

Introduction

I FIRST LEARNED OF MAIDA SPRINGER IN 1985, WHEN I saw a postcard showing a picture of her that had been taken in Timbuktu, Mali, in 1974.¹ Microphone in hand and wearing African garments, Springer was speaking about the massive drought in the Sahel. She was in Mali as a member of the African American Labor Center (AALC), one of the international auxiliaries of the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).² An avid student of African American history, I was astonished to discover this woman, a pioneer domestic and international labor activist, whom I had never heard of. Then, in 1987, I came across more information on Springer through Pauli Murray's posthumously published autobiography, *Song in a Weary Throat*, which she dedicated to Springer. I also discovered a collection of Springer's papers at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College and the transcript of an interview of her conducted by the Black Women's Oral History Project.³ Researching Springer's work with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and with the AFL-CIO in Africa suggested how many aspects of African American history have yet to be recorded.

I decided to contact Springer to learn more about her career in the international labor movement, and she graciously invited me to her Pittsburgh home for a weekend. After we spent a couple of hours reviewing the events in her life, she

asked what I wanted of her. I explained my desire to write a dissertation on her career that would include oral-history segments. She replied that others had also asked for her help in writing her biography, but she was not interested. Accepting her explanation with some disappointment, I nevertheless insisted that she must at some point record the important history of her life's work. Later I learned that a number of labor and civil rights activists, including Pauli Murray, Caroline Ware, Julius Nyerere, and James Farmer, had similarly encouraged her to record her unique experiences. In 1973 Springer herself had launched an oral-history project to record the experiences of African labor leaders. Although the African American Labor History Center, formed to carry out this work, had the support of a wide range of renowned scholars and was under the aegis of the AALC, the project failed to obtain sufficient funding to carry out its work.

Springer responded that she was aware of the significance of her career to different histories. Then she looked at me and on the spot decided to collaborate with me on the dissertation. I had not expected her to change her mind, but I was pleased and honored that she had. Springer explained that others who had approached her had come with preconceived ideas about the roles she played, but she believed I would be fair.

At that time I knew little of the international Cold War struggle in the labor movement. Although I knew something about many of the people of African descent with whom Springer was connected, I knew nothing of the controversies surrounding white labor leaders like Charles Zimmerman, Jay Lovestone, and Irving Brown. I was also unfamiliar with the two rival world labor bodies, the non-Communist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Communist-run World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). During my preliminary research, I was surprised to discover that a fellow graduate student had heard of Springer's work. My reaction turned to shock when he asserted that she had been involved in international espionage activities designed to weaken and split African labor. This allegation was in complete contrast with what I knew about Springer from her collection of papers and other archival materials. I had read numerous letters from African labor and nationalist leaders expressing their complete trust and affection for her. Moreover, U.S. labor and government officials had made similar comments about Springer's influence. For example, Dan Lazorchick, who traveled to Africa in 1960 for the U.S. Department of Labor's Division of International Trade Union Organizations, remarked that his reception among Africans was greatly enhanced because of his connection to Springer.

I began to realize the extent to which the Cold War raged strong in scholarship about the AFL-CIO's role in Africa and elsewhere. By the time I had completed my research I knew how utterly inadequate much of this scholarship was

in assessing international labor relations from the standpoint of African American labor leaders and the Africans with whom they worked. The African labor movements, particularly those in the British colonies, counted Springer, George McCray, and A. Philip Randolph as vital allies in the effort to advance their interests internationally. Randolph, who was Springer's lifelong mentor, encouraged her ascent in the ranks of labor's leadership, used her organizational and promotional skills in domestic civil rights activism, and, as a vice president of the AFL-CIO, supported her Africa programs.

My research and interactions with Springer have given me no reason to doubt that she has provided truthful portrayals of her experiences as she sees them. She does not claim to be objective, and I agree that complete objectivity is elusive. In this study, I have instead strived for balance by giving serious attention to all of the information I have gathered. In writing about the AFL-CIO's controversial foreign policy and Springer's role with respect to it, I have attempted to blend her assessment of events, historical documentation, and criticisms of the AFL-CIO's policies and practices into a cohesive yet multifaceted story.

