

## GLOBAL RACE WOMAN

Adrien K. Wing\*

### I. INTRODUCTION

It was my pleasure to participate in Temple International & Comparative Law Journal's (TICLJ) 2025 symposium on *Feminism and the Theory of International Law*. The symposium was based upon the forthcoming OXFORD HANDBOOK ON WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW, written by a globally diverse array of authors.<sup>1</sup> It was my honor to have been asked to do the framing chapter for this wonderful handbook, *The Woman in International Law: Centering Global Critical Race Feminism*.<sup>2</sup> Many of the authors initially gathered together in Luxembourg in October 2022 through the support of the Max Planck Institute Luxembourg for Procedural Law. I was delighted to be the keynote speaker at that event. At Temple, I provided an overview of my chapter, which was followed by a thoughtful commentary written by Temple Law Associate Professor Meghan Morris.

When the TICLJ invited all panelists to submit a small essay, I decided to take the opportunity to do another chapter in my autobiographical series. I once asked my former boss, civil liberties lawyer Leonard Boudin,<sup>3</sup> why he did not write an autobiography about his long career. Without elaboration, he said, "the guilty are living." I understood what he meant, and it has guided me as I have written my previous autobiographical pieces. Thus, while there are many things I could say, there are numerous stories I cannot tell. Even with attempts at creating anonymity, I fear that some of the people I would discuss, whether living or dead, would be identifiable. Thus, the limited space allocated for this essay helps me as I decide what anecdotes I wish to convey.

In the first autobiographical article, *Brief Reflections Toward a Multiplicative Theory & Praxis of Being*, published four years after I started

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1. See OXFORD HANDBOOK ON WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW (J. Jarpa Dawuni, Nienke Grossman, Jaya Ramji-Nogales, & Hélène Ruiz-Fabri eds., 2025) (hereinafter OXFORD HANDBOOK).

2. See Adrien K. Wing, *The Woman in International Law: Centering Global Critical Race Feminism*, in OXFORD HANDBOOK.

3. See Nick Ravo, *Leonard Boudin, Civil Liberties Lawyer, Dies at 77*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 26, 1989), <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/26/obituaries/leonard-boudin-civil-liberties-lawyer-dies-at-77.html>.

teaching, I talked about the very early stages of my pre-tenure career as the first Black female professor at Iowa Law.<sup>4</sup> In the second article, *One L Redux*, I focused on how I felt returning to speak at my alma mater, Stanford Law School, which did not even have a Black female professor at that time, nearly ten years after I became a tenured professor.<sup>5</sup> The third piece, *Lessons from a Portrait*, explored being a senior scholar, approaching having my oil portrait painted at Iowa, a prestigious accolade for twenty-five years of service.<sup>6</sup> The final piece, *And Still We Rise*, was written as I began contemplating retirement.<sup>7</sup>

Now, retirement looms. I have been saying that I will retire in three to five years for more than five years. I have been in administration for over ten years, most of it as Associate Dean of International & Comparative Law Programs. I have written 160 publications. I remain one of Iowa Law's most cited authors. I have directed our France summer program for twenty-five years, and it is forty-one years old now. I have taught thousands of students, and have had hundreds of research assistants. I have mentored many around the world. I have nineteen grandchildren now from my seven children. A great grandchild is on the way. Forty years of service at Iowa Law is on the horizon. I am fourth in seniority out of over forty faculty. James C. Sommerville, aka grandpa James, and I have known each other forty-five years, with nearly thirty years as a recycled couple in Iowa. We are considering doing a joint autobiography, focusing on a few of our many adventures.

For this installment, *Global Race Woman*, I have decided to emphasize selected aspects of my career that includes being an international lawyer for five years in New York City, and then nearly forty years as an international and comparative law professor, fields where still too few Black women tread.

I will use the perspective for what I have termed Global Critical Race Feminism (GCRF), in my Oxford chapter, and in the anthology of this name.<sup>8</sup> GCRF involves the status of women of color around the world. First, in the chapter, I highlighted the genesis of the term, that is, what each letter in GCRF means. Then, I noted the various contributions of GCRF that should be used by all international law scholars, regardless of

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4. See Adrien K. Wing, *Brief Reflections Toward a Multiplicative Theory ↗ Praxis of Being*, 6 BERKELEY WOMEN'S L. J. 181 (1990-1991); T. HARRY WILLIAMS, P.G. T. BEAUREGARD: NAPOLEON IN GRAY (1955).

