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### ***Professor Merze Tate: Diplomatic Historian, Cosmopolitan Woman***

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On June 18, 1931, Merze Tate, a 26-year old Indianapolis high school history teacher wrote in her travel diary: “Le paquebot Montrose un bateau de la Ligne Canadian Pacific a parti de Montreal a onze heures au matin. Je suis la negresse seulemente.” Or, in English: “The (mail) steamer Montrose, a Canadian Pacific Line boat, left Montreal at eleven in the morning. I am the only Negro woman.” That entry marks the beginning of Tate’s lifetime of intrepid travel and intellectual adventures, going it alone accompanied only by confidence, curiosity, courage, and often, her camera. The S. S. Montrose landed at Cherbourg, where Tate took a train to Paris to explore the city and the Colonial Exposition of 1931. She next traveled to Switzerland where she entered a summer program of study at the Geneva School of International

Relations. By the end of her eight weeks in Europe, she had visited 15 countries, touring historical sites and museums. She noted in her diary that her status as a “colored American” had made her “quite a curiosity myself.” She ended her trip in Liverpool where she boarded the Duchess of Richmond for her return trip to Quebec. Whether she was once again the only “Negresse” aboard goes unremarked in her diary, perhaps because that status had come to feel so very normal to her.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, that trip held clues to the life and career that Tate was inventing for herself, inspired by the worlds she wanted to discover and driven by the intellect and ambition that would lead her to doctorates in international relations first at Oxford and then at Harvard, and to a professorship in diplomatic history at Howard University from 1942 to 1977. Her voracious appetite for international travel led her to travel all over the world and to another extended stay abroad – in India in 1950-51 for a year when she was a Fulbright scholar. She was a prolific scholar who published five ground-breaking books, three by Harvard and Yale, and dozens of journal articles on diplomatic history, international relations, and imperialism. A versatile intellectual, she moved from one specialty to another, publishing pioneering and definitive work on the disarmament movement and on imperialism in the Pacific.

Tate was so proud of the exceptional life that she had led that she bequeathed us something few black women have the power to generate: an historical archive. She donated her professional and personal papers to Howard University, along with travel photographs and films; at her death in 1996, additional materials were donated to Western Michigan University. Yet accounts of Tate's life and work have not made it into the historical record despite her many academic achievements, singular for a black woman scholar of her generation. Tate also was among that minority of African American scholars in the humanities and social sciences who did not focus their work on domestic racial matters. She was an outlier in her own field of diplomatic history, but was embraced by her fellow black historians who valued her international credentials and expertise.

Despite all of that, Tate's life's work has all but disappeared from the narrative of American and African American diplomatic, political, and intellectual life in the twentieth century, or for that matter, black women's history despite her best attempts to make sure that her legacy survived her death in 1996. This outcome is particularly ironic because in the last decades of her life, Tate served as an advisor, an interviewer, and an interviewee in the Black Women Oral History Project at Radcliffe. Her detailed recollections at the end of her career help us better understand how dedicated and driven she was to

overcome the long odds that she would become a productive and successful scholar. It is up to us now to help her do one of the few things she was not able to do for herself – rescue her legacy from obscurity and critique her body of work.<sup>2</sup>

I have come to see my work on her as the writing of the “geopolitics of a life” because the shifting politics of place, race, and travel drive her life’s story. Hers was a black scholar’s life full of the challenge and tension of the worlds in which she lived, worked, and traveled, but which also held the many joys she took from those worlds and the work she produced in it.

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Like everything about Tate’s life, the story of her birth and her childhood defies expectations. Tate was born in 1905 on her family’s farm in rural Isabella County, Michigan during a blizzard; so bad was the storm that no doctor could reach their house. Instead, a neighbor attended her mother and delivered the baby. Later, having never seen the mother or the baby, the doctor filled out the birth certificate as required by law and mistakenly presumed and wrote that Tate was a “white child.” Tate would be unaware of that mistake until she ran into confusion when she applied for the passport that allowed her to study and travel in Europe in 1931.<sup>3</sup>

The doctor’s racial assumptions were well founded. The middle of rural Michigan was a very unlikely place for a black baby to be born. Tate’s was one of the few black families there, but they were among the earliest. Her maternal and paternal great grandparents were one of a handful of free black families who emigrated in covered wagons and oxcarts from Ohio to central Michigan in order to take advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 that granted settlers large tracts of land for a nominal fee. Tate was born on the large farm settled by her great grandparents, black “pioneers” in the literal sense of the word who embraced and celebrated their status as Michigan’s “Old Settlers.”<sup>4</sup>

Tate’s recollections of her rural Michigan childhood are of harsh winters, nine mile walks to school, during which she memorized historical battles, poetry, and Chaucer to pass the time. Her playmates and

her schoolmates were white. Then as later in life, she presented herself as intellectually insatiable and versatile, fearless and confident, disciplined and driven, proud and competitive – and very tough.<sup>5</sup> Her virtuosity would carry her into a one “first” after another – graduating first in her high school class in Battle Creek and first at Western Michigan University, where she also was the first black student. She would be the first black woman to earn a graduate degree at Oxford, in 1935. In 1941, she was the first black woman to receive the Ph. D. in government from Harvard (Ralph Bunche had preceded her as the first black person). Finally, in 1942, Tate joined the faculty at Howard, the first black woman in the history department at a time when the university’s stellar cohort of professors included Rayford Logan, E. Franklin Frazier, Sterling Brown, Charles Davis, Abram Harris, and Bunche, to name a few.