At no time has Springer attempted to impose her views on me. For example, while she responded to criticisms of the AFL-CIO's role in Africa, she also suggested that I draw my own conclusions. She placed only two limitations on my writing. First, we agreed that this biography would focus on her public and not her private life. Springer is protective not so much of her own privacy as of that of her family. Still, she has provided evocative portraits of some family members. Second, after I had come across letters in her home revealing that a small number of African and U.S. labor leaders had acted in dishonest and self-serving ways at her expense, she requested that I not use this material. She did not want to appear vengeful or bitter; nor did she think her detractors deserved the attention. Moreover, she seemed not to want these negative incidents to overshadow some of the more positive aspects of her work with labor nor to serve the purposes of those whom she views as having a vendetta against labor without an attendant interest in building a more equitable labor movement. When controversial material of this kind was available in public archives, I have addressed these issues.

A unique feature of this biography is that it connects pan-Africanism, national and international labor relations, the Cold War, and African American, labor, women's, and civil rights history. In addition to documenting Springer's role in international labor relations, the biography examines a wide range of social movements and political leaders. Its principal goal is to understand Springer's role as a black woman working in the white male-dominated fields of the U.S. labor movement and international affairs and within the context of the Cold War. It addresses four major questions. First is what impact Springer's race, gender, nationality, and AFL affiliation had on her experiences within the Amer-

ican labor movement and how these factors influenced her relationships with African labor leaders, ICFTU leaders, and colonial government officials. Second is how her activism in Africa changes our understanding of the conflicts over international labor policy within the AFL-CIO and between the AFL-CIO and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). The third question concerns Springer's role in the fiercely contested pan-African labor struggles over the nonalignment issue and the nation-building policies of independent African nations. Finally, the fourth question has to do with the way Springer negotiated her work within the ideological and structural parameters of the AFL-CIO's foreign policy.

Although Springer has begun to receive attention from scholars, no one has yet documented and analyzed the role of African American labor leaders in Africa during the Cold War and the various independence movements.⁴ Pan-African scholarship and scholarship concerning the response of African Americans to U.S. foreign policy recognizes the vital role African labor played in anti-colonial struggles; less understood, however, are the ways in which the strong ties between African American labor leaders and African labor and independence leaders contributed to the independence struggles, the formation of AFL-CIO policy, and the development of stronger labor unions.⁵ African labor scholarship also has largely ignored the tremendous influence African American labor leaders had in forging links between Africa and the West and the role that their strong professional and personal ties played in shaping the pan-African labor debate over the volatile issue of affiliation to non-African labor internationals.⁶ Scholarship concerning AFL-CIO foreign policy has tended to concentrate on its role in Europe or the Americas.⁷ Those scholars who have given some attention to Africa, including strong critics of AFL-CIO Cold War policies, have drawn little attention to the influence that blacks, both in the United States and in Africa, had on the direction, scope, and formation of AFL-CIO and ICFTU foreign policy.⁸

Springer's testimony and the wealth of papers concerning her career and the work of her colleagues open up a new arena of African American history and help to reshape the history of AFL-CIO activism in Africa. The paucity of information about Springer in labor, pan-African, and women's histories is largely due to the dearth of scholarship on the activities of the AFL-CIO in Africa; secondary factors are androcentrism in scholarship and Springer's own diffidence in promoting her achievements.⁹ Her story demonstrates interconnections between the struggles for African liberation and the U.S. civil rights movement.

Scholars have noted that World War II, by opening up national boundaries, allowed for the domestic race question to be linked with international issues of colonialism. Brenda Gayle Plummer and Penny M. Von Eschen are among those who argue that the repression of the Cold War contributed to a general de-

cline in anticolonial activism in the United States at the same time that opportunities for furthering the domestic civil rights agenda emerged.¹⁰ Indeed the statements of Randolph and Springer during this period reflect the general optimism regarding progress in civil rights. Speaking before workers in Morogoro, Tanganyika, in 1958, Springer remarked, "Prejudice is a disease which my country has not been cured of entirely but Negroes and whites alike in my country are determined to rid ourselves of this cancer. It is easier said than done. But the progress we have made in the last 20 years while not compelling at least gives room for hope."¹¹