5. See Adrien K. Wing, *One L Redux*, 78 U. M. K. C. L. REV. 1119 (2010).

6. See Adrien K. Wing, *Lessons from a Portrait: Keep Calm and Carry on*, in PRESUMED INCOMPETENT: THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND CLASS FOR WOMEN IN ACADEMIA 356 (Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González & Angela P. Harris, eds., 2012).

7. See Adrien K. Wing, *And Still We Rise*, in PRESUMED INCOMPETENT: RACE, CLASS, POWER, AND RESISTANCE OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIA II 223 (Yolanda Flores Niemann, Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Carmen G. González, eds., 2020).

8. See GLOBAL CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM (Adrien K. Wing, ed., 2000).

the topic of their work. The GCRF tools I briefly detailed were: anti-essentialism, demarginalization, intersectionality, narrative, praxis, and looking to the bottom. I concluded with a plea to commit or recommit to service and to be aware and inclusive of the diverse experiences of women of color, no matter where located.

## II. GCRF GENESIS<sup>9</sup>

This essay, which focuses on my over forty-three-year career as a Black female international lawyer/law professor, constitutes an example of GCRF. The “G” in GCRF stands for Global, international or transnational in scope. The ‘C’ in GCRF stands for Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which developed in the 1970s by white men influenced in part by European postmodernists, as a progressive approach to deconstructing law.<sup>10</sup> These men, known as Crits, included Roberto Unger, Duncan Kennedy, David Kennedy, Karl Klare, Morton Horwitz, Jack Balkin, and Mark Tushnet, among others. As people of color joined the legal academy as professors, CLS analysis was broadened into “R,” Critical Race Theory (CRT).<sup>11</sup> Crits did not have an emphasis on race. CRT founders included the late Professor Derrick Bell, Professors Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, among others. CRT developed many offshoots that could be classified to include: Latino/a Critical Theory (LATCRIT); AsianCrit; IndianCrit; Critical White Studies; Queer Race Crit; Ecrit (empirical); DisCrit (disability); DesiCrit (South Asians); ClassCrit; and Black Masculinity Crit. Publications involving critiques of Islamophobia have been written as well.<sup>12</sup>

As women became law professors, they were intrigued by CLS, but then went beyond it to emphasize the “F,” feminist jurisprudence. Catherine McKinnon was among the most prominent scholars, beginning in the early period. Critical Race Feminism (CRF)<sup>13</sup> evolved as the intersection of race and gender, representing women of color, with Crenshaw as a foremother. It was also influenced by womanist theory developed by women outside law such as bell hooks, Angela Y. Davis,

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9. This section from Wing, *The Woman in International Law*, *supra* note 2.

10. For postmodernists, see Jacques Derrida, *KEY CONCEPTS* (Clare Colebrook ed., 2014); for a collection of CLS materials, see Duncan Kennedy & Karl E. Klare, *A Bibliography of Critical Legal Studies*, 94 *YALE L. J.* 461 (1984). *See generally* *THE ESSENTIAL FOUCAULT* (Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose eds., 2003).

11. *See CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotunda, Gary Peller & Kendall Thomas, eds., 1996); *RICHARD DELGADO AND JEAN STEFANCIC, CRITICAL RACE THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION* (4th ed., 2023).

12. *See e.g.*, KHALED A. BEYDOUN, *AMERICAN ISLAMOPHOBIA: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS AND RISE OF FEAR* (2019); SAHAR AZIZ, *THE RACIAL MUSLIM: WHEN RACISM QUASHES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM* (2021).

13. *See CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM: A READER* (Adrien K. Wing ed, 2d ed., 2003).

Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker.<sup>14</sup> While most of the literature that might be termed CRF was domestic in nature, Professor Jeremy Levitt edited an important collection on BLACK WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: DELIBERATE INTERACTIONS MOVEMENTS AND ACTIONS.<sup>15</sup>

### III. USING GCRF AS FRAMEWORK<sup>16</sup>

Now that we have examined the derivation of GCRF, we need to visualize how it can help to frame analysis. The tools I briefly discussed in the Handbook chapter and will use here are: anti-essentialism, demarginalization, intersectionality, narrative, praxis, and looking to the bottom. All of these terms have been developed and used in many contexts and by many authors in the past few decades. It should be noted that the tools intersect with each other as well.

Anti-essentialism connotes that we should not essentialize the status of women. Retired Professor Angela Harris and others developed the concept to differentiate that women of color may have different experiences than white women.<sup>17</sup> Going beyond Harris, I recently co-edited a volume with my former research assistant Hisham Kassim, on women in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>18</sup> We were well aware of the problems of essentialism. I was especially aware as one of my daughters is an Ethiopian Muslim, who wears a hijab. The volume only covered ten societies, even though there are more countries in the region. Note that Ethiopia is not in the region. Moreover, we decided to limit the book to the Muslim majorities, rather than try to cover religious minorities such as Christians or Bahai.

Crenshaw wrote the major article about the need to demarginalize the position of women of color, bringing them to the center of analysis, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race & Sex*.<sup>19</sup> This same article also developed the notion of intersectionality, within the legal academy. It is now well known in many disciplines.

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14. See, e.g., THE WOMANIST READER: THE FIRST QUARTER CENTURY OF WOMANIST THOUGHT (Layli Phillips ed., 2006); PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT (2nd ed., 1990); BELL HOOKS, FEMINIST THEORY: FROM MARGIN TO CENTER (1984); TONI MORRISON, BELOVED (1987); ALICE WALKER, THE COLOR PURPLE (1982); ANGELA Y. DAVIS, WOMEN, RACE & CLASS (1981).

15. See BLACK WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: DELIBERATE INTERACTIONS MOVEMENTS AND ACTIONS (Jeremy Levitt ed., 2015).

16. This section from Wing, *The Woman in International Law*, *supra* note 2.

17. See Angela P. Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory*, 42 STAN. L. REV. 581 (1990).

18. See FAMILY LAW AND GENDER IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: CHANGE AND STASIS SINCE THE ARAB SPRING (Adrien K. Wing & Hisham Kassim eds., 2023).

19. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race & Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, 1989 U CHI. L. FOR. 139 (1989).

While Crenshaw and others have emphasized the intersection of two identities—race and sex, my own work as mentioned in the Handbook, goes beyond. I assisted the founding mothers and fathers of the post-apartheid South African constitution. The 1996 constitution has seventeen identities that can be analyzed through an intersectional lens: race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth.<sup>20</sup> Intersectionality is interwoven with anti-essentialism and demarginalization. Once you realize that you must bring certain women's experiences to the center, and regard them as unique from other groups, you must also interrogate the complexity of all their identities.

CRT and feminist theory are known for using a narrative approach in addition to the traditional law review articles with case analysis and hundreds of footnotes. This essay is an example of narrative. I wrote a previous narrative for this journal, which held a festschrift featuring the work of now retired Temple professor Henry Richardson III.<sup>21</sup>

Praxis, the intersection of theory and practice, is an important tool for progressive scholars, whether in GCRF or other areas. Constitution drafting, such as I did with South Africa, and also with Rwanda, and Palestine, is a form of praxis on an international scale.<sup>22</sup> In Iowa, I have been involved with the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR) since its founding in 1999, serving as director since 2013. Having just celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary, we present webinars, sponsor summer scholarships for students, host an annual academic conference, and cosponsor many local events, among many activities. We are currently overseeing a statewide effort financed by the state and federal level to provide legal services for Afghan refugees. We have an interdisciplinary advisory board from the university and community, including student members as well.<sup>23</sup>

The final tool, looking to the bottom, implies that we are particularly concerned with women who are at the poorest end of the economic, social, and political spectrum. No matter what country they are in, women of color have fewer resources as compared to the men of their ethnic group or nationality.

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20. See S. AFR. CONST. art. 9 (1996). See Adrien K. Wing, *Communitarianism v. Individualism: Constitutionalism in Namibia & South Africa*, 11 WIS. INT'L L. J. 295 (1993).

