

# Ralph Bunche

the odyssey continues...

# 4

MODULE

## Race...

## An American Dilemma

### ■ Synopsis: Module 4a



34 minutes

“Race...An American Dilemma” is the first of two modules dealing with the intersecting issues of colonialism, human rights and race in the United States and abroad. Module 4a focuses on the study commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation in 1938 to measure the social and economic impact of race in the United States. Since emancipation some 75 years earlier, little had changed socially or economically for the majority of African Americans. The corporation chose Gunnar Myrdal, a prominent Swedish sociologist, to direct the study and proposed that Ralph Bunche work with him on the project. The module connects Ralph Bunche’s work on *An American Dilemma* with his later involvement with the civil rights movement and his work at the U.N. in the areas of decolonization and human rights. The module includes:

- on-camera interviews of individuals who were part of the team Bunche assembled to work on the Carnegie project;
- footage of Medgar Evers advocating a boycott of racially segregated businesses and footage of Bunche speaking at Evers’ funeral;
- Bunche speaking at the March on Washington;
- commentary by scholars about international pressure and competition among the industrialized nations for access to the resources of the newly independent African nations, and the role those forces played in forcing the United States to address the race issue at home;

- Bunche's use of his prestige and the power of the newly independent nations at the U.N. to increase world pressure on the United States to set its house in order;
- passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly.

### ■ **Synopsis: Module 4b**



35 minutes

"Race...An American Dilemma Continues" considers the question of what tactics are most effective in addressing racism. It covers the civil rights struggle through 1969 and includes:

- Bunche's evolving views on the effectiveness of nonviolence in the civil rights struggle;
- Bunche's reaction to the riots in urban areas following the assassinations of Dr. King and Malcolm X;
- a discussion of how Bunche's public image as a moderate and highly successful black man was exploited by the white establishment and other groups, and how the rise of militant black nationalism operated against him and other moderate civil rights leaders;
- Bunche marching with Dr. King in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights march, and addressing the marchers in front of the Alabama State House;
- President Johnson addressing Congress on the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act;
- excerpts from Bunche's last major address to the East-West Conference in Honolulu in 1969 in which he warned of the danger to world peace caused by the ever widening gap between the haves—the largely white minority in the world—and the have-nots—the largely non-white majority.

## ■ Historical Background

The years following World War I witnessed a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in Northern states as well as in the South. As black soldiers returned from the European front, and more and more blacks migrated from the agricultural South to Northern cities in search of jobs, relations between the races became increasingly tense. In the summer of 1919, racial violence broke out in numerous cities across the country. Although President Woodrow Wilson fought (unsuccessfully) for U.S. Congressional support of the League of Nations, he was a segregationist and during his administration, Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, became a thoroughly segregated town.

Ralph Bunche had grown to adulthood during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He had distinguished himself as a scholar and teacher at Howard University. After an extensive study of colonialism, and in response to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, he had written *A World View of Race*, a critique of the colonial powers' use of propaganda to justify their appropriation of land and resources throughout the less developed areas of the world. Awarded a research fellowship, he traveled in Africa and the Far East to study the impact of colonization on the indigenous people and societies from the point of view of the colonized people themselves. He saw parallels between the condition of colonized peoples abroad and that of African Americans in the United States.

**In This Module** (in order of appearance)**TERMS TO KNOW—MODULES 4a & 4b**

Ku Klux Klan (KKK), caste system, untouchable, poll tax, segregation, emancipation/emancipated, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas; haves and have-nots, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Magna Carta, Jim Crow, March on Washington, token, Uncle Tom, black militants, ghetto

**PEOPLE REFERENCED—MODULE 4a**

Gunnar Myrdal, Woodrow Wilson, Harry Truman, Medgar Evers, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, Trygvie Lie, Dag Hammarskjöld, U Thant

**PEOPLE ON SCREEN—MODULE 4a**

Dr. John Hope Franklin, Sir Brian Urquhart, Judge William Bryant, Wilhelmina Rolark, George Stoney, Dr. Jonathan Holloway, Dr. Charles Henry, Dr. Ronald Walters, Robert Edgar, Dr. David Levering Lewis, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Professor Robert Hill, Dr. Edwin Smith, Ernest Gross, Dr. Benjamin Rivlin

**PEOPLE REFERENCED—MODULE 4b**

Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Gandhi, Jackie Robinson, Rachel Robinson, Trygvie Lie, Dag Hammarskjöld, U Thant, Lyndon Johnson, Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell, George Wallace

**PEOPLE ON SCREEN—MODULE 4b**

Dr. John A. Davis, Dr. Charles Henry, Dr. John Hope Franklin, Dr. Benjamin Rivlin, Amiri Baraka, Dr. Ronald Walters, James Farmer, Jane Johnson Taylor, Dr. Benjamin Rivlin, Dr. Herschelle Challenor

**PLACES REFERENCED—MODULES 4a & 4b**

Southern United States, Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Selma (Alabama)

## Relevant Standards

### National Council for the Social Studies Strands

#### Strand IV. Individual Development & Identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *individual development and identity*, so that the learner can: (e) examine the interactions of ethnic, national, or cultural influences in specific situations or events, (g) compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping, conformity, acts of altruism, and other behaviors on individuals and groups.