Some American blacks were beginning to break through barriers to employment in the professions and other job categories. Legal supports for segregation in housing, transportation, eating establishments, hotels, and public education were gradually dropping. The negative effects of segregation on the world's perception of American democracy and the exploitation of the issue by the Soviets also served as a powerful stimulus for change.¹²

Penny Von Eschen's contention, however, that Randolph was among those African American leaders who began to emphasize their Americanness as a way of distancing themselves from Africa is inconsistent with his reputation as a staunch defender of African labor and nationalist movements. Both Springer and Randolph had a vital concern with Africa at a time when most African Americans were reluctant to identify with the continent because of the deprecation of all things African in U.S. culture. In 1952 Randolph called for the creation of a "world congress of Negro workers" that would fight both colonialism and communism. Scheduled to speak before workers in New Delhi and Burma in 1953, Randolph expressed a longing also to visit Africa, "where the workers are stirring in their struggle for status, freedom and dignity."¹³ At the fifth ICFTU World Congress, held in Tunis in 1957, Randolph delivered a strongly worded anticolonial speech that validated the views of Africans present. In a letter written a few months later to the British TUC complaining about British labor representatives, the Ghana TUC quoted extensively from his speech.¹⁴ As an AFL-CIO vice president, Randolph had the requisite stature to get the concerns of Africans a hearing before an international whose policies the AFL-CIO was attempting to align more with the concerns of African labor and anticolonial movements as well as with the concerns of U.S. labor in fighting communism.

Springer, Randolph, and McCray tried to manipulate the Cold War in service to African liberation. Yet the wholesale expulsion of Communists who played leading roles in organizing blacks into CIO unions and in fighting union discrimination contributed to an environment less receptive to black advances. Springer understood how the Communist Party (CP) could be a source of inspiration and comfort for African Americans such as Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du

Bois, and CP leader Benjamin Davis. Her dilemma was to reconcile her disapproval of the curtailment of civil liberties and the persecution of black radicals with her distrust of the Communist Party.

In a 1953 discussion of Du Bois's book *The World and Africa*, Randolph voiced his concern about how the repressive climate of Cold War America wreaked havoc on struggles for equality and punished those who showed any pro-Communist views. He thought that Du Bois, whom he characterized as the "most competent person living to write an authentic book on Africa," might be "likely to slant this book in such a manner as to run into many difficulties from anti-Communist forces. I hope he doesn't. . . . In the present climate of the free world, even though a book might be well written and authentic in terms of facts, if it is weighted or oriented from the point of view of opinion in favor of the Communist world, it is doomed to a bad reception." Randolph's remark that Communists, if given the "slightest opportunity . . . would seek to capitalize on the great scholarship of Du Bois" demonstrated his own deep distrust of Communists. Yet he refrained from making statements about the political orientation of Du Bois, whose book he had not yet read, or of anyone else unless he knew them to be true. "Unfortunately, that is the trouble with many of the people who have become hysterical over Communists and Communism. They are ready to brand everybody as a Communist who is militant and stands up and fights for civil rights or any other kind of right."¹⁵

During Springer's own work in Africa, colonial sympathizers sometimes labeled her a Communist. Interestingly, the FBI kept a file on her from 1957 until 1970, when the New York office decided that a certain document indicated "in part" that she had an "anti-Communist philosophy" and her files revealed no "subversive activities."¹⁶ Du Bois would eventually join the CP and move to Ghana in 1961. Springer and Randolph, however, were among those who viewed the system of Communist rule as oppressive and unlikely to foster a lasting liberation of black people. As bad as the case of human rights was in the "free world," Randolph held that they were completely dismissed in Communist countries.¹⁷

Former AALC deputy director David Brombart has stated that Springer and McCray were "too advanced in their thinking." They faced great difficulties in getting their programs and ideas a hearing in the labor movement because they were perceived as too radical. They wanted white labor leaders to denounce Western allies for colonialism as vociferously as they did the Soviet Union for communism. Ironically, they counted Jay Lovestone, a former Communist leader turned Cold Warrior, as their ally. McCray relied on Lovestone, who was a primary architect of the AFL-CIO's Cold War policy, to let him know how AFL-CIO leaders received his African reports. "One false move on my part," he averred, "and my stuff will end in the waste basket."¹⁸

