

## CHAPTER VII

### Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez and Guion Bluford: The Last Cold War Race Battle

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There are two men who contend as the first African American in space. Neither Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez, nor Guion Bluford set out for this competition, nor was it a focal point for either's preparation for spaceflight, but the legacies of centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cold War competition between the United States and the USSR placed them both in the competition. The legacy of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade in the western hemisphere has been a shadow that lingers over North and South America. For a few years in the early 1980s, it hovered 200-300 miles above the Earth. The Cold War era superpower politics took the issue into space for reasons distantly related to race and slavery as a stark reminder that the shadow persists. In the end, this brief period revealed three things about race and the Cold War. First was the extent to which the uncomfortable legacy of African slavery remains prominent in the western hemisphere and American domestic politics. Secondly, this sequence of events in the 1980s also revealed that the rest of the world could be almost entirely oblivious to an issue that weighs so heavily on this side of the world. Also, finally, was the surprising effectiveness with which the United States had dealt with the international scope of racial issues during the three decades from the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the South and the early 1980s while missing their internally set metrics of accomplishment.

In reference books, exhibits, and public lectures, whenever mention occurs of the July 1983 flight of Guy Bluford on board the U.S. space shuttle *Challenger* there is usually a small qualification, an asterisk, or a question or objection made. Bluford was the first U.S. citizen of African descent to fly in space, but he was not the first black person, the qualification goes. That distinction belongs to Cuban pilot Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez who flew in space on board a Soviet spacecraft launched from the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan in 1980. There is no official arbiter or scorekeeper on this matter. The keeper of aviation and space world records, the International Aeronautics Federation (IAF) has no formal designation for the first of any given racial group flying in space or achieving any other aeronautical feats.<sup>1</sup> The participant-defined categories of records that the IAF keeps are measurable events according to geographical and political designations of aeronautical feats, except for the categories of sex. The unofficial status of both men's race was set aside in the press, which felt the compelling need to mention race in the description of their flights. Race, a social and non-scientific construct, has no significance in human spaceflight but it meant a great deal in the countries of origin of both men.

Beyond a common ancestry from Africa and the legacy of centuries of enslavement, Guion Bluford, and Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez had little in common. Given the proximity of the United States and Cuba, it is surprising how different their lives had been. Cuba had freed its

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<sup>1</sup> The list of Interkosmos missions in order: Czechoslovakia (1978), Poland (1978), GDR (1978), Bulgaria (1979), Hungary (1980), Vietnam (1981), Cuba (1980), Mongolia (1981), Romania (1981), France (1982), India (1984), Syria (1987), Bulgaria (1988) and Afghanistan (1988). The list of Black Americans who have flown in space: Bluford (1983), McNair (1984), Gregory (1985), Bolden (1986), Harris (1991), Jemison (1992), Winston Scott (1996), Robert Curbeam (1997), Michael Anderson (1998), Stephanie Wilson (2006), Joan Higginbotham (2006), B. Alvin Dew (2007), Leland D. Melvin (2008) and Robert Satcher (2009).

slaves two decades after the American Civil War, and that legacy had left an equally pernicious, but more complex racial hierarchy in place in the island nation. Castro's decision to align the Cuban Revolution with the USSR applied an additional barrier between the two men, landing them on opposite sides of the Cold War. The result was two entirely different scenarios emerging as black astronaut candidates by the early 1980s.

The remarkable thing about Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez's role in this debate is that his race was not the burning issue at the time that he flew in orbit, at least not within the context of the Cold War. It was not until Bluford's flight three years later that Tamayo Mendez's identity within Cuba social strife became a subject of widespread discussion. Although not immediately apparent, at the time, the elevation of Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez's flight in space to that of the first black in space happened not at the time of his spaceflight, but after Bluford's. The story of this elevation is an exciting example of the interaction between domestic and international politics and its impact on the space race competition between the United States and the USSR. The story of how Tamayo became the first black man in space is an intricate story of how different forces of technology and national politics and social forces of two very different nations converged on two men. Moreover, how one country's social issues leaped beyond the country's boundaries and left its mark on an unrelated Cold War competition.

That distinction between citizenship and race carries weight due to the history of the United States. A generation before, the blacks had been excluded from the flying opportunities that would have provided them with the credentials to stand as astronaut candidates for the Mercury program. Racial quotas had limited the number of black pilots during World War II, restricting their piloting activities to flying fighter aircraft and training for bomber units. As a result, by the end of the 1950s, few blacks had qualified for test pilot school that was a requirement for astronaut status. Only by the mid-1960s did the first generation of post-World War, post-segregation black military pilots begin to expand. Guy Bluford himself had been a veteran of the Vietnam War, the first fully integrated war that the US had fought. Within the United States, his symbolic role was evident.

