


ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Toward IR's "Fifth Debate": Racial Justice and the National Interest in Classical Realism

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This article addresses growing calls for a fifth debate on international relations' (IR) "race amnesia." The central argument is two-fold. First, contrary to conventional wisdom, racial justice was not omitted in "orthodox" scholarship—in particular Morgenthau's realism. On the contrary, classical realists repeatedly critiqued the lack of racial justice throughout their careers. Second, racial justice was not only a concern for Morgenthau but also integral to his conception of the national interest, particularly in the Vietnam War. To Morgenthau, the national interest failed in Vietnam because the United States failed to define its purpose at home. Fundamental to its purpose was the question of racial justice. Morgenthau's conception of the national interest has an enduring impact on contemporary realist scholarship. This scholarship engages with issues that are relevant to postcolonial IR, such as the pursuit of primacy in the War on Terror, the backlash in the form of Trumpism, and the Black Lives Matter protests. Morgenthau's work provides the intellectual roots that sustain these arguments. For a fifth debate on race in IR to materialize, it is thus this neglected dimension in Morgenthau's writing that postcolonial scholarship needs to engage with.

Este artículo aborda los crecientes llamamientos con relación a un quinto debate sobre la «amnesia racial» dentro de las RRII. La principal hipótesis se basa en dos puntos. En primer lugar, y en oposición a la creencia convencional, el mundo académico «ortodoxo», y en particular el realismo de Morgenthau, no omitió la justicia racial. Por el contrario, los realistas clásicos criticaron repetidamente la falta de justicia racial a lo largo de sus carreras. En segundo lugar, la justicia racial no sólo era una preocupación para Morgenthau, sino también representaba una parte integral de su concepción del interés nacional, particularmente en lo referente a la guerra de Vietnam. Para Morgenthau, el interés nacional fracasó en Vietnam porque Estados Unidos no supo definir sus propósitos a nivel interno. La cuestión de la justicia racial era fundamental para sus propósitos. La concepción del interés nacional por parte de Morgenthau tiene un impacto duradero en el campo académico realista contemporáneo. Este campo académico aborda temas que son relevantes para las RRII postcolo-

niales, como la búsqueda de la primacía en la Guerra contra el Terrorismo, la reacción violenta en forma de trumpismo y las protestas en el marco del movimiento «*Black Lives Matter*» (las vidas negras importan). El trabajo de Morgenthau proporciona las raíces intelectuales que sustentan estas hipótesis. Para que pueda materializarse un quinto debate con relación la raza en las RRII, es necesario que el campo académico poscolonial aborde esta dimensión, descuidada en los escritos de Morgenthau.

Cet article répond au nombre croissant d'appels à un cinquième débat sur « l'amnésie de la race » des RI. L'argument central est double. D'abord, contrairement à la sagesse populaire, la justice raciale n'a pas été omise dans la recherche « orthodoxe », en particulier dans le réalisme d'Hans Morgenthau. Au contraire, les réalistes classiques ont régulièrement critiqué l'absence de justice raciale tout au long de leur carrière. Ensuite, la justice raciale ne se contentait pas de préoccuper Hans Morgenthau : elle faisait partie intégrante de sa conception de l'intérêt national, notamment vis-à-vis de la guerre du Vietnam. Pour lui, l'intérêt national n'a pas prévalu au Vietnam parce que les États-Unis n'avaient pas défini la finalité de cette guerre au niveau national. La question de la justice raciale était déterminante pour sa finalité. Les effets de la conception d'Hans Morgenthau de l'intérêt national sont encore visibles sur la recherche réaliste contemporaine. Cette recherche traite de problématiques pertinentes pour les RI postcoloniales, comme la recherche de primauté dans la lutte contre le terrorisme, le retour de bâton sous la forme du trumpisme et les manifestations Black Lives Matter. Le travail d'Hans Morgenthau fournit les racines intellectuelles qui nourrissent ces arguments. Pour qu'un cinquième débat sur la race en RI voit le jour, il faut donc que la recherche postcoloniale s'intéresse à cette dimension négligée des écrits d'Hans Morgenthau.

Keywords: classical realism, fifth debate in IR, race

Palabras clave: realismo clásico, quinto debate en RRII, raza

Mots clés: réalisme classique, cinquième débat en RI, race

Introduction

In a recent article, [Hobson \(2022\)](#) urgently calls for a fifth great debate in international relations (IR). Unwittingly, he argues, large parts of the discipline provide an “apologia for racism” ([Hobson 2022](#), 1) by not engaging with the racialized origins and nature of the discipline and world politics at large. However, Hobson is far from convinced that this necessary debate will take place anytime soon. He writes that

while a fifth great debate concerning the Eurocentric racism of orthodox international relations/international political economy is long overdue, unfortunately the chances of it occurring are slim to zero. This is partly because intradisciplinary dialogue between international relations' orthodox and critical wings has completely broken down and partly because a simmering “white silence” of denial is the most likely response. ([Hobson 2022](#), 16)

With the aim to address this concern and provide a productive starting point for this debate, this article reflects on the role of race in classical realist thought. This is because it is one of the earliest theories to have had an impact on the discipline as we know it today. What is more, in many contributions to postcolonial IR and critical IR at large, classical realism is perceived to be an antithesis to their scholarship because it represents an orthodox IR that has omitted race from its scholarship. To use [Hobson's \(2022, 13\)](#) words, “We find an evacuation and naturalization of Western empire in the classical realist work of Hans Morgenthau ... and other realists.” However, recent IR scholarship has shown that classical realism precisely can

offer a base to (re-)start an intradisciplinary dialogue between orthodox and critical wings of the discipline. Solomon (2012), for example, was one of the first to show in the *International Studies Review* that classical realists considered emotions like love in their work, and reconsidering them offers fresh perspectives for the study of emotions in IR. Furthermore, Foulon and Meibauer (2020) have shown that realism can complement efforts to globalize IR by providing a historization and contextualization of state behavior and offering global case studies. Behr and Shani (2021) constructed a space for a pluriversal dialogue between different cosmologies based on their reading of mid-twentieth-century émigré scholars that are often linked to classical realism. Similarly, Karkour and Giese (2020) demonstrated that classical realist scholarship can serve as a bulwark against ideological camps in IR and rejuvenate a pluralist dialogue in the discipline. Finally, amongst others, Rösch and Watanabe (2017) demonstrated that realism is not exclusively a Western constellation of theories, but their methods have been employed and their questions have been asked across time and space.