21. See Adrien K. Wing, Henry J. Richardson III, *A Critical Race Man*, 31 TEMPLE INT'L COMP. L. J. 377 (2017).

22. See Adrien K. Wing & Mark Johnson, *The Promise of a Post Genocide Constitution: Healing Rwandan Spirit Injuries*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 247 (2002); Adrien K. Wing, *The New South African Constitution: An Example for Palestinian Consideration*, 7 PALESTINE Y.B. INT'L L. 105 (1992-1994).

23. See UICHR, <https://uichr.uiowa.edu> (last visited Mar. 11, 2025).

#### IV. RACE WOMAN

My narrative demarginalizes my particular intersectional experience as one of the few Black women in international and comparative law. I have also been fairly unique as I have combined that specialty with domestic civil rights law as well. My career has emphasized engaging in praxis to help those at the bottom.

First, why do I label myself, “Race Woman?” The late St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton discussed the idea of a “Race Man” in their 1945 book *BLACK METROPOLIS*.<sup>24</sup> This concept was historically used to indicate Black men who were outstanding achievers devoted to the betterment of Black people. They believed in racial pride and racial solidarity. W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X would be Race Men, while Clarence Thomas would not. At the time of conceptualization, the idea of Race Women was not discussed, even though there were Black women like Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, and others, who had fought for the race. In the modern era, Yale African Studies professor Hazel Carby deconstructed the “Race Man” term as being very patriarchal.<sup>25</sup> Thus today, I would certainly include many Black women involved in CRT/CRF, such as Crenshaw, Harris, Lani Guinier, Patricia Williams, Cheryl Harris, Dorothy Roberts, and Dorothy Brown, among others, as Race Women. I would humbly characterize some of what I have done in my career as being one as well.

My story is one of seeking to be a Race Woman in all that I do. I will tell the tale of how I got involved in international issues, including the role of mentoring. I will emphasize the importance of being involved in various organizations as a critical part of intersectional praxis.

I advise students of the need for mentors throughout their careers, and they may not be of the same race or gender as you. I have had great mentors along the way. In my educational years, from elementary school through law school, I believe I had only two Black female teachers, one in elementary school and one in college. Unfortunately, they did not become mentors.

At Newark Academy, my first mentor was a white man who was my French teacher, Joe Borlo. He came to my fiftieth high school reunion, even though he had to be near ninety years old. He also taught me Black Literature, although he was not Black. At Princeton, I had Black Professors Mike Mitchell and Howard Taylor. They would certainly both be classified as Race Men, and taught me Black history, education, and politics. La Frances Rodgers Rose was not a tenured Princeton faculty member, but a lecturer in sociology. I was in her inaugural course on Black women in 1975, and wished the university would hire her

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24. See ST. CLAIR DRAKE & HORACE CAYTON, *BLACK METROPOLIS: A STUDY OF NEGRO LIFE IN A NORTHERN CITY* (1st ed. 1945).

25. See HAZEL V. CARBY, *RACE MEN* (2000).

permanently. She did not become a mentor, in part due to her limited connection to the institution. She was a true Race Woman, and founded the International Black Women's Congress. At Stanford, I had a mentor, Bill Gould, the only Black professor. He had a specialty in labor law, but also on South Africa. We have stayed in good touch over the years. He spoke at Iowa more than once. I was honored to be asked to speak recently at the fiftieth anniversary of his affiliation with Stanford.

My interest in international affairs started in childhood. My maternal uncle James Pruitt went to Africa in 1964 through a program called Crossroads Africa, a precursor of the Peace Corps. I was a small child, but remember looking at his slides of exotic Zambia. My aunt Bess Pruitt was an artist manager for Black singers and dancers at this time. One of her groups was the Chuck Davis Dance company, a Black American ensemble doing African dance. Even as a teenager, I helped with the management and attended many rehearsals and concerts. Plus, this was the era when the civil rights movement metamorphosed into the Black Power movement, and all things African were emphasized—like dashikis and Afros. My Pruitt side family members were Race People, where my grandparents, aunts and uncles were involved in improving the civil rights of our people throughout the twentieth century. They were educators as well as church and community activists.

