

For Democracy and a Caste System? World War II, Race, and Democratic Inclusion in the United States

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Dear Readers,

This document contains the first and fourth chapters of my dissertation, which I am just now beginning to transition into a book manuscript. Chapter 1 is an introduction that frames the larger project. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the Roosevelt administration. I've included a chapter outline below so you can see where these pieces fit in the larger project. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and critiques,

-Steven

Project Outline (italicized chapters provided here)

1. *Contradictory Narratives of Race and War*
2. White Racial Attitudes During World War II: Methods and a Descriptive Baseline
3. Civil Rights, World War II, and U.S. Public Opinion
4. *The Roosevelt Administration and Civil Rights During the Second World War*
5. The Truman Administration, Military Service, and Postwar Civil Rights
6. War, Civil Rights, and Twentieth Century American Political Development

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Chapter 1

Contradictory Narratives of Race and War

Right in the middle of American participation in the Second World War, a race riot broke out in Detroit. June 20, 1943, was a hot summer day, and many of Detroit's residents, black and white alike, went to Belle Isle, an island park in the Detroit River. Problems began with a few unrelated scuffles, but as tensions increased, rumors of a race riot started to spread. By 11 pm, thousands were brawling on the bridge between the city and the island. By early morning, the police had arrested 47 people, and, temporarily at least, brought peace to the unrest. The riot, however, was further propelled by rumors that quickly spread around the city. In Paradise Valley, a predominantly black neighborhood, a rumor spread that white people had killed a black woman and her child by throwing them over the bridge. Many responded by attempting to travel to Belle Isle, only to find access to the bridge barricaded. Angered but without the expected outlet to vent their frustrations, they returned to Paradise Valley and began destroying many of the white-owned businesses. As police began moving in to Paradise Valley, another rumor spread among white crowds gathered along Woodward Avenue. This time the rumor was that black men at Belle Isle had raped several white women. A white mob began attacking black residents; police did little to stop it. It would take another twenty hours before the mayor of Detroit and the governor of Michigan went on the radio to proclaim a state of emergency; it would take even longer before federal troops were brought in to bring the riot to a close. In the end, 34 people were killed and more than 700 were injured. Property damage reached two million dollars. War production in Detroit, the core of what Roosevelt had called "the arsenal of democracy," came to a halt.¹

Ten days after the riot, an editorial in *The Nation* linked the riot and the racial divisions it represented to the ideological logic of the Second World War. "The Axis is losing battles in Europe and the Pacific," the editorial began, "but it can console itself with victories recently won in the United

¹Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 43-64.

States.” The language only grew stronger from there. “It is time for us to clear our minds and hearts of the contradictions that are rotting our moral position and undermining our purpose,” it read. “We cannot fight fascism abroad while turning a blind eye to fascism at home. We cannot inscribe our banners ‘For democracy and a caste system.’ We cannot liberate oppressed peoples while maintaining the right to oppress our own minorities.” Remaining passive in the face of such racial inequities, the article declared in conclusion, meant Americans “have no right to say complacently: ‘We are not as these *Herrenvolk*...’”²

Such sentiments were not unusual during World War II. A year later, in 1944, the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal published his mammoth two-volume opus on American race relations, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Over the course of nearly 1,500 pages, Myrdal made the contradiction between the aims of war and Jim Crow clear. “There is bound to be a redefinition of the Negro’s status in America as a result of this War,” he proclaimed.³ A few pages later, he articulated his reasoning. This war, he wrote, “is an ideological war fought in defense of democracy.” The nature of the totalitarian dictatorships the Allied forces were fighting “made the ideological issue much sharper in this War than it was in the First World War.” Further, since Nazism is “based on a racial superiority dogma,” American democratic principles “had to be applied more explicitly to race.” The implication of this, to Myrdal, was clear. “In fighting fascism and nazism,” he wrote, “America had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and the inalienable human freedoms.”⁴ Myrdal’s book was, according to Alan Brinkley, a “major factor in drawing white liberal attention to problems of race – precisely because Myrdal himself discussed racial injustice as a rebuke to the nation’s increasingly vocal claim to be the defender of democracy and personal freedom in a world menaced by totalitarianism.”⁵ Although it received some scattered criticism, the nature of the book – its social scientific language, non-partisan spon-

²“Defeat at Detroit,” *The Nation*, July 3, 1943, 4. A typographical error in the print magazine excluded a quotation mark, which is edited in here for clarity. Partially cited, among other places, in Maria Hohn, “‘We Will Never Go Back to the Old Way Again’: Germany in the African-American Debate on Civil Rights,” *Central European History* 41, 2008, 616.

³Gunny Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers: 1944), 997.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1004.

⁵Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 168-169.

sorship, massive length, Myrdal's European-ness – led it to seem like a “definitive analysis” of the American race problem in elite discourse.⁶ These arguments by white liberals complemented the rhetorical efforts of civil rights organizations and black newspapers, who advocated what came to be called the “Double-V campaign” for victory at home *and* abroad. The war, it seemed, had finally given them the tools necessary to make a real dent in white supremacy.

Others, however, were not so sure. The southern journalist John Temple Graves was among them. Black civil rights leaders, Graves wrote in 1942, had made “plain beyond question an intent to use the war for settling overnight the whole, long, complicated, infinitely delicate racial problem.” He was no fan of the Double-V campaign. “So little are they concerned by the fact that their all-embracing crusade means a domestic war while their country is making supreme war abroad that they have invited their followers to think in terms of a Double V-for-Victory – victory in battle with Hitler and victory in battle at home,” Graves wrote. “Victory, unhappily, doesn't work that way.” Later in the same article, while detailing improvements in the conditions of black southerners during the war, he noted the decline of lynchings, but warned, “Unhappily the number may increase now as a result of the agitations of the white man against the black and the black against the white.” For Graves, war meant putting domestic debates aside and doubling down on the war abroad. “This war must be won,” Graves wrote. “And the black man in the South, where most black men live, must get on with the white man in the South, no matter what Washington orders or New York demands.”⁷ Other white southern voices were less constrained. On the floor of the U.S. Senate, Mississippi's James Eastland declared southern soldiers – presumably he meant the white ones – wanted to return home “to see the integrity of the social institutions of the South unimpaired” and “white supremacy maintained.” According to Eastland, that was the real point of fighting the fascist menace. “Those boys are fighting to maintain the rights of the States,” Eastland declared. “Those boys are fighting to maintain white supremacy.”⁸

⁶Ibid.: 169-70; for criticism, see, e.g., Leo P. Crespi, “Is Gunnar Myrdal on the Right Track?” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9(2), 1945, 201-212. Ralph Ellison also penned a notable critique. Of course, Myrdal was not the only person writing on this topic. Countless books and articles were published linking the war to racial equality. Another important contribution was Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943).

