

Ralph Bunche

the odyssey continues...

12

M O D U L E

The Final Years

■ Synopsis



40 minutes

“The Final Years” focuses on the last years of Dr. Bunche’s life. This module includes:

- his sense of personal mission that kept him at the U.N. in spite of serious health issues;
- the tragedy of his daughter Jane’s suicide;
- his anguish over the Vietnam war;
- his reflections on the urban riots of the 1960s;
- his frustration at not being able to be fully involved in the civil rights movement at home;
- his last illness and death in 1971;
- an assessment of his legacy and achievements.

■ Historical Background

From its inception in the mid-1940s through the mid-1960s, the United Nations played a key role in preventing the Cold War from erupting into a third world war. Ralph Bunche was at the center of that effort, brokering armistice agreements in the Middle East, shepherding independence movements in Africa, overseeing the creation and deployment of U.N. peacekeeping forces and designing the policies and procedures for peacekeeping operations that would last to this day.

In 1958, Dr. Bunche began intensive treatment for diabetes, one of a number of health problems that plagued him throughout his later years. In spite of ill health, he kept up a grueling schedule, often working around the clock in an attempt to mediate international crises and stave off armed conflict. His behind-the-scenes efforts were not always appreciated by progressives and radicals who felt he was too much of a gradualist, but many who were impatient with his approach at the time eventually came to appreciate his ability to find a solution to seemingly intractable problems. He was able to see beyond an immediate problem to the future and envisioned the United Nations as an institution that would not only provide an immediate alternative to war but would lead the way to a more equitable and just world in the future. He believed in the possibility of change.

In This Module (in order of appearance)

TERMS TO KNOW

enigmatic, paradoxical, racism,
U.N. Special Political Committee,
dialysis

PEOPLE REFERENCED

Martin Luther King, Jr.,
Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk,
U Thant, Ruth Bunche,
Jane Bunche, Ralph Bunche, Jr.,
Golda Meir, Roy Wilkins,
Leontyne Price

PLACES REFERENCED

New York City, Vietnam

PEOPLE ON THE SCREEN

Dr. David Levering Lewis, Sir Brian
Urquhart, Jane Johnson Taylor,
Joan Bunche, Nina Pierce, Ralph
Bunche, Jr., William Mashler, F. T. Liu,
Dr. Herschelle Challenor, Dr. John
Hope Franklin, Dr. Vincent Browne,
Dr. Benjamin Rivlin

■ 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: (c) describe the ways family, religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, and other group and cultural influences contribute to the development of a sense of self; (f) analyze the role of perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs in the development of personal identity.

National Center for History in the Schools Standards

Standard 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore the student is able to

- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation including (a) the importance of the individual in history; (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational.

■ Map Connections

On a map of the world, locate the “hot spots” where Ralph Bunche was called upon to help resolve a crisis in his last years — Cyprus, Iran, Bahrain; locate Vietnam (where Bunche’s son served in the armed forces).

■ Before You Watch

For suggested preview 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 What does it mean to leave a legacy? What are some things you would like to leave as a legacy?

RECALL What do you think is Bunche’s greatest legacy?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT The 1960s were a time of great social and political change in the United States and throughout the world. What are some of the changes that were taking place at that time?

■ **While You Watch** (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 tactical mistake does Bunche think Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is making? Why does he think it is a mistake?

[Answers may include: Linking the civil rights movement with the peace movement; Bunche felt it would divide and weaken the civil rights movement, he felt King should stick to civil rights which was his area of expertise, not get involved with a highly controversial foreign policy issue.]

2. What are Bunche's personal feelings about the Vietnam war?

[He was frustrated that the U.N. had not been able to play a role in halting the war. He was extremely concerned about his son who was on active duty in Vietnam.]

3. What hope does Bunche express about the national outpouring of grief and mourning over the assassination of Dr. King?

[That if the sentiment behind the mourning could be converted to action, the racial problems in this country could be solved.]

4. What event devastates Bunche and his wife Ruth?

[The mysterious death of their daughter, who falls from the roof of her apartment building.]