Additionally, I had a connection to French, which I have discussed in the *Brief Reflections* article.<sup>26</sup> Our family lore was that Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard was my great-great-grandfather. Although it is unclear the full nature of his relationship with my great-great-grandmother Sally Hardin, French was in our blood through him. The French heritage was passed down the generations such that each generation studied French. My great uncle Bob, who fought in France in World War I was a French-English translator for the French army. He actually moved to France after the war, and spent most of his life there, lived in Tunisia, and died in Morocco. He was a Race Man, and was friends with UN mediator and Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche, as well as entertainer and activist Josephine Baker, and other Black expats based in France. I recently visited the apartment house he lived in near the Eiffel Tower. Language study has included my two biological sons, who each had twelve years of French.

My parents began my French studies in a private program when I was five. I studied it in my college prep schools throughout junior high and high school. I really wanted to go to France like the rich kids in my class, but my mom who was a widow with three small children after my father died, could not afford it. She said that one day I would go, and she was right. I was proud that I was able later to pay for her to go with me several times.

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26. See Wing, *supra* note 4 at 188.

At Princeton, I joined the very active anti-apartheid movement, a formative moment in my life. Little did I know that twenty years later, I would assist South Africa by working with the founding mothers and fathers on a new constitution. Thirteen years after Uncle Jimmy, I made my first trip abroad—to Kenya, via the same program as my uncle, Crossroads Africa. The 1977 Kenyan experience living in a rural hut for the summer made me decide that I wanted Africa to be my career, and not just a hobby. Our diverse group of college students helped with the construction of a school building, and we made friends with the villagers as well.

One of the most astonishing things was that despite my passion for Africa, the Africans did not see me as Black due to my light skin. Our group went through Paris coming back from Kenya, so I finally got to use my French—and on the Champs Élysées.

After the Kenya trip, I started senior year. It was too late to add courses to my major in Politics, and my certificate of concentration in Afro-American Studies, as it was then called. I was also earning a certificate in Teacher Prep, following a Pruitt family tradition of teaching on the high school level, even though I knew I wanted to become a lawyer. So, if I wanted to specialize in Africa, I would need another degree.

At my 1978 graduation, I co-won the Frederick Douglass Award for my various leadership efforts. The other winner was my mother's former student and leader of the PU anti-apartheid movement, Adhimu Chunga. She beamed with pride at the both of us. Adhimu attended my mom's funeral thirty-five years later.

I deferred my entry into Stanford Law School to enroll in UCLA's prestigious Master's program in African Studies. My father had attended UCLA at sixteen years old as one of the few Negroes in the 1940s, and it was a dream of mine to attend there too. One of my proudest finds from my dad's memorabilia was a life member card in the NAACP from 1962. Since he died when I was nine, I was not aware that he had this aspect in his life—a Race Man as well. It would have been incredibly radical in that era to belong to that group, much less on the highest level of membership.

At UCLA, I won a full fellowship, majoring in Political Science and minoring in International Education. I specialized in Southern Africa, and the then-newly independent Portuguese speaking countries of Africa—Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. I studied Swahili, which was the language of Kenya, and Portuguese. Once again, I was active in the campus anti-apartheid activities. I even found time to become an editor of the African Studies journal *Ufahamu*. I zipped through the two-year program in one year, with a perfect academic record in 1979.

I always advise students to make full use of the opportunities at their law school to help nail down their career interests. At Stanford, I wanted

to check out several areas of law, including civil rights, education law, entertainment law, and international law. I had already ruled out criminal law. At UCLA, I had done a semester internship at the LA Juvenile courts, which scared and depressed me. My entire destiny might have been different if I had liked the entertainment law firm, Rosenfeld, Meyer, and Susman, that I worked during my first summer. Entertainers were often spoiled and demanding, although I did enjoy meeting Marlon Brando's sister, who was a very sedate character actor client. Certainly, reality would have been different if I had taken the unpaid public interest summer position I had been offered in Los Angeles, but could not afford to accept. My interviewer was Patricia Williams, whom I would become friends with years later, as a fellow law professor and CRT specialist.