Race was not the first social issue to emerge out of the U.S. Soviet competition in the Cold War/Space Race battlefield. The first instance of the interaction between domestic politics and the Cold War occurred two decades before the flights of the American Space Shuttle. In June 1963, Soviet-trained civil defense parachutist, Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space. In response, there was an outcry among American women over the fact that the first woman in space was not an American, but a Russian, a Soviet citizen. The public debate was fueled by the less-public knowledge that women had indeed participated in the same screening that the Mercury astronauts had. Tereshkova's flight ignited in public a long-running debate of gender roles in aviation and spaceflight. Even though Tereshkova's flight had been a stunt along the lines of previous stunts in Soviet spaceflight of repeating similar missions in order to claim a new record, it sparked deep concerns in the United States that the country had fallen behind the Soviets in women's issues as well as aerospace technology. As much as Soviet propagandists tried to make the connection, there was little to compare Tereshkova's experience and contribution to that of pre- and World War II female pilots. The staged all-female flights of the 1930s had garnered popular press to promote the new Soviet aviation industry and reinforced national devotion to civil defense training in anticipation of war.<sup>2</sup> Soviet women pilots had played both transport and combat roles during the war. Tereshkova's flight had been a one-off

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<sup>2</sup> Lazar Brontman. *The Heroic Flight of the Rodina* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1938).

experience, and even though her corps of female cosmonaut candidates remained active for years after her flight, there was not another Soviet woman launched in space until the U.S. had announced the selection of women astronaut candidates almost two decades later. In 1963, Tereshkova precipitated an eruption of discussion in the United States over equal rights and woman, pitting American hero John Glenn against *Time* and *Life Magazine* reporter Claire Booth Luce. The discussion quickly vaporized into the antagonistic atmosphere of the Cold War.

### Race and the USSR

Despite its claims of egalitarianism and allegiance to recently decolonized nations of Africa, the USSR suffered its own patch of racial strife in the 1960s. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the USSR had always been cordial hosts to Americans, both black and white who came with an implicit or explicit critique of their homeland. After World War II and the death of Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev reached out to third world nations, most significantly to youth groups, culminating in the World Youth Festival held in Moscow in 1956.<sup>3</sup> From the youth festival grew invitations to almost exclusively male students from non-aligned countries to come to the USSR to study. These initiations led to the formation of the Friendship University later known under the name of the assassinated Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. All in all, there was a seven-fold increase in sub-Saharan African students studying in Moscow between 1959 and 1961. By the time of the collapse of the USSR, the enrollment numbers would reach a peak of 30,000.<sup>4</sup>

Close to the end of December 1963, there were public demonstrations in Moscow unlike others before. African students joined in protest over the death of a Ghanaian student, whose body was found in an isolated region of Moscow. After initial denials that a murder had taken place, accusations became known that the death of Edmund Assare-Addo took place over a violent dispute over mixed-race dating. The accusations and response were as every bit as grisly as one could expect in Jim Crow United States, including groups of Russian vigilante gangs that sought to resolve disputes on their terms.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the Cold War, accusations of racism, cultural impropriety and a general unease between the local Russian population and their guests, would churn up to political disturbances throughout the decades. However, unlike the few blacks who traveled to the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s to escape Jim Crow America, there was never a claim of an offer of assimilation to African students.

### Race in Cuba

Given their similar experience in the African slave trade, one might expect Cuba and the United States to have faced similar situations concerning race by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Enslaved Africans were brought to work the sugar plantations in Cuba as late as 1867 and were only emancipated in 1886 when African Cubans outnumbered European Cubans. The legacy of

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<sup>3</sup> Maxim Matusevich, "Testing the Limits of Soviet Internationalism: African Students in the Soviet Union," pp. 145-165, in Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Race Ethnicity and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Maxim Matusevich, "Testing the Limits of Soviet Internationalism: African Students in the Soviet Union," pp. 145-165, in Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Race Ethnicity and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics and the Cold War," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2, *Repenser le Dégât: Versions du Socialismes influences internationales et société soviétique* (Jan. – June 2006), pp 33-63.

the American invasion and generations of uprisings and revolutions left the slavery-constructed racial divide in Cuba as the status quo.

In post-revolutionary Cuba Castro initially chose to ignore the issue of race until the poor treatment of black Cuban guerrillas came to his attention. However, his inaction did not counterbalance Castro's awareness that black Cubans had not been the most enthusiastic participants in the revolution. He was not above making race into an international political statement, however. Fidel Castro's famous visit to the United Nations in 1960 and his decision to stay in Harlem was a powerful statement and established an iconic image of the trans-racial Cuban revolutionary. These images did not hide the fact that Castro himself was an opponent of the American Black power movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Using race international politics was one thing, supporting a movement that could have potentially explosive consequences at home was another.<sup>6</sup>

Cuba decided to intervene in the Angolan Civil War in 1977 that resurrected Castro's use of race in foreign relations. The ideological struggle in Angola drove Cuba's intervention, but the Cuban government did not evade the opportunity to demonstrate their racial link to the Angolans as a means of buttressing their support. They went as far as over-representing Afro-Cubans among the initial deployment of troops although this might have been a method to disguise the presence of foreign troops in an African country.<sup>7</sup> However, as was the case of Cuban relations with Black Americans, the opportunity to create an international stir was not equated with changes to the social system of race on the island.

#### U.S. Civil Rights and the Space Program

The role that race has played in the Cold War is a relatively recent exploration of historians. While equal rights for women have been a constant sub-theme of 20th-century modernization in Europe and the United States, race was a domestic issue that maintained a constant presence in the western hemisphere during the Cold War, especially for the United States.<sup>8</sup> Legal historian Mary Dudziak has written on the history of race in the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> Dudziak bases her historical assumptions about the relationship between race and the Cold War on Gunnar Myrdal's landmark history, *An American Dilemma*, basing her legal history on his assertion that the civil rights movement began in earnest during World War II.<sup>10</sup> According to Dudziak's extension of Myrdal's arguments, the American racial dilemma became a moral

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<sup>6</sup> Henley Adams, "Race and the Cuban Revolution: The Impact of Cuba's Intervention in Angola," pp. 200-226, in Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Race Ethnicity and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012, here 206).

