in stature.

So, how does Harriet Tubman go from a nurse to a scout to a spy? So, as the war intensifies, there was a concerted effort to take out the specific points that would weaken the Union Army. South Carolina was a very stronghold. The problem was is that the Union Army was losing

soldiers. So, then you have this large recruitment of black soldiers. Now, unbeknownst to a lot of people or unlike the field glory, a lot of black people didn't want to join the army, because they were very weary of white folks. So, that was one of the reasons why Harriet Tubman was down there, because she actually helped recruit a lot of the black soldiers, a lot of the black men, she was already in communication with them in finding out the information in terms of mapping the spatial area. So, she's actually the one who recruits and creates this military raid in June 1863.

Now, I actually drove down South Carolina, down the Combahee River. It's called the Combahee River Raid at night, in 2018. It is pitch black. Now, in addition to Harriet Tubman, having all of this information from the network, she's a master at mapping the land and the water territories. She knows about herbs. All of these things that she used, were integral in her going down that river in order to do a final raid in which they burned down – the military burned down plantations, and they say between 700 to 800 enslaved people free.

The irony of it all is after the war, she never received a pension. And it is when she fought for her pension, that information of her and what she did in the war came about. She ends up getting pension, not from her service. But there's a military that Nelson Davis and receives his pension. But I could not – finally, to say in conclusion, there are just things that she did that women could not do during that time, because of the gender roles. She not only was in combat, but she led a new military, and she was free to go and come as she please, which is very rare as a black person. But this also speaks to, this is where I'm going to throw in like the theory, this also speaks to how black people particularly during that time, were able to be invisible and visible at the same time we're integral in winning, the Union winning the Civil War.

[00:07:11] AH: Well, next up is Ambassador Brigety. Actually, we got connected on Twitter. You had tweeted about Ralph Bunche and his time in the OSS and you mentioned that he was someone that you were fascinated by. So, could you tell the listeners a little bit more about some of our American listeners may know him from winning the Nobel Prize or receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom? But just tell us a little bit more about his life and in particular his life as a spy?

[00:07:42] RB: Sure. It's an honor to be able to join you. Ralph Bunche, in my estimation is amongst the greatest least known Americans, certainly as the year since his death has passed

on. In short, as you mentioned, he is best known over the course of his career for being one of the founding leaders of the United Nations. He was part of the US delegation to the San Francisco conference that created the United Nations. He served as essentially a troubleshooter for all manner of crises around the world in the early days of the UN. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his work in negotiating a ceasefire to the first Arab-Israeli crisis that created the State of Israel.

However, Bunche was much, much more than that. He was born in 1904 in Detroit. He is the son of a barber and an amateur musician. His family through a series of circumstances ultimately relocated to Los Angeles after the death of his mother, and the abandonment of his family by his father. He was an extraordinary student, as well as a gifted athlete. He was the valedictorian of his high school class, Jefferson High School in Los Angeles. And then went on to receive a scholarship to UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles, where he studied international relations, and graduated the top of his class and is in Phi Beta Kappa.

As a result of his extraordinary scholarship, then with the support of his community, he went on to Harvard University, where he earned a Master's Degree in Political Science and was particularly interested in questions of colonization, especially in Africa. He went on to go from there in 1938, to Howard University in Washington, DC, the predominantly African American university that trained generations of brilliant people and also happens to be the alma mater of our first woman of color vice president, Kamala Harris.

He went to Howard in 1928, actually, 30 I'm sorry, I misspoke and he started the political science department at Howard University. He continued to work on his doctorate and he earned his doctorate in 1934. He became the first African American to earn a doctorate in political science from any American University. Because his work was focused on Africa and on the politics of the emerging decolonization movement, because after 1934, he went on to study at the London School of Economics, and University of Cape Town in South Africa. He actually spent a lot of time with people like **[inaudible 00:10:27]** and others that were kind of nascent young intellectuals, freedom fighters in these various places, particularly in London.