⁷John Temple Graves, “The Southern Negro and the War Crisis,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 18(4), 1942, 501, 514, 516.

⁸Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, (New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 206. Jason Morgan Ward describes the broader rhetoric of this sort that emerged in the white South. In comparison to civil rights advocates' Double-V campaign, Morgan Ward writes, “Yet defenders of segregation ar-

These stories are not just interesting historical anecdotes, but rather reflective of the ambiguities of academic scholarship on World War II's effect on civil rights politics in America. Political scientists Philip Klinkner and Rogers Smith argue "it is hard to escape the conclusion that it was... the emergence of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s that most set the stage for real transformations" on civil rights.⁹ Many historians, too, have been inclined to take a positive view of the war. Pete Daniel argues World War II "unleashed new expectations and, among many whites, taught tolerance." Taking it a step further, Daniel goes so far as to argue "the war in many ways made the civil rights movement possible."¹⁰ John Modell and colleagues point to the role of black military service, arguing, "To a democratic but inegalitarian nation, the cost of waging war may include the transformation of second-class citizens who are called upon to serve."¹¹ Among historians, this view was initially developed in the 1960s by scholars who saw the World War II era as the "forgotten years of the Negro revolution."¹²

However, historians have increasingly taken a more critical perspective on the war's relationship with civil rights. "If historians search for the roots of the civil rights movement in the wartime struggle, they will doubtlessly find something in the discordant record resembling the evidence they seek," Kevin Kruse and Stephen Tuck write. While acknowledging "the turmoil and rhetoric and bloodshed of war did indeed provide a far-reaching challenge to Southern, national and global systems of race," they argue it "did not push racial systems in a single direction, and certainly not one moving inexorably toward greater equality."¹³ More cynical perspectives

ticated their own vision of Double Victory. Championing white supremacy and demanding freedom from outside interference, Southern conservatives deemed civil rights agitation and federal encroachment to be as dangerous as an Axis invasion. The white South, like African Americans, had entered the war fighting on two fronts." He later describes this effort as "[m]ore than an elite rhetorical strategy but less than an authentic grassroots rebellion." Jason Morgan Ward, "'A War for States' Rights': The White Supremacist Vision of Double Victory," in *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127, 140.

⁹Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 137.

¹⁰Pete Daniel, "Going among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II," *The Journal of American History* 77 (3), 1990, 910.

¹¹John Modell, Marc Goulden, and Sigurdur Magnusson, "World War II in the Lives of Black Americans: Some Findings and Interpretations," *The Journal of American History* 76(3), 1989, 838.

¹²Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 55(1), 1968, 90-106.

¹³Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, "Introduction: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York: Oxford University Press: 2012), 11-12. They further note that Sitkoff has actually become somewhat more cynical about the

can also be found in the work of some political scientists. Daniel Kryder highlights the correlation between war and instances of racial violence, especially during the Second World War. Ronald Krebs demonstrates the limits of black civil rights gains after World War II by comparing them to the greater success of the Druze in Israel.¹⁴

Both perspectives contain kernels of truth. The logic of a war against Nazi racism gave civil rights groups a compelling rhetorical framework and made it intellectually more difficult to justify domestic Jim Crow. Yet the war also coincided with significant incidents of racial violence, many concentrated near military bases. Some black veterans returned home only to be beaten by white mobs, sometimes including law enforcement. And as the writing of John Temple Graves suggests, there were no shortage of whites who found the attempt by civil rights activists to use the war's antifascist logic to be troubling. Not everyone was so convinced that, to use a phrase from *The Nation's* editorial page, the war could not be fought against fascism abroad while also maintaining elements of fascism at home. For many white Americans, the war was fought to defend the status quo, white supremacy and all.

Given the discrepancies between these contradictory narratives, this dissertation asks the following question: Did World War II alter the racialized limits of American democracy? Stated in its most extreme form, I am interested in the question of what a world with the New Deal but no World War II looks like in terms of race, public opinion, and executive branch behavior. Perhaps more realistically, I hope to at least provide a theoretically and empirically grounded assessment of the specific ways in which the war influenced the politics of civil rights in its aftermath, as distinct from – although almost certainly interacting with – the New Deal and its resultant coalitional and ideological pressures.

The broader inquiry is broken down into two constitutive parts. First, did the war lead white Americans – civilians and veterans alike – to liberalized views on race relations and civil rights in its aftermath? Or were white Americans able to maintain an acceptance of – and in some cases a commitment to – white supremacy despite the experience of the war against Nazism? Second, did

war and civil rights as well. *Ibid.*, 5, 13f6.

¹⁴Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

the war lead the Roosevelt and Truman administrations to address civil rights in ways distinctive from how they would have otherwise, and earlier than when they would have otherwise? The first question necessitates the quantitative study of public opinion more common to behavioral researchers, while the second question requires careful qualitative analysis of the sort associated with the study of American political development.

Using multiple types of evidence and varied analytical perspectives, I argue the war's effect on white racial attitudes is more limited than many assume, but that the war both compelled and constrained the executive branch on civil rights policies in ways not widely acknowledged. This has a number of substantive implications for the study of race and American political development, as well as the relationship between the historical study of political institutions and the study of public opinion. Before turning to this evidence, however, this chapter frames the larger project in several ways. I first provide relevant background information about World War II and American civil rights. I then situate this research more concretely into a set of scholarly agendas¹⁵ and address several theoretical and methodological issues, including case selection, an executive branch focus, and the relationship between mass attitudes on civil rights and the presidential response to it. I conclude with a roadmap of the chapters to come.