Inspired by this scholarship, we argue that the question of racial justice was important for classical realist scholarship and that a reconsideration of some of their concepts—in particular, the national interest—will help to get a fifth great debate in IR off the ground. For, not only were classical realist scholars informed in their own thought by considerations for racial justice, but they have also inspired contemporary contributions to IR in reconsidering (foreign) policymaking. In other words, the present article responds to Acharya's (2014, 650) urge to “rethink their [so-called orthodox or mainstream theories like realism] assumptions and broaden the scope of their investigations” not only by looking beyond what is commonly associated with realist scholarship but also by reflecting on the very core of classical realism. To provide evidence to our argument, we focus on arguably the most prolific classical realist scholar: Hans J. Morgenthau. Repeatedly, Morgenthau has been called out for being the archetypical representative of orthodox IR by perpetuating a conservative and even reactionary worldview that provided the ground to sustain and further incorporate racism into the fabric of the discipline *and* world politics. However, as Rosenberg et al. (2023, 7; italics in the original) recently maintained, while “realism has functioned as the commonest *target* of critique ..., realism itself has functioned as a language of critique.” Demonstrating realism as a language of critique in terms of racism will help us to initiate this new great debate, as it reconsiders and rewrites the history of IR by gaining a different perspective of some of its core post-World War II representatives.

In doing so, we do not intend to offer a hagiographic reading of Morgenthau and his work but aim to demonstrate that questions of racial justice significantly informed his scholarship in an environment—academic and beyond—that had normalized racism and anti-Semitism. It is for this reason that we focus on two important events in which questions of racial justice can be most prominently distilled for Morgenthau's thought: the civil rights movement in the United States and the Vietnam War. There are several reasons that justify this choice. First, it demonstrates that Morgenthau did not separate domestic from foreign affairs, as both realms influence and co-constitute each other. This will be particularly relevant for our discussion of Morgenthau's national interest. Second, both were not singular events but were ongoing for much of Morgenthau's career in the United States. What is more, as archival research and a longitudinal analysis of his entire work reveal, his stance on racial justice during these two events was informed by his earlier thought on the political during his European years and his own personal experiences of racism and forced migration in the 1930s. Finally, our choice highlights that, while *Politics among Nations* is Morgenthau's most well-known work, he was a prolific writer, and his thought is most vividly expressed in essays and papers that he regularly published in newspapers, magazines, and journals but which have been until today hardly ever considered. Consequently, the argument in this paper is based on

the study of Morgenthau's most important academic contributions, such as *Politics among Nations*, *The Purpose of American Politics*, and *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, as well as on contributions intended for a wider audience and personal letters.

This paper proceeds in four steps. First, we summarize postcolonial critiques of classical realist scholarship before contextualizing Morgenthau and his work into mid-twentieth-century United States. In doing so, we particularly reflect on his stance toward the American civil rights movement and on the Vietnam War. Third, we zoom in onto Morgenthau's concept of the national interest and unearth to what extent considerations of racial justice played a role for him in conceiving of it because, as Shilliam (2023, 38) writes, "Hans Morgenthau identified domestic racism as a fundamental challenge to the national interest in the United States." Finally, we consider how Morgenthau's national interest and racial justice have informed IR scholarship to date and to what extent they can be seen as an invitation to start this fifth great debate.

Postcolonial Critiques of Realism's "Race Amnesia"

For more than two decades, postcolonial IR has elaborated on how the discipline has (unwittingly) omitted race as a fundamental category of analysis of world politics. This "amnesia" about race according to postcolonial scholars—for example, Persaud and Walker (2001), Davis et al. (2020), Biswas (2021), Shilliam (2011), and Vitalis (2000)—was reflected in the silence about imperial violence against racial minorities in Western democracies and the former colonies. As Sankaran Krishna writes,

IR discourse's valorisation, indeed fetishisation, of abstraction is premised on a desire to escape history, to efface the violence, genocide, and theft that marked the encounter between the rest and the West in the post-Columbian era. Abstraction, usually presented as the desire of the discipline to engage in theory-building rather than in descriptive or historical analysis, is a screen that simultaneously rationalises and elides the details of these encounters. By encouraging students to display their virtuosity in abstraction, the discipline brackets questions of theft of land, violence, and slavery - the three processes that have historically underlain the unequal global order we now find ourselves in. (Krishna 2001, 401–2)

Similarly, Barder (2017, 510) writes that "the concepts of race, racial hierarchy, and conflict received scant attention until very recently. Since the end of World War II, the previous century's concern with imperialism and anxieties over race have largely been forgotten or occluded." Due to such an "escape" from history and neglect of questions of imperial and racial violence, postcolonial IR scholarship brands realism, classical and structural, as, at best, silent about racism. At worst, as racist. For example, in *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, Hobson (2012, 84) originally argued that realism, again both classical and structural, engaged in "subliminal Eurocentrism" by which he meant the theories sought "to sanitise or whitewash Western imperialism from the historical record of world politics." "This move," Hobson (2012, 186) adds, "allows its representatives to speak a language that has appeared to be more socially acceptable in the post-Nazi/postcolonial era." In particular, the language employed "conceptions of formal or informal hierarchy and gradated sovereignty" that left the West "the pioneering agent or subject of world politics while the East is portrayed as a passive object of the diktat of the Western great powers" (Hobson 2012, 186). Indeed, as Morcillo Laiz (2022) has shown, it was not only the language of IR that has been affected, but realist scholarship was also used to shape non-Western educational institutions and disciplinary boundaries to replicate the ones of the West. More recently, Hobson (2022) conceded that such Eurocentrism is, in fact, racism.

Henderson (2013) advances a similar claim to Hobson, linking, in a first step, classical and structural realism to anarchy and, in a second step, anarchy to racism and imperial violence. Thus, Henderson (2013, 70) “examines the extent to which realism (and liberalism) are oriented by racist—primarily, white supremacist—precepts that inhere within their foundational construct, namely, anarchy.” “While realism and idealism converge on a white supremacist logic that has been evident since the establishment of the field of IR,” Henderson (2013, 85) argues, “not only was this racism present at the creation of the field, but it continues to inform the major paradigms, primarily—though not uniquely—through their conceptions of anarchy.” Realism “roots its conception of anarchy in the Hobbesian view of the state of nature” (Henderson 2013, 80). The Hobbesian state of nature, however, does not describe “the general state of mankind”; instead, it is applicable to “non-Whites.” Thus, “a non-white people, indeed the very non-white people upon whose land his fellow Europeans were then encroaching, is [Hobbes’] only real-life example of people in a state of nature” (Mills 1997, 65). Henderson therefore concludes,

the concerns among realists and idealists with anarchy are grounded in a racist discourse that is concerned with the obligations of superior peoples to impose order on the anarchic domains of inferior peoples in order to prevent the chaos presumed to be endemic in the latter from spilling over into the former’s territories or self-proclaimed spheres of interest. Similarly, the realist and idealist concern with power was grounded in a racist discourse concerned largely with the power of whites to control the tropics, subjugate its people, steal its resources and superimpose themselves through colonial administration. (Henderson 2013, 85)

