Introduction

The hands on the clock were approaching midnight on 15 August 1947 as thousands of South Asians surged, chanting "Jai Hind"—roughly, "Long Live India." The man who was to become the first prime minister of a nation that is slated to become the planet's largest in the twenty-first century, Jawaharlal Nehru, was uttering the words that would resonate through the ages, referring to his nation's "tryst with destiny." Amid a riot of tints and shades, the nation's new tricolor flag was unfurled on the ramparts of the magnificent Red Fort in New Delhi.[1]

Yet amid the huddled masses, all were not of Indian origin. One in particular was an African American, William Nelson, born in Paris—Kentucky, that is—in 1895, a graduate of the famed, historically Black Howard University. He had been posted in South Asia by the American Friends Services Committee, affiliated with the Quakers, a Pennsylvania-based religious group.[2] His presence was not entirely accidental: For a long time, a lengthy umbilical cord had linked the largest "minority" in what was to become the world's most powerful nation and the largest colony of the once potent British Empire. It was not deemed hyperbolic when, after this epochal independence day, W. E. B. Du Bois, who once asserted that the "greatest color problem in the world is that of India"[3]—not Black America—avowed that 15 August was "the greatest historical date of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[4]

Nor was it a surprise when, a few years after his appearance in Delhi, Nelson heard from a young minister named Martin Luther King Jr., who

Figure I.1 W. E. B. Du Bois, founder of the NAACP, also saw African Americans as part of a global "colored" majority that decidedly included India. (*Courtesy Library of Congress; photographer unknown.*)

informed his fellow theologian that "in a real sense my visit to India was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life." Why? "I do feel," he stressed, "I gained many meaningful insights that will deepen my understanding of nonviolence and also my commitment to it." King asked Nelson whether he had accumulated during his visit "any books or pamphlets on untouchability [*sic*]," since King was "in the process of making a study" of the fraught topic of caste, which had obvious implication for the fate of African Americans.[5] Indeed, the future Nobel laureate conceded in 1959, "We found the problem of the untouchables in India to be similar to the race problem in America," although India was "integrating its untouchables faster than the United States is integrating its Negro minority." King also exemplified another trend that was to characterize relations between the two nations—using India as leverage for domestic change in the United States, and vice versa—as he warned, "Many Indians are concerned that unless America solves its race problem *soon*, America will lose prestige greatly in the eyes of the world."[6]

This infatuation with India was nothing new for King. As a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, he had heard Howard University's President

Mordecai Johnson, just back from a trip to India, describe how the nonviolent *Satyagraha* of Mohandas K. Gandhi had brought about revolutionary changes in India society. King was so moved that, in the fall of 1950, he read extensively about Gandhi's life and work.[7] Then he took what he learned and applied it to Jim Crow in the United States.

The route of inspiration was not a one-way street leading from Black America to India. When Harold Leventhal, a member of the U.S. Army Signal Corps stationed in India (who later had a stellar career as a manager and promoter for Harry Belafonte, Odetta, and Bob Dylan), gained a coveted audience with Gandhi as World War II wound down, the saintly figure greeted him with a pressing query. "The first thing he wanted to know," recalled Leventhal years later, "was how Paul Robeson was."[8]

That King would seek to conjoin the destinies of Black America and India—or that Gandhi would be hungering for information about the tallest tree in Black America's forest—was not unusual. From the beginnings of the African's sojourn in North America, she had been linked to events in what was then British India.

This is a book that seeks to explore these conjoined destinies—though, admittedly, the major focus is on North America and the impact of ties between Black America and India there. Although it takes a glancing look at this relationship before the unfolding of the twentieth century, the primary emphasis is on the decades leading up to Indian independence in 1947. I suggest that African Americans and India shared a common experience of opposition to racism and imperialism during this period—albeit at varying tempos—that tended to bind them. I further suggest that this was part and parcel of a larger antiracist and anti-imperialist struggle that encompassed millions globally and that the 1945 defeat of Japan, a nation that had been a lodestar for Black America and India, along with the Cold War, which ensnared the Soviet Union (yet another nation that had been perceived as friendly to intellectuals in Harlem and Delhi), both set the stage for the retreat of Jim Crow and the erosion of colonialism.