So, it ended up being the international path that I took, with civil rights coming back in as I got involved with CRT years later. At Stanford, I took international and comparative law courses, joined the International Law Society, and became an editor of the STANFORD JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW ("SJIL"). The late John Merryman, a major comparative law scholar, became my mentor. We did a group project, and I wrote an article for SJIL under his supervision.<sup>27</sup> When I was a new law professor, Merryman later told me to write on safe subjects like contract law, instead of the race and gender issues I embraced. I am glad that I ignored this advice. I was able to get tenure even though I wrote on controversial topics. John believed in me as a professor. I would stay in touch with him until he passed away in 2015 at the age of ninety-five.

In law school, I became active in the anti-apartheid movement and took intermediate Swahili on an overload basis in my first year. More than forty years later, I would be invited to address the Kenyan judiciary annual conference, and was able to do so partly in Swahili.

In my 3L year, I was selected to join the National Board of the Black American Law Student Association (BALSA), as it was then called. I was Chair of the Southern Africa Task Force, and went to Angola, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania in that role. My early travel bug was in full swing. Now, it is hard to believe that I have now been to nearly one hundred countries.

I spent a semester working at the United Nations Council for Namibia, as Namibia was a country then-occupied by apartheid South Africa. That UN experience was exciting, especially because it was during the negotiations for the Law of the Sea Convention. Additionally, I met many young men slightly older than me, affiliated with various liberation movements, that the United States regarded as terrorist organizations at the time. As a young Black woman in an environment with few professional women, I got lots of wanted and unwanted attention. I

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27. See Adrien K. Wing, *Pleading & Proof of Foreign Law in American Courts: A Selected Bibliography*, 19 STAN. J. INT'L L. 175 (1983).

remember wanting to discuss the Convention over dinner with a young diplomat, who kept derailing the conversation to tell me that my eyes were like the moon! Years later, I had Muslim male friends who asked if I would be interested in being their second or third wife, along with their other wives!

I knew Thabo Mbeki from the African National Congress (ANC), who would become the second Black president of South Africa. I saw him again in his home country ten years later when I worked on the constitution. I met Sam Nujoma, leader of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), who would become the first president of Namibia. As a young lawyer, I ended up doing some legal work in New York for the Namibian Mission to the United Nations. I met representatives from the POLISARIO, a liberation movement fighting Morocco for the independence of the Western Sahara. That liberation never happened.

During that semester, I ate dinner at the home of Jose Ramos Horta, who would win the Nobel Prize and become the President of East Timor many years later. He spoke at Iowa sometime later, not through my auspices. I went up to him and said, "You probably won't remember me, but I met you when I worked at the UN way back in 1981." He said, "Adrien, Adrien, where have you been?"

At the UN, I learned the level of bureaucracy as well as sexism was overwhelming. The term "sexual harassment" had not been coined yet. I decided that it would not be a good place for my career. Years later, I turned down an opportunity to work in the UN Legal Department.

I spent my second law school summer at Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle, in New York City. Curtis was a Wall Street firm founded in 1830, well known for its international law practice,<sup>28</sup> which included a rare region—Africa. There were no other Black lawyers that summer, and no women in the international group. I won an award at my 1982 graduation from the Stanford African Student Association.

I ended up spending my first four years of my career at Curtis from 1982 to 1986, specializing in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. I worked eighty hours a week. We represented foreign governments as well as multinational corporations and banks. I had my first son in my second year of practice, but still managed to bill two thousand hours. It was an insane lifestyle, especially for a woman with a young family. There were no female partners to ask for guidance. One highlight was a pro bono case for the Legal Aid Society that got my client out of prison after four years. I bonded with some of my fellow summer associates, making relationships that continue to this day.

I had three very important mentors at Curtis. Laishley Peter Wragg

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28. See Curtis, *History Overview*, <https://www.curtilaw.com/our-firm/about/history/1800-1900-origins> (last visited Mar. 11, 2025).

specialized in Africa and would talk to me for hours about the good old days. He was in the sunset of his career with few billables. His contract specialty with African governments had fallen on hard times, and he could not retool. From him, although he did not say it openly, I learned the necessity of staying up to date, and of being on the cutting edge.