In our view, the problem with these postcolonial critiques of realism is one of false generalization. The first generalization is with regard to the association of realism with Hobbesianism. In a letter to *International Affairs*, Morgenthau explicitly rejected Martin Wight’s Hobbesian interpretation of his work:

To say that a truth is “hidden” in an “extreme” dictum can hardly be called an endorsement of the dictum. To call a position “extreme” is not to identify oneself with the position but to disassociate oneself from it ... I was trying to establish the point, in contrast to Hobbes’s, that moral principles are universal and, hence, are not created by the state. (Morgenthau 1959, 52)

Our point here is not that Morgenthau simply critiqued Hobbes, but that he rejected Hobbesian thinking.¹ Hobbesian thinking reinforces a “racist dualism” that distinguishes between the realm of whites/civilization from the realm of non-whites/barbarism. The state of nature and/or anarchy apply only to the latter to rationalize colonial administration. As Morgenthau’s reply to Wight demonstrates, he rejected the idea that there is one set of moral principles for so-called civilized society and another for the realm of “anarchy” (that is to say, beyond the state). This rejection is also evident in the fact that anarchy is central to structural realism but not classical realism.² “The term anarchy is mentioned in *Politics Among Nations* only three times; and when Morgenthau refers to it, it is in a critical dissociation from Hobbes,” as Behr and Heath (2009, 332) write. As the rest of our paper demonstrates, there is a lack of evidence from Morgenthau’s writings that he accepted “Hobbesian thinking.” Or, more specifically, that he rationalized “the construction of a hierarchical racial order to be imposed upon the anarchy allegedly arising from the tropics, which begged for rational colonial administration from whites” and/or “supported white racial domination through racial discrimination against non-white minorities at home” (Henderson 2013, 85). The evidence instead shows that Mor-

¹We thank one of our reviewers for raising this distinction between the critique of Hobbes and Hobbesian thinking.

²Indeed, Henderson (2013, 84–8) who presents this critique engages primarily with Waltz and presents no evidence that anarchy was fundamental to Morgenthau.

genthau was, in contrast, a critic of those who provided such rationalization and/or failed to address racial discrimination at home.

These generalizations are problematic because they lead to a gross misrepresentation of Morgenthau's thought on the national interest and its relation to racial justice in America. In the next section, we contextualize Morgenthau's quest on racial justice within the civil rights movement in mid-twentieth century America. After this, we outline in detail how Morgenthau incorporated his thought on racial justice into his conception of the national interest.

Morgenthau's Quest for Racial Justice in Mid-Twentieth-Century America

In the mid-1950s, Morgenthau reflected in a lengthy piece published in the *Review of Politics* on the state of his discipline. In it, and this deserves to be quoted at length to begin this section, Morgenthau (1955a, 446–7) summarized what in his opinion the task of political science would be

true to its moral commitment [political science] ought at the very least to be an unpopular undertaking. At its very best, it cannot help being a subversive and revolutionary force with regard to certain vested interests – intellectual, political, economic, social in general. For it must sit in continuous judgment upon political man and political society, measuring their truth, which is in good part a social convention, by its own. By doing so, it is not only an embarrassment to society intellectually, but it becomes also a political threat to the defenders or the opponents of the status quo or to both; for the social conventions about power, which political science cannot help subjecting to a critical – and often destructive – examination, are one of the main sources from which the claims to power, and hence power itself, derive.

Being critical of the socio-political status quo and challenging the vested interests that maintain it meant for Morgenthau that as an academic one is never solely a scholar but always also has to be an activist, to use a contemporary term. Around the same time that the *Review of Politics* paper was published, Morgenthau reiterated this point in a letter to Paul H. Nitze from February 12, 1955 (Morgenthau 1955c, HJM Papers, Box 44). He wrote that “[p]olitical theory is both theory and action. It is action in that it identifies itself with a particular point of view. It is a theory in that it provides a rational demonstration of that particular point of view.” Being Jewish, having experienced the rise of fascism, and having been forced to migrate more than once, it was clear to Morgenthau since his days in Europe that as a scholar one has to counteract developments that threaten democracy and the peaceful cohabitation of people. Just before taking up a position in Geneva in the early 1930s, for example, Morgenthau left a lecture at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt disillusioned. Theoretical talks there about a “free-floating intelligentsia” seemed futile to him if they did not take notice of the Nazi henchmen on the streets and the dangers that they entailed for the Weimar Republic (Morgenthau 1984, 14). Later in the United States, he again faced developments that had the potential to threaten democracy at large from anti-Semitism and xenophobia in academia and beyond to radical-right political movements like McCarthyism. As was the case in Europe, he used his voice to raise concerns publicly about these developments, from teaching at Jewish community centers and adult education institutions to speaking nationally on TV and radio.³

Specter (2022a, 162–3) is therefore right to argue that Morgenthau's *Haltung* also evolved in the United States, but his was far from merely being conservative, as Levine (2013) implied, or even reactionary and racist. This is because having had these experiences, Morgenthau regularly stressed the importance of minorities for democracy—both as a dissenting voice and a corrective for the majority as

³See, for example, leaflets and transcripts in Hans J. Morgenthau Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Boxes 3, 87, and 91.

well as the necessary other to gain understanding about the self in an ever-evolving process of becoming—in his work and as an activist. For example, he supported the careers of foreign academics in Chicago from the Austrian Gerald Stourzh to the Chinese Tsou Tang. Throughout his career in the United States, Morgenthau also criticized American governments for supporting fascist regimes in the name of anti-Communism. For example, after the CIA had supported a coup d'état against Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, [Morgenthau \(1974\)](#) not only spoke in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* against American support but went even further to argue that since World War II, the United States intervened “on behalf of ... fascist repression against ... radical reform” “with unflinching consistency.” He concluded that the United States “has become the foremost counterrevolutionary status quo power.” He was equally not convinced about the prospects of a “grand theory” for IR. This is because people speak with different tongues and through them, they give voice to different aspirations, emotional reactions, and values. Even if they would speak one language, the expression of their experiences would differ ([Morgenthau 1948](#), 201–2). Consequently, no single theoretical endeavor can capture the diversity of political thought around the world ([Rösch 2022](#), 209). In fact, all attempts in IR to develop such a theory thus far prioritized Western perspectives over others. In other words, Morgenthau spoke against a grand theory on similar grounds as [Hobson \(2022, 9\)](#) brought forward. Trying to develop one would “manifest cultural racism,” as it “deploy[s] a heavily polarized Western-filtered lens” that would not appreciate “the non-West ... on its own terms.”