So, when the war broke out and US entered the war in 1941, after Pearl Harbor. Bunche was 37 years old by that point. He also interestingly, notwithstanding his athletic prowess as a young

man, he also had some health issues, which ultimately did him at a relatively young age in 1968. So, he was recruited to join what was at the very beginning called the coordinator of information, which is kind of a small fledgling intelligence organization and later became the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services. Bunche moved to OSS in their research and analysis branch and served as an analyst and chief of the Africa division there.

So far as we know, Bunche was not a clandestine, operative, a spy classically turned. But we also know that he did extraordinary work in helping the United States understand this part of the world. And interestingly, we simply didn't have enough a lot of expertise on, because there weren't very many people studying Africa. Bunche in addition was also widely credited as being the father of African Studies in the United States, by virtue of his academic work on his doctoral dissertation at Harvard and his teaching at Howard.

So, after, as the war wound down and the work that he did, both on writing reports of political developments, especially in eastern and southern Africa, and a lot of the countries that were British colonies at the time. And subsequently, also writing manuals for that part of the world for American soldiers and other operatives, to have a sense of what they were engaging in, he transferred from OSS to the State Department and became the first African American desk officer. He was a desk officer for Africa, and then subsequently went on to be part of the US delegation to the San Francisco conference and the rest, as they say, is history.

So, Bunche's contribution to intelligence, in my view, several fold. First is, even those operatives at the tip of the spear, both need background information at the places where they're going to operate, so that they can do their jobs and that's what analysts do. And they also, when they bring that information back, somebody has to synthesize it. That's also what analysts do. So, Bunche was clearly in the vanguard of that very important analysis function of intelligence. He also obviously was the vanguard as an African American, and paved the way for many others who would go on to work in the intelligence services. He was obviously in the vanguard of African Americans serving in international diplomacy and public service. The library at the State Department is named in his honor, appropriately, and this a legacy that all of us who are African American foreign policy professionals stand proudly on and we simply could not be where we are, if not for his example.

[00:13:36] AH: I'm sure I'm not the only one, but hearing all of the things that Harriet and Ralph done in their lives is making me feel like and secure underachiever. They've just done such amazing things. On that note, all over to Mel Gamble to speak about another fascinating figure, Willie Merkerson Jr.

[00:14:00] MG: Thanks, Andrew. And I really appreciate it and I appreciate the parts that have already spoken about from Ambassador Brigety and Professor Shivers on Bunche who I know not personally but from working at the CIA, and Harriet Tubman as I've said before, she's a well-known but we don't know everything about her. So, I look forward to hearing more from Professor Shivers on her.

I tell someone, we have a pattern here, which starts with the Civil War, and then goes to World War Two. So, I added to that by picking out the Vietnam era. And the person that I'm going to talk about is still living. He's Mr. Willie Merkerson, who was an African American Special Forces officer, and then later joined the CIA as an intelligence officer. I met Mr. Merkerson in 1980, in Lagos, Nigeria. He was serving as the assistant army attaché at the American Embassy. I was assigned there as the CIA officer, undercover as the State Department officer. We developed a relationship. He knew the Nigerian military officers and the culture very well. And through my boss, the chief of station, he introduced me and other CIA officers to people that he knew in the community to help us obtain a better understanding of events in Nigeria.

This was an important period for US foreign policy, because the Nigerian military was preparing to transition from military to civilian role. There were many reports of threats of coup and counter coup attempts, and our job, the embassies job was to ensure a smooth transition from military leader and President Olusegun Obasanjo to then elected president **[inaudible 00:16:07]**. The transition went smoothly. And again, my boss, the chief of station in Nigeran was very impressed Mr. Merkerson and recommended that he considered joining the CIA after he retired from the military.