Background

Certain aspects of the Second World War are relatively clear cut. Most historical accounts place World War II's beginning – at least in the European theatre – with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, although fighting in Asia had been going on much longer. Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the United States entered the war the following day. Benito Mussolini was killed on April 28, 1945 and Adolf Hitler committed suicide two days later. Fighting continued in Asia until Atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6, 1945, and August 9, 1945, respectively. Japan surrendered on August 15, with documents being signed on September 2, officially ending the war. The war was a landmark

¹⁵This is articulated more fully in Chapters 3-5.

event in many respects. Over fifty million people died in the war.¹⁶ The use of atomic energy for weaponry brought research scientists into defense work in new ways, something that would continue throughout the Cold War. The postwar international economic order was substantially changed as well.¹⁷

The war's impact on the American state was profound. In 1939, the national government spent \$1.1 billion on national defense; just two years later, this number increased to over \$6 billion. The next year, in 1940, the American government instituted the first peacetime draft in the nation's history.¹⁸ The federal government expanded not just in size, but also in the scope of its authority – in no small part due to the Second War Powers Act of 1942, a grant of executive discretion that declared a state of emergency lasting until its formal termination a decade later.¹⁹ America's relationship with the rest of the world was also profoundly altered. The internationalist shift beginning with Lend-Lease was a clear departure from a recent history of "international aloofness."²⁰

For President Roosevelt, whose tenure in the 1930s had been defined in large part by the economic and social policies of the New Deal, the war meant "Dr. New Deal" had been replaced by "Dr. Win the War." However, there was at least one important shift on domestic policy. While 3,842 documented lynchings occurred between 1889 and 1941, the January 1942 federal investigation of the lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri, marked the first time the Department of Justice became directly involved in a state lynching case. Coming just a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it is probably no coincidence that the details of the lynching – Wright was seized by a mob of 600 whites, dragged through a black neighborhood tied to a car, and set on fire – were spread around the world by Axis propagandists.²¹

¹⁶John M. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 3. No precise number is available and all estimates have some underlying uncertainty. Recent evidence suggests the number is perhaps over sixty million.

¹⁷Anne-Marie Burley, "Regulating the World: Multilateralism, International Law, and the Projection of the New Deal Regulatory State," in *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, ed. John Gerard Ruggie, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 125-156.

¹⁸Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 147-148.

¹⁹James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

²¹*Ibid.*, 173; Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 60(3), 1973, 700.

The war's effect on the public was no less substantial. In the interwar period, many Americans – “disillusioned with the failure of peace after the ‘war to end all wars,’ World War I” – were “wary of foreign entanglements.” However, in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and America's formal entry into the war, national attitudes became more internationalist in nature.²² Beyond just public opinion towards interventionism, however, the war affected American society deeply. About 16 million Americans served in the war, more than the combined total of all U.S. wars until that time.²³

The South was particularly influenced by the war. Eight of the nine army training centers with capacities for 50,000 or more military personnel were located there. The war also coincided with dramatic shifts to the demographic makeup and political economy of the region. In 1940, 77 percent of all African Americans lived in the South, with half of black southerners living in rural areas. Employment in agriculture was 73 percent above the national average and per capita income 40 percent below it. The region was “considerably poorer, blacker, and more rural than any other part of the United States,” as Morton Sosna puts it. Over the course of the war, 1.6 million civilians migrated out of the South. The rural population declined by nearly 3.5 million, bringing it to about 7 million total – less than half what it had been before the Great Depression started the trend. African Americans accounted for about two-thirds of migration out of the South, as well as half of the intraregional movement from the rural South to its urban centers. African Americans who left the South disproportionately went to states with strong city machine politics.²⁴ By the war's end, the black rural population dropped by 30 percent and the share of the national black population living in the region fell to 68 percent. Military service had a particularly strong influence on migration for young black veterans. Over half of black men in their twenties during their service lived in a different region by 1950, compared to a third of nonveteran black men and a quarter of white veterans in that age group. Economically, changes were similarly vast. As Dil-

²²Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 176.

²³Morton Sosna, “Introduction,” in *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*, ed. Neil McMillen, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), xvi.

²⁴John Frederick Martin, *Civil Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism: The Democratic Party 1945-1976*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 50. On the same page, Martin suggests Tom Pendergrast, the boss of Kansas City who introduced Harry Truman into Democratic political office, “was perhaps the first of the Democratic bosses to win over the new urban blacks, and he did so in a state where the Klan was a power in politics.”

lard Lasseter of the War Manpower Commission in Atlanta declared in 1944, "Due to conditions arising out of the war, the South has undergone more economic changes in two years than in any previous fifty."²⁵

Yet World War II's effects went far beyond this. An enemy more explicitly racist than Nazi Germany is difficult to imagine, and in this sense the Second World War provided a unique set of opportunities for the 1940s civil rights movement. "Unlike the aftermath of World War I," Kimberley Johnson writes, "nearly two decades of organizational activity and institution building prior to World War II provided a means of translating the rhetoric, limited reforms, and slim political openings created by a war for democracy into action."²⁶ "[T]he hysterical cries of the preachers of democracy for Europe leave us cold," an editorial in the NAACP's *Crisis* proclaimed. "We want democracy in Alabama, Arkansas, in Mississippi and Michigan, in the District of Columbia – in the *Senate of the United States*."²⁷ For external factors to the civil rights movement – like international political pressures – "processes internal to the movement contributed to the favorable effect they had on the structure of black political opportunities during the period in question," according to Doug McAdam.²⁸ It was not just the exogenous shock of war, in other words, that magically transformed the abilities of civil rights activists. Rather, it was processes endogenous to these groups that directed the war's impact. Black newspapers played a significant role in relating the international goals of war to the domestic goal of civil rights. The *Pittsburgh Courier* advocated a Double V campaign – victory at home and abroad – while the *Chicago Defender* sought to com-

²⁵Sosna, "Introduction," xiv-xvi; Pete Daniel, "Going among Strangers," 886; Dillard B. Lasseter, "The Impact of the War on the South and Implications for Postwar Developments," *Social Forces* 23(1), 1944, 20; Modell et al., "World War II in the Lives of Black Americans," 839. As Pete Daniel describes it, "In the South then, the war planted seeds that hastened the development of a new agricultural structure, intensified urbanization, and launched a civil rights movement. The war, more than the New Deal, ended hard times for many southerners, and during the war the role of the federal government, enlarged to fight depression, expanded and became ever more critical in reshaping southern culture." Daniel, "Going Home Among Strangers," 887. Change was not restricted to the South, of course. There is a large historical literature on the impact of the war on urban areas. See Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in WWII*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Roger W. Lotchin (Editor), *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). Due to increases in the black populations of northern cities as a result of southern out-migration, Democratic politicians in the North were beginning to have a new set of incentives and strategic calculations to make.