To further explicate the context that had normalized cultural racism and reflect on Morgenthau's stance on racial justice, this paper now draws attention to Morgenthau's reaction to two crises that he experienced after his forced migration to the United States in 1937: racial segregation and the civil rights movement as well as the Vietnam War. As mentioned, both crises highlight that for Morgenthau, the artificial separation of domestic and foreign politics did not do justice to the multiplicities of human relations and only would lead to a distorted understanding of reality. What is more, Morgenthau fervently argued for racial justice during these crises, as they had the potential to threaten American democracy at large ([Morgenthau 1970](#), 32).

Racial Segregation, Civil Rights Movement, and the Crisis of American Democracy

The first issue that Morgenthau identified as an existential threat for American democracy was racial inequalities. With the end of World War II, the civil rights movement in the United States gained momentum, not least because many Black Americans had served in the armed forces to fight Nazism in Europe and the Japanese in the Asia-Pacific in the name of peace and democracy. Now, they also demanded equal opportunities at home. A watershed moment occurred in 1954, when the US Supreme Court declared in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* racial segregation in schools as unconstitutional. Shortly thereafter, Rosa Parks became a national symbol of the civil rights movement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) for refusing to surrender her seat to a White person. A first culmination of the civil rights movement took place in August 1963, when Martin Luther King Jr. marched with approx. 250.000 people to Washington to demand jobs and freedom.

During this time, Morgenthau, then not yet the “national figure” ([Arendt and McCarthy 1995](#), 217) that he became in the mid-1960s for publicly criticizing the Vietnam War, regularly advocated for racial justice. Trying to foster a public debate, this happened mainly in articles written for a wider non-academic audience in magazines like the *Chicago Review*, *New Republic*, or *Commentary*. Back then, the latter was not yet a neoconservative mouthpiece, but was still promoting ideas of the Jewish left. In these writings, [Morgenthau \(1970, 210\)](#) criticized that the continued racial segregation was in fact at odds with “the distinctive characteristic of American soci-

ety: equality in freedom." Claiming to be a democracy, the US government needed to provide equal opportunities to all their citizens for them to pursue their social and economic aspirations (Shilliam 2023, 50). However, the situation was far from it because ruthless politicians securitized Black Americans to conceal the failure of their economic policies to address unemployment and poverty for American society at large in the mid-twentieth century. As a result, Morgenthau (1970, 213) cautioned that resentments would grow and cause "anew the enmity of races and jeopardizing the ability of the government to govern without the continuous use of violence." Furthermore, racial segregation not only had the potential to lead to more violence domestically, but Morgenthau also feared its impact on America's standing in the world. Treating Black Americans as inferior to White Americans would undermine "the effectiveness of the ideological policies which it [the United States] pursues toward the native population of Africa" (Morgenthau 1955b, 321; also Shilliam 2023, 52). Eventually, he argued that it would not be America's foreign affairs that would trigger a domino effect in which major non-aligned countries in Africa and elsewhere would opt to support the Soviet Union and fall for Communism, as then President Dwight D. Eisenhower claimed in the 1950s, but their domestic racial inequalities.

For Morgenthau, therefore, these inequalities affected the entire socio-political fabric of the United States. Racism "is a metastasized cancer to be treated by more complex and uncertain means" (Morgenthau 1970, 211). Enforcing policies "by legal enactment" (Morgenthau 1970, 210) would not solve these inequalities, as they would not do away with the underlying racist ideologies. Here, Morgenthau (2012; also Scheurman 2008; Chas 2023) makes a similar point to one from more than 30 years earlier in his European writings. Settling for a way to live together in a society and how to balance its diversities is a constantly evolving process that involves all society members. In other words, it cannot be solved by legal means alone but requires a political solution. Only in a political sphere can the aforementioned equality in freedom be established. This is because freedom results "from the interplay of the totality of social forces, opposing, checking, supporting each other ... in ever changing configurations" (Morgenthau 1958, 122). By securitizing Black Americans and thereby politicizing their bodies and lives, however, a depoliticization of American society took place. The United States were no longer a "marketplace of ideas" (Morgenthau 2004, 69) that would capture American society in all its diversities because not all people could express their interests and opinions freely to an extent that they feel satisfied of having contributed to an ever-evolving understanding of the common good. Rather, for Morgenthau, continued racial segregation would eventually cause a clash of irreconcilable interests that breaks society into "neo-communities," to use a term that the sociologist Reckwitz (2020) recently coined, meaning that particularistic, exclusionary discussions would evolve that no longer involve all society members. However, not engaging with others reduces the ability of people to restrain themselves, as they no longer encounter different perspectives that not only challenge but also invite them to reflect on and potentially revise their own perspectives. Hence, as Hom and Steele (2010, 279) have shown, "restraint is the most reliable means to limit excesses," and if restraint is missing, it may indeed lead to violence between these different neo-communities. In terms of racial injustice, mass violence had happened before Morgenthau arrived in the United States like the Tulsa Race Massacre (1921) and he had to witness them himself like the Newark Riots (1967). Transcending racial segregation was therefore for Morgenthau essential to protect democracies from imploding, causing even more disruption and violence, as only in democratic political spheres racism could be curtailed.

Morgenthau was unsure, however, if the nation-state constituted the right form of sociation to address racial inequalities and if liberal modernity in which nation-states were embedded was in fact causing these inequalities. Much has been written

about Morgenthau promoting the idea of a global form of sociation that transcends the nation-state (e.g., [Scheuerman 2011](#); [Kostagiannis 2014](#); [Karkour 2022a](#)). Often, these contributions focus on Morgenthau's concern about states having the ability to destroy humanity altogether since the nuclear bomb was invented. However, when recent readings of Morgenthau identify a "tragic" ([Lebow 2003](#)) and even "apocalyptic" ([McQueen 2018](#)) streak in his work, it was also because of pressing concerns about racial inequalities and societal frictions created through the very existence of the nation-state. National narratives of homogeneity and uniqueness, which are the essence of the nation-state for Morgenthau, always entail the creation of otherness. However, othering people forfeit at the same time the *raison d'être* of the nation-state to be able to secure freedom for its people. This is one of the reasons that turns the nation-state into a "blind and potent monster," of which he warned during the early 1960s ([Morgenthau 1962a](#), 61). A few years later, in the essay collection *Truth and Power*, he further elaborated on what he meant by that, arguing that "[a] government possessed of unprecedented power [through weapons of mass destruction] appears to be impotent in the face of the threat of social disintegration and the promise of social justice" ([Morgenthau 1970](#), 32). As Morgenthau witnessed himself, not trying to address these inequalities, potentially even furthering them to secure the status quo, might not only disintegrate the affected states through violent domestic outbursts but might also pave the way for fascism or other forms of totalitarian governments ([Morgenthau 1970](#), 37).

