

# Ollie Stewart: An African American Looking at American Politics, Society and Culture

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## Abstract

This article examines and interprets the writings of Ollie Stewart, the Paris-based foreign correspondent for the *Afro-American* newspaper from 1949 to 1977. The articles and lively columns this expat journalist wrote during the post-World War II period when the black press was in decline, provided his and foreigners' views about some of the seminal events that were shaping America and directly impacting Blacks throughout the world. Though at one point he was the only Black correspondent reporting continually reporting from abroad, he has largely been invisible in media history. This article aims to fill this gap. Using framing theory approach and textual analysis, this article examines how Stewart addressed race, U.S. foreign policy, politics and the achievements and activities of Blacks abroad. Stewart's writing provided information and viewpoints that were largely excluded from mainstream media and filled an important void in the press and American history.

Ollie Anderson Stewart was one of at least twenty-seven African-American correspondents who covered Black troops during World War II from all theatres. Like the other Black war correspondents, Stewart wrote about the valor and success of the fighter pilots now known as the Tuskegee Airmen. He also chronicled the experiences and contributions, hence, the day-to-day grind of Black soldiers who did the war's manual labor; the only roles they were given for much of the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The black press was in its glory days during the war, bringing readers the stories they were not getting in the mainstream media.<sup>2</sup> Stewart ranked among the best of Black correspondents, filing hundreds of stories, interviewing Pope Pius II and being one of only a few correspondents to meet with President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill at Casablanca in 1943. After the war, the black press was unable to afford the costs associated with dispatching correspondents to report firsthand from overseas. It, therefore, had to engage in episodic newsgathering by Black writers who rarely lived in foreign lands. Stewart was the exception.<sup>3</sup> In 1949, he became the only African American reporting continually from overseas.<sup>4</sup> With the backing of the *Afro-American* newspaper chain, and pursuing other ventures to support himself, Stewart maintained a base in Paris for 28 years, filing articles and columns for the Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and national editions of the newspaper, and writing freelance pieces for other publications. He had already established himself as a reputable journalist prior to and during the war, but in Paris, he solidified that reputation and became much sought after in social and political circles. Despite his longevity and unique position as an African-American journalist living and writing from abroad, Stewart remains almost invisible in media, journalism and American history.

This study aims to rescue the Paris-based correspondent from invisibility and to provide an analysis of his foreign reporting from the post-World War II years until his return to the United States in 1977. This study is significant because it not only sheds light on the career of one individual, but it expands the breadth of knowledge about African-American foreign correspondence, a genre that has received scant attention in media history. Because it covers a broad period during which seminal movements occurred at home and abroad, this article also illustrates how one major African-American publication carried on its foreign news reporting and contributed to the discourse about Blacks at home and in Europe.

Using framing theory, this study identifies and examines Stewart's writings to determine the content and perspectives he provided. According to Robert Entman, framing is predicated upon giving salience to "some aspects of a perceived reality, thereby promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." Framing affects public opinion and can affect public policy formation.

With that guiding theoretical framework, this study asks: Why did Stewart become an expatriate? Did he address integration or politics or wars? Did his columns advocate for the race, as Black journalists often did in their columns, or were his pieces primarily human interest and entertaining topics? How did Stewart frame the world from his perch overseas?

Founded in 1892, the *Afro-American* was in the forefront of Black foreign correspondence, reporting on the slave trade in Liberia during the late 1920s, dispatching its managing editor, William Jones, to report on Africa and the Diaspora, as well as the League of Nations, during the 1930s. Editor and publisher Carl Murphy reported from Haiti during the same decade, even as he dispatched a star reporter, Ralph Matthews, to cover the coronation of King George VI in 1937, and poet Langston Hughes to cover the Spanish Civil War.<sup>5</sup> The newspaper group published at times as many as thirteen editions.

Like the *Afro-American*, the *Chicago Defender* had an impressive record of newsgathering from abroad before World War II. In the 1920s, it became the first Black publication to establish a foreign news service devoted to information that affected Blacks and people of color. Despite its hardships during the 1930s, the *Defender* continued to engage in global journalism while highlighting mass unemployment, lack of adequate housing, and lack of jobs for Blacks at home.

The rationale for Black foreign newsgathering was rooted in the traditional role of the African-American press, which was to fill a void left by the mainstream media that traditionally framed Blacks at home in stereotypical ways. Black editors were not content to acquiesce to the general press's misrepresentation of nonwhite others, therefore, it set out to explore linkages between Black people at home and people of color abroad, to educate readers about occurrences abroad that affected minority populations, and to explore and compare race relations abroad with the United States. After much wrangling with the federal government, the black press succeeded in obtaining minimal coverage from abroad by Ralph Waldo Tyler during World War I. Tyler, an African-American, worked under the auspices of the Creel Commission, leaving Black editors not completely pleased. But World War II provided a great opportunity for the black press to fashion a counter-image to the negatively-construed personas of Blacks so prevalent in American society and often perpetuated by the mainstream media. Race journalists believed that stories about Blacks' loyalty to their country and the heroic contributions of Black troops would aid in pushing for racial equality and economic progress at home. And as Metz T. Lochard, longtime foreign editor of the *Chicago Defender*, stated, by World War II,

Black editors were smarter as a result of the experience in the last war (World War I) and the post-war years in which discrimination was not only continued but increased. Their newsgathering facilities had expanded to follow their men around the globe. Their protests were couched in terms of global responsibility and merged with the problems of subjugated people everywhere (Lochard, n.d.).