²⁶Kimberley Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age before Brown*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 99.

²⁷Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 148.

²⁸Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970: Second Edition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982], 271n.

memorate the lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri, by urging readers, “Remember Pearl Harbor and Sikeston, too.”²⁹ Wartime saw major increases in the strength of black political and civic organizations. Membership in the NAACP, for example, increased ten-fold during the war, while the readership of black newspapers went up by an estimated 40 percent.³⁰ This coincided with an international shift in the NAACP’s rhetoric. “Those attending the NAACP’s annual conference in Philadelphia in June 1940 heard speaker after speaker link the global struggle against tyranny to the historic battle against racial persecution,” according to Jonathan Rosenberg.³¹

Unfortunately, the war was far from a move into easy racial tolerance. Wartime violence on the homefront was an unsettling reminder that in fighting a war against Nazism, America had a ways to go. Many such cases were reported in *A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*. The August 1943 edition described how a black soldier stationed at Camp Van Dorn in Mississippi was killed by a white civilian allegedly for saying “yes” instead of “yes, Sir.”³² The September 1943 edition reported the following incident from Charleston, South Carolina:

A few weeks ago a Negro soldier was severely beaten by two civilian policemen. The former was apparently sober when the officers accosted him and demanded that he get into a patrol wagon. The beating ensued when the soldier refused. “Hell, shoot me,” the Negro said, “It’s your country I’m supposed to die for anyway. Go ahead and shoot.” The civilian policemen were obviously shamed by this statement, and put their guns away to await the arrival of M.P.’s.³³

The January 1944 edition attempted a more systematic account, calculating 242 major incidents involving black-white conflict in 47 U.S. cities between March 1 and December 31, 1943, which “range in seriousness from hate strikes to race riots, from soldier and civilian clashes to racial conflicts over housing sites.” Forty-six percent were in the South, 42 percent in the North, and 12 percent on the West Coast.³⁴ Later that year, the editors noted, “One of the ironies of D-Day was

²⁹Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War: Revised Edition*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993 [1976]), 100.

³⁰Harvard Sitkoff, “Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War,” *The Journal of American History* 58(3), 1971, 663; Thomas Sugrue, “Hillburn, Hattiesburg, and Hitler: Wartime Activists Think Globally and Act Locally,” in *The Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90.

³¹Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 133.

³²*A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, 1943 1(1), 9.

³³*A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, 1943 1(2), 9.

³⁴*A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, 1944 1(6), 2.

the fact that it was the beginning of one of the largest hate strikes witnessed in recent months.”³⁵ Public discourse on race couldn’t help but be affected by this seeming discrepancy, as the rhetoric by *The Nation’s* editorial board, Gunnar Myrdal, and others mentioned in the introductory section suggests.

As this dissertation describes, the 1930s civil rights agenda of anti-lynching and anti-poll tax legislation gave way to more war-specific claims about discrimination in the defense industry and segregation in the armed forces. In contrast to the near absence of national policy accomplishments on civil rights in the 1920s and 1930s, the 1940s would see executive action related to these new policy items. The goal of this dissertation is to ask what World War II meant for race and American political development. The answer, I argue, can be found in assessing the ways in which the war did – and did not – lead whites to rethink the racial status quo, and the ways in which it did – and did not – force the executive branch to move earlier and differently on civil rights policies that it would have otherwise. Yet before turning to my findings, this focus requires a few more words of justification.

War and American Politics: Some Theoretical and Methodological Justifications

In his 1957 book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Anthony Downs set the framework for much political science research about American politics. However, one statement by Downs has been notably forgotten. “In essence, we are assuming that citizens’ political tastes are fixed,” he wrote. “Even though these tastes often change radically in the long run, we believe our assumption is plausible in the short run, barring wars or other social upheavals.”³⁶ However, as David Mayhew notes in an article written nearly a half-century later, scholars of American politics have long focused almost entirely on domestic factors like economic fundamentals to explain public policy outcomes. This has led to a tendency to “underplay contingency,” of which wars are a prime

³⁵ *A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, 1944 1(11), 5. The incident took place in Cincinnati, Ohio.

³⁶ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley), 47. Emphasis added. The only reference to this sentence I am familiar with is Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

example.³⁷ This is a striking contrast to research in international relations and comparative politics, where scholars have drawn on research agendas emphasizing “the second image reversed” and how “war made the state,” respectively.³⁸ As Elizabeth Kier and Ronald Krebs note, war can have profound, complex effects on democratic politics. “Democracies often compromise their principles during crises. Executive authority grows, rights of due process are set aside, and free expression suffers,” they write. “But war’s effects on liberal-democratic institutions and processes are diverse, often contradictory, and not always negative.”³⁹ Considering this duality, it is striking that scholarship on race and American political development has, quite rightly, increasingly turned to the mid-1940s as the beginning of a critical shift on civil rights, but without engaging with the international context of the Second World War.⁴⁰ This dissertation highlights the war’s central, albeit uneven, impact on race and American political development, offering insights for this research agenda, as well as amendments to previously mentioned accounts of the war’s impact on civil rights.⁴¹

The specific details of how this dissertation contributes to such theoretical accounts are described in the relevant chapters.⁴² Several general aspects of this dissertation, however, merit further justification before proceeding. The first concern is the issue of case selection generally, and the use of a single case particularly.⁴³ Research on war and domestic politics tends to look at

³⁷David R. Mayhew, “Wars and American Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3(3), 2005, 482.

³⁸Peter Gouevtich, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization* 32(4), 1978, 881-912; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995).