Vietnam War, Colonialism, and the Crisis of Ethics

The second event that highlighted for Morgenthau an existential threat to American democracy caused by a lack of racial justice was the Vietnam War. It is by now well known that Morgenthau fiercely opposed this war for which he paid a personal price. According to his own accounts ([Morgenthau 1970](#), 16; see also [Molloy 2020](#), 330), the FBI operated a "Project Morgenthau,"⁴ during which his tax revenues were scrutinized for inconsistencies, to search for material to incriminate him. While the existence of such a project has not been conclusively confirmed, the Department of Defense indeed never again consulted his expertise, and numerous letters addressed to Morgenthau have been preserved in his archive at the Library of Congress that tell a grim story of personal attacks against him. In a letter to Walter Lippmann from May 6, 1965 ([Morgenthau 1965a](#), HJM Papers, Box 36), he consequently reports that "I receive every day letters with xenophobic, red-baiting, and anti-Semitic attacks, not to speak of anonymous telephone calls at all hours of the day and night."

In recent years, a substantial body of literature has emerged that provided IR with in-depth knowledge about Morgenthau's anti-Vietnam War stance (e.g., [See 2001](#); [Zambernardi 2011](#); [Klusmeyer 2016](#); [Karkour 2018](#); [Reichwein 2021](#); [Kirshner 2022](#)). While these writings could help to question interpretations of Morgenthau simply opposing the war due to military and political misjudgments, Morgenthau's concerns about racial justice were equally a stimulus for his critique and have yet to be considered in more detail. In fact, the Vietnam War had convinced him that American foreign policy was involved in the enforcement of a paternalistic, even racist worldview. Critically employing Aristotle's distinction between master and slave, Morgenthau discussed with his students in the early 1970s how American foreign policy was a continuation of Western imperialism that had subjugated other people for centuries based on racialized worldviews of Western superiority.

The paternalistic conception of the justification of slavery was based upon the Aristotelian principle; that is, to take good care of the slave was regarded as a moral

⁴In a letter to Martin F. Herz from May 14, 1969, Morgenthau spoke of an "Operation Morgenthau." See Hans J. Morgenthau Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Box 26.

principle. The master took care of the slave because the slave couldn't take care of himself. So you have here an assimilation of the relationship between a father and a child ... If you look at the justification for colonialism in Great Britain you find a very similar conception. If you read for instance the essay of John Stuart Mill on non-intervention, you'll find it the most fantastic ideological justification of British policy ... Mill makes a point that Britain has never interfered in the affairs of other nations, and when it has as in the case of India, it was only for the good of the barbarians. Here were again people who could not take care of their own affairs and were in a semi-barbaric state. The British would bring the enlightened principles of human life to those disadvantaged barbarians. (Morgenthau 2004, 34)⁵

In other words, Morgenthau criticized in these lectures American foreign policy for operating on racial inequalities that did not acknowledge the agency of other, particularly non-Western people to pursue their own political goals. However, sharing his concerns about American foreign policy with his students was not on the spur of the moment, but was the result of a prolonged reflection on what kind of foreign policy would be needed for the United States in an age of decolonization and in the context of the Vietnam War. Several years before the seminars on Aristotle's distinction between master and slave took place in late 1971, Morgenthau (1969) conceived of *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*. In this book, he had already elaborated on a critique of John Stuart Mill and his notion of non-intervention to highlight the misguided American intervention in Vietnam (Morgenthau 1969, 114–8).

We therefore disagree with the claim that Morgenthau did not critique America's involvement due to anti-imperialism (e.g., Guilhot 2014; Specter 2022a). In fact, this is precisely what Morgenthau did. The United States had misjudged for Morgenthau the conflict in Mainland Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese did not rise against the French to establish a communist regime—not least because of their historical opposition to the main communist country in the region, China—but they fought an anti-colonial war for “national liberation” (Morgenthau 1965b, 25). Communism only served the Vietnamese as a vehicle to achieve independence from France, and their communism differed from the ones in the Soviet Union or China, as they all pursued their own goals in their own contexts (Morgenthau 1968, 30; 1969, 132). In addition to the Vietnam War, Morgenthau's critique of American foreign policy objectifying non-Western people and what Hobson (2022, 13; italics in the original) calls “benign *liberal imperialism* of Britain and America” can be seen in his stance toward foreign aid. As he stressed on several occasions, foreign aid is not only a technical operation to provide food, shelter, or skillsets but depends “upon the existence of a political and social environment conducive to it” (Morgenthau 1962b, 267). Morgenthau received much criticism for it, as exemplified in a letter from a resident of Washington on May 21, 1976: “You white people, with your condescension, and paternalism, and I suspect racism too, are sickening” (Fort 1976, HJM Papers, Box 20). However, criticizing US foreign policy as paternalistic for not granting agency to others also meant that Morgenthau would criticize governments in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere for not using their agency to pursue a common good that had evolved out of discussions involving the whole of society but to satisfy their own vested interests. In other words, demanding racial justice entailed for Morgenthau not only equal opportunities but also was part of a wider “ethic of responsibility” (Klusmeyer 2009, 344; Stullerova 2021, 120).

As recent contributions to the discipline have shown (e.g., Long and Schmidt 2005; Isaac 2012; Specter 2022a), the United States pursued such paternalistic, racist foreign policies already before World War II. For Morgenthau, however, arriving in the United States with very little knowledge about the country prior to his forced migration, it was particularly since the end of the war that such a worldview came to

⁵In addition to the British Empire, Morgenthau also specifically criticizes the Spanish Empire and the American annexation of the Philippines.

dominate its foreign policy. In the United States, [Morgenthau \(1958, 176\)](#) argued, a new form of nationalism had emerged that was “in its truth a political religion, a nationalistic universalism which identifies the standards and goals of a particular nation with the principles that govern the universe.” Narratives of uniqueness in combination with a positivistic faith in the prospects of science turned into what [Morgenthau \(2004, 36\)](#) referred to his students as “cultural blinders” and what [Hobson \(2022, 4–5\)](#) called an “apparently neutral cultural rhetoric.” These blinders were so pervasive, dominating people’s (world) political imaginaries, that they concealed the structural racism that was woven in the social fabric of the United States. Consequently, foreign policymakers also approached external relations with “ethnocentric arrogance” ([Winsor 1969, 7](#)), as Morgenthau once called it in an interview, rather than considering socio-political and cultural contexts that would have provided them with a more intricate understanding of the issues the United States was engaged in ([Devetak 2018](#)). Being an émigré scholar helped [Morgenthau \(1960b\)](#) to identify these blinders because his “great advantage is that ... he can look at it [the United States] from within and also with the critical objectivity of an outsider. So he knows where the foundations, emotional and social, are weak,” as put in an Indian review of his work. Many high-ranking politicians of that time, by contrast, recognized this—if at all—only in hindsight. Former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, for example, remarked in the 2003 documentary *The Fog of War* that the insight information provided by Llewellyn Thompson, who previously had been US ambassador to the Soviet Union, helped to deescalate the Cuban Missile Crisis. McNamara also realized that this expert knowledge on Vietnam was missing and caused the United States to intervene in this anti-colonial war.⁶