Tate would spend the remainder of her thirty-five year academic career at Howard, but her world travels and innovative scholarship had just begun. She never married and had no children, but she led a vibrant social life in a wide and diverse community of friends in Washington, across the country, and around the world. Tate’s accomplishments did not go unnoticed during her lifetime, even if they have escaped subsequent attention. Her work and her extended travels garnered repeated coverage in African American newspapers and journals, and she received many awards.

A very generous philanthropist, Tate gave away considerable wealth accrued by saving and investing shrewdly in the stock market. At her death in 1996 at age 91, she left \$1.6 million to her undergraduate alma mater in Michigan, where beginning in the 1970s she had endowed full scholarships, programs, and a center, all named for her. In 1971, she also had funded a fellowship in her name at Radcliffe, and, in 1977, established the Merze Tate Fund at Howard that, among other events, sponsored the annual Merze Tate Seminar in Diplomatic History. In her gifting and naming, it is clear that Tate not only intended to help needy students and to support institutions that had helped her, but she also wanted to honor her own life.

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Tate's upbringing in the rural Michigan spared her from a childhood steeped in racial segregation and discrimination, or abject poverty. As she herself said, "I was born in Michigan, not in Mississippi. That probably has made all the difference in my life." But as she entered adulthood, racial discrimination greeted her in 1927 at the end of her training to be a high school teacher. Administrators at WMU were surprised to learn that the State of Michigan did not hire black teachers at the high school level, even if they had graduated from a white institution and at the top of the class as Tate had.<sup>6</sup>

Alarmed and concerned, officials at the school loaned Tate money so she could travel and look for jobs elsewhere in the mid-west. She had several offers, but settled in a history teaching position in Indianapolis at the new, segregated all-black Crispus Attucks High School in 1927. Once there, educated and professional black women reached out to Tate, welcoming her into the community, their homes, and their social clubs. Later she realized that she was being rushed to become a graduate member of two sororities, choosing to join Alpha Kappa Alpha because it was the oldest and, to her, the more prestigious.<sup>7</sup>

Tate's interest in international studies and in traveling abroad was already in place. While teaching high school, she also took graduate courses in Modern European history and learned French, German, and Spanish. She also learned to play bridge, a game she excelled at and one she considered a useful universal language in her travels. During the summers, she studied at Columbia Teachers' College and received her MA in 1930. She took all that she had learned with her when she sailed alone from Montreal in 1931.<sup>8</sup>

When she came back to the United States, she returned with the intention of doing graduate work abroad and applied to the AKA's for their recently established foreign fellowship program for black women. In 1932, Tate received a \$1,000 fellowship from the sorority which she intended to use to study at Oxford with Professor Alfred Zimmern who had taught her international relations and law in Geneva. This was a bold ambition born of Tate's moxie and intellectual self-confidence. She had first to pass the screening at the American Association of University Women, which at that point did not even admit black women as

members; and, she also had to be admitted into Oxford's graduate program. She got through both processes, quieting those who had thought her a fool for daring to try.

Tate's decision to go to Oxford for three years meant that she had to resign her job and quickly sell her house, risks which she took for the opportunity to study international relations and law, diplomatic history, economics, and geopolitics. She went with a sense of adventure and excitement but also with greater recognition that she bore a weight of responsibility as a black woman. Her immersion in the black community in Indianapolis and AKA activities had shaped her identity as a "colored American" in ways that her upbringing in rural Michigan had not. That is reflected in this poem of resolve and faith that she wrote aboard ship en route to Oxford:

"Thoughts on Entering Oxford"

When I consider what before me lies/ A chance to make a name/ A chance to die/ A chance to gather from these ancient walls/ Covered with ivy, hiding famous halls/ What this mother of learning is ready to bestow/ On one who has the courage to go/ Through endless hours of toil and grief and joy/ I think of constant strife without these walls/ And wonder if our lives are worth the while we spend on earth nurturing petty whiles/ Then I recall/ Who best bear his yoke/ May serve Him best/ This relieves my mind and then I rest/ And make my one big wish a prayer to be/ A credit to my race and my sorority.

