

Comprehensive Exploration of Pearl S. Buck's Advocacy for Human Rights and Civil Rights

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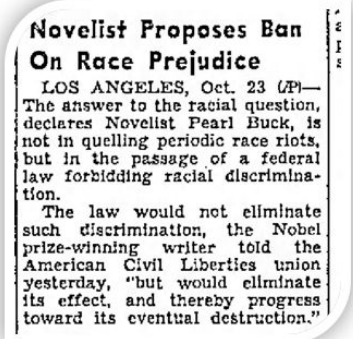


1 Introduction to Pearl S. Buck's Legacy

Pearl S. Buck, celebrated for her literary and humanitarian contributions, was also an early and often overlooked advocate for racial equality in America. Despite her white heritage, she began speaking out for Black Americans as early as 1933, at a time when the United States was entrenched in racial segregation and the harsh realities of the Jim Crow era. The Great Depression exacerbated racial tensions, and African Americans faced severe economic hardship. Against this backdrop, Buck's writings and actions revealed a deep understanding of racial dynamics and a commitment to justice.

Pearl S. Buck made significant contributions to the fight against racial discrimination in America, her efforts were distinct in scope and influence. Here's a comparison of her impacts:

- **Cultural Influence and Advocacy:** Pearl S. Buck, primarily known as an author, raised awareness about racial discrimination, especially toward Asian-Americans and mixed-race children. Through her novels like *The Good Earth* and other writings, she humanized Asian characters and highlighted the shared humanity between East and West, challenging Western prejudices.
- **Adoption and Mixed-Race Children:** Buck played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of mixed-race children who were often abandoned or ostracized, particularly Amerasian children. She founded the first international and interracial adoption agency, *Welcome House*, in 1949, providing homes for children who faced racial discrimination in America.
- **Early Voice in Civil Rights:** Buck was an outspoken critic of segregation and racism long before the Civil Rights Movement gained widespread momentum. Her writings and speeches emphasized the need for equality and justice, and she used her platform as a Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author to speak out against racism.



Pearl S. Buck's Activism and Humanitarian Efforts 1

Pearl Buck's experiences living in China and her Southern family's history influenced her perspective on race. In her essay "Race Relations and Race Pride," she shared how her grandfathers refused to participate in the slave trade and upheld the principle of paying equal wages to both Black and white workers. She also recounted her confrontation with racial arrogance, citing an incident in Shanghai where an American marine mistreated a Chinese rickshaw puller. The rickshaw puller's dignified response taught Buck that pride in race is often strongest in those who have the least reason for personal pride. Through such narratives, Buck urged for empathy, understanding, and unity amid widespread discrimination.

The Kansas City Deaconess Wed Feb 1, 1933

Page 4

Pearl S. Buck's Activism and Humanitarian Efforts 2

The call informs us that Pearl Buck, Wendell Willkie, Gardner Cowles of the OWI, and several white editors and advertising men "have all agreed to participate actively." There are to be "open discussions pertaining to the specific departments of the publishing business, and, so far as possible, with technicians whose ability and prestige are nationally recognized. It is hoped that this conference will not only clarify the atmosphere for the Negro press, but will open new vistas for it as a more dynamic force in America."

This is a curious conference because it strikes a new low in presumption and condescension. Here is a group who permitted its Negro official to smear the entire Negro press and backed him up in it to such an extent that Walter White felt it necessary to resign from it, and now this same group is eager to bring "concrete benefits" to it, and underscores the word for fear its meaning might be lost. It looks as if having failed to club the Negro press into line, these people now propose to lure it with carrots. Incidentally, not a single Negro is scheduled to speak!

Page 5

NOTABLE ISSUE OF A NEGRO NEWSPAPER.

An admirable contribution to national unity and to clarification of war aims is to be found in the 100-page special edition issued yesterday by a Negro newspaper, the Chicago Defender. Editors and contributors alike address themselves to strengthening the bond between the white and colored races and to emphasizing that, in the words of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, the Negro sociologist, "we are fighting for a free world, and against all race hate and caste, whether in America, England, Japan or Germany."

The list of contributors gathered in this notable example of journalism is distinguished, including President Roosevelt, Gen. MacArthur, Wendell Willkie, Francis Biddle, Justice Black, Langston Hughes, Pearl Buck, H. G. Wells, Harold Laski and many others. The edition is a literal storehouse of enlightening facts and stimulating thought on the Negro's role in the war. It will fall short of its fine purpose, however, if its circulation is limited

Pearl S. Buck's Activism and Humanitarian Efforts 3



realize that such persons were not worthy of contempt or notice, not worth anger, even, and a poor rickshaw puller in Shanghai taught me that. . . . One day I saw in Shanghai an American marine give his rickshaw puller a brutal kick. The rickshaw puller in Shanghai is proverbially the poorest and most downtrodden of creatures. He drifts there in extremest poverty from all over China. This one was no exception. He was a middle aged man, and starving thin, and he had been pulling a big American half again his size.