#### Strand V. Individuals, Groups, & Institutions

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions*, so that the learner can: (b) analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture in both historical and contemporary settings.

#### Strand VI. Power, Authority, & Governance

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance*, so that the learner can: (f) analyze and evaluate conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations.

#### Strand VII. Production, Distribution, & Consumption

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services*, so that the learner can: (j) apply knowledge of production, distribution, and consumption in the analysis of a public issue...and devise an economic plan for accomplishing a socially desirable outcome related to that issue.

#### Strand IX. Global Connections

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *global connections and interdependence*, so that the learner can: (d) analyze the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues such as health, security, resource allocation, economic development, and environmental quality, (f) analyze or formulate policy statements demonstrating an understanding of concerns, standards, issues, and conflicts related to universal human rights.

#### Strand X. Civic Ideas and Practices

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic*, so that the learner can: (e) analyze and evaluate the influence of various forms of citizen action on public policy.

## National Center for History in the Schools Standards

### Standard 2. Historical Comprehension

The student comprehends a variety of historical sources:

Therefore, the student is able to

- F. Appreciate historical perspectives— (a) describing the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts, and the like; (b) considering the historical context in which the event unfolded—the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place; and (c) avoiding “present-mindedness,” judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

### Standard 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore the student is able to

- B. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears;
- D. Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries.

### Standard 4. Historical Research Capabilities

The student conducts historical research: Therefore the student is able to

- F. Support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

### Standard 5. Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student engages in historical issues-analysis and decision-making:

Therefore, the student is able to

- A. Identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation;
- B. Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances and current factors contributing to contemporary problems and alternative courses of action;
- E. Formulate a position or course of action on an issue by identifying the nature of the problem, analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the problem, and choosing a plausible solution from a choice of carefully evaluated options.

## ■ Map Connections

On a map of the United States, locate the states mentioned in the video that were the focus of research for *An American Dilemma* (Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oregon, Indiana, Vermont).

## ■ Before You Watch: Modules 4a and 4b

For suggested previewing strategies and activities, see page 4 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

If this is the first module screened, ask the students: Have you ever heard of Ralph Bunche? What do you know or think you know about Ralph Bunche? What do you predict you might find out about him in the video you are about to watch?

**OPINION** Do you feel that racism affects you or your life? What racial group(s) do you consider yourself to be part of? Which racial group exerts the greatest influence on you?

**RECALL** What did Ralph Bunche observe about the effect of colonialism on colonized peoples? In Bunche's view, what purpose did the colonial system serve?

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT** The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was active not only in the South, but also in Indiana, Oregon, Vermont, and other northern states. Why did the organization appeal to some Americans living in the North? Can its beliefs be compared to those promulgated by the Nazis in Germany? What impact do you think organizations like the Ku Klux Klan had on those who joined? On those whom it demonized?

■ **While You Watch—Module 4a** (with teacher's answer key)

For suggestions on how to use these questions, see pages 4-5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. What are race relations like in Washington, D. C. in the 1920s?

*[Answers may include the following: The city has become fully segregated due in part to the policies of the Wilson administration; Ku Klux Klan parade draws cheering crowds.]*

2. *An American Dilemma* is the first major study of the impact of race on American society. Why do you think Bunche does not claim credit for the contributions he made to the study?

*[Answers may include the following: He may feel that the American public would be more likely to accept the validity of the study's findings if they are attributed to a white person; they would question whether a black scholar could be impartial in dealing with matters of race; Bunche is more interested in results than in receiving credit.]*

3. What kinds of experiences do the researchers have while working on the project? Do they ever feel that they are in any danger?

