As they gained independence, African governments were courted from many corners. One of the most unusual was a group of unofficial diplomats from Papua, which was then still the Dutch colony of West New Guinea. There, in the seas where Asia faded into the Pacific islands, a Papuan nationalist movement sought to insert itself into an Indonesian-Dutch diplomatic and military struggle for control of their homeland. The Dutch spoke of tutelage, the Indonesians of regaining a part of their territory still under colonial rule. The issue threatened to erupt into war before the US government intervened in 1962 and forced a settlement that saw the territory transferred to Indonesian rule, where it remains, restively, to this day.

Papuan nationalists touring Africa in 1962, months before the American-mediated settlement, carried with them a pamphlet. “BROTHERS AND SISTERS NEGROIDS!” it exhorted. “It’s about time you break away from your busy work to listen to what we Papuans have to say! Many, many times you have heard about us from the Dutch and Indonesians, without having known us. Now we will take the floor ourselves. We are living in the Pacific, our people are called Papuans, our ethnic origin is the Negroid race.” The pamphlet made an audacious claim that mobilized ideas of race to back a demand for independence. As they traveled through Africa, their hosts remarked with surprise on their appearance. These inhabitants of a Dutch colony, claimed by Indonesia, “looked African.” Armed with that perception, they tried to turn “race” into a diplomatic asset, transforming marginalization and powerlessness into a tool they could wield internationally.

It would be difficult to make a case for ethnic ties between Africa and the Melanesian Pacific, but the emergent Papuan nationalist movement nevertheless seized on the dark skins and curly hair of many people in both areas. They lacked the strength to win their case internationally. Yet in deciding to press the case for Papuan-African
commonality, they forged the identity that is still asserted in today’s Papuan independence movement.

The case for the Papuans was not just one of diplomacy: it was an effort to convince the world that there was such a thing as a Papuan people. The claim was grounded in an assertion of racial difference between Papuans and Indonesians—something made clear in the title of the Papuan nationalist pamphlet, *The Voice of the Negroids of the Pacific to the Negroids throughout the World*. The pamphlet’s opening article, signed by nationalist leader Nicolaas Jouwe, conceded that the case could not be grounded in historical records, since the Papuans’ ancestors were illiterate. Still, he wrote, “we Papuans know that we are an independent people and this is the time we want to fight before the international forum to remain ourselves. We do not want to be slaves anymore.” Papuans were a distinct people who “differ[ed] from the Indonesians ethnologically not in the way the Indian differs from the Pakistani but like the people of Ghana in West Africa differ from the Chinese. . . . WE ARE PAPUANS AND WANT TO REMAIN PAPUANS!” Lest there be any mistaking its intent, *Voice of the Negroids* was copiously illustrated with photographs of Papuans. One depicted a Papuan teacher alongside Frédéric Guirma, Upper Volta’s ambassador to the United Nations. “What is the ethnical difference between them?” the caption asked. Similarly, an appeal from the Papuan National Committee, the main vessel of Papuan nationalism, called on “all negroid peoples in the world” as “fellow tribesmen” to lend help. Papuan nationalists continually stressed difference from Indonesia as foundational to their nation. “The Papuan people form a nation, which has the right to its territory and its national State, in the same way as the other peoples of the world,” one public meeting resolved in a motion to UN Secretary-General U Thant. “The Papuans are not Indonesians.” Grounded in claims of difference and claims of international justice, the Papuan nationalist case looked to the United Nations for support. As a host of new African states joined the United Nations, they found hope in identification with Africa’s decolonization wave and with Africans.

The period leading up to the publication of *The Voice of the Negroids* saw Papuans form an identity within the context of Dutch-Indonesian struggle, defining themselves along lines of “race.” The idea that Papuans were a race apart from
Indonesians was very much a product of colonial administration and anthropology. Yet Papuan nationalists sought to reclaim and redeploy the idea that they were “black” for their own ends. This was partly to build a unifying sense of nation within Papua, but equally it had pragmatic diplomatic goals, as a strategy to build international support for Papuan independence. Diplomatic struggle drove identity formation. Papuan nonstate diplomats donned the hallowed pan-African mantle. This gave them a claim to the dignity of independence, and offered the prospect of overseas supporters able to lend weight to their claims for a separate future from the regional giant, Indonesia.

Yet it also left them victim to ideas of space and place implicit in Western minds. If they were black, that made them, to many in the West, primitive. A claim for independence was rendered into an argument against independence. Diplomatic thinking of the day “situate[d] black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, on the underside, outside the normal),” to cite Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. Writing on the history of Papua’s transfer from Dutch to Indonesian rule has similarly tended to exclude Papuan voices, even though “the situated knowledge of these communities and their contributions to real and imagined human geographies are significant political acts and expressions.” In other words, Papuans were subjects in their own history, even though most historical accounts have omitted them.