I stopped and spoke to the American with indignation, and the Chinese puller watched this, perfectly understanding what was going on, although I spoke in English. At last he smiled and said to comfort me, "Never mind, Lady; look at him! You and I see he is a man of no understanding. Even among white men if there is one of understanding he does not behave like this."

Page 6

Cultural Bridging Between East and West

In the early 1930s, Buck became an outspoken advocate against racial prejudice in the United States, particularly concerning the Black community. Her significant efforts are evidenced by her impactful visit to Harlem in 1933, where she addressed a gathering at the Y.W.C.A. Buck's presence in Harlem, organized by the Friends of Opportunity Magazine, was not a mere gesture but a deliberate engagement with the community. She challenged the prevailing stereotypes and celebrated Harlem's cultural and intellectual vibrancy, aligning herself with marginalized communities and calling for a rejection of racial superiority.

The **second** visitor was Mrs. Pearl S. Buck, author of the Pulitzer prize novel, "The Good Earth," and the new novel, "Sons," who greeted a large and representative group at tea at the Y. W. C. A. on a recent Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Buck was brought to **Harlem** by a committee of the Friends of Opportunity Magazine. A brilliant musical program

Page 7

Impact on Literature and Society

Pearl S. Buck's activism also extended to advocating for anti-lynching legislation in the 1930s. At the time, lynching was a brutal manifestation of white supremacy, with perpetrators often going unpunished. Buck's efforts to promote an anti-lynching bill aimed to provide legal protection and uphold civil rights for Black Americans. Her advocacy was a direct challenge to systemic racism and a call for transformative change. By using her prominence as a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Buck raised awareness about the horrors of lynching and galvanized public support to end this barbaric practice.

Page 8

Ongoing Relevance of Buck's Work

Beyond her writings, Buck took direct action to combat racial inequality. She supported efforts to improve educational opportunities for Black students and backed the anti-lynching bill to confront the systemic violence against Black Americans. Her solidarity with the Black community and vocal opposition to racial hatred made her a key ally during a time when many remained silent. Buck's advocacy not only challenged the status quo but also set an example of interracial solidarity in the struggle for equality.

Page 9

Preserving and Celebrating Buck's Heritage

In collaboration with other civil rights leaders, such as Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Eleanor Roosevelt, Buck amplified the fight for racial justice. In 1942, she, along with Roosevelt and others, was recognized on the Race Relations Honor Roll for their significant contributions to improving race relations. Buck's partnership with Du Bois, a co-founder of the NAACP, highlighted the importance of cross-racial alliances. Together, they worked on initiatives to promote social justice and dismantle racial stereotypes.

Negro Hero At Pearl Harbor On Race Relations Honor Roll

New York, Feb. 7 (AP)—Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Joe Louis and an unnamed Negro hero of Pearl Harbor are among the persons listed in the Honor Roll in Race Relations of 1941 on the basis of a poll conducted by Dr. Lawrence Reddick of the New York Public Library.

Dr. Reddick, curator of the Schomburg collection of Negro literature at the library, listed as leaders in promoting better relations: Mrs. Roosevelt; Pearl S. Buck, author; Mark F. Ethridge, Louisville, chairman of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice; Carl van Vechten, who established the James Weldon Johnson collection at Yale University; the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the New York newspaper PM.

Besides Louis, he named these Negroes: A. Clayton Powell, Jr., first Negro elected to the New York City Council; Dean Dixon, symphony conductor; A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; the late Dr. E. E. Just, biologist; Ollie Stewart, newspaperman; Dr. Ambrose Caliver, of the U. S. Office of Education; Richard Wright, novelist; Dr.

W. E. B. Du Bois, He's Still Fighting for Seventy-Two.

A Negro Has Something to Say

Pearl S. Buck's Enduring Influence

Buck's contributions were frequently featured in publications that addressed racial issues. For instance, in a 1942 special edition of the Chicago Defender, she, along with other notable figures, emphasized the fight against all forms of racial hatred. Her critique of the U.S. military's exclusion of Black individuals and her push for policy changes in the Navy demonstrated her relentless pursuit of racial equality. Buck's advocacy for Black Americans helped initiate policy changes, such as the opening of all naval service ratings to Black volunteers, marking a significant step toward greater inclusion.

The New York Age, 1942 04 18 Page 6

THE NAVY'S NEW POLICY

PRESSURE on the part of the Negro press and organizations, along with the criticism of such outstanding white leaders as Wendell Willkie and Pearl Buck, has resulted in the Navy Department changing its policy as regards the enlistment of Negroes. The policy of the department has been modified to the extent that Negro volunteers are acceptable for enlistment for general service in the reserve components of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. All ratings in those three branches of the Naval Service will be open to them and recruiting is to be begun as soon as a suitable training station is established.

Conclusion:

A Legacy of Compassion and Understanding

In conclusion, Pearl S. Buck's efforts against racial discrimination in the 1930s, 40s and beyond exemplify her commitment to justice and equality. Her visit to Harlem, her support for anti-lynching legislation, and her collaborations with other civil rights leaders showcase a legacy that continues to inspire. Buck's activism reminds us of the power of empathy, solidarity, and the importance of using one's voice to challenge systemic injustice and promote positive social change.