*[Answers may include the following: One project coordinator recalls getting reports on scraps of paper; another of being warned to get out of town; hearing stories about "one or two" blacks voting; it was dangerous for a white and black person to shake hands; friends were hoping Bunche would come back alive and wondering if he was taking a gun; Myrdal did not understand the etiquette of race relations in the South and created problems for Bunche; when Myrdal asked a white girl whether she had ever thought of marrying a Negro, Bunche and Myrdal found themselves being followed by troopers.]*

4. What conclusions does Bunche come to as a result of the Myrdal study?

*[That American southern blacks are essentially political, economic, and social untouchables. On the other hand, Bunche believes that the American creed will triumph in the end. That it will be very difficult for Americans to continue to practice racial discrimination when it is clearly contrary to their basic belief in justice and democracy.]*

5. Why is *An American Dilemma* perceived to be objective?

*[The author is a Swedish sociologist who presumably has no axe to grind regarding American race relations and would be more likely to look at the problem impartially. Also, the study is based on scientific research and analysis.]*

6. How does Bunche's work on *An American Dilemma* change his belief that economic considerations will overcome racial prejudice?  
*[He begins to believe that race prejudice is powerful enough to prevent black and white workers from uniting to further their common interests.]*
7. What impact does the publication of *An American Dilemma* have on U.S. public policy?  
*[Truman sets up a committee to make recommendations for improvement of race relations; Supreme Court cites it in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision.]*
8. What role does Bunche envision for *An American Dilemma*? Does he feel that it will serve a strictly scientific role or does he expect it will accomplish something more?  
*[He believed that it had the potential to effect social change.]*
9. Who was Medgar Evers?  
*[Answers may include the following: A civil rights leader; an official of the NAACP who was assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi; a martyr; an African American who could not be intimidated.]*
10. What parallel does Ralph Bunche see between the status of colonized peoples and the status of the African American?  
*[He sees both as having been economically exploited and being subjected to vicious psychological propaganda.]*
11. What does Bunche say in his interview and speeches at the March on Washington and at the Selma-Montgomery Voting Rights March?  
*[Answers may include the following: The individual cannot detach himself from the group; until the group as a whole is free, no individual is free; he is happy to participate, feels privileged, highly honored; his identification with efforts for full emancipation of Negroes is automatic because he is Negro but he would feel the same as an American; "what is being done here today is one of the truest and finest expressions of American democracy at work;" the problem of race in the U.S. must be solved completely and without delay.]*
12. What document does Eleanor Roosevelt present to the U.N. General Assembly?  
*[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.]*
13. What role does Bunche feel this document could play in the United States?  
*[Bunche sees it as putting international pressure on all countries who are members of the United Nations to practice the principles laid down in the Declaration, including equal treatment for all citizens regardless of race, sex, or religion; he uses every opportunity to remind Americans of this obligation and how far they were from living up to it.]*

■ **While You Watch—Module 4b** (with teacher’s answer key)

1. What is Bunche’s primary lifelong concern?

*[Closing the gap between the American creed of liberty and justice for all and the practice of racial discrimination.]*

2. Why is Bunche criticized by some U.S. government officials?

*[They feel that it is not appropriate for Bunche, as an international civil servant, to express his views on domestic political issues and that as an American he should not use his position at the U.N. in any way that would embarrass the United States in front of the world.]*

3. Though Bunche admires Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violent resistance, he doubts that nonviolence will be effective in the United States. Who changes his mind?

*[Martin Luther King, Jr.]*

4. According to Amiri Baraka, how did Black Power advocates like Malcolm X feel about the civil rights movement?

*[It had not gone far enough in achieving full liberation for blacks.]*

5. How does Bunche characterize the rioting that takes place in cities across the country in the 1960s?

*[Answers may include the following: He feels it is an inevitable consequence of the conditions in the ghettos; that it is not an organized insurrection, that it serves no rational purpose, but is the result of harsh ghetto life that breeds a peculiar kind of pride, a burning resentment.]*

6. What concern does Bunche have about some government programs for the ghettos?

*[That they will result in perpetuating the ghetto and American-style apartheid instead of achieving true progress for blacks within the American mainstream.]*

7. In the 1960s, how did the public perception of Bunche differ from his work behind the scenes?

*[Answers may include the following: He was perceived by more militant black activists as being too moderate; some saw him as an Uncle Tom; they were not aware of his early civil rights activism and did not understand the impact of his work at the U.N. in advancing the freedom of people around the world as well as at home.]*

8. How does Bunche’s cousin, Jane Johnson Taylor, characterize Bunche?

*[As an internationalist; a man who belonged to the world as well as to his race.]*

9. How does the emergence of newly independent nations in Africa and elsewhere around the world affect United States civil rights policy?