Whatever trepidations Tate had about her decision dissipated quickly. She found Oxford to be "a dream of a place" with its richness of history; she reveled in its intellectual, cultural, and social offerings. She enjoyed its traditions and joined in many of them, including learning to ride a bicycle for the first time, replete in her academic gown and hat. Being there shaped her sense of herself as a scholar and confirmed for her that she could compete well with white men in classes and on examinations. But she also remained very aware of the singularity of her status there as a woman of color engaged in graduate level work: "I was the only colored American in the entire university, man or woman, and the first to get a higher research degree." For the rest of her life, she would proudly remind people that although Alain Locke in 1907 had

become the first African American Rhodes Scholar, he was a mere undergraduate at Oxford while she had been awarded her degree for graduate work.<sup>9</sup>

Three years at Oxford did not appear to leave her homesick for the United States. Indeed, after finishing her degree she decided to improve her German by enrolling for the summer at the University of Berlin. Her time there was over-shadowed by the many harrowing encounters and frightening evidence of the rise of Hitler and Nazism and its vicious and violent anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup> Those experiences may have made her a little more interested in returning to the United States. At the end of that summer, Tate received the first of several invitations that would take her to the faculties of black colleges. She left Berlin in August, 1935 en route to New York where she headed south to Washington, and in a first for her, rode a Jim Crow train, to Concord, North Carolina to take a position as dean of women and instructor in history at Barber-Scotia College. After three years out of the country, Tate took some of Oxford with her there: "I was sort of a freak to the girls. It was apparently an interesting freak because my language was different. I had in three years that I'd been abroad, I'd acquired I guess some of the Oxonian accent." She then was offered a position at Bennett College, a black woman's school in Greensboro, as professor of history and chairman of the social science division. Tate remembered her time on black college campuses in North Carolina with great fondness, saying that "it was a narrow life, but a rich one."<sup>11</sup>

As she tells the story, the fact that she would later leave Bennett to become the first black woman to earn the Ph. D. in government at Harvard happened accidentally, or providentially. In 1938, while attending a graduation at Harvard with a friend, she watched the awarding of Ph. D.'s: "And I was watching this very carefully and reading you see, the titles of their dissertations. And I thought, 'These dissertations aren't any more significant than my B. Litt. dissertation at Oxford. So I started getting ideas.'<sup>12</sup> After the ceremony, Tate made an appointment for the next day with the dean of the graduate school at Radcliffe, Bernice Brown Cronkhite who became a lifelong friend and supporter. In their meeting, Tate asked to be admitted into summer school to take

courses in international relations and diplomatic history. One of the reasons for their immediate affinity was that Cronkhite, the first Ph. D. trained at Radcliffe, also had studied international law and government. By the end of that summer, Tate set about figuring out how she could study for the Ph. D. there, with Cronkhite's encouragement and support.<sup>13</sup>

After another year at Bennett and with a 1939 Rosenwald Fellowship in hand, she returned to Radcliffe and earned her degree in 1941. She accepted a position again as dean of women and associate professor of political science, this time at Morgan State in Baltimore, a location she liked because of its proximity to Washington's federal archives and the Library of Congress. From there, she was hired in 1942 at the age of 37 into a temporary position in Howard's history department, later made permanent; she worked her way up the professorial ranks and remained there until her retirement in 1977.<sup>14</sup>

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Tate became a prolific and versatile scholar at Howard despite career-long struggles against gender discrimination, salary inequities, lack of resources, and the demands of heavy teaching loads and university service. Her interests moved on several fronts, some overlapping and some quite disparate. When asked by an interviewer how she moved from topic to topic, she merely said, "that's where I'm a freak," again employing a term that she often invoked wryly as self-description. The fact that she was one the few African American or female scholars trained and publishing in the field of international relations and diplomatic history also made her a rarity. Those facts seemed to be ever-present in her mind, not so much as an impediment but as a motivator for her to fight herself as "free" of the prevailing constraints of gender and race as possible.

Tate established her excellent scholarly reputation through two books on disarmament based on her degree work on the subject at Oxford and Harvard. The first, The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907, was published in 1942. The use of the word "illusion" in the book's title signaled that she did not hold much optimism on the prospect of disarmament.<sup>15</sup> Tate had an



engineer's mind and an easy facility for the technological and algebraic aspects of armaments, whether ships or gunnery, but she saw them as mere mechanisms to be employed in on-going ideological and political battles.<sup>16</sup> Tate's book, published propitiously in the midst of yet world war, generated laudatory review attention in political science, international affairs, historical, and African American studies journals.<sup>17</sup>

In a second book, Tate expanded her work by focusing on the period 1907 forward, which had been suggested by many of the reviewers, and added a focus on the United States. That 1948 book, The United States and Armaments, featured an authorial voice that was more assertive, expressing a greater sense of urgency after the ferocious destructiveness of World War II.<sup>18</sup> The conjoined nexus of scientific research, technological advance, and new weapons she described so ably in her book would come later to be known as the "military industrial complex," laid out here by Tate as a cautionary futuristic tale. Once again, reviewers praised Tate's second book which would prove to have staying power as the definitive history of disarmament policy in Europe and in the United States; it was re-issued with renewed interest twenty years later in 1969.<sup>19</sup>

Tate also turned to black studies journals to publish her work for an audience interested not only in domestic racial issues but in international affairs, especially on empire, imperialism, and colonialism, persistent themes in her work, including her 1943 article, "The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World" in a special issue of the Journal of Negro Education.