The *Pittsburgh Courier* accomplished a major milestone when its Joel Augustus Rogers became the first correspondent the black press dispatched overseas.<sup>6</sup> The Associated News Service and the *Chicago Defender* also provided first-hand coverage of the Italian-Ethiopian War.<sup>7</sup> Such coverage increased as other Black publications covered World War II.

Ollie Stewart played a major role in helping the black press to accomplish its goals. Very little biographical information is available on Stewart; however, his obituary and articles in the *Afro-American* shed some light on his background. He was born on May 18, 1906 in Gibsland, Louisiana. He graduated in 1930 from what is now Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee, and soon began submitting freelance articles to such publications as *Southern Magazine*, the *Southern Workman*, and *Opportunity* magazine. Stewart obtained notoriety when his article about Father Divine, a Black spiritual leader, appeared in *Scribner's Commentator* and *Readers Digest*. He was paid \$650 for "Harlem's God in his Heaven," a huge sum in 1940 (Scope note, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center). He joined the *Afro-American* as a correspondent in New York, and sometime before June 1940, he became sports editor.

Stewart's first experience as a foreign correspondent came when the *Afro-American* sent him to do a special series on people of color in South America in 1941. A year later the newspaper sent him as a war correspondent to Europe and North Africa, from where he sent regular dispatches covering the African, French, Italian, and German sectors of the war. The reports were colorful and detailed, and in many instances they were the only means for families to get information about their loved ones who were deployed to undisclosed locations.

Stewart returned to the United States and his post at the *Afro-American* after the war, but because he could not tolerate racism and discrimination, he returned to Europe in April 1949<sup>8</sup> and made his home in Paris until 1977, when he returned to America and died shortly thereafter. In Paris, Stewart wrote a weekly column titled "Report from Europe" in the *Afro-American* (in some editions in the early '50s, it sometimes appeared as "Report from Paris") and occasional articles and short stories for the publication and others such as *Readers Digest* and *True Detective*.

Because Stewart's stories about the war were also published in a book, *This Is Our War*, and because of the sheer volume of that output, this study focuses on Stewart's work from the time he returned to the United States in 1946 until he died in May 1977. Included are columns and articles he wrote from Paris and during trips to London, Germany, Helsinki and Rome between 1949 and 1977. Because database searches, internet searches, and encyclopedia references did not yield any substantial information about Stewart, this paper relied solely on the articles in the online archives of Afro.com, and manuscripts in an Ollie Stewart folder at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Stewart's writings during his post-World War II career at the *Afro-American* newspapers totaled 478, of which 426 were columns and 52 were article written in the *Afro-American*, the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Washington Afro-American*.

Because we wanted to find out what Stewart was writing and the perspectives he was providing, we paid closer attention to the articles he wrote during some of the most tumultuous historical periods of the 1950s to the 1970s. We employed a textual analysis of these articles to identify the topics and broad themes that ran through Stewart's writing. We wanted determine how and why a Black reporter, living abroad, framed issues that had import to African Americans and Blacks worldwide. Articles were then grouped according to themes by period. Because so many of the articles were about the same issues, this study examined 48 articles that best represent those themes for the periods and answer. Specifically, we ask: What was the nature of Stewart's writings during seminal historical periods? To what extent did Stewart cover race relations and discrimination abroad? To what extent did Stewart advocate for Blacks at home and abroad as was the custom of the black press? And, how did the content of his column change over the years?

Stewart, who was based in Paris, was a regular writer for the *Afro-American* newspaper chain. His stint abroad coincided with tremendous political and social tumult in the United States and abroad. In the U.S., African Americans were fighting a bitter civil rights battle that began after the Great War. The women's movement was beginning to attract attention, especially with rulings such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Politically, the United States faced criticism at home and abroad for its unpopular foreign policies and its involvement in Indo-China and the Korean and Vietnam and wars. Stewart witnessed five different presidents in his career as a foreign reporter—Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. His articles and columns reflect all of these socio-political events, and include commentary and opinion on some of the most significant journalistic events that occurred during the civil rights movement. Based on an examination of his articles, however, we found that the themes running through his columns were not necessarily tied to the seminal movements mentioned above. For instance, during the civil rights movement in America, Stewart wrote predominantly about travel, visitors in Paris, fashion and the arts.