The new Papuan identity was constructed internationally, rather than by factors from within the territory. It is best understood as part of the Africa-centred global wave of decolonization in the early 1960s. Papuans, told they were “black,” reclaimed and redeployed the imposed race category. Rejecting any notion that they were part of another country, or destined for years of “tutelage,” they demanded equality with other peoples, framing this claim in internationally accepted terms as a demand for decolonization and self-determination. The decolonizing “wind of change” in Africa offered a window for parallel Papuan hopes for decolonization, but Cold War politics slammed that window shut. Although it failed in its bid for independence, the Papuan claim to be in a sense African became foundational to Papuan nationalism. Before it could make claims that linked Papua to Africa in the 1960s, however, Papuan nationalism had to form within more limited regional spaces.
Papua in Indonesian and Melanesian Contexts, 1945–1959

Papuan identity emerged in the short period between the Indonesian independence declaration of 1945, and the Indonesian takeover of the 1960s. It was historically contingent—which does not make it less real or deeply held. International factors were key in identity formation. In 1944, Allied forces pushed the Japanese military out of New Guinea. General Douglas MacArthur established his base at what is now the Papuan provincial capital, Jayapura—then called Kampong Harapan, the village of hope. The arrival of African American soldiers made a major impression. Jouwe recalled the impression of these dark-skinned troops on local Papuans: “They saw how the Negroes, who were as black as we, were building roads, driving large army trucks, and were able to do all sorts of things as well as the Whites. They saw Black pilots, Black sailors, Blacks in beautiful uniforms with bottles of Coca-Cola. Of course they had no idea about racial discrimination in the USA. But what they saw opened their eyes. They had always been despised and treated as savages.”

Another nationalist leader, E. J. Bonay, took away a similar impression of African American soldiers: “They worked and fought shoulder to shoulder with their white comrades. The Negro men flew fighter planes, commanded warships, fired artillery, and drove vehicles and so forth. . . . Seeing this, Papuans asked themselves why can the Negroes do these things and the Papuans not? Is not our skin color and hair the same?”

Papuan elites had to contend with the fact of Indonesia’s independence declaration, issued two days after the Japanese surrender. Was merdeka (freedom) to be realized in partnership with the new Republic of Indonesia, or in opposition to it? For Indonesian nationalists, there was no question: Papua was part of the Dutch East Indies, therefore part of Indonesia, and the proclamation settled the issue of self-determination once and for all. Dutch officials proposed an eventual independent Papua in union with the Netherlands. The proposal split the Papuan elite into two factions. Silas Papare emerged as the leader of those who rejected it, while Markus Kaisiepo, Nicolaas Jouwe, and others accepted it. The idea of separating Papua from Indonesia went back to the 1930s, with some Dutch groups seeing it as a new tropical Holland to be carved out of the wilderness. These groups included fascists who sought a “white New Guinea.” In this vision, Papuans were invisible, part of nature. Colonial race scholarship rendered them as
Melanesian rather than Indonesian, the anthropological catchall term for the rest of the Indies (plus present-day Malaysia, the Philippines, and Madagascar). Anthropology mapped race on lines of difference. Where the Indonesians were for the most part brown skinned and straight haired, Papuans’ black skin and curly hair prompted their depiction as “Oriental Negroes” by turn-of-the-century Dutch explorers. Nineteenth-century writers had speculated that Melanesians might be originally from Africa—they were “all children of Ham.” As Gerald Horne has noted, a “blackbirding” trade in “Papuan savages” went back to the nineteenth-century construction of a “white Pacific” in Australia, the United States, and elsewhere.

Papuan nationalists renamed the territory Irian, a term coined by Markus Kaisiepo meaning the hot land that rises out of the tropical haze. Silas Papare established the first nationalist group, the Partai Kemerdekaan Irian Indonesia (PKII), the Irian Indonesian Independence Party. After planning an anti-Dutch uprising, Papare was jailed for a time, then founded the PKII in 1946 to seek independence from the Netherlands as an autonomous component of the new decentralized Indonesian Republic. Papare stressed that “the PKII will only recognize a government of its own choice, that is, constituted by the people and for the people.” If Papare represented one current in Papuan nationalism, Markus Kaisiepo represented the other. Kaisiepo was foremost among the early Papuan nationalists who rejected the path to independence as part of Indonesia. By the 1960s he was, in the words of an Australian diplomat, “regarded by the Dutch as the doyen of the Papuan elite.”

In the sense of newness and discovery, Papuan reactions echoed global feelings. “A wind is rising,” wrote Walter White, who went on to head the NAACP—“a wind of determination by the have-nots of the world to share the benefits of freedom and prosperity which the haves of the earth have tried to keep exclusively for themselves.” White deplored the return of such European holdings as Papua to their former colonial ruler. “Colored peoples, particularly in the Pacific, believed, whether correctly or not, that in its later stages the war was being fought to restore empire to Great Britain, France, Holland, and Portugal,” he wrote. US policy, influenced by racialized thinking, tended to preach self-determination but sympathize with European governments. Washington took a pro-Dutch stance in the early stages of the Indonesian revolution, which drew the
condemnation of African American anticolonialists at home. It shifted only after the new Republic of Indonesia proved its anticommunist bona fides by crushing a communist uprising in 1948.16

American and UN diplomacy saw the Netherlands accept Indonesian independence in 1949. The Indonesian-Dutch negotiations leading to this deal deadlocked over control of Papua. Papuan leaders complained that Papua’s fate was being settled with no Papuans present, as if it was “a piece of merchandise.”17 Papuan nationalism was forming, with Indonesia defined as the “other.” This process gelled under Dutch rule in the 1950s.