There, Tate employs language that is not cloaked in objectivity and a voice that is as direct and powerful as one would expect from someone with her confidence and bravado. She defines the "darker peoples" in her title expansively to include people of African descent and residents of Africa, India, Burma, Malaysia, China, Japan, Polynesia, and Melanesia. Casting them all as "peoples of color," she warned that: "They are no longer willing to accept the white man's exalted view of trusteeship; they no longer quake at the teachings of the white man's missionaries, who bring them the white man's God but a God in whom the

white man does not believe; no longer are glass beads and trinkets marvelous to them; they are much more interested in the marvels of the white man's guns."<sup>20</sup> She also reminded readers that black Americans know "that there are elements in this country which practiced Nazism long before Adolph Hitler celebrated his first birthday and which today dominate the Federal Government and the Army and Navy."<sup>21</sup>

Tate also wrote with passion about the injustice of sending "colored" troops into battle, at a time when they were denied their basic rights and freedoms. She knew some of those troops because she helped train 300 black engineering, medical, and dental students at Howard University in the Army Specialized Training Program, many of whom were shipped out to Italy to join the 92nd Infantry. Tate not only taught them and wrote to them during the war but kept in touch with them for the remainder of their careers. Dubbing themselves "The Prometheans" after the Greek scholar-warrior, the group honored Tate as their most outstanding professor, always praising her at their reunion events as an honorary member. She also campaigned publicly for fair treatment of black soldiers, especially officers, even after the military was ordered to desegregate.<sup>22</sup>

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Tate's ambition to travel the world and launch new research had been put on hold by the war, but in the 1950s, she was able to resume a frenetic solo travel itinerary that would take her well beyond Europe and lay the groundwork for her future research. Indeed, international travel and extended stays outside of the US continued to dominate Tate's personal and professional life in that decade. She won a Fulbright to India in 1950-1951 to teach a geopolitics course at Tagore's World University.<sup>23</sup> Tate used the Fulbright to explore India exhaustively and to make her first around the world tour. En route to India, she made stops in Europe, revisiting friends and places from her time at Oxford: England, France, Germany, Switzerland, adding Rome. After a side-trip to Egypt, she arrived in India, where she reveled in its rich history and its diversity of cultures, and learned to drape and wear a sari. She reportedly traveled over 16,000 miles there, lecturing and teaching at 11 universities. During her year abroad, she also lectured in Burma, Ceylon,

Thailand, Singapore, Manila, and Cambodia; she was hosted on a three-week visit to Japan by a group of women leaders who had visited with her at Howard. Finally, she traveled to Hawaii, where she launched her new interest in studying the history of Hawaii and the Pacific region. She was welcomed home triumphantly in Los Angeles by The Links, the black woman's social group. Tate's account of her travels presented herself as heroic and intrepid as the title of a newspaper article about her illustrated, claiming that "Magellan Had Nothing on Howard's Merze Tate After 44,000-Mile Trip."<sup>24</sup>

Tate came back from her latest year abroad trip most impressed by her time traveling throughout Asia. She felt so strongly about the importance of that region and the necessity for intellectual work about it in 1953 that she sketched out and proposed to Howard that the university establish a new Asian Studies Program, something that did not come to fruition. She put her expertise on India's history and cultures to work in many reviews of books about India over the years.<sup>25</sup>

By the time Tate made another extended trip around the world in 1958, her reputation as a seasoned and savvy woman world traveler had only grown: "While fashion wise men and women debate the pros and cons of the sack dress, Miss Merze Tate serenely chose three to wear in the tropics on her Pacific safari which will end in her circling the globe for the second time before returning home." Tate flew to Hawaii for three months of research, with a two-month side research trip to Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, and Australia. Her return trip took her to Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, India, Baghdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Beirut, Ankara, Istanbul, Vienna, Germany, Paris, and London before returning to New York. On this trip as with her others, Tate traveled alone, as she says, with her camera and later a movie camera as her companions. She often stayed with friends and associates developed through her travels and her work, and through her association with the military men she had taught at Howard, many of whom remained in the service and were stationed all over the world. At various points, she added Nepal, Tibet, Greece, Bali, Ethiopia, and Russia to her list of travels completed.<sup>26</sup>

Between her travels and her teaching, Tate managed to write articles and reviews on an array of topics, but it was the Pacific islands, large and small, that remained Tate's intellectual focus for three decades, yielding a vast body of work that does not lend itself as easily to summary as her earlier work on disarmament. She published two books in the 1960's that became, and remain, a standard treatment of the history of the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and its conversion into a "near colonial" status from that time until statehood in 1959.<sup>27</sup> Relying on the records kept by the British government, she told the story of the 19th century struggle for Hawaii's kingdom and its lands and strategic location from the point of view of the Hawaiian people and its leaders – not just that of the United States government or other nations, the normal purview of diplomatic historians and of those relying on the sources she mined. "The Hawaiian controversy was more than a partisan issue," Tate wrote, "it actually initiated the great debate in American history over the merits of imperialism."<sup>28</sup>