After some consideration, Major Merkerson retired in August 1980 and joined the CIA soon afterwards. Now, I tell that part because that's almost in the middle of his career. Major Merkerson, what many of us did not know at the time was that he had received the Distinguished Service Award, which is second down from the Medal of Honor, and Major

Merkerson had joined the military in 1957. But the period where he received the award was in 1968, where he was in Vietnam, serving with a detachment A223 company V, 5th Special Forces, Airborne. And as the Special Forces advisor to a Vietnamese Task Force conducting a search and destroy mission in **[inaudible 00:17:22]** province, and then Lieutenant Merkerson led the two-company force against what turned out to be two North Vietnamese Army Battalion.

His unit encountered heavy gunfire, but he moved along the lines shouting encouragement, rallying the troops and personally firing machine guns, mortars and grenade launchers. He fearlessly led this attack through the encirclement of the enemy and under intense sniper fire. He set up an evacuation and treatment center for his wounded soldiers. He is now under consideration for the Medal of Honor, so it makes everyone very proud of this individual.

Mr. Merkerson, was a native of Columbia, South Carolina, which brings us up to the point where as I said, that was where I met him. Mr. Merkerson retired from the military and joined the CIA, first as a director of operations paramilitary officer, and later as a director of operations case officer. During that timeframe, he served in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and conducted operations in Europe. While serving in the CIA, he worked extensively with US Special Ops Command and Joint Special Operations Command, otherwise known as JSOC, in the US and overseas. He served as Chief of Operations at CIA Special Ops Group from 2009 to 2011. Mr. Merkerson, he was involved in a number of operations, many of which I can't talk about, but I can, at some point, give you a sense of what he was involved in, in one or two operations.

[00:19:16] AH: I think what would be really interesting now would be just to put those figures into conversation with one another. So, the first part would just be, we've got one figure in the Civil War, one around World War Two and one in the Vietnam War. What kind of links do you all see between them? Are they're really strong connections? Or are they quite different types of figures and give us a sense of how you would join those three lives together into a bigger narrative?

[00:19:46] RB: If I may, the sort of thing that I think is most significant about what you're saying, and putting those three fingers in dialogue together, is that it's not just those three, not even just those three individuals, but not even just those wars African Americans have been involved in

the security of this country to include what we would today call intelligence, literally from the earliest days of the Republic, right through the present moment. And not just involved peripherally, but doing things that not only have been of great importance strategically, or of great heroism tactically in any given circumstance, but have consistently demonstrated loyalty to a country that has not shown the same level of loyalty to them. And that's important for a variety of reasons to understand that.

I get asked by young students of color all the time, "How do I as a student, feel like I belong in a certain place where there are very few people who look like me in various aspects of the Foreign Affairs establishment?" I have to remind them that they stand on the shoulders of their ancestors, who have done this sort of work for centuries. And we don't know enough about them. And I don't simply mean that African Americans don't know enough about their work. I mean, Americans don't know enough about their work, because to understand the full measure of their devotion, as well as their competence is to forever dispel the view that they have not been worthy of the full respect of their nation. And in the year 2021, that may seem like an outrageous claim, but it was precisely that view for the vast majority of our country's history that prevented the full inclusion of African Americans and the American story.

[00:21:49] KS: I want to add that several things, excellent points. I also want to add that we're talking about three wars that were not only critical in American history, but were critical in world history. So, this is very important, and black people contributed to the shifts of how they played out. So, that's one thing I want to earmark in this conversation.

The second thing I want to say is, is that these three very complicated and accomplished individuals had multiple objectives. What Ambassador Brigety points out is you can participate in something that you may not 100% are in agreement with, like Harriet Tubman, right? But the outcome, the overall objective is what she specifically was pushing for. I wanted to give like a really quick example, is one of the generals that she works with, or colonels that she works with in the Civil War is a man by the name of James Montgomery. James Montgomery was a really good friend of John Brown. John Brown was the white abolitionist who attempted to declare war and going to war with the United States government in order to abolish slavery. So, why does a white abolitionist who was good friends with the man who waged war with the US government

siding, could mean army, it was because he believed in abolition. He believed in the freeing of enslaved individuals, maybe not how the Union ran in its entirety.