³⁹Elizabeth Kier and Ronald Krebs, “Introduction: War and Democracy in Comparative Perspective,” in *In War’s Wake: International Conflict and the Fate of Liberal Democracy*, ed. Elizabeth Kier and Ronald R. Krebs, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

⁴⁰Brian Feinstein and Eric Schickler, “Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered,” *Studies in American Political Development* 22, 2008, 1-31; Eric Schickler and Devin Caughey, “Public Opinion, Organized Labor, and the Limits of New Deal Liberalism,” *Studies in American Political Development* 25(2), 2011, 162-189; Eric Schickler, “New Deal Liberalism and Racial Liberalism in the Mass Public, 1937-1968,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11(1), 2013, 75-98.

⁴¹In particular, this dissertation systematically places its arguments in comparison to the arguments of Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*; Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*; Kryder, *Divided Arsenal*; and Robert P. Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴²Chapter 3 situates an analysis of public opinion with reference to unverified assumptions about mass attitudes common to studies of the era. Chapter 4 frames a consideration of the Roosevelt administration with reference to scholarship on its neglect of civil rights, as well as Klinkner and Smith’s argument about the time period. Finally, Chapter 5 moves to the Truman administration, and in doing so mediates between the more positive arguments of Klinkner and Smith and the more negative take by Krebs.

⁴³For a more methodological discussion of single case research, see John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187-210.

multiple wars or issue areas. Klinkner and Smith focus on the issue of civil rights, but since they begin in 1619 and end in 1998, they cover all major wars in American history. Saldin examines multiple wars (from the Spanish-American War to the Vietnam War), and while he considers the incorporation of marginalized groups, he is also interested in broader shifts related to the state and the party system. Krebs is focused on minority inclusion, but uses both multiple countries (African American rights claims in the United State and rights claims by the Druze in Israel) and multiple wars (World War I and the Cold War for the U.S. case).⁴⁴ I argue that an in depth examination of civil rights during World War II is merited for several reasons. First, in aiming for generalizability – and, thus, exchanging depth for breadth – previous accounts of war’s impact on American civil rights politics have missed important details of the the World War II case, which have affected their general claims about war and minority incorporation. Second, if the dependent variable is civil rights, I argue World War II – a total war, widely supported, against an obviously racist enemy – is a critical case for an examination of war as an independent variable. Further, the political development of civil rights in the context of the Second World War – compelled yet also constrained by the wartime context – had profound implications for the twentieth century politics of civil rights.⁴⁵ As such, it is essential to make sure scholarly accounts of this juncture are accurate.

Related to the selection of the specific war, there is also the question of dependent variable. Why black civil rights? Certainly the war had profound implications for the rights of Japanese Americans, as Japanese interment and the *Korematsu v. United States* Supreme Court case affirming its constitutionality demonstrate. In the war’s aftermath, national civil rights debates would be understood by Democrats in the Pacific Northwest especially through the lens of their experience with Japanese American rights claims (as well as Native American rights claims).⁴⁶ The war also coincided with intriguing developments in the push for Mexican-American civil rights, especially in Texas.⁴⁷ Yet while these aspects of the war’s impact on race and American politics

⁴⁴Kryder, by contrast, does focus on the single case of race relations during World War II.

⁴⁵This argument is articulated more fully in the conclusion.

⁴⁶Transcript, July 19, 1952, meeting of DNC subcommittee on platform and resolutions; Folder: “Proceedings of Subcommittee on Platform and Resolutions, July 19, 1952”; Box 217; Records of the Democratic National Committee; Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

⁴⁷Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Strug-

are deeply important, I argue the focus on black civil rights is merited for several reasons. First, there is the substantial difference in population size. In 1940, African Americans represented 10 percent of the population overall, and 21 percent of the population in the South. In some states, they approached a majority. In Mississippi, to take the closest example, 49 percent of residents were African Americans (this was a slight decrease from the 1930 Census, when Mississippi had more black residents than white residents). Residents of “Hispanic origin (of any race),” by contrast, constituted only one percent of the national population, while residents who identified as “Asian and Pacific Islander” represented just .002 percent. In 1940, even Texas had more African American residents than Hispanic residents.⁴⁸ Second, black civil rights drew far more national political attention than the rights claims of other marginalized groups. If the object of study is outcomes on civil rights, black civil rights makes sense as a focal point.

A second concern is the institutional focus on the executive branch, rather than Congress, the Supreme Court, or the political parties. Scholars have increasingly – and rightly – called for greater attention to Congress in studies of American political development.⁴⁹ However, while Congress is a useful site for preference expression, it is a less useful site if the object of inquiry is actual public policy outcomes, at least for the study of civil rights in the 1940s. Recent scholarship by Julian Zelizer supports this interpretation. “In certain respects, World War II had a transformative effect on the United States,” he writes. “. . . The U.S. Congress, however was difficult to change.”⁵⁰ The war “did not bring progress on the legislative front.”⁵¹ As Katznelson and colleagues have

gle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas,” *The Journal of American History* 92(4), 2006, 1212-1237. The 1943 “Zoot Suit Riots” in Los Angeles also highlighted racial tensions between Mexican-Americans and whites in California. See Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁴⁸United States Census Bureau, “Table 1. United States – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990,” 2002, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab01.pdf>; United States Census Bureau, “Table 4. South Region – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990,” 2002, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab04.pdf>; United States Census Bureau, “Table 39. Mississippi – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1800 to 1990,” <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab39.pdf>; United States Census Bureau, “Table 58. Texas – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1850 to 1990,” 2002, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab58.pdf>.

⁴⁹Ira Katznelson and John S. Lapinski, “At the Crossroads: Congress and American Political Development,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4(2), 2006, 243-260.