<sup>7</sup> Henley Adams, "Race and the Cuban Revolution: The Impact of Cuba's Intervention in Angola," pp. 200-226, in Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Race Ethnicity and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012, here 210).

<sup>8</sup> Susan Bridger, "The Cold War and the Cosmos: Valentina Tereshkova and the First Woman's Space Flight." In *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, edited by Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood, 222-237. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Mary. L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Gunnar Myrdal and Sissela Bok, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

dilemma for American foreign policy during the world buildup to World War II. During the war years, it acquired tremendous international implications, driving the U.S.'s limited forays into equal opportunity during the war and causing public discomfort in the vast areas that went unchanged. According to Dudziak, this American international self-consciousness about race drove the Roosevelt administration to respond more readily to domestic threats of protest that they had in the past. Roosevelt signed executive order # 8802 with little enforcement strength to prohibit discrimination among U.S. contractors to the War Department. The War Department tried experimental, segregated black units of the Army Air Forces and Marine Corps. The resulting lessons were mainly about the inefficiency of segregation and less about the rewards of integration, but the wartime actions established that the U.S. would have to take action if it was to maintain its post-war role of guardian of democracy.

By the beginning of the Cold War Americans were committed to telling a particular story about civil rights—one that linked civil rights and progress by telling the story of a triumph of good versus evil. By necessity, this civil rights story maintained U.S. moral suasion after the war. Citing Michael Sherry, Dudziak points out that safeguarding the US's overseas image was of prominent importance, even in the case of domestic policy. It was that motivation more than anything that contributed to the quick turnaround in the organization of American forces overseas and led to the deployment of integrated troops during the Korean War, just five short years after the segregated World War II.

Dudziak makes a three-pronged argument on the role that US civil rights played in the international arena that drove foreign policy: First, the importance to the American identity of the narrative of progress mentioned above. Second, was concern over the experiences of brown-skinned foreigners visiting the United States, especially those coming from the newly independent former colonial states? Otherwise, isolated incidents threatened the U.S. image abroad as a country of opportunity. Observers of foreign relations recognized the significance of the perception of the US abroad. Journalist Edward R. Murrow wrote to President Johnson in January 1964 saying, "The progress of the civil rights movement in this country is of preeminent interest overseas, particularly in Africa."<sup>11</sup> The third was the ruthlessness with which the government repressed dissent from among blacks in America. The official U.S. response to the internal critique of the civil rights situation in the country was disproportionate to the tone of those critiques, interpreting them as attacks on the Johnson Administration.<sup>12</sup>

No matter how stable this political justification might have been in the 1950s and early 1960s, the three-pronged approach unraveled in the 1960s in response to other events which could not be controlled from either the White House or the Pentagon. Events of 1963 included both the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (August 15) and the March on Washington (August 28) shattered the administration's narrative of progress. The further unraveling of the US's ability to manage the storyline continued in 1964. Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act was quickly followed by the Gulf of Tonkin resolution to expand the Vietnam War. Vietnam displaced racial progress as the foremost symbol of the United States, even in the eyes of White House insiders.<sup>13</sup> The increasing and prolonged white southern

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<sup>11</sup> Dudziak, page 209

<sup>12</sup> Dudziak, pages 210-220.

<sup>13</sup> Dudziak, page 241.

violence against the Freedom Riders and Martin Luther King's receipt of the Nobel Prize in December 1964, internationalized the coverage of the Civil Rights struggle. The same was true of the increasing popularity of Malcolm X both at home and abroad and his break with the Nation of Islam for broader Muslim identity.

The toppling of the delicate balance on which civil Rights was demonstrating American progress drew Soviet interest. There were many Soviet attempts to make a proper link between the urban riots of 1968 in the U.S. to American policy in Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> With the change in administrations and political parties in the White House so was there a change in tone and direction in domestic policy. "Just as Vietnam had eclipsed civil rights as a defining issue affecting U.S. prestige abroad, law and order had eclipsed social justice as a politically popular response to racial conflict."<sup>15</sup> In the end the "Cold War imperative for social change...did not survive the length of the Cold War itself."<sup>16</sup> However, the history of race in America remained an international story with the United States pointing progress from the past as an indication of progress and the USSR identifying that same past as an indication of political frailty.<sup>17</sup> Nixon's domestic and international civil rights policy ignored domestic race relations and continued through the Ford administration. The Nixon-Ford White House's demonstrated willingness to deal with the apartheid South African government was the clear expression of their Cold War perception that fighting the Soviets and their surrogates trumped human rights.<sup>18</sup> Nixon and Kissinger were not deliberately supporting racism, but their priorities were to support anything that challenged the USSR. That included American Black Panther complaints about rampant racism in Castro's Cuba.<sup>19</sup>

It was not until the Jimmy Carter administration that human rights abroad regained some of the currency in domestic American politics that it once had immediately after World War II. Carter had won a close victory to the White House with the votes of southern blacks, and he had witnessed the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement in Georgia where he served as Governor in the early 1970s. As President, Carter had to deal with the more complicated aspects of the legacy of race relations. He made his claim on the role that race relations would play in foreign relations with his appointment of Andrew Young as Ambassador to the United Nations. However well-intentioned Carter's policies had been at the beginning of his term, they were marred by events that occurred under his watch that ultimately weakened his Presidency irreparably. The Iranian Hostage Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had doomed all of Carter's foreign policy to failure and set the stage for a racially indifferent Reagan administration.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dudziak, page 243.