Some of his articles were light pieces meant purely for enjoyment. These included profiles of interesting people, places and customs, and eyewitness accounts of life in Paris. Stewart's travel pieces were extraordinarily detailed, colorful, and full of anecdotes. They contained valuable tips for travelers. For instance, in May 1952 he did a three-part series titled "So you plan to go to Europe," in the *Washington Afro-American*, detailing the when, what and how of Paris for potential travelers.<sup>9</sup>

Race was a dominant theme in his works during this time, but he did not dwell on it continually. In fact, in a column written in 1958, Stewart laid out the focus of his column thus: “Nine times out of ten this space is filled with news about the people who come here from the USA to visit a while, or those who come here to work. But now and then I just like to talk about Paris.”<sup>10</sup> The exceptions to this were the columns he wrote during the Vietnam War, which were more political than cultural in nature. Stewart also stayed away from “messing around with French politics” because, as he wrote in a column, “it isn’t safe for a foreigner.”<sup>11</sup>

Stewart’s writings defied African-American stereotypes the mainstream media often employed. This coincided with the traditional role and mission of the black press. His columns from Paris were mostly firsthand accounts of life in the city, and his articles were about events in Europe that were relevant to a Black audience in America. From travel, fashion, politics, and food, to profiles of interesting visitors, humorous tales, and strongly-worded opinions, his columns offered quick snapshots of Paris. The writings were akin to a historical record of accomplished and ordinary Black Americans musicians, veterans, arctic explorers, doctors, academics, teachers, housewives, politicians, entrepreneurs who traveled through Paris.

When Stewart came back to America after a total of 16 months covering the war, he went on a speaking tour of schools and colleges, after which he returned to France and wrote articles about post-war Europe. Upon his second return home, Stewart went to work at the *Afro-American* in Washington D.C., covering housing, education, employment, politics, society, the arts, and challenges Blacks faced despite their stellar and patriotic contributions in World War II.

He was in the courtroom for the Columbia race trial in Tennessee in 1946, where twenty-six Black defendants charged with rioting and attempted murder were tried in front of an all-white jury. On June 22, 1946, Stewart reported that Blacks were being systematically excluded from jury service. A week later, he described the scene in the courtroom as being “like going ‘up to the front’ in war.”<sup>12</sup> He explained: “During the war we did have a chance in a foxhole when things got rough—but I’m not so sure about this place.”<sup>13</sup> When covering the case of Herman M. Sweatt, a Black student who was denied admission into the University of Texas law school because of his race, Stewart reported that the “ugly facts,” were that plans for the Black law school existed only on paper.<sup>14</sup>

Incidents such as these convinced Stewart that he could not live as a second-class citizen in his own country. His intolerance for discrimination as well as his disillusionment with the state of race relations at home drove him back to Paris in April 1949. During the next 28 years, he rarely wrote about specific instances of racism against himself in his columns, but on one rare occasion, he did. On April 6, 1965, Stewart wrote:

Civil rights has been my fight the whole of my life (sic). When I was born, I never could vote. My mother and father were fairly well educated (had degrees and taught school)—but they couldn't vote either. I've been kept out of the swimming pool in a New Jersey high school, refused a cup of coffee in the Washington station, told to go to the back door by a Cincinnati restaurant owner, and Jim Crowed from Albany to Jacksonville.<sup>15</sup>

On March 18, 1969 article in *The New York Times* quoted Stewart's explanation for moving to Paris. "I can concentrate here," Stewart told Thomas Johnson, the first Black reporter the newspaper sent overseas. "In America I would spend 75 percent of my time thinking about color—here color is nothing to worry about."<sup>16</sup> Stewart achieved success as a Paris-based journalist, making a name for himself as the *Afro-American's* foreign correspondent, and becoming much sought-after in social and political circles in Paris.

There, he expanded his repertoire of works. While in America Stewart primarily reported on politics and racial discrimination; in Paris, he wrote about fashion, entertainment and society, in addition to race relations and U.S. foreign policy. He also commented on political occurrences at home. The spread of stories by Stewart that appeared in the June 24, 1950, edition of the *Afro-American* is a good example of his diverse interests. The paper carried a front-page article, "Not Married, Lena Insists," about singer Lena Horne denying reports that she was married to Lennie Hayton, a white musician. Stewart's column, "Report from Europe," was about interesting African Americans visiting Paris, including Kenneth Spencer, a young bass baritone from New York City; Dan Goldman Jr., a painter from New York; and various army personnel. In the political news section of the edition, Stewart, writing from Germany, described segregation at the Kitzingen Army Training Center (KTC) in the U.S. zone. "One thing is still noticeable about the officers club at KTC. When there are dances and parties, all the white officers and their wives and guests group themselves together on one side of the room," Stewart wrote.<sup>17</sup>

While Stewart's columns highlighted racial injustice, he also wrote about instances that illustrated progress in building racial equality. His column on January 5, 1954, was about equal employment opportunities in foreign embassies, and noted that the situation had improved dramatically over the past five years. He wrote that Blacks could "be found in top jobs in consulates and the information service all over the Continent."<sup>18</sup>

After the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling that banned segregation in public schools in the country, Stewart wrote a celebratory column lauding Thurgood Marshall's efforts. "From the day many years ago when he argued the Sweatt case in Austin, Texas, I knew that Jim Crow schools were on their way out."<sup>19</sup> On January 3, 1956, Stewart's column was about the lynching of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Black boy from Chicago who had whistled at a white woman.