Instead, political problems were solved through seemingly “technically self-sufficient and ... simple, clear-cut solutions” ([Morgenthau 1965b, 70](#)). It is for this reason that Morgenthau considered American foreign policy during the Vietnam War inadequate because it did not consider the specific historical Vietnamese context but tried to respond to what happened there with policies that were successful in Europe more than 20 years earlier. However, “the problems Americans are facing in Asia are utterly different from those they successfully dealt with in Europe two decades ago, and the political world they were facing in Europe has been radically transformed” ([Morgenthau 1968, 30](#); similar [1969, 130](#)). In a letter to Irving Kristol, then the editor of the anti-Stalinist British magazine *Encounter*, from August 20, 1956 ([Morgenthau 1956](#), HJM Papers, Box 34), Morgenthau had already outlined that “nationalism ... [in] Europe is entirely different from [the one] ... in Asia and Africa, a difference which we are unable to see because we project our conception of nationalism and our experience with it onto Asia and Africa.” This demonstrates that reflexivity was a key trait for Morgenthau to avoid essentializing one’s own position and neglecting racial and other differences in public opinion-making,⁷ as carefully elaborated by [Molloy \(2020\)](#) in more detail. To return to the lengthy quote of Morgenthau at the beginning of this section, “[d]issensus and healthy debate characterize genuine democracy for Morgenthau who was perturbed by what he perceived to be a worrying concern with conformity and consensus among the political and academic elites of Vietnam War era America” ([Molloy 2020, 321](#)).

Racial Justice in Morgenthau’s Conception of the National Interest

Building upon the previous section that showed Morgenthau’s quest for racial justice in the mid-twentieth century in America, an element of his work that has been

⁶McNamara recounts these episodes in the first lesson on “Empathize with your enemy.” For a digital copy, see <https://bit.ly/3O7oAyz> (accessed August 8, 2023).

⁷[Morgenthau \(2004, 36\)](#) particularly mentioned gender inequalities in his Aristotle-Lectures. In this sense, Morgenthau’s critique of racism resonates with recent attempts to conceptualize race as a material and spatio-temporal relation of power ([Harper-Shipman et al 2021](#)).

largely unacknowledged in IR so far, this section focuses on one of Morgenthau's misunderstood concepts—the national interest—to highlight how Morgenthau incorporated racial justice in his conception of the national interest.

While ultimately Morgenthau wanted to transcend a world of nation-states and argued for a new world order (Scheuerman 2011; McKeil 2023), he argued in *The Purpose of American Politics* that America cannot define its national interest without a clear sense of its national purpose. Morgenthau defined America's national purpose as "equality in freedom." Writing in 1960, Morgenthau noted that America was not capable of coming to a consensus over its national interest due to its failure to define this sense of purpose. To define the nation's purpose, Morgenthau argued, each generation of Americans needed to ask themselves anew: What does equality in freedom mean in the present historical context? In the context of his writing, such definition could not omit a key problem in American society: racial equality. "When we speak of equality in freedom in America and pride ourselves on its achievement," Morgenthau (1960a, 306) wrote, "we cannot ignore what has been a hindrance to its full achievement—that is, the denial of racial equality." America's national interest, therefore, ought to involve a spatio-temporal negotiation of its basic principles of equality and freedom. "The unequal condition of the black American," Morgenthau (1970, 209–10) wrote a decade later in *Truth and Power*, "has been an endemic denial of the purpose for the sake of which the United States of America was created and which, in aspiration and partial fulfillment has remained the distinctive characteristic of American society; equality in freedom." "Less than thirty years ago," Morgenthau added, "I had to deal with American consuls who considered it their patriotic duty to violate the law in order to prevent the immigration of Jews; once I was here, I could not find a place to sleep in the White Mountains of New Hampshire until I registered under my wife's maiden name." Racial justice was therefore integral to Morgenthau's thinking about the American national interest. The national interest could not be devoid from the transcendental standards that American society seeks to achieve, albeit cannot realize fully once and for all. Instead, each generation of Americans held a responsibility to redefine it; provide "equality in freedom" a concrete spatio-temporal meaning.

Morgenthau's critique of American society, as the events in Vietnam were unfolding, was precisely in that it failed to negotiate its sense of purpose and grapple with the reality of racial injustice. Resonating with his earlier European discussions of the concept of the political (Morgenthau 2012), such failure was ultimately the reason why America could not find consensus on its national interest. Morgenthau's understanding of the national interest therefore is different from how structural realists would conceptualize it later on, simply in terms of the balance of power abroad. While considerations of the balance of power are important, they were not sufficient according to Morgenthau (Molloy 2013; Karkour 2022b). Without a higher sense of purpose, equality in freedom defined in terms of racial justice at home and abroad, Morgenthau castigated the transformation of America into "a soulless giant, armed to the teeth and producing abundantly, but for no other end than to stay ahead of the Russians" (Morgenthau 1960a, 299). By contrast, Morgenthau (1960a, 299) argued that "our national purpose is not to stay ahead of the Russians quantitatively ... but to be different from, and superior to, them in those qualities which are peculiarly our own." The key quality that America possesses is ensuring that "equality in freedom still has a home in America and still worthy of emulation" (Morgenthau 1960a, 299). Nor is "equality in freedom" a question to be settled at home alone, but rather "the new significance of America as a model of equality" pertains also to "the nations emerging from colonial and semi-colonial status" (Morgenthau 1960a, 301). In other words, racial justice at home ought to also represent a model for America to become a model for racial justice abroad. In failing to achieve this, Morgenthau noted, "What an irony it would be if the majority of mankind were to achieve the American purpose for itself in opposition to America!" (Morgenthau

1960a, 307). Morgenthau's concern in this regard is epitomized in a letter to Senator Joseph S. Clark from January 7, 1967 (Morgenthau 1967, HJM Papers, Box 9) in which he complained about a Department of Defense sponsored propaganda movie distributed to schools that omitted Vietnamese anti-colonial struggles from its narrative. He concluded the letter, claiming that "I don't need to point to the ominous meaning that such a development [the ideological interference of the Department of Defense in public opinion-making] could have for the future of American democracy." Morgenthau saw the struggle for racial justice at home as integral to America's support for the global movement against colonialism and racial inequality abroad: "the racial minorities of America are in the process of merging into that vast movement of non-white peoples, comprising four fifth of mankind who demand equality" (Morgenthau 1960a, 307). This means that the anti-colonial struggles for racial justice are not antithetical to America's national interest but rather integral to it: "These peoples have undertaken to achieve for themselves and in relation to the white man what American has offered to the world as its purpose: equality in freedom" (Morgenthau 1960a, 307).