Springer admired and respected Lovestone in part because she believed him to be honest in his dealings with her and not one who held a double standard regarding African and white Western labor movements. He was one of the few white labor figures who in the late 1940s took seriously her talk about the will of Africans to liberate themselves. She also appreciated small efforts he made on her behalf. For example, after she mentioned her desire to have Kenyan labor leader Tom Mboya meet with a group of ILGWU educational directors during his first U.S. visit in 1956, Lovestone made it possible for a luncheon to be held. In many other instances Springer entertained and hosted Africans at her own expense. In a rare interview given in 1978, Lovestone remarked that Springer had not "been given enough credit" for her work among African trade unionists. "She had a sound idea long before we had auxiliaries [the AFL-CIO international institutions]. . . . Her idea—I'll put it in my own language—it's one thing fellows hungry are given some fish and to eat and be satisfied. It's another thing to teach him how to be a fisherman. And she, without expressing it in that form, sensed that."¹⁹

Springer noted that Lovestone never tried to make her a Cold Warrior. In his disagreements with her and McCray over the AFL-CIO's concentration on communism in African policy, he was characteristically blunt but also respectful, a quality he did not show many who disagreed with him. Clearly, he otherwise valued their activism.

Randolph too considered Lovestone an ally in the cause of African liberation. He had first known Lovestone as a Communist leader. In early 1931 they were both scheduled as speakers in a roundtable discussion on unemployment at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.²⁰ In an interview with Springer, Randolph recalled Lovestone's street activism: "Street meetings represented one of our most effective educational agencies at that time, and I may say that our participants were not altogether black. We had some young white radicals who shared the soapbox with us in carrying the message and the fight against imperialism in Africa. . . . Jay Lovestone was a brilliant mind, and has a long record of struggle and propaganda for labor in general and world socialism in particular."²¹

In contrast, various labor leaders and historians have excoriated Lovestone along with Irving Brown and AFL-CIO president George Meany as virulent anti-Communist ideologues with connections to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). CIO leaders Walter and Victor Reuther helped to foster allegations of CIA involvement. There existed between them and Lovestone a mutual personal and professional hatred. When former CIA official Thomas Braden publicly upbraided the Reuthers for hypocrisy, Victor admitted with qualifications that he had received CIA money for the CIO's international activities in postwar Europe. Ironically, since CIO leaders were noted for their comparatively progres-

sive stance in civil rights and foreign affairs, their opposition to Lovestone led them to support the policies of international labor leaders whom Africans viewed as having vested interests in maintaining colonialism.²²

Although Meany and Lovestone always vociferously denied charges of CIA involvement, they did through the operations of the AFL's Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC) receive CIA funding.²³ In response to the FTUC's willingness to take money but not direction from the agency, the CIA reduced FTUC funding and diversified its labor contacts. Lovestone, however, maintained a long-standing personal and professional relationship with Jim Angleton, a CIA counterintelligence officer. Serving as field representative for the AFL and later the AFL-CIO from 1945 to 1962, Brown was instrumental in fighting Communist unions in Europe and helping to organize the anti-Communist Force Ouvrière (Worker's Force) in France. However, by the late 1950s he was spending increasing amounts of time in Africa.²⁴

Unlike the case of postwar Europe, allegations of CIA involvement have not been as fully documented in the AFL-CIO's work in Africa. Such suspicions, in the context of Cold War antagonisms and power struggles, have nevertheless touched many labor leaders involved in international affairs. Based upon assertions made by the People's News Service in 1978, Barry Cohen alleged that Springer served as the CIA contact officer for Tom Mboya. Springer, who considered Mboya as her second son, retorted that the only truth to the charge was in the spelling of her and Mboya's names.²⁵ She also commented on the impossibility of disproving such allegations. However, the available documentation does not demonstrate that she had easy access to financial support for the programs and projects African labor leaders requested of her. She lobbied not only the AFL-CIO and its affiliates for financial and material support but nonlabor organizations as well.