So, there are these complicated junctures, I think, where we talk about these histories, and these people that we need to acknowledge and they're not one note. Another thing I wanted to bring to the fore, that Harriet Tubman does, I think is important, is that she would be considered today a disabled person. She either had either narcolepsy or epilepsy or a combination of the two. So, these are these things that we talked about how do these people maneuver and navigate in these very extreme circumstances, and I would say all three of these individuals provide a template of espionage and collecting intelligence that the United States government simply did not have, because they did not have access in these communities like they did.

So, for the sake of the security as Ambassador Brigety says, for the sake of the security of the country, and maybe specifically to their communities, they offer this information.

[00:24:20] AH: Mel, as a former senior intelligence officer, what are your thoughts?

[00:24:26] MG: Well, at the fear of almost repeating and parts what Ambassador Brigety and Professor Shivers have said, all of them are significant because they wanted to do what was in the best interest of our country. A country that they loved and we're a part of, even though in every respect, you can pick the war, we were being denied that privilege. Of course, they wanted us to fight. A Civil War we had the fight meaning African Americans, and World War Two, it was segregated, but Ralph Bunche did not let that deter him from going in. I have to give some credit to the OSS and Joe Donovan. He just saw you for what you brought to the table and not necessarily what color you were.

These were people that didn't allow this to deter them. And the same could be said, of Major Merkerson in the Vietnam War. A war that was not – eventually we didn't feel was warranted, and that many people could have walked away from it. But he didn't and he loved this country, and he wanted to do the best. But the recognition, that's one factor, we tend to not to – we, African Americans tend not to receive, and many of these occasions, but it's coming to the forefront today, which I'm very happy about. Award is another thing. We don't look for awards. Most most people don't. But those that are given are not usually given to African Americans,

whether in promotions, or recognitions of their accomplishments, or medals should honor them. And again, the irony is, in this the association between Major Merkerson and hopefully getting the Medal of Honor and Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill.

[00:26:21] RB: If I can just add quickly to let Mr. Gamble said. Two things. First of all, I believe the woman he was talking about in France was Josephine Baker, who was an American actress. First, a woman of color ever to appear in a Motion Picture. She heroically worked for the French resistance, having moved to Paris during World War Two. She was personally awarded the Croix de guerre by General de Gaulle for her efforts. And in the point of awards and medals, I should also note something else I forgot. It's easy to forget, given all the accolades he got, that Ralph Bunche was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Kennedy in 1963.

[00:26:59] AH: Great. Are there any questions that you're dying to ask each other about the respective figures that you spoke about?

[00:27:05] RB: I would ask Mr. Gamble, to what extent is Major Merkerson's story known within the CIA, particularly within the National Clandestine Service? How much has he been seen as a hero to those people who within the NCS that may be operatives of color?

[00:27:23] MG: Thank you for that question, Ambassador Brigety. It's ironic, even for me, and I've known a Major Merkerson, well, since 1980 or count of the years on that 40 years. He never talked about his time in Vietnam. It was only during, when I had a meeting with some of the Special Ops people in the CIA, that they headed that, they said, "You know, he's an American hero and we would look at him and look at this." And we thought, in part, they were joking, but they weren't. But no one would say anything. You talk about timing, it was only within the past two weeks, when I received this request from Andrew, to speak about somebody that Major Merkerson sent me the writeup for the recommendations for the Medal of Honor from two Special Forces officers and he asked me to review it. And that was when I learned what he had accomplished from that aspect.

He was well respected in the CIA as an operations officer. Again, there are many, many operations that he was involved in, that we are all envious of, from many, many aspects. But very few people know of his accomplishments in the military. And then the irony is very few

people in the military know his accomplishments in the CIA. So, it makes it very difficult. But we're trying to get that message out now, and this gives me one opportunity to recognize him as one of America's heroes. So, thank you for that question.