This epochal process was of major strategic import for Black America. A minority in the United States that historically had been an orphan of sorts, virtually denuded of rights, Negroes had been compelled to seek succor and allies globally. As Du Bois—and, to a degree, Marcus Garvey—put it, there was a compelling need to be deemed part of a global majority of the "colored" fighting a common foe. However, after the forced retreat from juridical Jim Crow and the reluctant granting of formal citizenship rights to African Americans, this battered minority also felt the need to distance itself from previous allies—particularly an independent India that pioneered in forming the Non-Aligned Movement, which was perceived widely in Washington

as all too close to Moscow. The question insufficiently contemplated, then as now, is what would be the fate of African Americans once the international equation (not least, the Cold War) that compelled these halting steps toward racial equality began to change?

Ironically, the heightened influence of Delhi that accompanied Indian independence and the mass diffusion shortly thereafter of Gandhi's ideals in a Black America about to be liberated from the worst excesses of Jim Crow did not lead to an expansion of this once important relationship. Today, the once bountiful bilateral tie has withered significantly.

Nevertheless, too much can be made of this latter point, since the crusading of a newly independent India on behalf of the plight of colonized Africa—a plight that was inextricably tied to the ravages of a slave trade that led to the creation of Black America—redounded to the benefit of African Americans, not least since independent African states quickly began to speak out against Jim Crow.[9] It was more than a half-century ago at a profoundly important meeting in Bandung, Indonesia, of nations that came to be called the "Third World"—mostly from Africa and Asia—that the cosmopolitan Nehru quite movingly spoke of the plight of Africa and, more particularly, of those who came to be known as African American. "There is nothing more terrible," he said with passion, "there is nothing more horrible than the infinite tragedy of Africa in the past few hundred years. . . . When I think of it, everything else pales into insignificance; that infinite tragedy of Africa ever since the days when millions of [Africans] were carried away in galleys as slaves to America and elsewhere, the way they were treated, the way they were taken away, 50 percent dying in the galleys. We have to bear that burden, all of us. We did not do it ourselves, but the world has to bear it . . . this Infinite Tragedy."[10]

These heartfelt words were also a reflection of the fact that, as the pivotal twentieth century unfolded, an Asian diaspora in North America increased substantially, which made leaders such as Nehru more aware of developments there. Thus, his words were expanded subsequently by Gary Okihiro: "We are a kindred people, African and Asian-American. . . . We share a history of migration, interaction and cultural sharing and commerce and trade. We share a history of European colonization, decolonization, and independence under neocolonization and dependency. We share a history of oppression in the United States, successively serving as slave and cheap labor, as peoples excluded and absorbed, as victims of mob rule and Jim Crow."[11] This shared history is particularly prominent in the richly braided relations that conjoin Black America and India.

The persistence of this conjoined experience became ever clearer when Jim Crow came under sharper assault—as India emerged as an independent nation. In 1955, Delhi's ambassador in Washington had an experience in that

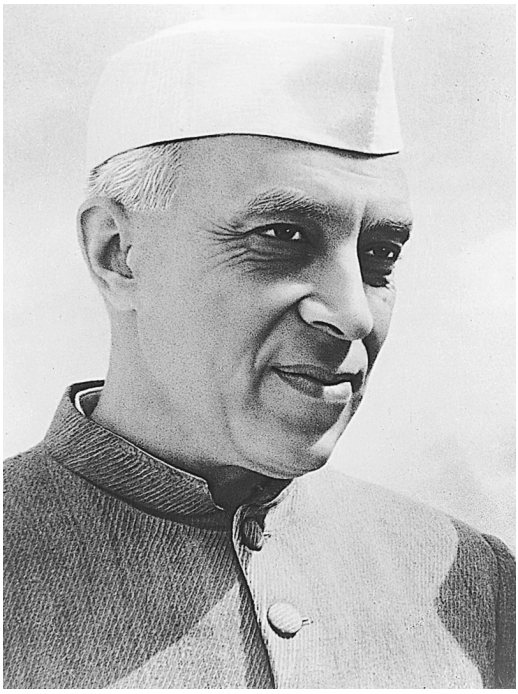

Figure I.2 Jawaharlal Nehru, first prime minister of independent India, spoke eloquently of the plight endured by Africans and African Americans. (*Courtesy Library of Congress; photographer unknown.*)

citadel of Jim Crow—Houston, Texas—that sheds light on why his superior, Nehru, may have been so sensitive to the plight of Africans. For it was then that the management of a local restaurant placed the distinguished, but dark-skinned, ambassador in the less than commodious Jim Crow section for Negroes.[12] Over the decades, such commonalities bound ever tighter Black America and India.