A particularly compelling aspect of her work on Hawaii was her analysis of the role that New England missionaries played in Hawaii starting in 1819 which led her to be one of the earliest to theorize about the links between religious exploration, state diplomacy, and imperialism in the nineteenth century. Tate's history of the missionaries used an innovative generational approach, revealing how the largest landowners and the ruling business class on the islands were the sons and grandsons of those early missionary families but who had rejected their families' religious aims. Tate details how the children of the missionaries were not educated alongside the children native to the islands, but were sent instead to a new network of private elementary and secondary schools. These were modeled after New England preparatory schools and created to avoid shipping the children back to the United States to boarding schools. The descendants of those private preparatory schools still exist; President Barack Obama graduated from one of the oldest of them, the Punahou School which was founded in 1841.

At the same time, and by way of contrast, Tate highlighted that the educational system the missionaries established for the island's peoples served as a model for the vocational training model at

Hampton Institute, and later, through its graduate Booker T. Washington, at Tuskegee. Richard Armstrong, a Pennsylvania school teacher, served the Sandwich Islands Mission in the 1830s, eventually working for the project for 17 years before becoming the minister of public education for the Hawaiian kingdom. His son, Samuel, became a general in the Union Army and served as director of the Freedman's Bureau and later as founder and principal of Hampton Institute, bringing their ideas about the civilizing influence of vocational training as practiced by his father.<sup>29</sup>

As much as Tate had declared herself not to be an historian of domestic racial issues, it was impossible to avoid them in nineteenth-century United States political history, especially if one were focused on international expansion. Among her earliest publications on Hawaii were two articles concerned directly with slavery, or rather with the question of whether slavery, and, later free southern "colored" would be instituted in Hawaii after annexation or whether some temporary importation of slave labor would be possible.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to her focus on Hawaii, Tate also completed several articles and two unpublished books on the expansionist aims of Australia and New Zealand, "Australia from the Tropics to the Pole" and "New Zealand: Expansion in the Pacific." She found the drama of the Hawaiian monarchy in the decades in the nineteenth century leading up to its overthrow and demise to be so compelling that she also wrote a 780 page fictionalized rendering of that history, Uneasy: The Life and Times of Kamehaameha IV. She was unable to bring that to print in the late 1970s despite at various times adopting a Hawaiian pseudonym, hiring an agent and making appeals for Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' editorial attention at Doubleday.<sup>31</sup>

After completing her work on the Pacific, Tate turned next to Africa, about which she had written and taught for decades and one of the places she long had been interested in visiting. She finally made it there in two trips in the 1970s, going on her own and alone in 1973 to visit Dakar, Liberia, the Congo, Tanzania, Zambia, and eventually Ethiopia and Egypt.<sup>32</sup>

On her second trip in 1976, she went to research the history of the mineral extraction industry and the privately funded web of railroads and ports then under construction in southern and east Africa to transport those minerals. She went then to South Africa as an official guest of the apartheid South African government, traveling in luxury and gaining access to the state and corporate officials and documents that she found essential to her research project. In her mind, she was there under a subterfuge. She knew that the South African government was treating her well even though she was “colored” but only because they saw her first as an “American,” a category superseding their own racial classification system.<sup>33</sup>

Tate characterized her work on Africa as a study of European imperialism: “Railways in the African colonies are more efficacious than guns. History indicates that railways have been in most cases a better means of settling a country than have wars and military enterprise.” Tate’s two unpublished manuscripts from her work in Africa bear titles that bear out her argument: “Mineral Railways in Africa: The Impact on the National Economics” and “Colonial Railways: Sinews and Arteries of Empire.”<sup>34</sup>

The fact that these two manuscripts never made it into print was not for lack of trying or resourcefulness on Tate’s behalf. This is yet another reminder of how difficult it had been all along for Tate to place her books and articles. In some ways, it is a miracle that as much of her work made it into print as it did. She wrote long, detailed work, and pursued her own interests, often way ahead of the scholarly mainstream, and produced work that rarely fit neatly into a single discipline. Yet what is perhaps more miraculous is that she never stopped researching and she continued to write and revise long, complicated manuscripts even after she retired from teaching in 1977. To say that she was driven to do that work seems at best a profound understatement.<sup>35</sup>

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After Tate retired from Howard in 1977, she served on the advisory committee on the Black Women Oral History Project as both an interviewer and an interviewee. On racism or racial

discrimination, she lingered little. She seemed to believe that her many achievements were evidence that she had overcome racism and had somehow “beat” it which proved her own exceptionalism.