[00:29:11] KS: I have a question for, it could either be for Ambassador Brigety, or it could be for former intelligence officer, Mr. Gamble. How do you think the work that the two individuals you talked about, how do you think it plays in the current state of Africa today?

[00:29:28] RB: It's interesting, for Black History Month, I've been tweeting and posting on social media, tried to do it every day, a particular figure, and of all the ones that I posted, Ralph Bunche got the most tweets and retweets and what was really – there's actually a street named after him in Nairobi. I got a number of people tweeting on that thread, Kenyans who said, "I thought Ralph Bunche was Kenyan. I had no idea he was an American." Which then made them go back and kind of look more about his history. Like, "Wow, I had no idea about all the things that this did."

So, I think, it's almost as if we are at a point now where we're kind of rediscovering heroes, and for a variety of reasons, just because the nature of information flow is so much easier now than it was before, because things can go viral. And frankly, because, 300 years from now, people are going to look back on this last century or so, and see just how much has changed, and how unbelievably quickly, for example, countries in Africa move from being essentially subjects of European powers, to being fully independent states, to having their own questions within them about democracy and leadership and generational change in the context of the most profound technological and economic changes the world has ever seen.

So, the long way of saying that, I think certainly in Bunche's case, people are beginning to look at not only just what he did as a person, but what the things he did at the time that for the kinds of lives that they're able to lead today and what their future can look like, as well.

[00:31:11] MG: Major Merkerson, I think that he's revered and the number of locations for what he signed in the relationships that he's maintained, he's been well respected. There's a big difference for people, I say, you know, that go to Africa, and they go there, and they think they know it, but they really don't know it. It's when you could talk to the taxi driver, or the the guy

that's cleaning the street, then you know, the people, not just the bureaucrats, but the people. That's when you get a sense of, to me, of understanding what Africa is all about. And Major Merkerson had that quality and a number of countries that he lived in. And they reached out to him today to talk about, regardless of the fact that – they knew that he was CIA and many of those cases. But that had nothing to do with who he was as a person.

I have a question for you Professor Shivers, you mentioned on Harriet Tubman, that today she would be viewed with disability. I served on President Biden's and Harris' transition team on the intelligence community, but also on the diversity aspect of it. One thing that I saw, I learned more about was, not just looking at diversity from the color of people a color perspective, but from a disability perspective. I'm just trying to figure out, could you expound a little more on Harriet Tubman, and what would have been considered a disability for her?

[00:33:07] KS: That's an excellent, excellent question. Thank you for asking. I have some follow up questions too, this is a great conversation. So, when Harriet was about eight or nine, so Harriet Tubman's mother worked in the house. She was the house lay and so it was Harriet Tubman. However, what happened is, is that there was somebody, the inheritances of slaves were divided. And so, Harriet Tubman was actually sit to multiple different plantation homes to serve as the cook or the domestic.

So, when she was about 8 or 9 or 10, there was an overseer chasing another slave and through some type of iron or something in the direction of this leg that was running, but it just so happened that Harriet, they called her Minty, Minty was walking and she was the one who got hit in the head. So, from then on, she would have what they would call sleeping spells, which was also a form of, what we would call narcolepsy. But there were also some descriptions of when she came out of it, it might have been epilepsy as well. How the documentation or when they did interview her, she said that it was at these moments that she would go into – she would have sleeping spells. She described it almost as a trance. When she would come out of it, she would have more clarity in how she would move when she was transporting people. What foods or what herbs in the forest will be best to treat different ailments. And so, she used what we would call disability as an ability in her comings and goings. But I think it was also part of her disguise too, as being presented as a frail person. She was highly intelligent. Her memory to

map things and know them over and over again over, not hundreds. but thousands of miles, is crazy. Her remembering people and having a network. Her ability to lead.

She had actually led men, and also was in communication with generals and colonels. This was even unheard of even just basic men in the military.

[00:35:29] AH: Thank you. As someone that never grew up in the United States and wasn't educated here, how much to each of these figures come up in the education system? How did you all come to learn about each of these figures? Does everyone learn about Harriet Tubman and skill, but the other figures later in life? Help me understand that.