The postwar international climate made it necessary for the Netherlands to justify its continued colonial presence in Papua. Dutch authorities insisted that there were two different races in the Netherlands East Indies: on this, “we can trust the simple evidence of our own eyes.”18 By making race the reason for their presence in Papua, they set the boundaries within which a new Papuan or Melanesian identity could emerge. As Danilyn Rutherford has written, “the Papuan was born in a process of naming in which those designated as such had little part.”19

The result was a colonial government that gave an unusually large responsibility to anthropologists. Plans drawn up in 1949 for a colonywide parliament were shelved for a series of local councils. A gradualist approach stressed political training but avoided firm target dates for independence. In the words of Governor Jan van Baal, himself a distinguished anthropologist: “Real independence is dependent on economic development.”20 Dutch colonialists wanted to prove they could succeed next to an Indonesia that was failing. At the United Nations, the Dutch government argued for a “sacred mission” in West New Guinea that represented “the natural self-respect of a guardian who has begun the upbringing of an infant and does not want to relinquish the responsibility until the child can stand on its own legs.”21

Not surprisingly, Indonesian leaders were unimpressed with Dutch efforts to follow policies in New Guinea that they remembered all too well themselves. They derided claims for a separate Papuan political unit as racial pseudoscience. One Indonesian pamphlet argued that “no one can draw a distinct dividing line between the so-called Papua and Malay areas!”22 The struggle to gain control of Papua became
increasingly central to Indonesian political unity. Patriotic songs, for instance, harnessed Indonesian nationalism to the campaign to “restore West Irian to the fold of the motherland.”

Papuan nationalists again found themselves squeezed between these two states in conflict. When in 1949 the Dutch government accepted Indonesian independence but held on to Papua, Silas Papare and his followers moved to Indonesia to carry on the anticolonial struggle. Papare was appointed as one of three Papuan representatives in exile sitting in the Indonesian parliament. He founded the Irian Struggle Body, which continued to assert his right to speak for the Papuan people in international forums. In 1953 he was named a member of the Indonesian government’s Irian Bureau, set up as an embryo for a future provincial government. His key role, however, was to serve as a concrete representation of Papuan pro-Indonesian sentiment—his story made regular appearances in Indonesian pamphlets produced for international consumption. Papare declared an autonomous province from exile in 1956, but the Indonesian government ignored this, announcing its own “autonomous province” soon afterward under the leadership of the Sultan of Tidore—best known for his dynasty’s history as slave-traders along the Papuan coasts.

If Papare had been squeezed out in the “autonomous province” episode, Markus Kaisiepo also felt a sense of betrayal the same year as Dutch churches began to call for talks with Indonesia. Kaisiepo shifted away from Christianity as a result, stressing instead indigenous beliefs and unambiguous Papuan nationalism. With Jouwe, Bonay, and fourteen other leaders, he signed a 1956 Papuan resolution that it must be Papuans who maintained peace and stability in their country, given the call of the Dutch church for Indonesian-Dutch talks.

Although Dutch categorizing of race was formative, Indonesian attitudes on race also became decisive. The rejection of European racial classification was central to the Indonesian nationalist project, which asserted a single nation embracing all indigenous peoples throughout the archipelago.

Indonesian political depictions of Papua drew on ideas of center and periphery, civilization and savagery. Territory mattered, and the lingering Dutch presence on part of Indonesia’s “body” was painted as an “amputation” by Indonesian leaders. President
Sukarno, for instance, declared: “Compared to our archipelago, West Irian is the size of a *kelor* (horseradish) leaf, yet West Irian is part of our body. Would anybody allow one of his limbs to be amputated without putting up a fight? Does not a man cry out in pain if even the tiniest finger of his hand is cut off?” The idea of all ethnicities in the archipelago being Indonesian together was deeply rooted in Indonesian nationalism. Nevertheless, and unlike other regionally based ethnic minorities, Indonesian nationalist depictions of Papuans tended toward racial caricature. One activist wrote about the need to “free” Papuans from their “stone age civilization,” while noting their skills in music and sports; Foreign Minister Subandrio spoke of the need to get Papuans “down out of the trees even if we have to pull them down”; and Sukarno’s audience reportedly appeared in blackface at one rally. Indonesian nationalism, even as it extolled the struggle to gain control of Papua, othered the Papuan people.

The Indonesian-Dutch struggle was over who would possess the land. In Jouwe’s words: “Papua was like a virgin girl, being ready to be married by anyone strong enough to get her.” Gendered concepts had also been present from the beginnings of the Indonesian nationalist movement, a project of freeing the feminine body of the motherland (Ibu Pertiwi) from colonialism through dynamic action by nationalist men. These gendered themes became stronger as the nationalist movement won its freedom in a war of revolution that spawned heroic memories, and then inherited a state apparatus. Dutch colonial rhetoric often feminized Indonesian men, and US colonial-period images did the same. That legacy remained postindependence: US images portrayed Sukarno as a vain, emotional, and irrational ruler. But Sukarno’s popularity at home only benefited when he was criticized for womanizing on his foreign trips, and he was careful to bolster his masculine image through the conjuring of national grandeur and the construction of grand projects and symbols like the National Monument in Jakarta, a column locals dubbed “Sukarno’s last erection.”

Throughout the 1950s, Western assumptions about Indonesian backwardness and incapacity reinforced strategic calculations that privileged European concerns. One typical note from a Western diplomat underlines this point:
Looked at objectively and realistically in the light of current conditions in Indonesia, of course, acquisition of another vast stretch of primitive territory would be like piling Ossia upon Pelion. . . . But emotion, pride and bitterness compounded have expanded the issue of control over a rugged and backward South Sea tract of land into a political problem of global impact, possibly fraught with menace to the world’s peace and certainly to its peace of mind.\(^{30}\)

Only when this attitude began to shift, and racialized attitudes toward “primitive” Papuans began to grow, did this change.