⁵⁰Julian E. Zelizer, “Confronting the Roadblock: Congress, Civil Rights, and World War II,” in *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 39. The war, he suggests, “did help to produce a generational change in Congress that benefited civil rights. To trace the contributions of the war, however, it is necessary to focus on long-term generational change rather than the

described, the coalition between southern Democrats and northern Republicans, bolstered by institutional features of the Senate like the filibuster, effectively killed almost all civil right legislation. The soldier voting bill is an exception, but its effects were far more limited than those of the executive orders this dissertation analyzes.⁵²

The Supreme Court might also seem a reasonable area of study, particularly since the war coincided with the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* decision, which ruled against the white primary in the South. Klinkner and Smith suggest as much. “The Court’s decision in *Smith* reflected its emerging stress on the protection of civil and political rights, an emphasis influenced by the changing global context,” they write. Although they acknowledge that Justice Stanley Reed, who wrote the *Smith* majority opinion, “made no mention of the war,” they point to two sources: A *New York Times* correspondent, who declared the “real reason” for the Court’s move against the white primary was “that the common sacrifices of wartime have turned public opinion and the Court against previously sustained devices to exclude minorities”; and a 1979 book by the historian Darlene Clark Hine, which argues, “The white primary was one of the casualties of World War II.”⁵³ However, the *Smith* case was somewhat more complicated than that. Intellectually, it was effectively decided prior to U.S. entry into the war, by the decision in early 1941’s *United States v. Classic*, which declared Congress had certain rights to regulate primaries. It is difficult to closely identify the Court’s decision with the wartime context, *per se*. And, of course, in a case that was more directly tied up in World War II – *Korematsu v. United States*, decided later in 1944 – the Court offered one of the most profoundly illiberal, racially exclusionary decisions in its history, ruling that Japanese internment was constitutional.⁵⁴ The courts were important, as the NAACP’s legal advocacy made clear. Yet in the pre-*Brown* era, executive action produced more civil rights outcomes.

The Democratic and Republican National Committees offer a final potential area of study. These party committees have increasingly become an objective of scholarly attention.⁵⁵ The imme-

immediate political situation.” *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵²I do, however, discuss public opinion related to giving ballots to black soldiers in Chapter 2.

⁵³Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 193.

⁵⁴For a contemporaneous discussion of this issue, see Eugene V. Rostow, “The Japanese American Cases—A Disaster,” *Yale Law Journal* 54, July 1945, 489-535.

⁵⁵This literature is still very much in development, but see Daniel Galvin, “The Transformation of Political Institutions: Investments in Institutional Resources and Gradual Change in the National Party Committees,” *Studies in American Political Development* 26(1), 2012, 50-70; Christopher Baylor, “First to the Party: The Group Origins of the

diated postwar period was certainly an important moment of transition in how the national party provided a space for state-level Democratic party elites to negotiate the party's future on civil rights, in a moment when black voters were claiming to be "the balance of power" in presidential elections, rather than electorally captured.⁵⁶ The party committee will play a small role in my analysis of the Truman years. However, while the state parties and the national party committee are excellent sites for preference expression, they, too, are less useful as sites of policy outcomes. This does not mean they do not merit increased scholarly attention. They do. However, that is not the object of this dissertation.

These negative arguments are helpful, but fortunately there are also positive arguments for an executive branch focus. Perhaps most importantly, the actual concrete achievements on civil rights in the 1940s were almost entirely executive orders issued by Roosevelt and Truman, since the racially liberal coalition in the Senate was unable to override "the Southern veto." Although executive orders are often limited in comparison to congressional legislation, they represent the primary accomplishments of the 1940s civil rights agenda.⁵⁷ The executive branch is also inextricably linked to war-making, holding the "sword" in the national government. This fits with growing attention to the "wartime presidency."⁵⁸ Finally, social movements in the 1940s saw the presidency as a place for pressure – probably in large part because they were all too familiar with the filibuster's ability to kill legislation in the Senate. Cornelius Bynum's biography of A. Philip Randolph, for example, suggests the executive branch focus "reflected [Randolph's] basic understanding of interest group politics." Congress "routinely ignored or overlooked the needs of African Americans in drafting New Deal labor legislation," in part because "African Americans wielded insufficient political clout." Randolph, he argues, "recognized that by targeting Roosevelt and later Truman he could concentrate what political leverage African Americans did possess in

Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940-1960," *Studies in American Political Development* 27, 2013, 1-31.

⁵⁶This is a topic I am exploring in a separate project. See Steven White, "Beyond 'Northern' Democrats: State Parties, the Democratic National Committee, and Civil Rights, 1944-1952," Unpublished Manuscript, Columbia University, 2014. For a discussion of "electoral capture," see Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵⁷For a more general discussion of executive orders, see William Howell, "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35(3), 2005, 418-439;

⁵⁸The "sword" rhetoric originates in Federalist 78. For an exploration of the wartime presidency, see William Howell et al., *The Wartime Presidency*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

one branch of government instead of expending it on a disinterested Congress.”⁵⁹

A third issue to address is the link between elite institutions and public opinion. The question of what effect the war might have on racial attitudes was the subject of curiosity at the time. In a 1942 special issue of *The Annals of the American Academic of Political and Social Science* dedicated to the subject of “Minority Peoples in a Nation at War,” the social psychologist Otto Klineberg attempted to set it up this way:

There remains the more general question as to what effect the war situation has had on the attitudes toward minority groups in this country. In terms of what we know of social relationships, it is to be expected that a crisis situation would not leave unaffected the interrelationships among the various subgroups that constitute the American people.

To the question as to what effect a war situation in general, and this war in particular, should have on these interrelationships, it is by no means easy to give a clear and unequivocal answer. In terms of logic and social science, there are factors in the situation which would lead us to expect an improvement in the status of minority groups, and other factors which would lead us to expect the opposite.⁶⁰

A year later, the sociologist Charles S. Johnson described it this way:

In normal times there are numerous issues in the focus of discussion involving race, and these issues are discussions are a part of the public opinion. A crisis situation such as that created by the war penetrates to deeper levels. The issues are larger and more ponderable. They involve not only the options that men discuss but the ideologies that men fight about because they cannot discuss them. In this framework it is perhaps easier to understand the present incidence of racial tension in the United States.

The war has raised new and deeper issues which are closer to the basic ideologies than to the public opinions. It has had a disruptive effect upon the familiar institutions in which racial adjustments of a sort have been worked out. It has made new demands for manpower, in both the military and production fields, which transcend the virtues of the traditional race system. Moreover, the over-all democratic philosophy of the war brings a new hope of freedom to the minorities and, at the same time, brings a threat of dissolution to the long entrenched traditions of social and racial dominance.⁶¹

While the Johnson quote ends on a positive note, Klineberg’s assessment that there are “factors

⁵⁹Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 189-190.