*[The United States policy of treating black Americans as second-class citizens puts it at a disadvantage in the competition among industrialized nations for access to the material resources of the new nations. Global economic forces put pressure on the U.S. to change its racial policy.]*

10. According to John Hope Franklin, how is Bunche unique?

*[He could move from the local to the national to the international scene, take the power and prestige he accumulated there and work back to address local problems.]*

11. How does Bunche in his last speeches and interviews return to the ideas he had as a younger man?

*[Bunche had discounted the significance of race as a factor in social conflict, but he now feels that race and color are important psychological factors that will have to be reckoned with if there is to be lasting peace at home and around the world.]*

12. What warning does Bunche give about the future peace of the world?

*[That the world cannot remain at peace if wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a minority of largely white nations while the vast majority of humanity, largely people of color, live in extreme poverty.]*

## ■ After You Watch

### Post-Viewing Discussion Questions—Modules 4a and 4b

For suggestions on how to structure post-viewing discussions or activities, see page 5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. In speaking about African Americans who live in one of the areas in Alabama that he visits, George Stoney says there was a “rumor that one or two of them were voting.” What does that tell us about voting rights in the South for blacks during the 1930s? Are there any infringements on the right of African Americans to vote in the United States today? Cite evidence for your response.
2. Ralph Bunche spoke of the harshness of ghetto life, and the burning resentment it fostered, but didn’t see the riots in the ghettos as political in nature. Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Why or why not?
3. As Black Power gained ground and the ghettos exploded in the 1960s, Ralph Bunche and other insiders were looked at with suspicion or were considered to be no longer effectual. What do you think is the most productive way to promote social change—working from inside the establishment or organization or exerting pressure from the outside? Explain your response.

4. Dr. Bunche is characterized as unique in that he was willing to bring the power and prestige of his international accomplishments back to influence local and national issues. Can you think of any other world leaders (from the U.S. or from other countries) who have done the same? Are there national leaders who have come back to influence local conditions? If you were to become internationally known and powerful someday, how might you bring your prestige and power to bear on the issues of today in your local community?

### ■ Digging Deeper—Activities and Research Projects

1. Remind the students that these modules begin with references to the racial policies and attitudes of President Woodrow Wilson, and that, toward the end, Module 4b includes footage of President Lyndon Johnson speaking about civil rights. Ask them to research specific elements of the racial policies of each president—legislation each proposed and supported or rejected, operational practices and policies in the White House under each, and public statements about civil rights issues made by each. Have students prepare a chart, Venn diagram, poster, or other form of visual display that summarizes key features of each presidential administration, and compares and contrasts the two men. Students should be prepared to speak or write about the events at home and in the world at large that influenced the two men and might account for the differences between Wilson’s and Johnson’s policies.
2. Have students read excerpts from *An American Dilemma*. Ask them to conduct interviews with friends, family members, and community members about their attitudes toward race that parallel the kinds of questions researchers asked in their field studies for *An American Dilemma*. Have them share results of the interviews and discuss to what extent the attitudes expressed to the students today parallel or differ from those in Myrdal’s 1938 study.
3. Ask students to research the civil rights activists and African American leaders in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, and the conflicts between gradualists and insiders, such as Bunche and more militant leaders, such as Amiri Baraka. Some figures for possible research are Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, A. Philip Randolph, Roger Wilkins, Bayard Rustin, Angela Davis, Fred Hampton, Whitney Young, Julian Bond, Robert Moses, and Amiri Baraka. Alternatively, they might focus on various civil rights organizations and their different points of view: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Urban League; Black Panthers; Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Have them create a poster display with images

of the leaders or groups and representative quotes from each illustrating the range of points of view represented. (*Note:* This project is also suggested for Modules 10A and 10B.)

4. Have students create a timeline of the movement for African independence and Africanization on that continent and the civil rights movement in the United States. Have them identify key events for each. Ask them to find out if there were any direct connections between leaders or events in Africa and leaders or events in the United States. (One Congo-related event to include might be the Ali-Frazier prizefight in Zaire.) (*Note:* This project is also suggested for Modules 10A and 10B.)
5. Divide students into interest groups and have them research the question of whether the United States should pay reparations to African Americans. Ask one group to research the question from the point of view of descendants of enslaved people who helped build the nation's capital. Ask another group to research from the point of view of descendants of former slaveholding families. Ask a third to research from the point of view of descendants of immigrants who came to the United States more recently. Have a fourth group research from the point of view of Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II and were awarded reparations from the government. Add other groups with points of view that you feel would be useful and informative to a full discussion of the issue. Convene a mock town meeting in which each group presents its basic position. Moderate a discussion in which groups and individuals question one another, present additional information, and try to persuade the others of their point of view. Ask students to summarize the results in the form of resolutions or recommendations.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **While You Watch “Race...An American Dilemma”**

1. What are race relations like in Washington, D. C. in the 1920s?
2. *An American Dilemma* is the first major study of the impact of race on American society. Why do you think Bunche does not claim credit for the contributions he made to the study?
3. What kinds of experiences do the researchers have while working on the project? Do they ever feel that they are in any danger?
4. What conclusions does Bunche come to as a result of the Myrdal study?