Stewart described the wrath of a young French girl who happened to see a picture of Till's open casket and his mutilated face, and demanded why "somebody doesn't do something about such things?"<sup>20</sup> Stewart then asked his readers how they would have answered. On May 7, 1957, in the magazine section of the *Washington Afro-American*, he wrote a piece on the use of the word "Negress" to describe a statue by artist Henry Matisse on exhibition in Baltimore. Both items are interesting examples of Stewart's role as ambassador for his race. In the first instance, he described how he tried to make sense of a violent racially-inspired lynching for his French audience, who did not understand why Black Americans did not seek revenge by killing the murderers themselves. He drew parallels with the Nazi atrocities in Europe to explain his view that public opinion about mass lynchings was slowly changing—"the whole of Europe...suffered the brutalities of the Nazis for four years until outside help and power released them from tortures, killings and indignities much worse than anything ever seen in the South."<sup>21</sup> In the second instance, Stewart interviewed artists and art historians to find an answer, and concluded that the confusion arose out of cultural dissimilarities—Matisse had used the word "Negress" because in France the word is not considered offensive.

Stewart's work not only educated his readers about racial discrimination in America, but also placed the issue in a broader, global perspective. His columns discussed the African freedom movement and the treatment of Blacks in Europe and Asia Pacific. He advocated for a strong NAACP at home that would fight for disfranchised Blacks, and a politically-aware and involved Black community. On October 5, 1957, Stewart condemned Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, who had sent the Arkansas National Guard to stop nine Black teenagers from enrolling in the all-white Central High School, in defiance of a Supreme Court decision. Stewart was particularly critical of the apathy in the Black community, pointing out the need for Blacks to financially and politically support the NAACP. He wrote, "In a way, I am guilty. And you who read this are guilty too...Maybe in my articles I could have created more goodwill. Maybe in traveling about the South I could have made more white friends, encouraged more colored people to vote and become economically secure."<sup>22</sup> Stewart believed that Blacks who were successful should help others who were still struggling. In June 1963, he urged professional athletes, (who, in his opinion had won lucrative sports sponsorships because of the efforts of courageous newsmen who reported on the Civil Rights Movement) to "issue a statement strongly supporting the equal rights struggle. And after that...write a big fat check!"<sup>23</sup>

Stewart's columns constantly drew comparisons about race relations in America and in other countries, possibly to show his readers that there were countries in the world that did not tolerate segregation, and others that were exactly like America. His February 4, 1958, column highlighted European perceptions of racism in America. He mentioned a book by two Frenchmen who advised their countrymen how to behave in the U.S. The authors wrote that French tourists should not take their Black friends along on a visit to a white family in a southern home because "mixing was taboo and sticking your neck out by acting Parisian wasn't going to get you anywhere."<sup>24</sup> Housing discrimination in the U.S. and Britain was the subject of Stewart's June 23, 1959 column. "A nice happy community in the United States can be as calm as sunset—until one lone colored family moves in.



And then it's like dripping water in hot grease."<sup>25</sup> About Britain he wrote, "It has resisted invasions by the Germans, French and others...but a few thousand Jamaicans have thrown the whole island into a tizzy."<sup>26</sup> A column on the same topic in 1962 showed that in contrast to the U.S. and Britain, in Paris, mixed housing was the norm—"a 'For White Only' sign on a house in Paris jolly well wouldn't stay there long."<sup>27</sup> Five years later, Stewart wrote that the situation in Britain remained unchanged. He quoted a white homeowner who explained that the property value of their homes in his area would "drop by at least \$2,000" if a Black moved in, and asked "Would you want that to happen to your property?"<sup>28</sup>

Along with criticizing the U.S. government for condoning and promoting discrimination in America, Stewart also commented on the media's role in promoting stereotypes. In June 1961, he wrote about the bias against mixed race marriages being propagated by American media. He gave the example of an American magazine that had purposely cited only failed mixed marriages in an article, despite several examples of the contrary. "These marriages have lasted for so many years, have been so successful by any standards, that they couldn't be used to prove the "hazards" of mixed couples—which is what the magazine set out to prove."<sup>29</sup>