**Papua as “New Africa,” 1960–1962**

Racial categories in the Papuan-Indonesian conflict were very recent constructions. In adopting “race” as a marker of difference, Papuan nationalists embraced a new mental map of sharp division, rather than gradual shading, between Indonesia and Melanesia (islands of dark-skinned people). A sharp racial divide was then painted as a sharp ideological divide. “I don’t believe that in the future we will be friendly with Asiatic people,” Jouwe wrote. “They will become more and more communistic. We are a Pacific people.”\(^ {31}\)

Nationalism surged as the Dutch government announced a ten-year plan for self-government. In 1961, a semi-elected New Guinea Council with a Papuan majority took office. With this step, Papuan nationalists became diplomatic actors. The council swiftly staked a claim as the legitimate international voice of the Papuan people. It resolved, for instance, that the Netherlands was “no longer free” to dispose of the territory without council consent.\(^ {32}\)

A Papuan National Congress convened in October 1961 to choose and deploy images of nationhood—a new flag and anthem—in the global diplomatic arena. Within a year, 95 percent of Papuan students could identify the new symbols. The Congress, “knowing that we are united as a people and a nation,” demanded “our own position, equal to that of the free nations and in the ranks of these nations.” Despite this, Indonesians and Americans believed that the new flag, designed by Jouwe, was a Dutch creation, and that the Dutch rather than a nationalist gathering had insisted on a name
change from Netherlands New Guinea to West Papua. This ascribed to colonial rulers what was in fact the result of Papuan agency.\textsuperscript{33}

A group of young Papuans formed the National Party, Parna, which called for tripartite Indonesian-Dutch-Papuan talks on the territory’s future. One Dutch official dismissed their call as “naïve and infantile,” evoking images of a Dutch father toward his Papuan children that still pervaded the Netherlands government.\textsuperscript{34} Still, Parna was a significant political force, founded in a rejection of “father-son dependency” and complaints that the white minority was engaging in “apartheid,” and willing to criticize the Dutch government for not moving quickly enough toward self-determination. It seemed driven by typical anticolonial sentiments, noting that “even today there are Netherlanders, and among those religious leaders in Papua country, who still regard the people of New Guinea as a herd of animals, who cannot think, who can only eat.”\textsuperscript{35} The reference to apartheid, meanwhile, indicated a global awareness and a sense of connection to decolonization struggles in Africa.

The initial space for Papuan race perceptions was Melanesia. In attempting to move Papuan mental maps to a Pacific rather than Southeast Asian setting and to build regional security partnerships, Dutch officials had sought to create links between their colony and the decolonizing Pacific islands, especially the Australian-administered half of the island (now Papua New Guinea). Papuan leaders used this opening presented by Dutch strategic calculations for their own ends, pressing for a “Melanesian Federation” including the whole island. At an Australian-Dutch administrative cooperation conference in 1961, Jouwe hoped for “the distant day when all Papuans from Sorong in West New Guinea to Samarai in East New Guinea will share common political feelings.”\textsuperscript{36} Kaisiepo attended South Pacific Commission meetings as a Papuan representative, where he was able to convince “leading persons of the Polynesian, Micronesian, and Melanesian peoples” to call on the United Nations to support “the unity of the Melanesian people which cannot be destroyed and who cannot be compelled to unite with any other people than the Melanesian people, based upon the unity of the Island of New Guinea.”\textsuperscript{37}
Yet Melanesia was not enough to meet the need for international diplomatic support. The nationalist mental map based on Melanesian racial identity therefore expanded to include Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana in particular seized the global pan-African imagination. It was “a virile black republic headed by a disciple” of pan-Africanism, “the African American Camelot.” Nkrumah declared: “For too long in our history Africa has spoken through the voice of others. Now what I have called the African Personality in international affairs will have a chance of making its proper impact and will let the world know it through the voices of its sons.”

Sixteen more African countries joined the United Nations in 1960, shifting the balance of voting power and making African support a valuable asset. In the fall of 1961, the Papua case came to the United Nations as part of the General Assembly’s declaration on how to implement the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, passed the year before. Unlike the other colonial powers, the Dutch government had supported that resolution and brought forward a plan to end colonialism in Papua the following year, hoping its vote for rapid decolonization had earned it some credibility. Foreign Minister Joseph Luns offered to transfer sovereignty to the Papuans and administration to the United Nations, while still paying the costs of administration. Indonesian foreign minister Subandrio called that “a declaration of war,” while his ambassador in Washington declared that the Dutch meant “not to give self-determination but to create separatism and finally to amputate Irian Barat [Papua] from Indonesian territory.” Indonesian diplomats instead backed a proposal from India for bilateral Indonesian-Dutch talks.

Into this battle entered the newly formed Brazzaville group, an association of thirteen “moderate” African countries, most of them newly independent from France. In their first joint diplomatic effort, the Brazzaville states offered a resolution endorsing Papuan self-determination that married Indian and Dutch resolutions by calling for bilateral talks, but also authorized implementation of the Luns plan if talks did not reach a speedy agreement. This would include a UN mission to decide on the territory’s future. The Brazzaville resolution was the product of the diplomacy and desires of its African sponsors, who saw their own experience mirrored among Papuan nationalists. American officials in Washington were seeking a resolution and willing to accept some of the
Indonesian arguments, but the US delegation to the United Nations rallied behind the Brazzaville group’s efforts. “Real heroes were French-Africans who took on arduous task out of belief in principle of self-determination,” the delegation reported. They had shown the “courage of their convictions” and won a “moral victory due to their steadfastness in resisting powerful pressures and blandishments to eliminate self-determination from their resolution.” In voting that followed bloc lines, the Brazzaville resolution fell short of the two-thirds needed for adoption. Most significantly, the UN experience permitted the expression of Papuan diplomacy.