<sup>15</sup> Dudziak, page 248.

<sup>16</sup> Dudziak, page 249

<sup>17</sup> Dudziak, pages 253-4.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Bortstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line. American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 239-241.

<sup>19</sup> Bortstelmann, 242.

<sup>20</sup> Bortstelmann, 252-259.

The entire history of NASA and NASA influenced efforts to increase diversity were not entirely grim. The instances of indirect attempts to improve the situation especially among southern blacks do offer a few nuggets of accomplishments. Two recently published histories of the pre- and early NASA periods present insights on what NASA could and could not influence in the social sphere of America. Moving from the broader policy debate to practical results of expanding civil rights and advocating integration in the United States where the situation is more modest and not directly resulting from NASA and the US federal government's efforts to integrate the civil service. There have been two recent accounts of these efforts and their outcomes. The first is the story of how Lyndon Johnson sought to impose the Great Society concepts onto the south through the NASA centers in the South. The second is the remarkable account of how West Virginia and Virginia's segregated societies contributed to the formation of an isolated group of black women who calculated orbits and trajectories for NASA. Richard Paul and Steven Moss dug deep and worked against time to uncover the results of efforts to impose Great Society standards to the societies surrounding NASA centers, focusing mainly in the attempts to integrate educational institutions in the Deep South.<sup>21</sup> Paul and Moss tracked down some of the surviving black Southerners who were the original recruits to study at previously segregated Southern engineering schools near NASA Centers. The two also made comparisons of the impact of NASA's policies on the professional and technical labor forces in Texas, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. Margaret Lee Shetterly approached the story of NASA surrounded segregation from within by uncovering of the stories of the black women mathematicians who worked for the segregated contractor to NASA's Langley Research Center.<sup>22</sup> Shetterly's story culminates with on the life story of Katherine Johnson, whose good fortune at being in the right place at a time with Universities and contractors were willing to meet the letter of the law within the confines of their Jim Crow culture. What Paul, Ross and Shetterly uncovered were not so much the successes of NASA's efforts to integrate, but the presence of blacks, even in the South who were ready and willing to seize opportunities with NASA once any arose. The human spaceflight programs of the post-Apollo era unfolded with this history of race and the Cold War as one of many backgrounds. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, other, more severe issues dominated the U.S.-Soviet global competition and race, and human spaceflight had lost its prominence. In contrast, the domestic history of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba loomed more substantial and immediate in the stories of how human spaceflight was unfolding at that time, less inhibited by global competition and more influenced by local politics and recent history.<sup>23</sup>

#### Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez

Soyuz 38's flight occurred as part of a long-term change in the direction of human spaceflight within the Soviet Union, although next events sparked the relations between the United States and the USSR. Once the USSR had backed off its manned lunar program, the country continued to work out the internal competitions within its space industry to focus on

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Paul and Steven Moss, *We Could not Fail: The First African Americans in the Space Program*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden figures: the American Dream and the Untold Story of Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. New York: Harper Collins, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Kim McQuaid, "Race, Gender, and Space Exploration: A Chapter in the Social History of the Space Age," *Journal of American Studies*, 41 (2007), 2, 405-434.

long-duration spaceflight in near-Earth orbit. In order to sustain long-duration flights, they had to overcome a technical obstacle that prevented them from maintaining humans in space for over three months. The batteries that operated the systems on board the *Soyuz* at that time had a maximum flight life of 60 days. In order to exceed what had been the long-duration spaceflight record set by American astronauts Pogue, Gibson, and Carr on board the Skylab 4 mission in November 1973 of 84 days, the Russians would have to replace the Soyuz spacecraft docked to the Salyut 6 space station every 60 days. Of course, the Soviet technicians could quickly send a robotic spacecraft to the space station every two months, but their flight doctors recognized the psychological benefits of having visiting crews come to the station every ninety days. The truth was that long-duration spaceflight was often dull and isolating and having visitors would contribute to the crews' health.

While the obvious solution would be to fly existing Soviet cosmonauts to the station to facilitate the craft swap-out, Soviet space planners turned to another alternative that would further distract attention from the shortcoming of the technology by announcing a new program. Interkosmos, the Council on International Cooperation on the Study and Uses of Space had been founded in 1966 under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. The council began as a domestic, Soviet government organization with representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Communications, and Health and other scientific research organization. The initial purpose of the council formed to oversee cooperative space agreements with other countries, such as India, France, the US, Sweden, Austria. In 1970 eight other socialist countries joined Interkosmos (including USSR): Bulgaria, Hungary, GDR, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia to form the organization that became widely known during the 1970s as the Soviet alternation to NASA and the European Space Agency.

Salyut 6, first station with dual docking ports to accommodate two Soyuz spacecraft was ready for launch at Baikonur on 29 September 1977. The first mission to the station, Soyuz 25 (crew Kovalenok and Riumin), failed to dock on initial approach and depleted fuel and had to return to Earth.<sup>24</sup> The first successful docking mission with Salyut 6 was the Soyuz 26 mission (crew: Grechko and Romanenko) who stayed on board the station for 96 days.<sup>25</sup> Grechko and Romanenko greeted two visiting missions to Salyut 6 during this time. The first was the all-Soviet crew of Soyuz 27—Soviet Dzhaniybekov and Makarov.<sup>26</sup> The second visiting crew was that of Soyuz 28, the first Interkosmos mission that included a cosmonaut from the Czechoslovak Republic, Vladimír Remek along with mission commander Gubarev. In quick succession after the Czechoslovak mission, in June and August 1978, the Polish and German missions succeed with the Soyuz 30 and 31 craft, respectively. The Salyut 6 space station and was the beginning of what developed into over two decades worth of long duration spaceflight experimentation. By the 1980s, the duration of these flights was routinely exceeding the operational life of the Soyuz ferry spacecraft.

