

Evolution of the State Department
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What we now call the State Department began as Foreign Affairs, whose first Ambassadors, even before we were officially a country, were John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, with Benjamin Franklin serving as an unofficial Ambassador.

A recent PBS broadcast in the series "American Experience" (Season 34 Ep 2), provided the experience of Black diplomats serving during the Cold War. Their experiences were like those of so many other "non-White Protestant males" who monopolized State Department service for so long. Our inspiring ideals were not matched by our practices. The State Department was a bastion of white, Protestant men, almost all of them elite in their educations.

The Black diplomats program showed that it was not the State Department changing its understood rules about "no Negroes, Jews, or women," but the decision of the remarkable President Harry Truman, who had already desegregated the military (against opposition) at the end of World War II.

By posting a distinguished Black diplomat to Liberia, the State Department defended its prejudices by carving out only Black countries for posting American Black diplomats. Such appointments prevented qualified diplomats from rising in their careers by ghettoizing their service. Diplomats are promoted by having widely varied postings, not the case for them.

The evolution of the United States from its aristocratic beginnings in 1776 was understood by its founding fathers, who envisioned changes as we grew more educated and experienced. Those who now want to return our country to its 18th century roots belie how much more we resemble what we professed at our beginnings: a self-ruling republic that was governed by rule of law, not whim of a hereditary ruler or ruling caste.

The Founders? "founding sin" has dogged us from the beginning and lingers even today: the enslavement of black people kidnapped from Africa and forced into a system that has embarrassed our claims of being a country of freedom and equality. The Founders had to compromise with the Southern slave owners if we were to have a republic at all. This burdened us with the contradiction of equal opportunity yet dependent upon involuntary servitude, a horror finally addressed when a civil war almost split us into two countries, which would have been a disaster.

The evolution of American values over time has promised to save us. Black slavery was abolished, and for a time, distinguished Black men were elected to Congress, became judges, and entrepreneurs began to create Black communities of wealth. Unfortunately, for almost a century, this progress was reversed by concerted attacks by thugs, lynchings, local laws designed to intimidate and segregate Blacks, and secret agreements by our power structures (including the State Department) to deny opportunities to Black candidates.

Happily, these impediments have been confronted over time, until today, when we have seen the election of a biracial president, Black men risen to top ranks in the military, intelligence services, and all other institutions, including the academic world.

The State Department has evolved from its Protestant White Elite Men into an institution that better resembles this country. Jews, women, Catholics, and those with no religious affiliation, have served with distinction, making our foreign policy experts reflect who we want to be seen in the world.

During the elite-dominated 19th century, our Middle East policies were shaped by a State Department that had romantic illusions about aristocratic Arabs and distaste for "pushy" Zionist Jews. Read *The Arabists*, by Robert D. Kaplan, for the history of this folly.

The consequences of this anti-Jewish bias prevented Jews on the eve of World War II from escaping the Nazi genocides, sending ships full of refugees back to Europe to die. Fortunately, there were individuals in consulates and others appointed by FDR who ignored their orders and did what was right.

An excellent TV drama series, *Madam Secretary*, is not only entertaining, but presents a picture of US diplomacy at its best. The issues facing the State Department are not usually front-page news, but should be.

Would we really be a better country if the State Department joined the Supreme Court in reverting to the Founders? time? Think about it.

683 words

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