When President Harry S. Truman welcomed Nehru to the United States in October 1949, he proclaimed, "Destiny willed it that our country should have been discovered in the search for a new route to yours." This signified how the settling and exploitation of North America was tied to India.[13] Early on, Africans in North America and India found themselves part of a similar economic circuit. As one study put it, "The textile industry of [the] whole of Western Europe was transformed during the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth by two powerful influences . . . the African Slave Trade [and] the introduction into Europe of new stuffs, the cottons and muslins of India."[14] British traders had been attracted to the southeastern coast of India during the seventeenth century precisely because of the opportunity to

obtain cotton textiles. These textiles initially were shipped largely to the Indonesian archipelago, where the East India Company used them to purchase pepper and spices that later were exported to London for resale in Europe, North America, or the African coast—the latter being a major site for the traffic in human beings. The point is that India and what was to become Black America were linked organically, just as London's colonies in South Asia and North America were connected.[15] Early on, comparisons between British North America and British India were rife, with some asserting that the latter was "more valuable."[16]

This Asian colony once exported calico to Great Britain, but after the advent of the cotton gin in the 1790s, the British began exporting cotton goods to India, thus destroying its counterpart in South Asia and becoming more dependent on African slave labor in the U.S. South. This cotton connection also indicated that Black America and India were exceedingly potent ends of an empire headquartered in London, part of a triangle trade of the new type. Thus, as one analyst put it, "India had been surpassed first by Britain as an exporter of calico, probably in the 1790s, and then by the U.S.A. as a producer of raw cotton in 1821: in the 1820s she became a net importer of cotton goods instead of a net exporter."[17] Actually, this changed relationship of London to India may have been affected by the loss of Britain's valuable colony in North America, for that loss increased the importance to the empire of South Asia.

The American Revolution underscored that African slavery was as important to the fortunes of the United States as India was to that of the British Empire. Thus, the concerted attempt in the run-up to Indian independence in 1947 to join the fate of India with that of the United States generally was not coincidental, for more reasons than one. As the pro–India independence intellectual J. T. Sunderland once put it, "England pays more heed to the public sentiment of America than to that of any other country, if not of all other countries combined. . . . [W]e know that it was largely the strong public sentiment of America in favor of home rule for Ireland that caused England to give Ireland freedom."[18] London's concern was justifiable. Near the same time that Sunderland penned these weighty words, the influential New York Times Book Review posted the telling question, "Why is there such an eager interest in all that concerns India?"[19]

Still, the engagement of the young republic with India served to reinforce calcified biases among Euro-Americans toward those with dark skin—yet another reason that this global relationship had such weight and longevity. North American merchants in India conducted most of their business in British-built ports, where, it was reported, "Race was an organizing principle. At Madras and Calcutta, there were forts where the Europeans lived and

worked and a native [*sic*] section"—often shabby and dilapidated—"often known simply as 'black town,'". This must have been reassuring to Americans who were rapidly becoming accustomed to segregation. At Madras, one Yankee noted, no "'blacks' were permitted inside the fort," Such practices convinced "most Americans [that the] racial character of Indians [was] a factor in their subjugation by the British." Indeed, notes Susan Bean, "Remarks on the racial order of British India recur often in American journals throughout the age of sail."[20]

Opposition by African Americans to British colonialism in India was buoyed by the fact that there was a similar opposition among a sector of Euro-Americans, who continued to see London as an enemy in the wake of the 1776 Revolution and the War of 1812. Given such an atmosphere, it was easier for U.S. Negroes to express antipathy, which was no small thing, given that London often was seen in the immediate pre–1865 era as a firm opponent of slavery and the slave trade and thus in some senses preferable to Washington. Suggestive of the harshness of Euro-American opinion was Josiah Harlan, a staunch antebellum opponent of London whose stance was buttressed by his long and celebrated sojourn in South Asia, a journey that was celebrated in the film *The Man Who Would Be King*. In his influential writings, Harlan portrayed the British Empire as a "vast corrupt behemoth that had brought nothing but misery to the oppressed and plundered millions." London, he said, "has riveted the shackles of slavery upon the whole agricultural population of British India [and, in the process] inflicted famines, discontent, disaffection, rebellion, financial distress, fall of prices, reduced revenues, crime abounding . . . might against rights, cultivation declining, total absence of internal improvements, no public works, no roads, no canals, no dissemination of knowledge or improvements in education." These, he thundered, were "the consequences of a military despotism, . . . a government imposed upon millions and sustained by the sword, without a philanthropic motive, originating in cupidity, nourished and developed by tyrannous force, sealed in blood." And these were some of his milder reproaches of the empire, whose demolition he avidly advocated.[21] Yet despite Harlan's unmasked fury, the fact was that an unceasing river of cotton bound the empire, British India, the United States, and Black America.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the cotton industry was among the world's largest, drawing on the labor of perhaps twenty million workers. Prior to 1861, most of the world supply of raw cotton had been produced by enslaved Africans on plantations in the U.S. South and was spun into thread and woven into cloth by textile workers in Lancashire. Then the U.S. Civil War intervened, and as if on a seesaw, India again rose in importance. India had