The effort to identify with Africa trapped the Papuan leadership between two African camps. With African politics polarized between Brazzaville group “moderates” and Casablanca group “radicals,” appeals to pan-African sentiment from outside had less space than they would after the formation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. The two camps were especially divided on attitudes toward the Congo civil war. Indonesia backed Patrice Lumumba’s central government, and in doing so won the support of African governments that sided with Lumumba. Indonesian officials argued with some success that the Dutch were trying to split Indonesia through a separate Papuan state, in the same way many African leaders thought Belgium was trying to split the Congo by backing separatists. Here, Jakarta deployed a powerful argument grounded in African-Asian solidarity and anticolonialism, recalling the 1955 Bandung conference and appealing to the Casablanca group’s sympathy toward the new Non-Aligned Movement formed in Belgrade in 1961. Sukarno’s notion of solidarity among the “new emerging forces” of Africa and Asia appealed more to some governments than did Papuan appeals to a putative pan-Africanism.

Papuan nationalists were further handicapped by the need to disarm Western concerns that their country might become “another Congo,” fears that were already motivating policy. The US State Department’s first study of the Papua problem evoked images of “witchcraft, the cutting off of the finger-ends of widows, and headhunting,” and determined that “premature independence” would be counter to American and Western interests. Dutch officials warned of “a Congo situation” if they left Papua too quickly. “Another Congo cannot happen here,” one Parna leader said, acknowledging the comparison. Policy makers already disposed to view such cases as Papua through racial
preconceptions did so all the more as Papuan diplomats stressed their identification with Africa. For many in the West, Africa still evoked images of the primitive. It was “the place of the savage, the natural abode of evil, the banquet hall of the cannibal, and the pit of blackness itself.” Yet the effort to disarm Western fears of another Congo alienated key African governments. When a Dutch diplomat told officials at Ghana’s foreign ministry that premature withdrawal risked “a vacuum which would permit a situation similar to Congo to develop,” he evoked only anger at colonial meddling in the Congo conflict.

Both Washington and Jakarta saw the Papuans as mired in the Stone Age, a factor that eased American policy makers’ journey from neutrality to a more pro-Indonesian stance on the Papua issue. There was no effort to ascertain Papuan views: ideas of Papua as hopelessly primitive underpinned a strategic calculation. Ironically, this came even as Papuan views were becoming clearer and more vocal in support of self-determination. The New Guinea Council issued a note on self-determination in February 1962 that made its stance crystal clear: “The Papuan people as an ethnological unit has the right to decide its own fate in pursuance of item 2 of the decolonisation resolution 1514 (XV). . . . As set out in item 6 of the Decolonisation Resolution of the United Nations No. 1514 (XV), an insufficient economic or social development of the population should in itself not justify the prevention of the right to self-determination from being exercised.” This statement was followed up with a decision to send missions overseas to African and Asian countries, including Indonesia, a call for independence by 1970 at the latest, and an acceptance of trusteeship by the United Nations or by any country other than Indonesia.

Similarly, Papuan exiles in Indonesia were moving toward a call for self-determination. Silas Papare and his supporters had worked closely with Indonesian authorities until their declaration of an autonomous provincial government-in-exile failed to win Indonesian government support. In 1960, Papare was pensioned off, at age forty-two, from his position as an ex officio member of the Indonesian parliament. After the election of the New Guinea Council and the inauguration of new nationalist symbols, Papare told the American ambassador that he faced arrest for being too critical of Sukarno. Three New Guinea councilors had asked him to return and assist in an independence declaration, he said. Papuan nationalists were simply “awaiting his return
before announcing independence.” He said he wanted to return to be part of a new Papuan state, and asked for American aid to “assist and protect new nation.” This episode came just days after Indonesian foreign minister Subandrio described Papare as “by far the best” of the Pauans living in Indonesia, and the likely candidate for governor of a future Indonesian province.\(^45\) Papare’s back-channel negotiations with members of the New Guinea Council were a sign that the two streams of Papuan nationalism, which had diverged in 1945–1949, were converging. Those nationalists proved too weak, however, to assert themselves as an international force independent of their respective patrons.

In Washington, Papua appeared as a land too hopelessly primitive to dream of self-determination. “For those Americans who could find it on a map,” Bradley Simpson points out, “West New Guinea was a blank slate upon which they could write their fantasies about primitive people and the benefits of encounter with the West.”\(^46\) Stone Age images began to reach a wider American audience beginning with the 1961 Harvard-Peabody anthropological expedition to the Dani people of the interior mountains, and the many photographs of scantily clad Dani men and topless Dani women transmitted home. From it came a series of books and films such as the anthropological classic *Dead Birds*, often previewed in photographic spreads in US magazines.\(^47\) Also prominent in Western depictions were the Asmat, profiled in the 1960 film *Le Ciel et la Boue* (released in English in 1961 as *The Sky Above, the Earth Below*). Michael Rockefeller, a promising young anthropologist whose family name always conjured attention, added a fascination with Asmat art, shipping large amounts of it home to New York. Asmat art, like “Negro art,” allowed collectors to praise its beauty while still looking down on its makers as primitive.\(^48\) In early 1962, Rockefeller drowned on an expedition to the Asmat. The search for his body, never found, featured the personal participation of his father, New York governor Nelson Rockefeller. This made headlines, and underlined the image of Papua as hopelessly exotic, hostile, and primitive.