During the 1960s, when the civil rights movement began in America, Stewart's columns mentioned some of the seminal protest events, such as white civil rights hero James Peck's freedom bus ride to Alabama, and student unrests throughout the country, but he did not dwell heavily on these events. In raising issues of racial inequality and segregation, however, Stewart was fulfilling what Elizabeth Murphy Moss, a former reporter, editor and publisher of the *Afro-American* newspapers, had envisioned. In a speech in 1969, she said: "The responsibility of the Black newspaper is to guide, counsel, educate, help people in trouble and through its columns suggest solutions to problems and means of correcting injustices."<sup>30</sup>

In his columns Stewart continued to portray the world's reaction to racial inequalities in America and showed that there was international support and interest in the civil rights movement. In July 1964, he wrote about France's contempt for Senator Barry Goldwater, who had voted against the Civil Rights Bill: "In all my years in France I don't think I have heard such wholesale condemnation of an American by the average Frenchman," Stewart wrote.<sup>31</sup> Less than a year later, he highlighted the efforts of the Paris American Racial Integration Support organization to spread the message of integration to Americans overseas and to young French people. Stewart explained why American expats were hosting Civil Rights Nights in Paris: "Because we're away from home—and we feel guilty and frustrated. This is the only way we can show our support for what he (Martin Luther King Jr.) is doing."<sup>32</sup>

While writing on international political issues, Stewart used the narrative of race. In doing this, he was following on the track of black press leaders who recognized the need to go global in reporting racial wrongs. For instance, an article in *the Washington Afro-American* on May 2, 1950, was about intense racial discrimination practiced in South Africa.

Stewart quoted an anonymous visitor (who feared reprisals if his name was made public) who charged that if South African Prime Minister Daniel Francois Malan “had his way he would have separate air for colored people to breathe.”<sup>33</sup> Stewart wrote, “I began to think of Georgia, which matches South Africa in prejudice, and I wondered if he knew about Georgia.”<sup>34</sup> In an article in the *Baltimore Afro-American* in July 24, 1951, Stewart highlighted racial discrimination at a U.S. hospital in Paris that refused employment to a qualified nurse who was not white.<sup>35</sup> Focusing on the bigger picture, he wrote, “Exposure of hiring bias at the hospital, however, is but the first step in the Franco-American campaign against the importation of American prejudice into France. The American Express and Western Union have all-white staffs in all their offices here. They are next on the list.”

Another article several years later provided a forward-looking perspective about the big tasks that lay ahead of Ghana following its independence from British rule, and the expectation that Blacks would seize the opportunity of presenting themselves on an international platform. Stewart pointed out that Ghana would need Black men and women to fill the top jobs in various sectors the British previously handled.<sup>36</sup>

In his Africa-related stories written in the late '50s and early '60s, Stewart focused on African independence and nation-building. A December 1958 column reported that an investor who had traveled to Ghana to explore business propositions for a group of American investors, found that things looked “promising” and that Africa was progressing “faster than most people imagine.”<sup>37</sup> In October 1959, Stewart wrote that Africa was “attracting more and more Americans,” some of whom went there “as experts, as diplomats—and others just to see and learn.”<sup>38</sup> In April 1961, he wrote about the natural resources of Africa that could help it become a major player in the world market.

Coverage also attempted to build a common kinship among Blacks. An example is his report on Laurin Rugambwa, the first African to be named cardinal in 1,500 years. Stewart, the only reporter from a Black newspaper present at the ceremony in Rome, described the event and his celebrity treatment, as follows:

The room for the ceremony was crowded when I arrived, but for the same reason that Cardinal Rugambwa attracted attention, the laymen and even fellow journalists made way for me. Their action seemed to say that they knew I had special reason to be right down front—which is just where I placed myself. And, brother, was I photographed! The ceremony was late getting underway, and for a time there you might have thought I was getting a Red Hat!<sup>39</sup>

Race featured prominently in Stewart's lighter-themed columns as well. These pieces featured mostly Black men and women who traveled to Paris from America, Black businesses in Paris, and the view of Black people on politics around the world. One column was about a book called *Americanisms*, written by a French editor, on the manner in which English was spoken in the United States. Stewart brought in a new perspective (which the book reviewer had been left out) by discussing the contribution of minorities to the language. "The American language is as rich in idioms and colloquial expressions as any language in the world, and more than a few of our most vivid figures of speech are produced by minority groups in the U.S.," wrote Stewart.<sup>40</sup> Blacks in sports figured prominently in his other columns. Stewart reported from the 1960 Olympics in Helsinki that although only 43 Black athletes were on the U.S. squad of 281, they won more than a third of the gold medals the U.S. collected.