contributed only 16 percent of Britain's supply of raw cotton in 1860 and 1.1 percent of France's in 1857. By 1862, it contributed 75 percent to Britain and as much as 70 percent to France. As one journal put it, "The emancipation of the enslaved races and the regeneration of the people of the East [are] intimately connected." The Bombay Chamber of Commerce, which was in a position to know, opined at the Civil War's end that that the "emancipation of American slaves [was] a matter of paramount importance for the future of India's cotton industry, signifying a permanent change in the agricultural structure and trade of India."[22]

Likewise, Dwijendra Tripathi is not far wrong in observing that, by 1860, "cotton had become the nerve centre of England's industrial and economic life, [whereas] the role of supplies from substitute sources in frustrating the grandiose scheme of Southern policymakers has received insufficient attention." In other words, the ability of Britain to secure supplies of cotton in India—as opposed to the slave South—was a signal factor in buoying the effort by the progressive sector of the British working class to forestall intervention by London on behalf of the so-called Confederate States of America, whose success would have realized a central dream of the English elite: splitting and thereby weakening its emerging rival in North America.

India was pivotal in the foiling of the plot to divide the United States. This colony, says Tripathi, was "the most important feeder of the British manufactories during the war." India, he adds portentously, "contributed to shattering the Confederate design,"[23] which means that African Americans are forever grateful. In fact, as former U.S. Secretary of State William Seward asserted during the Civil War, "Fortunes were made by speculation in cotton almost as rapidly in Bombay as they were lost in New Orleans," suggesting how India was levitated as the slave South was submerged.[24]

The relationship between Black America and India was facilitated by their ties of singular intimacy. In 1762, a British expedition was sent from Madras to seize the rich Spanish settlement in Manila. The ships were staffed by a wildly heterogeneous body of workers, including African slave soldiers recruited by the East India Company (some of whom may have spent time in North America) and an even larger number of South Asians. In fact, not only Africans and Indians but Native Americans as well had been drawn into the orbit of the empire to serve its far-flung ambitions.[25]

South Asians began to arrive in the United States in larger numbers in 1851. For example, half a dozen Asian Indians marched in the East India Marine Society contingent for the Fourth of July parade in Salem, Massachusetts; they were said by New England chroniclers to have married Negro women and become part of the Black population of the city.[26] The presence of a large dark-skinned population in the person of African Americans meant

that South Asians seeking refuge could find a home of sorts in Black America. However, the virtual equation of dark skin with bondage harbored dire consequences for South Asians. Some early migrants from India to North America in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, says Gordon Chang, "had been indentured, and in several cases others, because of their dark complexions had been forced into chattel slavery along with Africans."[27]

Granville T. Woods, for example, is a name routinely touted during Black History Month. Woods is highly regarded as a "Black" inventor; actually, he was born in 1856 in Australia, the place of birth of both of his parents, though his "mother's father was a Malay Indian and his other grandparents were by birth full-blooded . . . Australian aborigines, born in the wilds back of Melbourne." Although he was probably a "quarter black [*sic*]," says his biographer Rayvon Fouché, the "majority of both black and white societies viewed him as a Negro." Though his biographer asserts boldly, "I contend he was not an American Negro," today in the United States Woods is regarded as such, though it might be similarly plausible to regard him as "Indian."[28] Something similar might be said about the well-regarded Tuskegee Airman Virgil Richardson. He was born in Arkansas in 1916, but his mother's family traced its roots back to India. His mother's grandfather Joe Green Cotler had been brought to North America from Bombay by his mother, an indentured servant.[29] Paul William Quinn, a fiercely antiracist "Black" cleric in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania, was likewise a migrant from southern India.[30]