Rockefeller’s romantic swim and the still more romantic search for signs of his body (or even his miraculous survival) stirred American imaginations far more than did his fascination with Asmat artistic “remnants of a marvelous past.”\(^49\) Press accounts stressed unchanging timelessness. A photograph used in 1940 coverage of an American aircrew that crashed in the interior lands of the Dani peoples was used, as if current, in
1961—with “native of Shangri-La” now captioned instead as “Typical Native—More Primitive Than Civilized.” If anything, the imagery had become less sympathetic to Dani peoples over time. In the 1940s, comic-book stories like “WAC in Shangri-La” celebrated adventure, but by the 1960s, the land and people seemed hostile. Helpful natives who had been “good farmers” in the 1940s comic became “a savage tribe focused on war” in a 1961 New York Times report.50

The land merged with the people in explorers’ stories. Explorer Heinrich Harrer’s 1962 mission to the interior aimed at both conquering the last unclimbed mountain and unearthing the secrets of the Dani people. His account combined with reports from the Harvard anthropologists to make the Dani the predominant representatives of West New Guinea in the US popular imagination: Harrer portrayed them as wild children, unpredictable as puppies, capable of enormous and thoughtless cruelties as well as “richly comic” moments.51 A war over control of this land seemed absurd, yet one nevertheless loomed as Indonesian troops began to infiltrate Papua in support of their government’s claim. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy cited a book of photographs, Les papous coupeurs de têtes [Papuan headhunters], as evidence that Papuans were far from “ready” for self-determination.52 As Indonesian-Dutch tensions flared into jungle skirmishes and naval clashes, Indonesia began to receive significant shipments of Soviet arms. US policy makers began to work to avoid a war in Southeast Asia. Kennedy said “he had a couple of wars in Southeast Asia; and West New Guinea was one he would like not to have to fight. . . . Laos and Vietnam were enough.”53

Kennedy administration thinking on Papua was consciously racialized. A war “would have been white men against the Africans, the Asians, and the Communists,” Robert Kennedy recalled.54 The administration already faced a divisive internal battle over civil rights that raised issues of American identity and racial inclusion. Its foreign policy aimed at winning over the global South, inhabited mainly by peoples of color. Civil rights progress at home aimed, in Mary Dudziak’s telling, to recount “a story of progress, a story of the triumph of good over evil, a story of US moral superiority.” Racism was America’s “Achilles heel” in foreign policy.55 That approach would have been undermined by any conflict pitting Europeans against Third World countries along racial lines. Papua policy was not a case of US government ignorance of the Papuan
political situation. With conceptions of the primitive in the background, the administration acted on its own mental maps. Those privileged the global over the local and saw autonomous regional developments mostly through Cold War lenses.

Visiting Indonesia, Robert Kennedy made remarks hinting at Papuan primitivism that enraged Papuan leaders. Drawing parallels to American history, a group of New Guinea councilors called those words “advice to Indonesia to eradicate Papuan people just like in history other people have been almost eradicated because they were so backwards not to know shotguns and firewater.” In a telegram to the White House, they added: “Independence and democracy can be understood and practiced by common people even if they have not seen Harvard.” This was filed with a State Department note stating: “[T]here is no advantage to be gained in replying to these persons.” Papuan resentment of the Kennedy administration role continues to linger. One recent nationalist publication complains of Kennedy’s “Anti-Papua” feelings, arguing that the president’s “disregard for West Papua” combined “America’s economic and political interests” with “JFK’s revengeful attitude toward West Papua,” a result of the death of Michael Rockefeller.56

With few prospects of Western support, Papuan appeals to Africa seemed the only hope of generating new international support for self-determination. They continued to foster the Brazzaville connection, hosting a visit by the heads of the Upper Volta and Dahomey UN delegations in April 1962. American officials tried at the last minute to have the Dutch prevent this visit, expressing “qualms over this project” and worrying it would encourage the New Guinea Council to declare independence. They sought and obtained Dutch assurances that there would be no Papuan independence declaration in April.57

Dahomey’s delegate, Maxime-Léopold Zollner, returned to New York “profoundly struck by the racial differences between the inhabitants of New Guinea and those of Indonesia.” Ambassador Guirma of Upper Volta was also “deeply impressed by the ethnical differences between Papuans and the inhabitants of Indonesia which led him to disregard Djakarta’s contention that West Irians are Indonesians.” Papuan nationalists toured Africa in the first half of 1962. Visits and appeals included the Brazzaville group, with trips to Upper Volta, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Dahomey. But they aimed
especially at key states seen as having strong Third World nationalist credentials: Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, the Congo, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. Kaisiepo said Papuans “did not want to be handed over to Indonesia like cattle” but would not declare a premature independence. The key effort was to win support in Ghana. There, officials were reportedly “struck not so much by the strength of the West New Guinea [Papua] case as by the color and the physiognomy of the West New Guineans, whom they thought would look like Indonesians. Their strong resemblance to Africans surprised the Ghanaians and made at least one of the officials think that perhaps Ghana was supporting the wrong side in the dispute.” That did not lead to any policy change, however: Ghana’s alignment with Indonesia mattered more. “We share your views completely and stand behind you,” the Papuans were told, “but Nkrumah is a great friend of Sukarno’s and therefore we have to vote against.”58 The imperatives of Afro-Asian solidarity trumped Papuan appeals to pan-Africanism.