From 1949 when he first wrote from Paris as an expat reporter, until the mid-60s, Stewart's columns were mainly about people. Occasionally, he referred to important events in American politics and foreign policies, sometimes giving his own opinion, and sometimes summing up popular opinion in France. On John Kennedy being elected President, Stewart wrote that France widely anticipated radical changes in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>41</sup> When Lyndon Johnson was elected President, Stewart wrote about Americans in Paris flocking "to the American Embassy, the student Center, and Harry's New York Bar until they had to lock the doors."<sup>42</sup>

Stewart's columns, especially those written in the '50s and early '60s, celebrated the achievements of Blacks in America and abroad, thereby cultivating a sense of racial pride among his Black audience. Writing in 1954 about Black singer Charles Holland's struggle to gain acceptance in America, Stewart noted that the tenor received some of the most applause when he performed at an international festival in Nice, France. Other artists Stewart mentioned in his columns included James Walker, a comedian whom Stewart called him "one of the funniest men in the world today,"<sup>43</sup> and 22-year-old actor Gypsy Marpessa Dawn Menor, who was "creating quite a stir in French movie circles."<sup>44</sup> In an article published in the *Afro-American* on April 7, 1956, Stewart wrote about the popularity Black entertainers enjoyed in Paris. "Colored entertainers mean money in the till in Europe—especially in France." The reason, he said, was that customers had a conviction in Black artists because "colored performers are the best."<sup>45</sup>

During the 1960s, the U.S. was immersed in the second wave feminist movement. This wave grew out of the civil rights and anti-war movements, and aimed for equality for women in political and social arenas. Though Stewart did not address the feminist movement, he emphasized women's empowerment through the perspective of race. His columns carried numerous examples of accomplished Black women travelers from America—some vacationing with their families, some giving lectures or musical performances in Europe, and others touring the world. For example, on June 4, 1957, he wrote: "I always like to meet and talk to very important people...so this week it's been a pleasure to pass some time with two women who qualify on all counts: they're important and they're nice to be around."<sup>46</sup>

By highlighting these women and others like them, Stewart gave recognition and voice to a severely neglected part of the American population. Stewart's writings sometimes equated women and Blacks as the disfranchised, oppressed minority. He was definitely not a feminist, as he acknowledged in his column in the *Washington Afro-American* on June 17, 1975: "I've never beaten the drums for Women's Lib. I'm not beating any drums now especially for women."<sup>47</sup> But in the same column he wrote: "Over the years in the United States, as well as most of the so called developed countries, women have been the yardstick. If they caught hell, if they were shortchanged (and they were), a lot of talk about freedom and such was pure tripe."<sup>48</sup> While he frowned upon American women "telling their husbands what to eat, how to dress, where to go and what to say when they get there," something "a European woman would never try"<sup>49</sup> he also pointed out the hypocrisy of American males who had barred women from voting for 250 years.

In his later years—between 1968 and 1977—Stewart's columns focused intensely on politics. One of his biggest preoccupations was the Vietnam War. He wrote about France's immense interest in the war—"This historic 2000-year-old city, which has seen revolutions, riots and glory, has seldom been so shaken up. Just about everybody was caught up in the excitement—American elections and war."<sup>50</sup> In a 1968 year-end column, Stewart wrote that World War II had been a declared war that many people believed in.<sup>51</sup> He closely followed developments in Vietnam and Nixon's decisions, the failure of the Paris Peace talks, and the widespread protests against the war by Americans and Europeans in Paris, Madrid, Rome and London.

Besides the Vietnam War, Stewart's writings in his later years were critical of American foreign policy. A strong theme in the '70s was his stand against what he called insidious European and American imperialism in Africa and developing nations. His columns charged that the Western world exploited Nigeria for its oilfields, that public opinion was turning against the U.S. because of its threat to grab Arab oilfields, and that the U.S. government was being criticized globally for "staking more American lives in the Mideast powder keg,"<sup>52</sup> for refusing funds at home to rebuild "ghettos," and for using the funds instead to support troops overseas and give loans to foreign governments. Stewart opined on the devaluation of the dollar and criticized President Gerald Ford for pardoning Nixon in the Watergate scandal.

He closely followed the decisions of America's policy makers, often using his columns to decode complex policies. In a December 13, 1969 column Stewart reported that the U.S. was supplying "hardware" to the military junta in Greece, much like it did in Korea, Formosa and Vietnam. Drawing a larger picture for his readers, he wrote: "While the U.S. sheds "briny tears" about a few million people in Vietnam, it remains tremendously silent about going into Rhodesia, Mozambique, and South Africa to bring a little freedom to millions and millions of Black Africans who beg in vain for even a taste of justice."<sup>53</sup> On May 20, 1975, Stewart reported on a conference where delegations from 10 countries met to discuss energy and economic problems.