5. Why doesn't Bunche retire from the U.N. when he says he will?

[Answers may include: U Thant begs him to stay on; on a profound psychological level, he may need to stay involved after his daughter's death; he feels compelled to do all he can do to ensure that the U.N. continues along the path that he had envisioned for it; he has a calling to his work.]

6. How does Bunche react to his son being called up to serve in Vietnam?

[He thinks the war is senseless, useless; he's enraged, more so upon realizing that if he gives voice to his feelings, it may place his son in even greater danger.]

7. Does Bunche finally retire from the U.N. when he loses his eyesight and is hospitalized for his diabetes?

[Not immediately; he works from his hospital bed as soon as he is able to do so; he eventually retires because of concerns that his family would lose his pension.]

8. What are some of the things he is working on as he nears death?

[Answers may include: U.N. peacekeeping missions; U.N. Special Political Committee; the Israeli-Palestinian problem; documentation of the civil rights movement.]

9. Who is the first mourner to appear at the funeral home? Why is this significant?

[Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel. It is significant because it shows the measure of her respect for Bunche in spite of the fact that they did not always agree or have an easy relationship.]

10. What are some of Bunche's most lasting legacies?

[Answers may include: The invention of U.N. Peacekeeping; his contribution to, and documentation of, the civil rights movement; helping avert a third world war over the Congo and the Suez Canal; the peaceful decolonization of many colonies and all the trust territories in Africa and around the world; helping draft Chapters XI and XII of the United Nations Charter; his work in setting up the International Atomic Energy Agency; laying the foundations for a strong and effective United Nations; his work in assuring passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.]

■ After You Watch

Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

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

1. Dr. Bunche said, "I have a deep seated bias against hate and intolerance... against racial and religious bigotry ... against war, a bias for peace ... which leads me to believe in the essential goodness of my fellow man, which leads me to believe that no problem of human relations is ever insoluble." What evidence can you cite to support Dr. Bunche's optimistic view of human potential? What are some examples in history where humans have displayed their "essential goodness"?
2. Why did people the world over mourn Dr. Bunche's death?
3. How does Dr. Bunche's interest in the Civil Rights Documentation Project reflect his training in anthropology as a field researcher?
4. Do you think Bunche's goal of achieving freedom and equality for people of color, both in the United States and in former colonial countries, has been achieved? Why or why not?

■ Digging Deeper—Activities and Research Projects

1. Ask students to think about Dr. Bunche’s entire life, his character, his accomplishments. Have them work in teams to write and illustrate books for younger students that communicate what they think are the most important things everyone should know about Dr. Bunche. Arrange for them to visit elementary school classrooms to read their books.
2. Have students design memorial cubes to Dr. Bunche: create $10 \times 10 \times 10$ cardboard cubes; on each of the six sides, students place six different elements they want to communicate about Bunche. For example, a side might show a picture of Dr. Bunche, a quotation from him or about him, a list of accomplishments, something about his childhood, something about his family, something about his winning the Nobel Peace Prize, negotiating the armistice in Palestine—whatever each student feels are six important things to communicate. Build a “Dr. Bunche” wall or mobile from all the cubes for display in the school library or reception area where others can view and read them.
3. Begin or continue a Model U.N. project at your school. You can find information at:

<http://www.nmun.org/> (colleges)

<http://www.nhsmun.org/> (high schools)

4. Have students research resources documenting the civil rights movement and share what they learn in class discussion, visual display, or in recorded or video-taped format. Online primary sources (video and audio clips) can be found at <http://www.c-span.org/classroom/bhm2004.asp>. Howard University archives include the oral history interviews that were part of the Civil Rights Documentation Project organized by Dr. Ralph Bunche. These interviews are now collectively referred to as Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection and are part of the Howard University Voting Rights Act Oral History and Documentation Project, which can be found at <http://www.huarchivesnet.howard.edu/9911huarnet/madison1.htm>. A list of all the oral history interviews is at <http://www.founders.howard.edu/moorland-springarn/ohindex.htm>. Another Civil Rights Documentation Project focusing on Mississippi is online at <http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/history.shtml>. The American Library Association page of links to resources on the civil rights movement is located at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/backissues2004/september04/civilrights.htm>

Name: _____ Date: _____

9. Who is the first mourner to appear at the funeral home? Why is this significant?

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