Richardson's diverse gene pool, which also included a modicum of African ancestry, should not be deemed shocking. Because of the profusion of Negro sailors in the United States,[31] African Americans had been sailing to South Asia for some years. Missionaries, too, flocked to the region, including Amanda Berry Smith of the African Methodist Episcopal faith, who was born to slaves in Maryland in 1837 but by 1881 was spreading the word of God in Burma. There Smith "held a meeting in the Methodist Church for colored men especially, [and a] nice company of these men gathered; some were from the West Indies, some from the West Coast of Africa, and some from Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. One man from the West Indies, had been in Burma for twenty years." There were "about twenty of these men in all," Smith reported, and yes, she confirmed, "These were colored men; my own people." Further, she noted, "It seemed that these men were better off than [many of their compatriots in North America]. . . . [S]ome of them were engineers on railways, some conductors, some in government service, and they all had good positions, and made money. Some of them had nice families of children."[32] There seemed to be a special bond between African Americans and South Asians, or so thought former U.S. Secretary of State

William Seward. While traveling in Madras, he remarked that he heard a "Tamil lyric [that] was prettily sung by one class. Its plaintive strain recalled our Negro melodies."[33]

Because of the evidently intimate relationship between South Asians and African Americans, London felt compelled to monitor the latter, which was an important component of its former colony and now growing rival, the United States. When President Theodore Roosevelt deigned to have dinner at the White House with Booker T. Washington, London's influential *Spectator* seemed more concerned than some journals behind the "Cotton Curtain" in the U.S. South. Although the *Spectator* called the invitation a "noble and courageous act," it also sincerely wished that Roosevelt "had not invited Mr. Washington because . . . [a] recognition of the non-existent equality of the races is not the best way to kill the white prejudice against the black." Instead, the journal advocated as the "best solution to the problem" that the "whites and [the] blacks . . . avowedly form themselves into two castes like the Hindoos and Mussulmans of India, with no intercourse except in the common business of life."[34]

This apartheid-like sentiment reached an appreciative audience in a United States wracked with racist separatism. In such a manner, despite their frequent differences, London and Washington often reinforced each other. Still, peculiar strains characterized the relationship. In 1909, for instance, Roosevelt gave a major pro-empire peroration. Strikingly, he delivered the speech at an important African American church in Washington, D.C.,[35] reflective of the fact that those few blacks who could vote routinely cast their ballots for his party, the Republicans. Ironically, in the same year, African Americans, spearheaded by W. E. B. Du Bois, formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to push for voting rights that could lead them to vote for pro-empire politicians and to push for civil rights that could lead them to assemble and petition on behalf of the dissolution of that same empire via independence for its chief asset: India.

To make sure that the colonized were quarantined from the putatively seditious messages carried by African Americans, London made it difficult for African Americans to visit India. Du Bois, an inveterate traveler, discovered this to his dismay when he sought to travel to the subcontinent in the 1930s. He found that it was next to impossible to obtain a visa, and once he did, he had to "pledge [to] limit his words and activities." Moreover, he lamented, "The accommodations offered by steamships often involve racial discrimination, while the cost of such trips is of course prohibitive to the mass of Indians and Negroes."[36]

Such barriers were strewn in the path of potential Black visitors to South Asia not least because there were so many parallels between the African

Americans and Indians. There was something to the point of making a linkage between the "Mussulmans," or Muslims, of India, who made up about 12 percent of that colony's population, and the situation facing the roughly 12 percent of the United States that was African American. This congruence sheds light on the profound influence that South Asian Muslims have had on the religious experience of Black America. Ghulam Ahmad of the Punjab was the leader of the Ahmadiyya movement that extended its tentacles into North America about the time of Booker T. Washington's infamous dinner. "While espousing heterogeneity," writes Michael Gomez, the movement "was in reality an Indian-led movement with a mostly African-American constituency." Not only were the "Ahmadis in North America . . . greatly dependent on the fortunes of Pan-Africanism and nationalism among the African-derived population," according to Gomez, but, in fact, the group now known as the Nation of Islam was influenced profoundly by Ahmadiyya and, it has been speculated, the "foreparents [of] Fard Muhammad [a patron saint of the sect] were from Pakistan, with possible connections to the Ahmadiya movement." A precursor of the Nation of Islam, which came into existence approximately seventy-five years ago, was the Society for the Development of Our Own, which had "10,000 [members in] fourteen chapters around the country." Those members included "individuals from India" along with "those of African descent."[37] (Of course, Ahmadiyya was not singular in its influence on Black American religious thinking. Fard, who is sometimes referred to as "Fard Muhammad," also reputedly worked with the ecumenical Theosophist Society in California, an entity that was deeply influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, and South Asia more generally.[38])