The timing of the introductions of this seemingly easy and inexpensive success of the international guest visitor program coincided with a dramatic shift in U.S. Soviet foreign

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<sup>24</sup> *Raketno-Kosmicheskaya Korporatsiya "Energia" Imeni S.P. Koroleva*. Edited by Iurii Pavlovich Semenov. Moskva: Raketno-kosmicheskaya korporatsiya "Energia" imeni S.P. Koroleva, 1996, page 298.

<sup>25</sup> 10 December 1977 to 16 March 1978.

<sup>26</sup> 2-10 March 1978.



relations. On Christmas Eve 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, unleashing American objections to their human rights situation and denunciation of their imperial aims in Central Asia. While the USSR's actions strengthened President Carter's campaign on human rights that led to the American boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow the Soviet response was further intransigence. In the realm of human spaceflight, the USSR immediately and quickly announced the expansion of its guest cosmonaut program to include the next group of Interkosmos nations of Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Vietnam, Cuba and Mongolia. Primary cosmonaut and backups were selected from each country.

Moreover, although Soyuz launches were still not officially announced in advance at that time, there was an official announcement of Pham's flight in advance with little specific detail.<sup>27</sup> The launch of Vietnamese fighter pilot, Pham Tuan onboard Soyuz 37 on 23 July 1980 as part of the sixth international crew. The flight signaled that the program had expanded beyond the Warsaw Pact and set space observers to speculate which of the USSR's socialist allies would be next in spaceflight.

Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez's life story follows a social trajectory that is common to post-revolutionary Soviet and Cuban heroes. Tamayo was born on 29 January 1942, in Guantanamo. Biographies of him are unclear about the precise circumstances of his birth and early childhood, but he was an orphan from youth. The only certainty from his early biography is that he was mixed-race, showing evident African ancestry in his features. Later in life, he claimed that he had to shine shoes as a child, as that was the only work available to him under the Batista regime.<sup>28</sup> In 1961 he graduated from the Eheristo Rebelde Technological Institute. He received flight training at the Eiskoi (now Komarov) Air Force School. He completed his flying studies at the Military Flight Training School in the Soviet Union. Returning to Cuba, Tamayo graduated from the Gomez Advanced Training School for Armaments. He joined the Cuban Communist Party in 1967 at age 25, a few years too young, by Soviet standards, but probably an average age for an ambitious young Air Force Officer.

On September 19, 1980, Cuban Air Force pilot, Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez was launched from Baikonur on board the Soyuz 38 *en route* to the Salyut 6 space station. Experienced cosmonaut Yuri Romanenko commanded the mission.<sup>29</sup> The described mission of the weeklong stay on board the space station was Earth observation and natural resources. As designed by the mission, Tamayo and Romanenko joined station crew Leonid Popov and Valerie Riumin on board Salyut 6 and returned to Earth on board Soyuz 37 that had carried the Vietnamese pilot to the station two months prior.<sup>30</sup> Popov and Riumin were within two weeks of breaking an endurance record (over 175 days, the final stay totaled 185 days). Tamayo Mendez was the

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<sup>27</sup> The Soviets released information about the flight of Vietnamese cosmonaut before releasing an official press release. The announcement occurred took place during the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, at a time when many journalists were in the country covering the athletes. David K. Willis, "Soviets bid for third World Prestige with Viet Cosmonaut," *Christian Science Monitor* July 25, 1980.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Sheehan, "Across the U.S.-Cuba Divide, A Retired General Takes a Step" *The Washington Post* (1974-Current File), May 03, 1998. 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1620165112?accountid=46638>.

<sup>29</sup> "Cuban in Crew of Soyuz Craft Sent into Space," *The Washington Post* (1974-Current File), Sep 19, 1980. 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/147186338?accountid=46638>.

<sup>30</sup> "Bread and Salt Greet 2 Visitors to Space Lab." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Sep 21, 1980. 11, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/121093025?accountid=46638>.

seventh non-Soviet citizen to launch on a Soyuz. The Soyuz 38 crew performed over 20 experiments primarily described as Earth resources observation to aid Cuban agriculture. After flight Brezhnev awarded Tamayo the Order of Lenin and Hero of the Soviet Union award--the routine prizes that cosmonauts received. After his flight Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez continued in his military career, achieving the rank of General in the Cuban Air Force as Director of Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba. He has remained active in retired life, with sporadic appearances meeting foreign delegations, most recently with senior Chinese military officials in 1990.<sup>31</sup>