“There was complete deadlock when America insisted that nothing but oil be discussed,” Stewart wrote, adding that America’s goal was to keep “African nations poor by refusing to buy their products until the prices hit absolute rock bottom.”<sup>54</sup>

There are no indications that Stewart ever visited United States during the 28 years he lived and reported from abroad.<sup>55</sup> He seems to have kept in touch with America through newspapers, television and magazines, and through conversations with American visitors. It’s no surprise then that his later writings demonstrate a complete disconnect with social and cultural life in the US. In a September 23, 1975 column Stewart said he had watched his last American movie in 1937, and did not much care for what the studios churned out.<sup>56</sup> He also expressed surprise about the car-centric culture in the United States, where he said teens had not seen a train. In 1977, when he returned to America for medical treatment and to reunite with his family, he found that the country had changed immensely. Though only two articles from the period after his return to the U.S. were found in the archives, they were sufficient to show Stewart’s disbelief that the desegregated society he and other writers from the black press had fought so long and so hard for, were finally here. Stewart, however, deeply disliked the capitalistic culture of post-war America.

After his return to the U.S., he did a two-part series in March 1977, which was published in the *Baltimore Afro-American*. In the first article, titled, “Afro’s Ollie Stewart comes home after 28 years,” Stewart described his experience at the Atlanta airport as being indicative of how things had changed in America while he was away. Having missed a connecting flight in Atlanta, he had approached the airline desk for assistance and assumed that since “this is the heart of the South,” he would be put up “in Blackville, probably a rooming house or something like a YMCA—and a long ride from the terminal.”<sup>57</sup> He was very surprised when Delta Airlines treated him cordially and put up in the five-star Admiral Benbow Hotel. When he spoke to his brother on the phone, he got an explanation: “Today just about every public place you can think wants to know only one thing—can you pay? If you’ve got the money, that’s it. You’re in.”<sup>58</sup> The second article was a scathing critique of American culture, the media, and the U.S. fear of Communism. Television was “clogging the air day and night” and “block-long cars” were “guzzling gas like crazy,”<sup>59</sup> while the President talked about an energy crisis, and U.S. reporters misled audiences about politics and politicians. Integration was the only thing change Stewart welcomed.

From these examples it’s clear that the dominant frame in Stewart’s writing was race. From his perch in Europe, he gave balanced accounts of race relations in Europe, telling readers that discrimination was almost non-existent in France, but was accepted in England. Stewart ceaselessly criticized racial discrimination and inequality in America and he often exhorted fellow Blacks to fight for their rights and exercise their political clout. His columns were a wealth of information about celebrated Black achievers of the time who were often ignored in the mainstream media.

By highlighting the accomplishments and activities of Black musicians, academics, professionals, and other common Black Americans, Stewart sought to cultivate a sense of pride among African Americans for their roots and heritage. And by documenting the opinions of the rest of the world about America, Stewart's columns brought a sense of balance to mainstream news coverage about U.S. politics and foreign policy.

In his columns from 1949 to the mid-'60s, he focused mainly on travel, culture and people—through the race lens—while making occasional references to seminal political issues at home. The content of his columns became overly political during the Vietnam War and U.S. intervention in the Middle East and Africa during the late '60s to the mid-'70s.

From his writings we also see that Stewart saw himself as a Black man first and then an American. After his move to Paris, he seemed to have adopted French citizenship in a way,<sup>60</sup> severely limiting his affiliation with America. Perhaps this distance, both physical and mental afforded him the detachment and insight to hold up the country of his birth to harsh scrutiny. Through his articles, he drew comparisons between Paris, which he portrayed as individualistic, creative and free, while America, in his opinion, was unpopular and materialistic, and was characterized by herd instinct, hypocrisy and prudishness.<sup>64</sup> This was very much in keeping with the role of the black press and its previous foreign correspondence that provided an alternative narrative to the mainstream media in order to cultivate a favorable attitude toward Blacks worldwide and hopefully impact public opinion and public policy. As Entman noted in further explaining framing in 2008, it is “an omnipresent process. . . that involves selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation... Framing works to shape and alter audience member's interpretation and preferences.”<sup>65</sup> From America, but not American, in Paris, but not Parisian—Stewart's stories enabled the *Afro-American* to continue to carry on its foreign newsgathering and thereby contribute to the discourse about people of color worldwide. While it's impossible to determine the effect his writing had on readers, Stewart's unique position as a African American and respected journalist made him a credible and affordable conduit for the common Black man to experience Europe politically and culturally, in an intelligent way, and for readers—Black or white—to interpret that experience from the black press<sup>61</sup>

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## References and Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> The *Afro-American* alone fielded seven correspondents during the war.

<sup>3</sup> Homer Smith, *A Black Man in Red Russia* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964); Chatwood Hall, "Why I Went to Russia and Why I Left," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Sept. 27, 1955, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart was not the first African-American correspondent who filed stories while living abroad. Homer Smith, using the pen name Chatwood Hall, had been a correspondent based in Russia from 1932 until 1946 before moving to Ethiopia and filing periodic stories through 1966, when he returned to the United States. Enoch Waters was based in Africa when he filed stories for the Associated Negro Press from across the continent for eighteen months, beginning in 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Carl J. Murphy, "Education Group Sails for Haiti," *Afro-American*, June 14, 1930. Scope Note, Ollie Stewart Folder, Manuscript Department, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; Ralph Matthews, "Matthew Sees All England in Arms; AFRO Editor in London Sees Behind Coronation; Show Feverish Preparation for Coming War," *Afro-American* May 8, 1937; Ralph Matthews, "Carl Murphy Was a Newspaperman's Newspaperman – A Tribute," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Mar. 11, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Joel A. Rogers, "Getting Inside News from the Front," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Nov. 9, 1935.