According to its official journal, "The Ahmadiya Movement in Islam was founded in 1890 by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, Punjab, India."[39] It dispatched missionaries not only to Black America but also to Africa, Australia, China, and Singapore. Like the Nation of Islam, it was quite successful in finding souls to save among those who were incarcerated.[40] Also like the Nation of Islam, it combined a scorching critique of Christianity with a searing analysis of the plight of Black America. In 1922, for example, Ahmadiyya's journal ran a lacerating story about the "thirty lynchings of Negroes by white Christians" that had been recorded in the first half of that year. "[S]ome [were] burnt at the stake, others [were] put to death. These are the wonderful acts of the meek lambs of Jesus," the journal added with biting sarcasm. "After all a tree is known by its fruits."[41] And in a final similarity to the Nation of Islam, Ahmadiyya was not necessarily embraced by other devotees of Islam. Although they did "claim to be the true followers of Islam" in their homeland (today's Pakistan), writes Surendra Nath Kaushik, they were "denigrated as apostates by fundamentalist forces,

[for] according to the critics, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad . . . by assuming the title of 'prophet' had flagrantly violated the principle of the Finality of Prophethood." The Nation of Islam was likewise accused of veering from orthodox and basic Islam.[42]

As emigration from South Asia to the U.S. West Coast increased in the early twentieth century, it was not difficult for developing anti–Asian biases to merge with pre-existing anti–African ones, giving Negroes and Indians a further reason to bond. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Jim Crow lubricated the path for bias against Asian migrants. At a meeting in San Francisco in late 1907, the Asiatic Exclusion League announced that "95 per cent of California's citizens are unanimous in their petitions and prayers for the rigid exclusion of all Orientals . . . that the Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay and Ethiopian can never dwell together in peace under the same fig tree." This was no idle threat: The league claimed "225 affiliated organizations," which did not include "Branch Leagues in Victoria, Port Townsend, Seattle, Bellingham, Nanaimo, Spokane, Everett, Tacoma, Portland, Anaconda and Denver."[43] To be sure, opposition to Asian immigration was not unknown in Black America. The fact remained, however, that white supremacy targeted these immigrants and Black America simultaneously, and more often than not, this drove the two into each other's arms—at times, quite literally.

As racist bias was rising, a large number of Indian Muslim men were moving in and out of, and settling in, U.S. port cities. By the 1920s, perhaps a quarter of the British maritime work force was of South Asian origin, and for various reasons these laborers saw more opportunity in North America than in the United Kingdom or India. In cities such as New Orleans and New York, a significant number of these migrants ended up living beside, working alongside, and starting families with African Americans, not least since color generally barred these men—and they were almost all men—from the Euro-American community. These men were primarily Bengali Muslims. According to Vivek Bald, by the 1930s dozens of them were working as peddlers in Jacksonville, Memphis, Atlanta, and Chattanooga, where, again, they became entangled with African Americans. Unfortunately, the desire for anonymity on the part of these men—who, after all, often entered the United States without proper documentation—and their frequent physical resemblance to African American men makes it difficult to trace their routes and numbers.[44] These keen resemblances were due in part to the fact that the African American population contained not only a modicum of Native American ancestry, but, as well, U.S. slave traders often had strayed far beyond the usual hunting grounds of West Africa to East Africa—which long had enjoyed a fruitful intercourse with India—and Madagascar, where Polynesians

and Indians, too, had long resided. Thus, the gene pool of African Americans included traces and hints of South Asia.[45]

The developing relationship between South Asia and Black America was reflected in a 1922 U.S. Naval Intelligence report, which noted with some concern that "the present Hindu revolutionary movement has definite connection with the Negro agitation in America. And both of these movements have leaning, at least for political reasons, to Bolshevik Russia. Ganti [*sic*; Gandhi] the leader of the Hindu Revolutionary Movement, and Garvey, the leader of the American Negro Agitation, were class mates while they were studying in England and in India. Garvey has remained ever since the closest friend, most ardent admirer and the handiest co-worker of Ganti, even though they live thousands of miles apart. Both Garvey and Ganti are strong believers of socialism and the revolutionary methods for realizing it."[46]

This generally misleading report was not altogether misguided in the sense that the two movements in question—Indian and African American—did make common cause from time to time with regimes that were frowned on in Washington and London, not only the one in Moscow, but the one in Tokyo, as well. Revolutionaries in Black America also were inspired by their peers in India. Cyril Briggs, a nascent Black communist, once proclaimed, "Look what the Hindus, another colored race, are doing in India. All these things are factors that help us here, right here in Harlem."[47] Hucheshwar G. Mudgal, who was born in India before migrating to Trinidad, then to the United States, served as editor of Garvey's newspaper, the *Negro World*, during one of its most militant phases.[48] Likewise, Leonard Howell, a founder of the Rastafarian faith in Jamaica more than seventy years ago, "published his own book under the pseudonym Gangungura Maragh, Hindi for 'teacher of famed wisdom.' "[49]