Soviet press coverage of Tamayo Mendez's flight spread over several sections of the print press. Not only did the flight achieve the usual front-page coverage accorded to TASS reporters, but it broke the barriers of the usual cast of reporters. Reporting during the mission spread beyond the front page and routine science reporting to the political and international pages. The standard report of the Soyuz 38 mission benefitted from enhancement surrounding Raul Castro's visit to the USSR that coincided with the mission to the space station. The first published report of the Soyuz 38 launch made it into print in *Pravda* the day after the successful launch. Beneath the prominent photos of Tamayo Mendez and his commander, Yuri Romanenko were the standard format and brief captions of their careers. The anonymous report from TASS listed Tamayo Mendez's first-class status as a military pilot, his membership in the Communist Party of Cuba and his selection as an astronaut candidate on 1 March 1978.<sup>32</sup> After two days in orbit, experiences Soviet space reporter, Vladimir Gubarev, began reporting in some detail on the specific activities of the international guest cosmonaut on board the Salyut 6 station. Gubarev first reported on Tamayo Mendez's assignment in this Interkosmos mission to conduct observational experiments and photography in assistance to Cuban agriculture with the well-wishes of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.<sup>33</sup> Gubarev's article opened the way to reporting in subsequent pages of that issue in *Pravda*, first publishing the full texts of congratulatory telegrams from both Brezhnev and Fidel Castro. Both leaders applauded the space station mission as an accomplishment of national and socialist revolution, referring to Tamayo Mendez as the first Latin American cosmonaut.<sup>34</sup> A page later in the same edition, foreign correspondent A. Trepetov filed a report on the local Havana response to the mission. The responses were pure of national pride, frequently citing Yuri Gagarin's 1961 visit to Cuba after his first flight in space as the source of Soviet-Cuban fraternity that had risen to new heights with the Soyuz 38 launch.<sup>35</sup> The routine, political and international reporting climaxed with Raul Castro's arrival in Moscow on September 22 and culminated with the award of Hero of the Soviet Union and the Gold Star to Tamayo Mendez on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the day after he landed after his mission.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sheehan, 1.

<sup>32</sup> "Kosmonavt-issledovatel' korablia 'Soyuz 38' podpalkovnik Arnal'do Tamaio Mendes" (Research cosmonaut of Soyuz 38, Lt. Col. Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez) *Pravda* No 263 (22693), 1.

<sup>33</sup> V. Gubarev, "Uzhin na reassvete," (Dinner at Dawn) *Pravda* No. 265 (22695), 3.

<sup>34</sup> "Primer druzhba i sotrunichestva," (Example of friendship and cooperation) *Pravda*, no, 265 (22695), 4.

<sup>35</sup> A. Trepetov, "Kuba likyet" (Cuba rejoices) *Pravda*, no, 265 (22695), 5.

<sup>36</sup> "Priem L. I. Brezhnevym R. Kastro" (Reception of Raul Castro by Leonid I. Brezhnev) *Pravda* No. 267 (22697) 23 September 1980, 1. And "Ukaz" (Decree) *Pravda* No. 271 (22701) 27 September 1980.

Guion S. Bluford, Jr.

At the same time that Soviet scientists were making the best of the limitations of their early space race hardware, the Americans were preparing to introduce a new type of spacecraft, the space shuttle orbiter, into operation. The deployment of the space shuttle mandated a new type of astronaut to populate the craft and fulfill the mission of exploiting space after the Apollo program. As a result, there was a dramatic change in the requirements for spaceflight. The 1959 requirements for NASA astronauts were restrictive to limit the potential candidate pool. Candidates had to be younger than 40 years old, shorter than 5 feet 11 inches (180 centimeters), in excellent health, have earned B.A. or equivalent in engineering, have the status as a qualified jet pilot, be a graduate of test pilot school, and have performed 1500 hours or more of flying time.<sup>37</sup> These criteria effectively reduced the applicant pool to white male test pilots. Of the 500 military pilots who qualified under these criteria in 1959, seven were selected.<sup>38</sup> As the early human spaceflight program in the U. S. developed, the selection criteria changed. In 1962 three changes were made to the astronaut requirements. The age limit to qualify as an astronaut lowered to 35 and height limitation rose to 6 feet (182 centimeters), and civilians were permitted to apply.<sup>39</sup> These changes still excluded all but the youngest Korean War veterans and had little effect on the numbers of qualifying women or minorities. In 1964 in anticipation of an advanced Apollo Moon exploration program, applications were invited from educational training for positions as scientist-astronaut.<sup>40</sup> In the early 1970's, when the applications were open for Shuttle astronaut, the requirements further relaxed combat experience requirements but increased the intensity of competition with more stringent academic requirements.

The necessary Shuttle astronaut requirements from 1978 included: excellent health, a B.A. in engineering or physical science or mathematics, 1000 hours of flying time, and one of the following: an advanced degree or jet aircraft and flight testing experience.<sup>41</sup> The more stringent academic requirements and more relaxed flight-training requirements had the effect of expanding the applicant pool outside of the white male bastion. There was a significant pool of women and black that qualified and could apply.

Guion Bluford was among those who applied and was accepted into the Shuttle astronaut program. Bluford was born in Philadelphia on November 22, 1942. He graduated from Pennsylvania State University in 1964 with a degree in Aerospace Engineering and a distinguished Air Force ROTC graduate. Bluford was a third-generation college graduate. His father had been a mechanical engineer.<sup>42</sup> Bluford's accomplishments were an impressive feat considering that the military services were segregated at the time of his birth. He continued his

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<sup>37</sup> "Astronaut Selection and Training," *NASA Facts* (KSC 35-81, revised May 1985), p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> The original seven American astronauts were: Shepherd, Grissom, Glenn, Carpenter, Schirra, Cooper and Slayton. Slayton did not fly a Mercury mission due to a heart murmur but later flew onboard the Apollo spacecraft in the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project mission in July 1975.