Moreover, documentation shows that Brown and McCray were the principal figures lobbying the AFL-CIO for financial support of Mboya. In urging support Brown once stated, "Of course, this must be done very discreetly since he is subject to all sorts of attacks from both the colonial crowds and the Communists as being too friendly to the USA."²⁶ Brown distributed some of the funding Mboya eventually received for both union and political work.²⁷ The ultimate source and amount of some of these funds and the uses to which they were put are legitimate points of inquiry; however, the AFL-CIO at least by 1961 charged Brown with making funding decisions regarding African projects. He also recommended African projects for the ICFTU.

Allegations of CIA involvement could have far-reaching consequences. It cast other shadows over the work of Brown and Mboya. For example, two years after Mboya's assassination in 1969, his widow, Pamela Mboya, wrote Brown to

his determined oral reading outside the door of the sleeping "colored servant," we are left with a cluster of unanswered questions. Why does this mother-teacher assume that the "undivided attention" of her servant would be inappropriately devoted to study? Why is no attempt made to determine the servant's wishes in regard to her own literacy? Why does Andrew's mother make no effort to remedy the conflict between his wish "to improve Ann's mind" and the faithful servant's exhausted sleeping? What are the "lessons" that, from the mother's perspective, are rightfully "his"—that is, necessary for the white, middle-class boy (and his mother) but not the for the "colored" domestic worker? How does that same servant's ongoing labor, which continually leaves her "fatigued," make possible the privileged mother's teaching of her son in the first place?

These questions must stand at the heart of any effort to recover the domestic literacy narrative for American literary and cultural history. That is, even as we assemble a story of the genre's positive constructions of (white) middle-class American motherhood, we must take equal note of its tendency to constrain others' uses of literacy. Along with analysis of ways in which the genre exalted motherly teaching, therefore, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America* will highlight its moves to exclude some Americans from full participation in national civic life.

Taken together, the book moves from the dawn of the narrative form's development in Americanized versions of Anna Laetitia Barbauld's primers, to its apex of political influence in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to the near-twilight of its activity on the American literary scene. The opening of *Managing Literacy* explicates the early history of the genre, emphasizing its close connections to the ideology of republican motherhood, debates about women's education, white women's social activism, and the emerging print marketplace for women's writing. After this limning of the genre's history in broad, interdisciplinary strokes, I juxtapose extended readings of two important midcentury literary texts (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frances E. W. Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice*) that have, up to now, been underinterpreted as educational initiatives tied to domestic literacy management. Then I examine the genre's usefulness for more imperialistic (if still purportedly "benevolent") teaching designs in white women's turn-of-the-century missionary literature. Finally, I show how echoes of the genre through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first bear traces of a challenging question: is it possible for writers and readers to use this flexible narrative form to claim social influence without constraining others?

AFL-CIO leaders viewed their Solidarity House grant as a way to establish independent influence in Kenya. Springer's and Randolph's documents again provide an alternate view. Randolph's statements demonstrate that his assistance to the KFL was not part of the AFL-CIO's competition with the ICFTU to influence African labor. Indeed, he advised the KFL on how they might induce the ICFTU and its affiliates to give aid by offering to name rooms in Solidarity House in their honor. Springer also did not seek to compete with the ICFTU. She constantly hoped for more ICFTU participation in Africa, provided it came without paternalism and condescension.³¹

Disappointed in the ICFTU's continuing poor record in Africa and motivated by the appeals of numerous Africans, Springer and Randolph were largely responsible for the AFL-CIO's decision in 1957 to sponsor a scholarship program for Africans to study in the United States. Some accounts of the conflicts surrounding this program are narrow and misinformed. Incorrectly identifying the scholarship program as the Americans' "own independent Africa labour centre," Don Thomson and Rodney Larson hold that it competed with the ICFTU's plan to build an African labor school. However, as the documentation of Springer, Randolph, and McCray illustrates, the ICFTU's decision to build the labor school was based on persistent AFL-CIO pressure and came in exchange for the AFL-CIO's agreement to curtail its scholarship program and desist from bilateral projects with Africa. Neither Thomson and Larson nor Anthony Carew address the views of Africans who were desperate to preserve the scholarship program.³²