<sup>7</sup> "Defender Foreign News Experts Forecast Attack on Ethiopia, Scooping World on Developments in African Empire: Intelligent Grasping of War Situation Allowed Defender Staff to Take This Step," *Chicago Defender*, January 4, 1936. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 24, 1953. In this article Stewart writes that he has been "a bona fide resident of France since Apr. 30, 1949."

<sup>9</sup> Ollie Stewart, "So You Plan to Go to Europe?" *Washington Afro-American*, May 20, 1952; Ollie Stewart, "So You Plan to Go to Europe?" *Washington Afro-American*, June 7, 1952.

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- <sup>10</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Jan. 28, 1958.
- <sup>11</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 7, 1951.
- <sup>12</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Trial Scene like Battlefield—Ollie," *Afro-American*, June 29, 1946. Thurgood Marshall, the Black lawyer for the NAACP who later became famous for his fight against segregation, was successful in getting all the defendants acquitted.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1
- <sup>14</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Stewart Sees US on Trial in Sweatt Case," *Afro-American*, May 24, 1947.
- <sup>15</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, April 6, 1965.
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, "Paris: Negroes' Way Station," *The New York Times*, Mar. 19, 1969.
- <sup>17</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Stewart Feels Kitzingen Has Outlived Usefulness," *Afro-American*, June 24, 1950.
- <sup>18</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 26, 1954.
- <sup>19</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 1, 1954.
- <sup>20</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 3, 1956.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Aug. 26, 1957.
- <sup>23</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, June 25, 1963.
- <sup>24</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Feb. 4, 1958.
- <sup>25</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Oct. 6, 1959.



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- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Feb. 27, 1962.
- <sup>28</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Oct. 10, 1967.
- <sup>29</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, June 20, 1961.
- <sup>30</sup> Armistead Pride and Clint Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Howard University Press, 1987): 133.
- <sup>31</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Afro-American*, July 28, 1964.
- <sup>32</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 22, 1966.
- <sup>33</sup> Ollie Stewart, "South African Racist Scored," *Washington Afro-American*, May 2, 1950.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ollie Stewart, "U.S. Hospital in Paris Sticks to Bias, Snubs Nurse 2<sup>nd</sup> Time," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 24, 1951.
- <sup>36</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Big Job Ahead for Baby Ghana Nation," *The Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 5, 1957.
- <sup>37</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 9, 1958.
- <sup>38</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Dec.15, 1959.
- <sup>39</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Ollie Finds Bond with Rugambwa," *Afro-American*, Apr. 9, 1960.
- <sup>40</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Afro-American*, Nov. 3, 1956.
- <sup>41</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Nov. 22, 1960.

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- <sup>42</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Nov. 17, 1964.
- <sup>43</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 3, 1957.
- <sup>44</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Ex-Coed Wins 3<sup>rd</sup> Paris Film Role," *Afro-American*, Apr. 7, 1956.
- <sup>45</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Tan Entertainers Mean Cash in European Clubs, Theatres," *Afro American*, April 7, 1956.
- <sup>46</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 4, 1957.
- <sup>47</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, June 17, 1975.
- <sup>48</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, May 20, 1975.
- <sup>49</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, May 19, 1959.
- <sup>50</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Nov. 19, 1968.
- <sup>51</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Dec. 31, 1968.
- <sup>52</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Sept. 30, 1975.
- <sup>53</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Afro-American*, Dec. 13, 1969.
- <sup>54</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Sept. 27, 1975.
- <sup>55</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Sept. 25, 1962

In this column Stewart wrote that he had been living "outside the USA (without going back even one day) since the end of 1948—which would be about 14 years." Stewart never mentioned returning until he actually did in 1977.

- <sup>56</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Sept. 23, 1975.

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<sup>57</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Afro's Ollie Stewart Comes Home After 28 Years," *Washington Afro-American*, Mar.22, 1977.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ollie (Stewart, "Ollie Stewart Reviews 'The Land I've Come Back To,'" *Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 29, 1977.

<sup>60</sup> Stewart explained that he never renounced his American citizenship, because he was born with it and had no plans to give it up.

<sup>64</sup> Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 21, 1961; Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Feb. 26, 1963; Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Afro-American*, May 17, 1966; Ollie Stewart, "Report from Europe," *Washington Afro-American*, Mar. 28, 1967.

<sup>65</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Media Framing Biases and Political Power: Explaining Slant in News of Campaign 2008," *Journalism* 11 (2010): 391.