But she complained vehemently about the persistent unfairness and inequity directed against her based on her sex. In the confined and segregated world of black academics in which she lived and worked, the starkly isolated sting of sexism repeatedly registered plainly and painfully for her. Indeed, Tate’s archive at Howard is full of evidence that starting in the early 1950s, Tate had argued vociferously that her male colleagues made more money and received more favored treatment than she did although in her view they were less well-trained, had done less work, and published fewer books and articles. In a letter to her dean, she had been clear about that: “The saintly approach would be for me to accept silently and supinely an inferior status and salary and still carry the heaviest burden.” She refused that path, arguing that “for me to accept an inferior status and salary would be a quiet recognition of incompetence and inferiority or evidence of inability to protect my own interests.”<sup>36</sup>

Tate served on the salary and promotions committee for the university and saw first-hand the roadblocks and disparate treatment facing women faculty. Yet Tate maintained a sense of resignation on this issue at the end of her career as she explained in her interview: “I have tried not to be disgruntled, and maybe I have been dismayed, but I’ve tried to prove, and I have, that I have produced more than the men with a higher salary. And the men know it. And the presidents know it. And the deans know it. And I mean produce at a scholarly level.”<sup>37</sup>

Although she emphasized gender discrimination, Tate was also always aware of her status as one of the few black historians of her generation. She believed that race had played a factor in denying her the Bancroft Prize for her first book on Hawaii which many had expected her to receive. After attending the 1972 AHA annual meeting, she reported to her Dean that the ratio of “Negroes to others – as usual – was small, not much over 1 per cent,” or about 25 or 35. In the sessions on diplomatic history and on Truman’s legacy, she was the “only person of color present.” A deep sense of isolation seemed to pervade her account.

The AHA Committee on Women Historians had invited Tate, as a “much admired senior scholar,” to participate in a panel on “Life Styles for Women Historians: Past and Future,” and there she noted that there was only one other black woman present in the room. It would be another two decades, in 1991, before the African American historian Roslyn Terborg-Penn and a former Tate student, in her capacity as chair of the AHA Committee on Women’s Historians, led the drive, with the support of the newly created Committee on Minority Historians, to have the organization award Tate its Scholarly Distinction Award, which she accepted in person at age 86, nearly fifteen years after her retirement from Howard, and a few years before her death.<sup>38</sup>

Tate’s own string of “firsts” certainly came through her own drive, intellect, and will. She remained grateful, however, that she received help at crucial moments from institutions, individuals, and groups, both black and white, some here and some abroad. In her words, that help had enabled her to succeed “in a color and sex discriminating society.” When she came into money herself, she endowed fellowships and scholarships for students she believed to be most like her, those with enormous potential but few resources. For that reason, she refused to designate them for black students only. “I made it very clear that it was not to be based on minorities or race. And it would be open to anyone with the proper qualifications and so on. And especially for internationals, for foreign students, thousands of miles from home. And when the fellowship might mean the difference between success or failure, or life or death.”<sup>39</sup> She also did not designate that these funds be reserved for women students.

Tate’s affinity for her family’s historical roots in Michigan drove her loyalty to WMU as did that institution’s early support of her and its eager recognition of her as one of its most distinguished graduates. So it was to them that she contributed most of her wealth both during her lifetime and at death, having named the institution her retirement pension beneficiary. After Tate died of a heart attack in Washington in 1996, she was buried beside her mother in a pine coffin in the Old Settler’s Cemetery in rural Michigan.

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We might now ask ourselves where Tate, this “granddaughter of pioneers,” fits in the history we gather here to discuss. As one of the most prolific black women scholars of her time, and one who was unabashed about asking for what she wanted, Tate would be likely to answer “front and center.” And so should we. But, if I have learned anything about her, I also know she would not want her legacy to be limited in any way, but would insist that we see her also, and perhaps even primarily, as a cosmopolitan world traveler and as a scholar of diplomatic history, of imperialism, empire, and anti-colonization – the driving concerns of her life’s work. To interpret the lessons of this life is to recognize first that the categories to which one might want to assign her can in no way contain her, but rather the “geopolitics” of this life require us to re-think the categories themselves, those of black internationalism, of black cosmopolitanism, of black intellectual history, of black women’s history, of black scholars at Howard, and ultimately, of black scholarship itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Merze Tate, *Travel Diary, 1931*, Merze Tate Papers (“MTP”), Moorland Spingarn Collection, Howard University. As always, I am grateful to the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, in particular Jo-Ellen Elbashir and Ida Jones who expedited the processing of this collection so I could begin to work in it. Thanks to Tsitsi Jaji for her translation assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Tate’s interview was among the last conducted, was the longest, but was not edited before the project ran out of funding, and therefore not included in the published volumes. Later, in 1984, those interviewed were featured in an exhibit and catalog entitled Women of Courage; Tate’s photograph and a short narrative were included there. A copy of the unedited transcript was made available to me by Ruth Edmunds Hill, Schlesinger Library, Oral History Division. Hill was coordinator of the Black Women Oral History Project.