Morgenthau's articulation of America's purpose as fundamental to its national interest is well grounded in his classical realist theory. Upon closer reading, in his famous "six principles of political realism," Morgenthau already argued that the national interest does not have a set meaning once and for all: "the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated" (Morgenthau 1978, 9; also Morgenthau 1952, 972). Racial justice was an obvious question in the political and cultural context of 1960s America. Morgenthau argued that it was not only contrary to America's sense of purpose, equality in freedom, to fail to address it domestically and expand its horizon internationally, but also a threat to "the very survival of America" (Morgenthau 1960a, 299). America's purpose, thus, is not just "a matter of social justice" but "the survival of America depends on it" (Morgenthau 1960a, 300).⁸ This is because, first, it would leave America on the wrong side of history; "alone in a hostile world" (Morgenthau 1960a, 300). Secondly, due to the advent of nuclear weapons, this failure will potentially bring an end to humanity itself. The monumental task of expanding the horizon of equality in freedom, to Morgenthau, was thus a steppingstone to "build the foundations for a supranational order that will take the control of nuclear weapons out of the hands of the nation state" (Morgenthau 1960a, 310). Morgenthau's call here to expand the horizon of equality in freedom as a precondition for a supranational order may seem like a contradiction with his realist theory. Morgenthau, however, remains consistent with his theory: "The failures of Wilson, of foreign aid and liberation" Morgenthau writes, "teach us that neither the export of American institutions nor verbal commitments without deeds will serve our purpose" (Morgenthau 1960a, 310). In line with his critique of the "crusading spirit" in his "six principles of political realism," Morgenthau rejects America's imposition of foreign rule or institutions. Instead, Morgenthau argues for the restoration of democracy in America and the defense of freedom at home (Morgenthau 1960a, 311–23). In other words, America must lead by example at home, and it is this example, "established in the eyes of the world by deeds" that ought to one day be the foundation on which "the worldwide influence of America must rest" (Morgenthau 1960a, 310).

⁸For Morgenthau, survival is the minimum requirement of the national interest: "The survival of a political unit, such as a nation, in its identity is the irreducible minimum, the necessary element of its interests vis-a-vis other units" (1952, 973). The "balancing mechanism," whose aim is to preserve the nation's survival, would only clash with America's purpose if by defending racial justice, America would jeopardize its own existence. We use the term "would" here because the statement is hypothetical. Morgenthau considered the opposite to be the case in 1960s America: not addressing racial justice was the threat to the national interest's minimum requirement, America's survival. We thank one of our reviewers for raising this question on the clash between balancing mechanisms and the national purpose.

This reading contradicts postcolonial critiques of Morgenthau in Vietnam. Nicolas Guilhot (2014, 714), for example, writes that "Morgenthau's 1965 denunciation of US policy in Vietnam, is not based on a principled opposition to imperialism, but on a clear discernment of what constitutes, at a given historical moment, the national interest of the United States." Morgenthau's analysis, thus, "is the same analysis that sustains recent realist critiques of US ventures in Iraq or Afghanistan, such as John Mearsheimer's" (Guilhot 2014, 714). In light of the war in the Ukraine and Mearsheimer's claim that the West had forced Russia into attacking the Ukraine, the critique of realism as enabling imperialism once again resurfaced. Specter (2022b, 71; italics in the original) highlights in a recent piece for *Dissent*, a magazine in which also Morgenthau published during the Vietnam War, that there is a "larger story of realism's imperial investments. Realism was not born in the 1930s but the 1880s and '90s, a period when both the terms 'geopolitics' and *Lebensraum* (living space) were first coined." In *The Atlantic Realists*, Specter (2022a, 3) adds that "[r]ealism," Morgenthau included, offers "an ideological justification for empire." We have in contrast demonstrated that Morgenthau was a critic of those who rationalized imperialism based on paternalistic views that characterize others as "children" and/or "barbarians." We have also demonstrated, again in contrast to Guilhot and the wider postcolonial scholarship, that the national interest according to Morgenthau meant something fundamentally different from structural realists, such as Mearsheimer, whose primary consideration was American hegemony pursued via a strategy of "offshore balancing" (Mearsheimer 2018; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016). While "a plethora of neo-realists became cooks in the 'kitchen of power,'" *Politics Among Nations* originated as a reflexive attempt to critique the ideological rationalization of power, as Behr and Heath (2009, 345). Rather than an instrument of "offshore balancing," Morgenthau's national interest was more a "critical device" for a reflexive analysis of foreign policy (Behr 2013). By "reflexive," it is meant here an analysis that is aware of the self-deceptive nature, and thus limitation of, power (Morgenthau 1959; also Cozette 2008; Scheuerman 2010; Rösch 2014; Behr and Williams 2017; Molloy 2020). The national interest entails a critique of power—including the blind pursuit of military and economic power without transcendental moral standards that address issues such as racial justice in America and the former colonies.

Morgenthau saw that increased militarism abroad and America's failure to define its national interest, on the one hand, as representative of a failure of democracy at home. On the other hand, this failure risked eroding US democracy further. It led to an "imperial presidency" and eroded trust in government, opening the path for "someone else, more likely than not a demagogue or demagogic elite catering to popular emotions and prejudices who will create a public opinion in support of a certain policy more likely than not to be unsound and dangerous" (Morgenthau 1960a, 264). Foreign and domestic policies in Morgenthau's realism therefore were inextricably linked. Foreign policy did not begin where domestic policy has ended. Rather, failure to define America's purpose at home, in terms of racial equality, also has a bearing on its failure to recognize this purpose and the national interest abroad. "Anarchy" did not intervene, as with structural realists, to separate liberalism at home from power politics abroad (Bessner and Guilhot 2015).

There is a range of emerging classical realist literature in IR today that employs Morgenthau's understanding of the national interest, its link to democracy, and racial justice at home. This literature shows that Morgenthau's thought on racial justice and its relation to the national interest remains relevant to the discipline, in particular to current debates on US militarism in light of the War on Terror and the domestic backlash, in the form of Trumpism and the recent Black Lives Matter protests. A fifth debate on race in IR, if there is to be one, requires engagement with this neglected dimension in Morgenthau's writing and its contemporary applications.

The National Interest and Racial Justice in Contemporary Classical Realist Thought

Racial justice remains relevant to the contemporary classical realist conceptions of the national interest. The critique that classical realist works present of US foreign policy in this regard remains distinct from structural realism. As with Morgenthau's analysis of the failure of US policy in Vietnam, contemporary classical realist literature does not perceive foreign and domestic policy as separate realms. Rather, US militarism abroad on one hand, and racial justice and democracy at home on the other, are closely intertwined.