Sympathy was higher in newly independent Tanganyika, where Prime Minister Julius Nyerere’s government proposed a ceasefire, a temporary Indonesian trusteeship accountable to the United Nations, and a UN office in Papua empowered to hold free elections on the territory’s future sponsored elections as soon as “the United Nations thinks the time is ripe to do so.” Tanganyikan diplomats called for immediate talks and offered to mediate. Tanganyika’s “first faltering step” into diplomacy should not be taken seriously for its own sake, but simply as an example of poor planning in new African foreign ministries, the US embassy’s report sniffed.59

In the first half of 1962, Indonesian-Dutch talks mediated by American diplomat Ellsworth Bunker led to a plan for transfer from Dutch to UN administration, followed by a transfer to Indonesia soon afterward, then some form of self-determination to be carried out by Indonesian authorities later on. This in effect accepted Indonesian arguments. US government pressure finally managed to extract Dutch agreement as well, and a final deal along those lines was signed in August 1962. Papuan nationalist leaders experienced that as betrayal. One petition called the Bunker plan “a fire that will burn us citizens of West Papua to death.” A group of leaders in the nationalist stronghold of Biak “reject[ed] Mr. Bunker’s proposal, because it leads to the enslavement and destruction of the people of Papua Barat by the modern imperialisme [sic] of Indonesia.” Citing the UN resolution on
ending colonialism in an appeal sent to the United Nations, Dutch authorities, and the Brazzaville states, they declared that “the rights of small nations are the same as those of the big nations. Thus the rights of the Papuans are the same as those of the Americans and the rights of the Papuans are the same as those of the Burmese.” Based on the promise of independence, Papuan nationalists had defined their nation in opposition to Indonesia, but now they faced the prospect of early Indonesian rule. Yet the cry for independence persisted. Parna renewed its call for independence by 1970. The Papuan National Council agreed to the Dutch-Indonesian deal but demanded that the UN authority recognize their flag and anthem and that a plebiscite be held by the end of 1963. A new Papuan National Front asked to send a delegation to UN headquarters to renegotiate the Bunker plan, calling for a plebiscite on self-determination to be held before the UN administration left, and for UN administrators to serve as deputies to Papuan counterparts. Pro-independence rallies across the territory waved signs with such messages as “We are not merchandise” and “How many Yankee dollars for selling Papua?” Similar sentiments came from outlying regions. A group in Manokwari, at the opposite end of Papua from the capital, announced: “[W]e stick to the flag of West Papua which is the nationalist symbol of West Papua.” From the Dani lands, only five years after the arrival of Dutch colonial administrators, anthropologist Karl Heider reported that “the enthusiasm for Papua Barat [West Papua] is great and, I think, mostly genuine. They have a flag, a song, and a name, and now a growing sense of identification. If Sukarno does take the country, he will be stuck with an area which is not only economically useless, but politically resentful.” Elite nationalism, driven by diplomatic imperatives, was being widely embraced.

This did not alter the determination of UN officials to manage a smooth transition to Indonesian rule. There was little knowledge of the situation on the ground, with UN officials for instance exclaiming with surprise that Papua’s lingua franca was a version of Malay, as was Indonesia’s (and, though this was not stated, Malaysia’s too). Indonesian officials stressed taking possession, more than liberation. Subandrio declared that Indonesia would “introduce civilization” in the interior and made it “quite clear that they have no intention of keeping . . . their agreement with the Netherlands” to hold a plebiscite.
Although Parna leader E. J. Bonay was appointed as the first governor of the Indonesian province of West Irian, he was soon removed as untrustworthy, then arrested. Silas Papare, passed over for governor, was arrested during the UN administration period in 1962. One by one, Papuan leaders found their way into jail or exile. Nationalist groups formed to lobby for independence from bases in the Netherlands, Senegal, Japan, and elsewhere. The language of racial difference from Indonesia remained central. A heavily documented appeal to U Thant and to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1965, for instance, concluded: “it is becoming clear to us that the Indonesians seriously intend to wipe out the 750,000 Papuans, of the NEGROID RACE, of[f] the face of their native earth, West Papua/West New Guinea, by brute force” and replace them with Indonesian migrants. “Papuans belong to a Negroid race, not Indonesian,” a Papuan youth group wrote the same year.65

A flurry of international diplomacy in 1969 tried to ensure that the “act of free choice” held by Indonesia in keeping with the terms of the 1962 agreement would be a real act of self-determination, not a piece of political theater. Jouwe’s Freedom Committee of West Papua–West New Guinea called on the United Nations to provide an armed peacekeeping and protection force. It argued that the United Nations was “co-responsible for the fate and future of the Papuan people,” given its role in handing the territory over to Indonesian rule. The same call went out to key Western governments but was met with silence or rejection. UN observers were said to have a stack of Papuan protest letters “a foot thick” handed over by such clandestine methods as being hidden inside seashells.66 When the act saw the 1,023 electors chosen by Indonesian authorities opt unanimously for integration into Indonesia, the majority of African governments refused to endorse the UN report accepting this as valid. Lingering sympathy for Papuan independence saw most Brazzaville states withhold their consent for Indonesian formal annexation. Ghana, now more convinced of the logic of the Papuan case and less in sympathy with General Suharto’s New Order regime in Indonesia, tried without success to amend the UN resolution, taking note of the act to require a further chance for free choice by 1975. Fifteen African states refused in the General Assembly voting to “take note” of the UN representative’s report, a result of Papuan lobbying of African governments.67
Indonesian rule, among its other harshly repressive aspects, aimed at removing the racial basis of Papuan identity. The “transmigration” program, for instance, aimed to move large numbers of Indonesian peasants from densely populated Java into Papua. Claims of racial difference nevertheless have been central to continued Papuan independence campaigning. Testifying to the UN Commission on Human Rights, for instance, the Free Papua Movement sought an end to “the obliteration of the Papuan Negroid or Melanesian people in West Papua” and recalled Brazzaville group support of the “Negroid people of West Papua.” This support network continues to linger, seen for instance in recent lobbying for Papuan human rights by the US Congressional Black Caucus. 68