Garvey's movement was not the only venue where Indians and Negroes could cross paths. Har Dayal, who was born in India and founded the influential Ghadar Party, became "secretary of the San Francisco branch of the Industrial Workers of the World [and] was friendly with socialists and anarchists," all of whom—and contrary to national practice—invited Negroes into the ranks.[50] The influential Indian migrant Dhan Gopal Mukerji arrived in California in the early twentieth century and became a student. He recalled that the cook at his fraternity "was a Negress. . . . [S]he gave me five dollars [when I arrived] and said, 'go and buy a pair of shoes and then come back to work."[51]

As the South Asian population began to proliferate in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, this kind of contact became more likely. More delegations were sent from Black America to India, especially those sponsored by Christian groups such as the Young Women's Christian

Association (YWCA) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which were more difficult for London to bar. In 1928, Juliette A. Derricotte, secretary for colored student work for the YWCA, found herself in Mysore and was moved tremendously by what she witnessed. "I ache with physical pain," she informed the readers of the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis*, "when I remember the struggles of all India today, religious, caste, economic, social, political; how can I tell of the control which oil and rubber and jute have in the relations of East and West, or explain how back of oil and rubber and jute are the more fundamental and external puzzles of economics, race, and religion."[52]

The sympathy was mutual. K. A. Abbas arrived in the United States from India in 1938 and was in for the shock of his life. "I first became conscious of the Negro problem," he told his readers in Bombay, "when traveling from Los Angeles to New York [by train]." This became a journey toward insight as he was subjected to racist discrimination based on his skin color and found "the sense of white superiority lurking even in the most educated and advanced section of the American people with the only exception of Communists (whose rigid ideology admits of no racial bias)."[53]

It was precisely this increase in South Asian visitors to the United States that had a far-reaching impact on Jim Crow. The United States found it difficult to portray itself as a paragon of human-rights virtue and exemplar of democracy in the battle of ideas with Moscow, and other presumed ideological foes, when a significant percentage of its citizenry was clearly treated atrociously and others who happened to be dark-skinned were treated similarly. As a result, Jim Crow had to go.

But that issue was joined well after Abbas's fraught visit to the United States. During the time that he was enduring racism, Nehru, a key leader of the independence movement in India, was being told by a confidante of the "feeling of affinity that the Afroamericans have with us, and of this desire for closer cultural contacts."[54] A global consciousness was accelerating among African Americans, particularly during the Depression decade, fueled by a search for insight propelled by economic distress, the growing role of the Communist Party, and the spark ignited by Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. In April 1936, Robert O. Jordan, president of the Ethiopian Pacific Movement, based in Harlem, reminded Nehru, "We, the coloured people in the Western Hemisphere, are suffering the same as our brothers in India and we hope it won't be long before the dark people of the world will get away from the [yoke] of the white man." These were not just hortatory exclamations, he added, noting that in 1922, when Gandhi "started his campaign, the British government wanted to send the British West Indian regiment from Jamaica to go to India to fight, [but] the regiment adamantly refused to go to India."

This, he asserted, caused London to "disband . . . the British West Indian regiment." The episode was not an isolated one, either, he argued. "I can assure the Indian people," said Jordan with confidence, "that the dark men in the Western Hemisphere will not be an obstacle in the way of colored freedom."[55] Thus, argued one commentator, "A unique interest related to presumed membership in a dark-skinned brotherhood" united Black America and India.[56] Recognition of this trend led Gandhi to assert during the same year Jordan wrote to Nehru, "It may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of non-violence will be delivered to the world."[57]

In turn, for a number of reasons there were few national groupings anywhere on the planet who spoke out more vigorously against racism in North America than Indians. It was an inexorable response of Indian migrants faced with bigotry of the rawest sort. It was a way for Indians to deflect charges of backwardness in their homeland by pointing accusingly at the primitive and primal racism that obtained in the United States. And it was partially a reflection of the personal relationships that had developed between Indians and African Americans in the United States.