<sup>39</sup> "Astronaut Selection and Training," p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> "Astronaut Selection and Training," p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> "Astronaut Selection and Training," p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Penelope McMillan, "Black Shuttle Astronaut Sees Self as 'Role Model'" *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Jul 14, 1983. 2, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/153527665?accountid=46638>.

studies while in the Air Force after receiving his pilot's wings in 1966. He earned a doctor of philosophy in aerospace engineering with a minor in laser physics from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1978, the year that he was accepted into the astronaut program.

The January announcement of the 1978 astronaut class, of which Sally Ride and Guy Bluford were members, proclaimed the strength in the diversity of minds as well as culture and gender. Six women were in the "class of 1978." Three black men were among the 35. Diversity was the catchword of this class, but gender and race were not the only indicators of diversity. As one journalist wrote, describing this new group of astronauts:

The diverse educational background of the astronauts also marks a departure from the nature of previous groups. This new diversity was due to the unique requirements of the new space shuttle program, for which the new astronauts have been training since July.<sup>43</sup> At the time, the coincidence of the selections of a national and gender diverse astronaut corps and the spaceflight of cosmonauts from an Asian and Latin American countries seemed to go unnoticed in the press. Accounts of Tamayo Mendez's flight noted on the oft-repeated chorus of socialist goodwill among Soviet-aligned nations. Only one contemporary account of the flight of Soyuz 38 made a passing remark about Tamayo's ethnicity at the time of his flight. An Associated Press brief on September 18 had noted that the Soviet-published photograph of Tamayo Mendez "suggest he was of mixed black and Caucasian origin."<sup>44</sup> All other references to Tamayo's race in the American were retrospective, after Bluford's flight. In contrast, Soviet references to Bluford's race were overt, citing him as the first black American included in a US spaceflight.<sup>45</sup>

#### How did the flights come to symbolize a Racial Standoff?

So how did Tamayo Mendez's race become significant? It was only in the aftermath of discussing the significance of Sally Ride's flight to become the first American woman in space almost twenty years after Valentina Tereshkova's flight that attention turned to the scheduled flight of Guy Bluford who was to be the first black among the "Class of 1978" to fly on board the Challenger in July 1983. The first journalist to link the flights of Tamayo Mendez and Guy Bluford was William Broad of the *New York Times*, who dispensed with finer, Latin American distinctions among blacks and mulattos and proclaimed Tamayo the first black in space as he fit the American classifications for racial identity.<sup>46</sup> Broad was quick to point out, however, that unlike Tamayo, Bluford had three other black American astronauts waiting to follow him into space.<sup>47</sup> There was a small irony that one of the first newspapers to challenge mainstream

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas O'Toole Washington Post, Staff Writer. "Shuttle Poised for Milestone Mission." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Aug 29, 1983. 2.

<sup>44</sup> "Cuban in Crew of Soyuz Craft Sent into Space," Moscow, September 18 [have to retrieve full citation from ProQuest.

<sup>45</sup> "Novyi polet 'Challengzhera'" (New flight of "Challenger") Pravda No. 243 (23769) August 31, 1983, 5.

<sup>46</sup> William J. Broad, "First U.S. Black in Space: Guion Stewart Bluford, Jr.," *The New York Times*, 8/31/1983.

<sup>47</sup> McNair, Gregory, and Bolden did follow Bluford into space each subsequent year through 1986 (Bolden's flight).

American assumptions about race and spaceflight was Bluford's hometown black newspaper, the Pittsburgh courier that stated outright that Tamayo was the first.<sup>48</sup>

One can assume that this reputable journalist was articulating a common sentiment about the role of race in spaceflight—if Valentina Tereshkova's flight had been a stunt to show up the Americans then the flight by anyone who would be perceived, by American standards, to be black prior to Bluford's flight had to be a similar stunt. However, the Cuban population is as much as 60% of what Americans would perceive to be black; thus, Tamayo Mendez's complexion is not so surprising. For Cubans, it would be more surprising if he had turned up as a manager of a foreign currency hotel in Cuba or well placed within the country's hospitality industry.<sup>49</sup>

So that is how, three years after his flight, Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez became the first black person in space. Surprisingly, that did not occur by birth on his part but happened mainly in the American press and as a result of American domestic politics and culture that was unrelated to the Cold War competition between the US and USSR. After three decades of promoting the idea of racial progress to bolster the American image abroad, especially in African nations and other developing nations, the United States had slowly abandoned its policy of promoting national progress as an indication of US superiority. Dissenting voices on the Civil Rights movement and the increasing involvement in Vietnam had made management of the message impossible. Nonetheless, the Cold War between the United States and the USSR continued. It is significant the one Cold War in which the US had not promoted its progress on civil had been the one in which the Soviet Union had scored early points in women's issues—the Space Race. While the Johnson Administration and NASA policies to improve the status and numbers of blacks among NASA engineering centers, especially in the deep South, had made some changes, NASA had made no self-conscious effort to break through the gender or race barriers that surrounded the most public faces of the Space Race—the astronauts. While the Soviets dipped into their pool of civil defense trained women for cosmonaut candidates, the Americans held fast to their initial description of an astronaut as a subset of experienced test pilots. The degree of successful accomplishment of these feats was less a measure of technological prowess and more a measure of the degree to which each side was willing to manipulate resources in the midst of international competition.