<sup>3</sup> Tate Oral History, Schlesinger Library. Maurice C. Woodard, “Merze Tate,” Political Science and Politics, vol. 38, no. 1 (January, 2005), pp. 101-102. Joseph E. Harris, “Merze Tate,” in Profiles: Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Howard University, vol. 2, July-Dec. 1998 (Washington, D. C.: Howard University), pp. 1-24.

<sup>4</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>5</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>6</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>7</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>8</sup> Tate Oral History. Janice Arenofsky, “Bridge Over Troubled Waters: The Story of the American Bridge Association,” n.d.

<sup>9</sup> Tate Oral History

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<sup>10</sup> Tate Oral History

<sup>11</sup> Tate Oral History

<sup>12</sup> Tate Oral History

<sup>13</sup> Tate Oral History. Letter to Tate from Leonard Holmberg, Registrar, Harvard University, Summer School of Arts and Sciences and of Education, December 4, 1968. MTP.

<sup>14</sup> Tate Oral History

<sup>15</sup> Merze Tate, The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1942), pp. 351-352, 358

<sup>16</sup> Tate, Disarmament Illusion, p. 346.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Martin Sears, "Review," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 224, Labor Relations and the War (Nov., 1942), pp. 201, 202. W. Arnold-Forster, "Review," International Affairs Review Supplement, vol. 19, no. 10 (Dec., 1942), pp. 532-533. J. Wesley Hoffman, "Review," The Journal of Modern History, vol. 15, no. 1 (March, 1943), pp. 62-63. William O. Shanahan, "Military Problems," The Review of Politics, vol. 5, no. 3 (July, 1943), pp. 387-392. Elton Atwater, "Review," The American Journal of International Law, vol. 36, no. 4 (October, 1942), pp. 742-743. Hans J. Morgenthau, "Review," Russian Review, vol. 2, no. 2 (spring, 1943), pp. 104-105. Pitman B. Potter, "Review," The American Political Science Review, vol. 36, no. 5 (Oct., 1942), p. 973. Julian Bretz, "Review," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 30, no. 1 (June, 1943), pp. 89-90. W. E. B. D., "Scholarly Delusion," Phylon, vol. 4, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1943), pp. 189-191. Rayford Logan, "No Peace for the Pacifists," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 12, no. 1 (winter, 1943), pp. 92-93. Carter G. Woodson, "Review," Journal of Negro History, vol. 28, no. 2 (April, 1943), pp. 251-253

<sup>18</sup> Tate, The United States and Armaments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).

<sup>19</sup> Elton Atwater, "Review," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 258, (July, 1948), pp. 141-142. William M. Boyd, "Diplomacy and War," Phylon, vol. 9, No. 3 (3rd quarter, 1948), pp. 279-281. Clifton J. Child, "Review," International Affairs, vol. 25, no. 1 (January, 1949), pp. 114-115. W. Henry Cooke, "Review," Pacific Historical Review, vol. 18, no. 1, (February, 1949), pp. 150-152. The 1969 reprint was published by Russell and Russell, Atheneum Press.

<sup>20</sup> Tate, "The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World" Journal of Negro Education, vol. 12, no. 3 (summer, 1943), p. 521.

<sup>21</sup> Tate, "War Aims," pp. 529, 532. For examples of some of her writings in this period, see, Tate, "Review: Krishnalal Shridharani, Warning to the West," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 12, no. 4 (autumn, 1943), pp. 654-655. Tate, "The White Man's Pan African Idea," (review of Lewis Snowden's The Union of South Africa), Journal of Negro Education, vol. 13, no. 1 (winter, 1944), pp. 76-79. Tate, "Whites and Blacks on South Africa," (review of Selwyn James, South of the Congo), Journal of Negro Education, vol. 13, no. 1 (winter, 1944), pp. 72-76.

<sup>22</sup> Tate Oral History. Also see, for example, "Howard's Prometheans hold 50th Reunion," Philadelphia Tribune, August 13, 1993. "Howard Univ. Prometheans Plan Reunion," Pittsburgh Courier, July 24, 1993. Tate, "Finds Army Dictator Rules Negro GIS in Germany With Brutal Fist," November 4, 1950 and "Tells Plight of Negro Officers at Kitzingen," November 11, 1950, both in Chicago Defender.

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<sup>23</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>24</sup> Tate's Oral interview. "Magellan Had Nothing on Howard's Merze Tate After 44,000- Mile Trip," Pittsburgh Courier, October 6, 1951.