Manuel Angulo was a very formal senior partner, who was a Harvard Law graduate. Several generations of his family had lived in the United States, decades before Fidel Castro came to power in his ancestral country, Cuba. Angulo had never worked with a woman, and was alleged to have said women should not work at law firms. I won him over when I brought in some news articles about some of our clients. I had not been asked to do that, but he apparently appreciated the initiative. I also noticed he had an article reprint on his desk that he had written way back in 1963. I discussed that article with him and mentioned my experience as a journal editor at Stanford. I asked if he had written more. He had not. He eventually gave me work on his major client, the government of Mexico and its state entity, Pemex, the national oil company. He said, "Let's do an article together!" He and I co-authored my first law review article. It was on the Act of State doctrine, a frequent defense for our foreign government clients, when sued by private citizens.<sup>29</sup> We presented the article at an Inter-American Bar conference in Mexico, and I got to work out of our Mexico City office. I wrote testimony based on that article that he delivered before a Senate Committee. The same article ended up being my job talk at Iowa just a few years later. Once I became a professor, Angulo contacted me for tips on how to enter the teaching profession.

Finally, Keigh Highet, who became Chair of the firm, was a dynamic mentor in his prime. During the Korean conflict, he had been based as a Marine at Camp Pendleton, where I was born. This was a good omen from my view. I was fascinated because as a young lawyer, he had represented the Namibian people before the ICJ in the 1960s, when a legal team tried to legally extract South West Africa, as it was then called, from South African control. Nearly twenty years later, my UN student experience illustrated the power of the hold of apartheid on Namibia. Keith handled cases at the International Court of Justice, and I got to work on the Memorials and other documents involving the continental shelf throughout my four years. It might sound boring, but not when you consider the oil underneath could greatly enrich the country winning claim to it. I did not get to go to the ICJ until many years later as a professor. I was delighted when Keith came to Iowa and spoke to my students.

Keith connected me in two ways that would be critical to my career.

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29. Adrien Wing & Manuel Angulo, *Proposed Amendments to the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act of 1976: The Act of State Doctrine*, 14 DENVER J. INT'L L. & POL'Y 299 (1986).

He told me, “Young Wing, you must join ASIL (the American Society of International Law).” They were thinking about a then radical idea—creating interest groups for the membership. Keith had me help on a memo advocating for their creation. So, I joined ASIL, and would later become Chair of the South African interest group. I have now been a member for forty-three years. At the first ASIL annual meeting I attended in 1983, Keith introduced me to all the movers and shakers in international law—all white men. There were almost no women or Blacks in attendance. Through Keith, I met an Iowa law professor named Burns Weston. A few years later, it would be Burns Weston, who would invite me to speak at Iowa on apartheid, which ultimately led to my third legal job—as a professor.

Initially, I attended luncheons sponsored by the ASIL Women in International Law Interest Group (WILIG), where there would be a few tables of women, and less than a handful of women of color. Today, those luncheons fill a ballroom, and I am on the upper end in seniority of those present.

Only four years after joining, I was elected to the ASIL Executive Council when they were seeking young lawyers, people living outside the Beltway, women, and people of color. I worked with a future mentor, Hank Richardson, and the late Howard Law School professor Goler Butcher<sup>30</sup> in getting ASIL to divest from corporations doing business in South Africa. Goler was the godmother of Black women in international law. She died at a relatively young age of sixty-seven, and I was sad that I did not get to build a mentor relationship with her. ASIL did create the Goler Butcher award in human rights, so she is not forgotten.

I would later co-found and become co-chair of BASIL—Blacks of ASIL.<sup>31</sup> My co-chair Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, was the first Black female Honorary ASIL President, and former president of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). We estimated that there might be one hundred Black members out of nearly four thousand around the world. Our goal has been to increase the numbers of Blacks in international law, as well as increase opportunities for them. I have held almost every major role in ASIL, including Vice President. I participated on many panels at annual meetings, with most

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30. See Richard Pearson, *Goler Butcher Dies: Lawyer and Professor*, WASH. POST, (June 13, 1993), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1993/06/13/goler-butcher-dies/60c3dabf-2f4f-40ba-bcc7-c3dbd9f4e1b1>.