The biographies of Tamayo Mendez and Bluford, too, represent incongruent stories traveling on inconsistent social trajectories. Tamayo Mendez's story follows the predictable arch of impoverished origins overcoming racial and social constraints to high accomplishment in no small part thanks to the Cuban Revolution. In contrast, Bluford's story is more challenging to fit into a single narrative neatly. On the one hand, as a black man in a previously all-white profession, he is a personification of social progress in America. On the other, as a third-generation college graduate, Bluford also represents an American ideal of hard work, perseverance and the American dream of improving status over generations. Tamayo Mendez and Bluford personified two different stories; one held up as a rarity in support of a revolutionary idea, the other one was sold softly as a common modern-day occurrence. The more significant distinction was that Tamayo Mendez was a single exemplar while Bluford was one of three and

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Fikes, "First Black Astronaut." *New Pittsburgh Courier (1981-2002)*, Feb 22, 1986. 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/201772570?accountid=46638>.

<sup>49</sup> Sheehan, 1.

then four, giving the higher strength of the American narrative through repetition. As an important side note, it must be remarked that the USSR, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century homeland of Pushkin, did not try to find a descendant of an African in Russia to send into space, but relied on its only close ally with a large African diaspora to supply the cosmonaut.

#### Conclusions—Why this was the last fight?

The propaganda currency of the spaceflights of Tamayo Mendez and Bluford differ from those of the early space race, especially from the flight of Valentina Tereshkova, in both planning and response. In the 1960s, it was clear that both sides shared a degree of focus on international prestige during the Cold War Space Race. Each side sought to demonstrate its social and technological sophistication through the flights. Two decades later, the sides were not competing at the same level for the same stakes. It is clear that the USSR was using its Vietnamese and Cuban allies as a distraction from the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However clumsy the announcements of these flights had been, they were not a direct attack on the United States but were an attempt to distract the world from the Soviet foreign policy. The fact that they reminded the world of American struggles in both foreign and domestic policy was an added benefit, not a primary objective. On the American side, the response was profoundly different that it would have been 20 years before. Instead of the isolated, but intense self-examination that resulted from Tereshkova's flight and the fierce repression of dissent that had characterized official policy during the early years of the Civil Rights movement, the announcement of the Cuban's flight elicited little official response from its neighbor to the north. Ambivalence over the significance of the pilot's racial identity was followed by indifference as to his significance to the Cold War.

Tamayo and Bluford's flights were the last of the space race's head-to-head competitions because that was the last time that space competition could be a direct surrogate for each side to demonstrate its values for a onetime event. The missions betrayed to vast gulfs in social conflict among three nations. Human spaceflights were no longer a matchup between the technologies of the US and the USSR. The missions turned into a comparison between the social settings of each nation involved. The act of plucking a mixed race pilot from among Cuban pilots seemed disingenuous on the Soviet Union's part. Previously there had never been an Interkosmos guest cosmonaut candidate from a racial or ethnic minority.

Soviet and Cuban intentions withered even further when Tamayo's background compared to that of Bluford. The American was not cherry-picked for his mission, but was a member of a deep bench of racially and gender diverse astronauts. Neither had he been cultivated through neither the LBJ-invoked southern strategy of integrating the space program in the 1960s nor the fruitless 1970s effort to address the ethnic composition of NASA contractors and staff. Bluford, along with his colleagues Gregory, McNair, and later Bolden, had emerged into the astronaut program through broader systems of progress than NASA acting alone. Overall, three factors led to Bluford's selection as the "first" for the US. The first factor was the more significant opportunity for blacks that the North had offered. Bluford and Gregory were descendants of the great migration, which brought their families the North a generation before them. Even in the cases of McNair and Bolden, who had each flourished in the isolated systems of South Carolina, sought educational opportunities in integrated Northern schools. The second factor was the degree to which the military played as a social change agent in the 1960s. Three of the class of 1978, Bluford, Gregory, and Bolden, benefitted from the integration of the armed forces, flying aircraft in America's first fully integrated war in Vietnam. Moreover, the final factor was the changed definition of an astronaut that occurred because of the shuttle program. This

transformation from the heroic, Cold Warrior spacefarer to true explorers forced a pull away from military stereotypes and allowed a more diverse astronaut crew.

The Long Civil Rights movement generated change for the astronaut program. Significantly, it brought to light the fact that while he might have seen the second black person to fly in space, Bluford represented profound changes in race relations in the US over the course of a quarter of a century. Of course, the question remains as to whether or not this last Cold War race battle was inevitable, or if somehow it was orchestrated. The lack of evidence that scheduling Tamayo Mendez's flight as an overt challenge to the freshly desegregated NASA astronaut corps is not proof that it does not exist. It is reasonable to assume that the USSR could have responded to the NASA announcement by requesting that the Cubans cherry-pick a mixed race cosmonaut candidate for the Interkosmos mission. Although this scenario remains plausible, it does beg two additional questions. First, if they did so, why did the Soviets or the Cubans not guarantee the deal with a mix-race backup for the mission?

Given that Soviets train and qualify crews as a unit, they increased the odds against themselves by having only one black man among the two crew options. The second and more pivotal question is that why, if this had been a final play to one-up the Americans, did no one on either the Soviet or Cuban side mention the fact at the time. The Soyuz 38 flight occurred during one of the steep declines of US-Soviet relations; within nine months of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and a few months of the US-led boycott of the Moscow-hosted Summer Olympics in 1980. If there was ever a time for the USSR to use propaganda ammunition against the United States, this had been the time.