⁶⁰Otto Klineberg, “Race Prejudice and the War,” *The Annals of the American Academic of Political and Social Science* 223, 1942, 190.

⁶¹Charles S. Johnson and Associates, *To Stem this Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States*, (New York: AMS Press, 1943), ix.

in the situation which would lead us to expect an improvement in the status of minority groups, and other factors which would lead us to expect the opposite” is perhaps the better guideline for this project. For the purposes of this dissertation, my concern with race and American democracy leads me to consider public opinion a critical component. Yet “public opinion” at this time period was not necessarily meant to be a representative cross-section of all the public. Pollsters like George Gallup were often more interested in surveying the voting public – leading to severe under sampling of African Americans generally, but black southerners in particular – which is somewhat different than present-day practices. However, even this more limited public – whites, basically – was useful if the concern is the link between people and politicians, as politicians were largely concerned with the preferences of the white voting public in an era of legal white supremacy in the South.⁶² There are more practical reasons as well. Given the tendency to simply assume World War II liberalized white racial attitudes, an empirical examination of whether this is actually the case is in order. This will provide a more nuanced and accurate understanding of race and American political development, particularly since state-centered analyses have often made underlying claims about public attitudes, without reference to such survey evidence.⁶³

Roadmap

This dissertation integrates analytical perspectives from the study of American political development and the study of public opinion and political behavior, two aspects of the American politics subfield that do not generally speak to each other. As Daniel Carpenter notes, research in the American political development tradition has “consistently analyzed institutions at the expense of emergent patterns of citizen behavior and organization.”⁶⁴ Likewise, while scholars of public opinion and political behavior have analyzed historical survey data, they generally have not

⁶²This theoretical justification will be addressed further in Chapter 2, which introduces the promises and perils of using polls from the quota sampling era pre-1952. With reference to the behavioral tradition, this limited public measured by early pollsters is reminiscent of V. O. Key, Jr.’s definition of public opinion as “those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed.” V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961), 262.

⁶³This argument is further developed in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴Daniel P. Carpenter. “The Multiple and Material Legacies of Stephen Skowronek,” *Social Science History* 27(3), 2003, 467.

given significant attention to its relationship with the sort of institutional change that concerns American political development scholars. Methodologically, then, I aim to bring together historical institutionalist and political behavioral approaches, considering both changes in institutions like the executive branch and the content of public opinion. In framing my inquiries, I strive to achieve a balance between reading history forward by relying on contemporaneous observations about the war and civil rights on the one hand, and presenting my data analysis and historical narratives with an eye toward present-day theoretical inquiries on the other.⁶⁵

Chapter 2 provides a descriptive baseline of white racial attitudes in the midst of the Second World War using two largely forgotten sources: the 1944 “Attitudes Toward Negroes” study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), and a NORC mini-sample examining attitudes toward soldier voting legislation then pending in Congress. Along with this substantive overview of the state of white racial attitudes, I also discuss the nature of public opinion surveys from this era, providing an overview of the weighting protocol recently developed that helps alleviate some of the sampling concerns related to them. This chapter concludes by considering the broader theoretical goals that will complement this baseline overview in the third chapter.

Chapter 3 gathers the available survey evidence to assess two theoretical expectations. The first is that the Second World War led to increases in white support for black civil rights in general; the second is that serving in the war led white veterans to be more racially liberal than their civilian counterparts who did not serve. I demonstrate that white attitudes toward civil rights policies – particularly federal intervention in state lynching cases and attitudes toward the abolishment of the poll tax – did not liberalize over the course of the war. If anything, white opposition to anti-lynching legislation actually increased, especially in the South. For veterans, the results are somewhat more mixed. White veterans were indistinguishable from non-veteran whites on many measures of racial prejudice. However, they were more supportive of federal anti-lynching legislation in the war’s immediate aftermath, and southern white veterans were more supportive of black voting rights in the early 1960s. The results have implications for scholarship assuming a

⁶⁵For an articulation of what it means to “read history forward,” see Giovannia Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond,” *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (8/9), 2010, 931-968.

liberalization of white attitudes, as well as recent analyses of the link between economic and civil rights liberalism in mass attitudes that have not focused on the wartime context.

Chapter 4 turns to the executive branch and considers the Roosevelt administration's record on civil rights in the context of the Second World War. Relying on internal executive branch documents, as well as attempts by black newspapers to get the administration to comment on the Double-V campaign, I demonstrate the White House's familiarity with the Double-V rhetoric of civil rights activists, and frame this as part of a larger debate within the Roosevelt administration about whether to maintain a New Deal focus on social policy or focus almost entirely on the military aspects of World War II. I then demonstrate how wartime activism compelled Roosevelt to issue an executive order to combat defense industry discrimination, but how this constrained the broader anti-job discrimination agenda. In demonstrating this dual effect of the war, these findings offer a more accurate depiction of the Roosevelt administration's civil rights record.

Chapter 5 examines the Truman administration's record on civil rights in a similar light. In particular, I point to Truman's belief in the republican virtues of military service as a variable that can mediate between his personal racism and relatively more extensive civil rights program. I demonstrate how violence against returning black veterans in the immediate postwar period led Truman to issue an executive order establishing the President's Committee on Civil Rights. I then discuss his executive order calling for equality of opportunity and treatment in the armed forces, eventually leading to the desegregation of the U.S. military. I also highlight one non-outcome: an effort by some in the Truman administration to establish a Presidential Committee on the Right to Vote, which was ultimately killed by party insiders. I finally consider how Truman's post-presidency analysis of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement can elucidate the constrained nature of his civil rights "liberalism." In demonstrating how the war both compelled and constrained the Truman administration's actions, I mediate between more positive accounts and more critical ones, demonstrating how analyses of Truman's relatively greater civil rights accomplishments must also take into account how his civil rights agenda was largely focused on racism directed against black veterans in particular, rather than African Americans more generally.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by analytically summarizing the evidence from the public opin-

ion and executive branch chapters into a coherent narrative of the war's effects on white racial attitudes and the presidencies of Roosevelt and Truman. I discuss the scholarly implications of this project for studies of race and American political development more generally, as well as the long-term implications of the policy developments the wartime context produced. The overall goal of this dissertation – what I hope to achieve by adding up these individual components – is to offer the best possible empirical assessment of the ways in which World War II did – and, in other ways, did not – alter the racialized limits of American democracy. In synthesizing the evidence provided in previous chapters, the conclusion attempts to offer such an assessment.