In their recent work, David Blagden and Patrick Porter present an analysis of US military involvement in the Middle East that draws on some of the concerns that Morgenthau earlier presented in Vietnam. "Realists," Blagden and Porter argue, "worry about the domestic consequences of an overmilitarized and expansive foreign policy." Indeed, Morgenthau was concerned that the excessive use of force in Vietnam would not only lead to policy failure but also threaten democracy at home by giving demagogues an opportunity to capitalize on the consequences of such failure (Morgenthau 1960a, 264–5). Similarly, Blagden and Porter (2021, 33) point out that "two decades of conflict in the name of combating global terrorism and defeating alien enemies accentuated the rise of an unhealthy, xenophobic, and paranoid populism." The Global War on Terror created a narrative of national security "around dangerous fanatical foreigners" that "inadvertently heightened xenophobia... increased toxic and potentially violent identity politics and racial divides" (Blagden and Porter 2021, 39). The consequence was a heightened national security state and surveillance of racial minorities at home. As Bali (2020, para. 1) put it in light of the Black Lives Matter protests, Trump described "purported lawlessness in cities like Portland and Chicago as 'worse than Afghanistan.'" Battlefields abroad served as laboratories "for counterinsurgency methods that are imported back into domestic policing" (Bali 2020, para. 3), while furnishing "a new enemy within" based on racial categories. "Military adventures," Morefield and Porter (2020, para. 12) write, created "a global battle space that ... 'boomeranged' back on the US, loosening restraint on the use of military violence at home." In short, as with Morgenthau, contemporary classical realist works account for the relationship between the national interest on the one hand, and the question of racial justice and democracy on the other. Militarism abroad, caused by a failure of America to define its national interest in terms of its sense of purpose and equality in freedom, remains intertwined with American democracy and the deterioration of race relations at home.

Due to this close interconnection between foreign policy and democracy at home, the aforementioned scholars argued that there was a need to reform US foreign policy. Recent works inspired by Morgenthau's writing took the task of presenting this reform. For example, to address the problem of mistrust in government elites that Morgenthau identified, scholars inspired by Morgenthau called for democratizing US foreign policy. Influenced by Morgenthau's (2004, 75) and other realists' like Hannah Arendt admiration for American town hall meetings, current scholarship seeks ways to rejuvenate them. Karkour (2022a) argued for the establishment of local branches of Think Tanks beyond the major cities to offer avenues for deliberation over the national interest in light of America's sense of national purpose. Behr (2019) has shown that in deciding upon a (foreign) policy strategy, politicians' decisions have to take the contingency and ephemerality of the national interest into account. To achieve this, Behr argued that it would be irresponsible to enact policies with irreversible outcomes. Rather, politicians need to consider the reversibility of their decisions, as the national interest is always in flux and continuously changes due to changing circumstances. This scholarship challenged the common misconception in the discipline that Morgenthau was cynical about democratic control of

foreign policy (Ripsman 2002, 34). Rather, the latest scholarship clarified that, according to Morgenthau (1960a), the government needs to play a leadership role in the debate over the national interest, namely to present a narrative over the nation's purpose, equality in freedom, and let the citizens deliberate over how it ought to be defined in the present spatio-temporal context. Democratizing American foreign policy is a policy tool today to address challenges not only posed by American foreign policy but also the failure of democracy and the question of racial justice at home, both of which were undermined by continuous militarism abroad. This dynamic, as noted in the works of Porter, Blagden, Morefield, Karkour, Behr, and others, contributed to the rise of demagoguery in the form of Trumpism and the deterioration of race relations by the targeting of racial minorities, as Morgenthau predicted over half a century ago. As Karkour (2022a, 586) concludes, "the democratization of US foreign policy is essential, on the one hand to empower the individual through enabling political engagement, and on the other to divert foreign policy from demagoguery and popular prejudices."

In sum, the literature outlined in this section shows that Morgenthau's thought on racial justice and its relation to the national interest remains relevant to the discipline, in particular to current debates on militarism in US foreign policy and its interlink with democracy and racial justice at home.

Fifth Debate on Race: An Invitation

Our central argument in this article was two-fold. First, contrary to conventional wisdom in postcolonial IR (and IR more generally), racial justice was not omitted in "orthodox" scholarship—in particular Morgenthau's realism. On the contrary, classical realists repeatedly critiqued the lack of racial justice throughout their careers, not least because political developments in Europe and later in the United States required them to do so. This is because they were often also targets of racial abuse. Second, and importantly, racial justice was not only a concern for Morgenthau but also integral to his conception of the national interest, particularly with regard the Vietnam War. To Morgenthau, the failure in Vietnam was not simply a failure to assess the balance of power or follow what later realists refer to as a strategy of "offshore balancing" to maintain it. Rather, the national interest failed abroad because the United States failed to define its purpose at home. Fundamental to its purpose was the question of racial justice. The United States thus embarked in an anti-colonial war. Imperial violence in the former colony was a reflection of racial violence against minorities at home. Militarism abroad reflected the failure of democracy at home, and the longer the war lasted the further democracy at home eroded.

Morgenthau's conception of the national interest, which links foreign policy to domestic politics, has an enduring impact on contemporary realist scholarship. Examples of this scholarship, as summarized in the last section of the article, engage with issues that are relevant to postcolonial IR, such as the pursuit of primacy and militarism in the War on Terror, the recent backlash in the form of Trumpism and populism at large as well as the Black Lives Matter protests (Shilliam 2023). Morgenthau's work provides the intellectual roots that sustain these arguments and their contemporary policy solutions to democratize foreign policy. If postcolonial scholars, such as Hobson, Henderson, and others, wish to engage in a fifth debate on race in IR, it is thus this neglected dimension in Morgenthau's writing that this scholarship should take into account. On many occasions, such as with questions of race, social equality, and colonialism, postcolonial scholarship would find a kindred spirit in classical realist scholarship. As Steele (2009, 357) wrote 15 years ago in this journal, "We may be coming to a point in the field of International Relations theory ... where the seeds of a pluralism planted some twenty years ago are reaping a mighty harvest." He added that "[w]hat the trailblazers ... could not envision was

that ... the pluralist infusion would allow today's IR scholars to engage classical realist texts in a critical and insightful manner." As of yet, however, this envisioning has hardly happened as we still do not listen "to other campfire tales" (Sylvester 2013, 621) in IR. While we do not expect postcolonial scholarship to agree with Morgenthau's reasoning and conclusions, we believe that outlining them not only would increase IR's harvest more widely but also present a suitable starting point to launch this much-needed debate in the discipline.

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