Conclusion
There is nothing inevitable about the course of identity formation in Papua. It was driven by the contingent needs of the various diplomatic actors, and by international rather than domestic factors. The demands of diplomacy in the period from 1949 to 1962, however, formed the basis for what is now a lasting and deeply held Papuan sense of nationalism.

Papuans were first equated with Africans in the nineteenth century, in the context of European defining and ordering of races. Colonial rule then codified and entrenched those perceived differences. Dutch rule over Papua continued after the rest of the Dutch East Indies became independent as Indonesia. Once the territory had been split from Indonesia, a justification was needed. Dutch rulers found it in a renewed mission of tutelage over a people newly defined as Papuan or Melanesian through the work of colonial anthropologists. What had been a political convenience to justify colonialism became the rallying cry for a people coming to think of themselves as Papuans. To gain international support, they sought allies who could be seen to share their new identity. This meant in the first case ethnic Melanesian peoples in the South Pacific, and then the African continent. Yet the same factors that led to identification with Melanesia and Africa cost Papuan nationalists their prospects of new overseas support. The idea that violence in the Congo was the result of “premature independence” forced Papuan leaders to offer reassurances to the West that cost them the prospect of support from such key African states as Ghana. The identification with Africa also reinforced Western policy
makers’ ideas that Papuans were “primitives” living in “the Stone Age” and thus not ready for self-determination. Papuan nationalists were not able to overcome these obstacles. For all their efforts to speak for themselves, they did not manage to make themselves heard internationally. Nevertheless, the identity forged in a diplomatic contest that peaked in the early 1960s continues to define the indigenous inhabitants of Papua. The strength of this identity is, if anything, stronger after half a century of Indonesian rule.

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Notes

1 Parts of this chapter were previously published as a journal article, “Regimes in Motion: The Kennedy Administration and Indonesia’s New Frontier, 1960–1962,” *Diplomatic History* 33(1) (January 2009): 95–123, and are republished with the permission of *Diplomatic History* and Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

2 The territory’s names are multitude. Papua is the oldest name for the island also known as New Guinea. Both names appear in the current designation of the eastern half of the island, Papua New Guinea. The western half became the colony of Netherlands New Guinea (or West New Guinea). Papuan nationalists created the name Irian in the 1940s, and the term was adopted in Indonesia as West Irian (Irian Barat) even as the Dutch continued to use the name West New Guinea. Papuan nationalists selected the new name West Papua in 1961. In 1963, the territory became the Indonesian province of West Irian, and was then renamed Irian Jaya (Great Irian) in 1969. The Indonesian government renamed the province as Papua in response to local demand in 2001. For convenience, the name Papua is used throughout this chapter.

3 This and following quotes taken from *Voice of the Negroids in the Pacific to the Negroids throughout the World* [Papuan nationalist pamphlet published in Hollandia, 1962].

4 *Voice of the Negroids*.

5 Papuan National Committee appeal to “all fellow-tribesmen of the Negroids throughout the world,” March 19, 1962.


11 Danilyn Fox Rutherford, “Trekking to New Guinea: Dutch Colonial Fantasies of a Virgin Land, 1900–1942,” in *Domesticating the Empire*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and


17 Penders, Debacle, 155.


20 Penders, Debacle, 396.


Canadian Embassy in Jakarta to Canadian DEA, April 25, 1960, LAC, RG25/6148/50409-40[4.2].


37 Declaration of South Pacific nationalist leaders, 1962, UN Archives, S-0229-25-2.


43 Canadian High Commission in Accra to DEA, January 10, 1962, LAC, RG 25/6149/50409-40[9].


45 US Embassy in Jakarta to State Department, December 15, 1961, and January 8, 1962, JKL, NSF box 205; Lumintang, *Pahlawan Nasional*.


48 George Schuyler wrote that “Negro Art” reassured whites that Negro meant savage: “even when he appears to be civilized, it is only necessary to beat a tom tom or wave a
rabbit’s foot and he is ready to strip off his Hart Shaffner & Marx suit, grab a spear and ride off wild-eyed on the back of a crocodile.” Cited in Campbell, Middle Passages, 205.


53 Walter W. Rostow (interviewee), recorded interview by Richard Neustadt (interviewer), April 11, 1964 (pp. 88–89). JFKL Oral History Program.

54 Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Schulman, eds., Robert Kennedy in His Own Words (Toronto: Bantam, 1988), 315–16.


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59 Tanganyikan delegation to UN proposals to U Thant, April 9, 1962, UN Archives, S-0884-22-5; US Embassy in Dar es Salaam to State Dept., April 11, 1962, JFKL NSF box 206.


63 Note on declaration of Sorong Doom leaders, UN Archives, S-0884-23-1.
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