Thomson and Larson also leave the impression that the British members of the ICFTU liked the idea of the AFL-CIO putting funds into the proposed school: "They accomplished more than even Geiger [the ICFTU's Swedish president] expected. The AFL-CIO plan to invest 50,000 dollars into the Africa labour centre was converted instead into a grant for the ICFTU scheme."³³ (Note that Thomson and Larson mistakenly identify the original beneficiary of the grant as the African labor center, when in actuality it was the scholarship program for Africa.) In a 1973 interview conducted by Springer, Randolph stated that the British opposed his lobbying the AFL-CIO for financial support of the proposed African labor school.³⁴

Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage suggest that Tom Mboya supported Arthur Ochwada as a trainee in the scholarship program "to ensure that he would be out of the way." Ochwada was challenging Mboya for the leadership of the KFL, but whatever Mboya's motivation, Ochwada himself had lobbied Springer, Randolph, Lovestone, and Brown for a scholarship to the United States. Moreover, while on the scholarship program, he asked Mboya to see to it that his stay in the United States was extended. The labor centers had ultimate responsibility for choosing the candidate, and the KFL unanimously supported Ochwada.³⁵

Barry Cohen's short account of AFL-CIO activities in Southern Rhodesia

characterizes Springer and Brown's support of labor leader Reuben Jamela as underhanded and as serving to undermine the labor movement.³⁶ This portrait, however, is not consistent with much of the available evidence. Among those African leaders who eventually opposed Jamela and affiliation with the ICFTU were many who continued to seek AFL-CIO aid and had very friendly relations with both Springer and Brown.

Cohen remarked that Springer provided Jamela with the financial assistance to travel. Springer replied that she never gave Jamela as much as ten cents for his own use. What she had done, twice, was to send fifty dollars from the AFL-CIO for him to deliver to the detained labor leader Josiah Mahuleke, who eventually opposed Jamela. Brown most likely was responsible for Jamela's travels. He wrote AFL-CIO international affairs director Michael Ross saying that he had "stuck his neck out" by inviting Jamela's trade union center to send a delegate to the third ICFTU African Regional Conference in Tunis that November 1960. The then-united leadership in the executive council chose Jamela. Brown would also advocate approaching foundations about providing aid to Southern Rhodesia and other English-speaking areas. He thought it a mistake for the United States to give the impression that Mboya was the only one who could win financial assistance.³⁷

Springer years later commented on the conflicting assessments of AFL-CIO policy in Africa: "The ugly names I have been called, and harassment that I sometimes have been subjected to in pre-independence Africa, has been a small price to pay for the opportunity of having been an AFL-CIO Representative in Africa. Whatever the present political interpretations of the AFL-CIO in Africa may be, I can say without equivocation that I have never been asked to do anything by the AFL-CIO that was in conflict with the early stated aims of the African Trade Union Movement."³⁸

The end of the Cold War affords scholars of pan-Africanism and labor the opportunity to move away from the simplistic polarities of communism and anti-communism in our understanding of the ILGWU and of the AFL-CIO's foreign policy in Africa. Springer's experiences provide one way to approach these histories from a fresh angle. By documenting the untold stories associated with her activism, this biography breaks new ground in the fields of pan-African studies and in African American and labor histories. It addresses the complex and controversial nature of Springer's activism by exploring the ways in which pan-Africanism, racism, and anticommunism affected her political development and her relationship with political and labor leaders in Africa, as well as with U.S. and European labor leaders. Although racism and sexism within organized labor created barriers to her obtaining institutional power, with the support of key leaders she pushed against those limitations and helped to garner support within the AFL-CIO for the agenda of African labor.

The U.S. labor movement's reputation in Africa was largely built on the

work of Maida Springer, George McCray, and A. Philip Randolph. Although Springer's projects seldom won the immediate approval of European labor—in-
deed, often they were met with outright hostility—and although they also fell
short of her own ambitions, as a pioneer she helped forge the early relationships
between the AFL-CIO and African labor and also opened the door wider for
those who followed her into international affairs.