[00:35:50] RB: Well, I think that many of us Americans here have heard about Harriet Tubman in school, but we heard like the 62nd paragraph version, nothing close to the level of detail that her life warrants, that one would know, say of other great Americans, whether they be presidents, or generals, or whatever. I think the movie Harriet, that came out a couple of years ago, has done a great deal in order to further educate Americans. Certainly, for me.

With regard to Ralph Bunche, I'm obviously kind of a foreign policy nerd, as it were, as all my fellow foreign policy nerds are. I just kind of started to hear about him, that there's a Ralph Bunche Center at Howard that is named after him. The library, the State Department is named after him, and there's a very great biography written by one of his young deputies, guy named Sir Brian Urquhart, who actually just died about a month or so ago. The more I read about him, like he is almost everything I want to be. He had some challenges with his personal life. But everybody can be an instructor to you, but is it a positively or negatively. So, I wouldn't exactly go so far as to call it a shrine, but I have like a little kind of shelf in my office that is dedicated exclusively to Bunche. Various books on him, and then a poster of him. A part of my informal mission life is just to continue to highlight this amazing American. That's an example of what many of us would aspire to be.

[00:37:21] MG: For me, I think that's an excellent question, Andrew. But I've got to show my age, because when I was in elementary school and high school in Virginia, right outside Washington, DC, in McLean, Virginia, as Ambassador Brigety said, it was just a rough thing. We were slaves, we were brought over in 1609, and that was life until the Civil War, and then

freedom. Nothing else in between. Not talking very much about it, anyone else. That was the way it was until I went to Howard. I attended Howard University and I was fortunate enough to be there, during a very difficult period, '66 to '70, where we began to ask those questions, who are we and why are we not talking about African Americans or Black Americans at that time more? And to define who we are and what roles that we play in history. I was a history major.

So, everything, all the history was about everyone else but us. Again, Africa was viewed as a place where they were gaining independence, but they weren't very relevant. Well, after we started asking those questions, there was a revision at Howard about inclusion, and redefining who we were by ourselves. So, that's been a process and it's sad to say, that 50 years later or so, we're still talking about these things. But we really need a revision in the books and in education, that makes it more pronounced, and not just about us, African Americans. But about people of color, and other ethnic groups as well.

[00:39:16] KS: I just want to add to that, if that's okay. A couple, not a couple, years ago, I interviewed Elaine Brown who was a former member of the Black Panther Party, and she was talking about the complicated life of Martin Luther King, Jr. She was frustrated because the education system had sterilized him and she said something like, the way that they're white washing Martin Luther King in 20 years, he's going to be a white woman with blond hair and blue eyes. I think that's what they did to somebody like Harriet Tubman. I mean, how many women do you know carry a gun and knew how to use a gun, and wasn't afraid to use a gun? That still is something that might be even considered taboo today, especially a black woman carrying a gun, right?

But I also want to say, some years ago, I went to Vietnam, do this cruise to Vietnam and there were all of these black men that were my father's age and would stop me and tell these stories. Well, I discovered that they were all in the Vietnam War, and they were returning back to Vietnam for the first time since the war. Seeing that, I still get chills thinking about them walking, and just going through this terrain, thinking about their 19, 18-year-old selves, 20-year-old selves, and they were crying. At that point, I thought about, just not only the Vietnam War, but all the wars, and all the stories that are lost and that will never be told. We really need to really reemphasize not only the contributions, but the costs of war, which is an important part of history.

Being in Italy, I want to say this, there's a town, which was highlighted in a Spike Lee movie a couple of years ago that every year celebrates African Americans for their contributions in World War Two. I actually have a coworker here in Florence whose father was one of those men or one of the African American men to contribute in terms of securing Italy. There is just not a history period in the American education system on a general basis. But specifically, to these contributions, because these are conversations about citizenship, in my opinion, ultimately.