<sup>25</sup> Tate to William Stuart Nelson, Dean, February 6, 1953. ATP. For examples of Tate's reviews of books related to India, see, Tate, "A Report on India," review of Robert Trumbell's As I See India, Journal of Negro Education, vol. 25, no. 4 (autumn, 1956), pp. 412-413; "A Personal Report on An American Negro in India," a scathing review of Saunders Redding's An American in India, A Personal Report on the Indian Dilemma and the Nature of her Conflicts, Journal of the Negro Education, vol. 24, no. 2 (spring, 1955), pp. 130-132. She criticized Redding for focusing on India's poverty, heat, and dirt, and for missing the rich cultural landscape and larger political issues at stake. Tate, "Life with the Nehrus," review of Nayantara Sahgal's Prison and Chocolate Cake, Journal of Negro Education, vol. 23, no. 4 (autumn, 1954), pp. 443-444. Tate, "Looting Land with Love," review of Hallam Tennyson's India's Walking Saint: The Story of Vinoba Bhave, Journal of Negro Education, vol. 24, no. 4 (autumn, 1955), pp. 454-456. Tate, "The Awakening East," review of Eleanor Roosevelt's Indian and the Awakening East, vol. 23, no. 1 (winter, 1954), pp. 61-63. Tate, "The Punjab Massacres of 1947," review of Khushwant Singh's Mano Majra, vol. 25, no. 4 (autumn, 1956), pp. 410-411. Tate, "Review," of Richard Wright's The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference, Journal of Negro History, vol. 41, no. 3 (July, 1956), pp. 263-265.

<sup>26</sup> Tate interview. Tate, Travel Diary, 1958. "3 Sacks Are in Educator's Bags as She Begins Pacific Safari," Chicago Defender, April 19, 1958.

<sup>27</sup> Tate, The United States and the Hawaiian Kingdom: A Political History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). Tate, Hawaii: Reciprocity or Annexation (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1968).

<sup>28</sup> Tate, The United States and the Hawaiian Kingdom, p. 315.

<sup>29</sup> Tate, The United States and the Hawaiian Kingdom, pp. 317-318, 12-13.

<sup>30</sup> Tate, "Slavery and Racism as Deterrents to the Annexation of Hawaii 1854-1855," Journal of Negro History, vol. 47, no. 1 (Jan., 1962), pp. 1-18. Tate and Fidele Foy, "Slavery and Racism in South Pacific Annexations," Journal of Negro History, vol. 50, no. 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 1-21. Tate, "Decadence of the Hawaiian Nation and Proposals to Import a Negro Labor Force," Journal of Negro History, vol. 47. No. 4 (Oct., 1962), pp. 248-263.

<sup>31</sup> Tate, "The Australasian Monroe Doctrine. Tate, "Australasian Interest in the Commerce and the Sovereignty of Hawaii." Tate, "Australia and Self-Determination for New Guinea." These and other articles are collected in Tate, Diplomacy in the Pacific: A Collection of Twenty-Seven Articles on Diplomacy in the Pacific and Influence of the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands Missionaries (Washington, DC: History Department, Howard University, 1973). Tate to Edward Tripp, editor, Yale University Press, July 17, 1972. Tate to David Stewart Hall, Vice President, James Brown Associates, Inc., November 30, 1973, but signed "Lelia Kaliokalani." Marie D. Brown, editor, Anchor Press/Doubleday, to Tate, January 12, 1978. Tate to Brown, February 21, 1978. MTP.

<sup>32</sup> Tate, review, "Who Are South Africans," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 23, no. 4 (autumn, 1954), pp. 444-447. Tate, review, "Life of the Kikuyu," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 26, no. 4 (autumn, 1957), p. 484. Tate, review, "Somaliland Under Italy's Heel," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 21, no. 4 (autumn, 1952), pp. 497-499. Tate, review, "Africa, A Study in Tropical Development," Journal of Negro Education vol. 38, no. 3 (Jul., 1953), pp. 335-339. Tate, review, "Imperialism in Disguise," Journal of Negro Education, vol. 23, no. 4 (autumn, 1954), pp. 447-449.

<sup>33</sup> Tate Oral History. Letter from Tate to Mr. Lepere, April 30, 1976. After South Africa, Tate traveled on her own to Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya. MTP.

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from Tate to Michael Lacy, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, September 23, 1976. MTP.

<sup>35</sup> "A Commentary Concerning 'Professor Merze Tate: A Profile,'" Profiles, The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Howard University, December, 1981. William T. Sturtevant, Chicago, Illinois, April 18, 1983. MTP.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Tate to Dean J. St. Clair Price, Howard University, October 29, 1951. MTP. Tate to William Stuart Nelson, Dean of the University, October 16, 1956. Tate to Frank Snowden, Jr., Dean, College of Liberal Arts, Howard University, September 21, 1960. Letters from Tate to Robert Owens, Dean, College of Liberal Arts, May 2, 1973, and again, on May 8, 1973. Letter from Owens to Tate, August 7, 1975.

<sup>37</sup> Tate Oral History.

<sup>38</sup> Tate to Bernice Brown Cronkhite, April 30, 1966. Tate to Robert L. Owens, Dean, Howard, January 3, 1972. Linda K. Kerber, AHA Committee on Women Historians to Tate, June 28, 1972 and December 20, 1972. Tate to Kerber, January 3, 1973. MTP.

<sup>39</sup> Tate, Acceptance Remarks, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1981 Distinguished Alumnus Award. Tate Oral History.