31. See *Blacks of the American Society of International Law*, ASIL, <https://www.asil.org/blacks-american-society-international-law> (last visited Mar. 11, 2025).

related to Africa.<sup>32</sup> I was involved in an emphasis on reparations as well.<sup>33</sup>

I am delighted that the first Black woman, Mélida Hodgson, partner at Arnold & Porter,<sup>34</sup> became ASIL President in 2024. Even though I have been most active with ASIL of all my professional groups, I knew that I could not become the first Black female president. I was too radical, specializing in the human rights field, including Palestine. I was not a law partner with the important contacts to draw large donations. I am a Cordell Hull patron, having donated \$25,000, even though I do not have the financial resources of a partner. Many have asked me: where did I get the money to donate that large amount? Turns out that \$250 a month did it, an amount I did not notice in my paycheck.

My greatest accomplishment with ASIL is that I was elected to the Board of Editors of the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW (AJIL), the top peer review journal of its kind. This journal was once only run by white men, the implication being that people of color and white women were not intellectually worthy. Through discussions with the Executive Council and BASIL, the Board adopted policies that have led to a very globally diverse group of editors. I was the second Black woman professor to be selected for the Board. I was then appointed to the Co-Chair selection committee, which resulted in picking two females for the first time, one a person of color. I was on the general membership committee as well. In addition to improving the demographics, there was a need to diversify the content. I helped contribute in this regard through the highly successful AJIL UNBOUND, an online only journal that publishes more issues on a shorter turnaround time.<sup>35</sup>

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32. See e.g., Adrien K. Wing, *Southern Africa: Prospects for Peace*, 83 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 350 (1989); Adrien K. Wing, *Effects & Effectiveness of Sanctions: South Africa*, 84 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 203 (1990); Adrien K. Wing, *The South African Transition to Democratic Rule: Lessons for International & Comparative Law*, 94 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 254 (2000); Adrien K. Wing, *Africa: Mapping New Boundaries in International Law*, 98 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 246 (2004); Adrien K. Wing, *Slave Trafficking*, 101 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 277 (2007); Adrien K. Wing, *The Politics of the Sudan*, 102 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 89 (2008); Adrien K. Wing, *Diverse Perspectives on the Impact of Colonialism on International Law*, 113 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 61 (2019).

33. See Adrien K. Wing, *Remarks, Reparations under International Law for Enslavement of African Persons in the Americas and the Caribbean*, *Proceedings of the Reparations Symposium 69* (American Society of International Law, 2021); Adrien K. Wing, *Remarks, Second Symposium on Reparations Under International Law for Enslavement of African Persons in the Americas and the Caribbean* 34 (American Society of International Law, 2024).

34. See Mélida Hodgson, ARNOLD & PORTER, <https://www.arnoldporter.com/en/people/h/hodgson-melida> (last visited Mar. 11, 2025).

35. See Adrien K. Wing & Catherine Powell, *Introduction to the Symposium on Feminist Approaches to International Law Thirty Years On: Still Alienating Oscar*, 116 AJIL UNBOUND 259 (2022); Adrien K. Wing & S. James Anaya, *Introduction to the Symposium on Rabiat Akande, 'An Imperial History of Race-Religion in International Law'*, 118 AJIL UNBOUND 103 (2024).

I am delighted that there are now younger Black women, who are very active in ASIL, and in international law more broadly. Fordham professor Catherine Powell, Stanford professor Tendayi Achiume, Debevoise partner Natalie Reid, UCLA professor Anna Spain Bradley, Cornell professor Chantal Thomas, Maryland professor Matiangai Sirleaf, attorney Adejoké Babington-Ashaye, Foley Hoag partner Tafadzwa Pasipanodya, Professor Victoria Sahani, and others, will all go far beyond what I have done.

I have many more stories to tell about being a Race Woman in this historical moment. I will leave them for another publication. I know that racism, sexism, and other -isms will not be eliminated in my lifetime, and perhaps that of my grandchildren. I do rest calmly in knowing that I am playing a small role in the struggles for diversity, equity, inclusion, and global justice. My ancestors, my sheroes and heroes, continue to warm my spirit on this journey.