[00:41:39] AH: On SpyCast, we had Lauren Wilkinson on who has this great novel called *American Spy*. In that novel, and speaking to Lauren, she talks about in America, there's a focus on her Africanness. But when she goes to Africa, the focus is on her Americanness. So, it just made me think about, you know, the figures we're speaking about today. So, sure they're important in African American History, but as we've discussed this morning, they're important in American history and world history. So, I wonder if you could just unpack. There's a lot to do there, but the Africanness, the Americanness, their role as part of the African diaspora, and their role in world history, not just the history of the African-American community.

So, there's all kinds of directions we can go here and this could easily go on for a long time. But I just wondered if you had any thoughts on?

[00:42:40] RB: Well, Andrew, you're correct. That's a whole another podcast. But I will say just very briefly, one, I think that quote gets it exactly right. I certainly have lived that, where in the United States as an African American, it's almost impossible to escape once African Americanness. But everywhere else I've been in the world, including in Africa, I'm seen as an American first.

Certainly, once people sort of hear you speak and sort of get to know you, and that's especially true amongst other people of African descent. Interestingly, my experience in Africa tells me that for the United States, our searing engagement with the continent is slavery. But for Africans, their searing engagement is colonialism, and which in some ways one can understand because it affected them much more directly. But let me just kind of close rapidly before we do this next podcast again, because you need another whole one to unpack this, as I say. The reason just to address these sorts of figures is because this is American history, is American history. I mean,

and you frankly, cannot fully understand the history of America, without understanding the history of those people who were otherwise dispossessed or treated as second class citizens for the vast majority of our history, and yet still loved Americans served her anyway.

Quite frankly, as a foreign affairs professional, I'm very grateful for what the International Spy Museum is doing to help educate Americans about the role of intelligence. The eyes and ears of our country, which our first line of defense and knowing that African Americans, plays a pivotal role in this critically important function, is something that all Americans need to understand.

[00:44:16] AH: Yeah, and we even have an exhibit on James Lafayette, but that could also be another podcast. So, any thoughts, Kaia, Mel?

[00:44:26] MG: Well, if I couldn't have said it any better than Ambassador Brigety, but I will add sort of a little, short eye opener for me. When I was working in South Africa, I was working with the South African Intel Service and one person that I was working with was an Afrikaner, white Afrikaner who – we are sitting down one day, we got to know each other very well. And he said to me, he was concerned about his kids and he was thinking about sending them to school in the US. He looked at me and he said, “If I send my kids to the US, will they be considered African American?” And my first reaction was, “No.” But then, he laughed. There was that smirk that he had and he was laughing. And then I said, “You know what, you've got a point here, because, you're in Africa and you're African American, but it was more an inside joke than anything.”

But to reiterate what Ambassador Brigety said about it, we African Americans here but in Africa, we're viewed as Americans, and they accept that. But we are working more and more much more closely with each other in trying to resolve world conflicts and what I did by heart well, to see not only in Africa, but the rest of the world, the reaction to the killing of George Floyd.

[00:46:01] KS: I just want to echo everybody's sentiments and just a couple of things. I got stranded in Nigeria when I was 25. I started off as Kaia. At the end, my hair was shaven, I was named **[inaudible 00:46:15]**. I'm telling you, it was an experience. In that period, I learned the double consciousness in a whole other way, what is it to be American, and to be black, which is you know, what this conversation is ending on. But I just want to say, we are a diverse people,

we're heterogeneous, not only all over the world, but in the United States. The three people who are talking right now, we have different perspectives, different lives, different politics. I'm pretty sure of it. But I just want to leave maybe with the ancestor Harriet Tubman. If she were here today. I think she would say thank you for putting me on a \$20 bill to pay black people in this country what they are owed.

[00:46:57] AH: Well said. Well, thanks ever so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

[00:46:59] RB: Thank you. Take care. God bless.

[00:47:01] KS: Thank you.

[00:47:01] MG: Thank you.

[END]