In the vortex of this last trend were Du Bois, founder of the NAACP, and Lala Lajpat Rai, who hailed from what is now Pakistan but spent a considerable amount of time in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century. Du Bois, said Rai, was a "personal friend of mine,"[58] while Du Bois affirmed of Rai that "he was at my home and in my office and we were members of the same club." Du Bois also called Rai a man of "restraint and sweet temper."[59] This personal tie helped Rai to use his vast array of contacts in British India on behalf of the cause of African Americans, once requesting of Du Bois "any recent literature which you can send me about the treatment of Negroes in the United States and also about the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. I have a few new numbers of the *Crisis* from 1917 to 1920 from which I am going to quote profusely."[60]

This bilateral relationship between an oppressed national minority in a budding superpower and the world's largest colony exploded in significance during World War II. Both Indians and African Americans had been courted by Japan, and it was not preordained that either would support London and Washington in their battle with Tokyo.[61] As a result, ruling classes in the two imperial powers were on the defensive and highly susceptible to yielding to the claims of the oppressed. Against this backdrop, a prototypical gathering took place at the White House in September 1944. Black leaders including Walter White of the NAACP, Channing Tobias, and Mary McLeod Bethune had arrived to discuss with President Franklin Roosevelt the U.S. role in "urging the Allies to end colonial rule in Africa, India and the West Indies."[62] This was part of a remarkable upsurge in support among Black Americans

for Indian independence, which helped immeasurably in pushing this inevitability toward realization. Again, this was a cross-cut saw, slicing in multiple directions. The famed General China, of the renowned movement toward independence in Kenya known popularly as "Mau Mau," recalled that it was in Calcutta that an "African-American soldier named Stephenson told him about the liberation of Haiti and he met Indian nationalists who asked him why Africans were not pushing off the yoke of colonial rule."[63]

World War II had trapped both the United States and the United Kingdom in a devolutionary spiral that led inexorably to the retreat of both Jim Crow and empire. This was particularly so for London. Indeed, when British rule in India finally ended in 1947, "80 percent of the Empire's subjects gained their independence at one stroke."[64] J. T. Sunderland observed in 1927 that, in a sense, India was driving the defense budget of London and shaping global events, in that "Great Britain demands to have the largest navy in the world and to control the seas. Why? Primarily in order that she may be able to keep India."[65] In 1901, Lord Curzon summed up the equation smartly when he asserted of the empire, "As long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it, we shall drop straightaway to a third-rate power."[66] The post–1947 era suggests that he was not far from the mark.

The connection between India and African Americans continues to the present day, although admittedly, since African Americans began to gain full citizenship rights, their perceived need for global alliances has dissipated. When the hip-hop icon Tupac Shakur carved the word "thug" on his abdomen, he (and his admirers) probably did not recognize that he was etching this connection in his flesh. In nineteenth-century British India, "thugs" were "bands of robbers who strangled their victims as sacrifices to the goddess Kali."[67] The term, of course, was no longer tethered to its original meaning when Shakur performed his homage, but it did continue to signify India's continuing resonance in the English-speaking world. After all, India today contains more English-speakers than any other nation—to the point that "thug" could be transformed into a reigning symbol for the outlaw culture that some in hip-hop would like to project.

Since the halcyon days leading up to August 1947, the relationship between Black America and India has so lost resonance that even posing such a tie may seem odd or, at best, quaint. However, as the self-proclaimed "sole remaining superpower," the United States, continues to lose altitude and is dogged even more by real and imagined adversaries, its relationship with India grows in importance. Certain Washington hawks, for instance, would like to play India against China, just as Beijing was manipulated against

Moscow during the Cold War. At the same time, however, one leading Indian military figure has predicted "a U.S.–India armed conflict late in the next decade, where, increasingly, China is on the India side."[68] Simultaneously, fear of China has contributed to an entente between Washington and New Delhi that has accelerated inward investment in India to a point at which this nation is being touted as a possible superpower itself at some point in this century.

Whatever scenario plays itself out, it is clear that African Americans, who have become the bulwark of the progressive voting bloc in an otherwise conservative national electorate, will play a crucial role. Thus, as what has been termed a "U.S. empire" winds down,[69] it is equally clear that African Americans, the most left-leaning sector of the electorate,[70] must play a pivotal role in the process, guaranteeing their importance, once more, in the end of empire. More to the point, when in October 2005 U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice—in the presence of British Foreign Minister Jack Straw—referred bitterly to the "empire of Jim Crow" that she had experienced during her Alabama childhood,[71] she was, perhaps unintentionally, again conjoining the fates of those who had endured U.S.-style racism and those who had languished during the heyday of the unlamented British Empire.

This book primarily concerns the relationship of Black America to India before August 1947—with the accent on the former. Yet overall it concerns how African Americans, a principal "end" or raison d'être of the empire of Jim Crow, came to crusade against the principal "end" of another empire: India.