Chapter 4

The Roosevelt Administration and Civil Rights During the Second World War

“It is transparently clear that we shall need to employ to their fullest all our resources, material and moral, in our struggle to maintain democracy in the world.

We can do so only if we marshal all of our forces in a democratic fashion and eliminate internal inconsistencies which bring into question the reality of the objectives for which your country is fighting.”

—Proposed reply for the President to make to a letter concerning military discrimination, January 5, 1943⁶⁶

“[A]nswer the letter yourself and tone it down.”

—President Roosevelt’s response⁶⁷

The presidential administration of Franklin Roosevelt – perhaps the most economically liberal one in American political history – has frequently been charged with neglecting racial inequality. Scholars have demonstrated how the administration compromised with southern white supremacists to pass economically liberal New Deal legislation that often excluded African Americans from their benefits (a common example being the exclusion of farmworkers and maids from the Social Security Act). Similarly, wartime measures like the G. I. Bill have been seen by some as “affirmative action for whites,” in turn leaving black veterans behind. This chapter places this debate about the Roosevelt administration and the politics of civil rights in the context of the Second World War. It asks how the war shaped and constrained the administration’s racial agenda; how various actors in the executive branch understood – and, in some cases, did not understand – the rhetorical strategy employed by civil rights organizations linking the war effort to their domestic agenda; and, overall, how the international struggle against Nazism shaped the politics of civil

⁶⁶Letter Draft, Mark Ethridge, Undated; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942”; OF 93; Franklin D. Roosevelt President’s Official Files, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter cited as FDR Official Files).

⁶⁷Letter, Franklin Roosevelt to Marvin McIntyre, January 13, 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

rights in the latter half of Roosevelt's presidency. In doing so, it sheds new light on debates about the administration's relative inaction on civil rights, as well as the relationship between war and policymaking more generally.

Members of the Roosevelt administration can be divided into three camps: those unaffected by the war (the President himself, whose relative detachment from racial concerns remained largely unchanged; Secretary Harold Ickes, whose racial liberalism made him a common target of appeals by civil rights groups, but who deferred to his position as a Cabinet member to deflect requests for action); those made more aware of racial inequality by it (Secretary Henry Stimson, initially perhaps the most racially conservative member of the administration, who was finally affected by images of black citizens beaten by whites in the Detroit race riot); and those made more cynical and conservative in their attitudes toward race by it (Secretary Frances Perkins, who largely ignored race during her tenure in the administration, preferring to focus on issues of class, but who became increasingly vocal in her criticisms of civil rights actors in the 1950s). This typology helps distinguish the groups of individuals within the administration who helped establish what the Roosevelt administration's record on race would come to be.

I argue wartime activism compelled the Roosevelt administration to act earlier, but that the war also constrained what civil rights activists were able to achieve. The war pushed the very specific issues of defense industry discrimination and military segregation onto the racial agenda, at the expense of the 1930s anti-lynching and anti-poll tax campaigns. This had a dual effect: It more firmly integrated class and economics into the civil rights agenda, but the war-specific nature of those claims simultaneously inhibited broader critiques of more systematic discrimination across all economic sectors (particularly discrimination by private businesses). In the absence of the Second World War, it is possible even the limited civil rights progress made under the purview of the Roosevelt administration would not have occurred. Yet the war also shaped the contours of what seemed possible. The war simultaneously made progress on certain issues more likely and other issues less likely, which is helpful in elucidating why the 1940s civil rights agenda progressed as it did.

Previous Research

Much research on civil rights politics in this time period is about the congressional “conservative coalition” and Roosevelt’s general acquiescence to it. Writing in 1949, Richard Hofstadter declared that southerners in Congress “are exercising a concurrent veto,” with the result being that the Democratic Party “thus finds itself in the anomalous position of being a party of ‘liberalism,’ whose achievements are subject to veto by a reactionary fashion.”⁶⁸ V. O. Key’s *Southern Politics*, also published in 1949, offered an initial empirical assessment of roll call data that would come to inspire future scholarship on Congress. In particular, scholars came to be interested in what Key called the “peculiar combination or cumulation of circumstances” that would lead southern Democrats into a coalition with Republicans against northern Democrats. One factor Key highlighted was “the compounding of regional interest plus agrarian antipathy toward labor.”⁶⁹ Ira Katznelson and colleagues have described how the intertwining of race and labor eventually created a cross-partisan alliance between racist southern Democrats and economically conservative Republicans, and the general role of southern Democratic congressmen in “limiting liberalism” during the New Deal and Fair Deal.⁷⁰

This affected several policy areas. One of the primary policy examples given is the “race-laden eligibility requirements” of the 1935 Social Security Act, particularly the exclusion of farmworkers and maids – the main employment opportunities available to black southerners at this time.⁷¹ The soldier voting debate likewise engaged such issues. As Key describes it, “The Republicans did not want the soldiers to vote Democratic. The southern Democrats did not want colored soldiers to vote.”⁷² Another policy, more related to the war, is the 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, which Katznelson describes as “[w]ritten under southern auspices” by racially conservative members of

⁶⁸Richard Hofstadter, “From Calhoun to the Dixiecrats,” *Social Research* 16, 1949, 150.

⁶⁹V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006 [1949]), 359. For a further clarification of Key’s analysis, see John Robert Moore, “The Conservative Coalition in the United States Senate, 1942-1945,” *The Journal of Southern History* 33(3), 1967, 368-376.

⁷⁰Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson, “The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal,” *Studies in American Political Development* 19, 2005, 1-30. See also Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, “Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950,” *Political Science Quarterly* 108(2), 1993, 283-306.

⁷¹Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7.

⁷²Key, *Southern Politics*, 358-59

Congress and “deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow.”⁷³ Despite pressure, the White House was hesitant to intervene in such congressional debates at risk of harming the coalition with southern Democrats.

Despite the compelling evidence of the Roosevelt administration’s failings on civil rights, not all accounts are so negative. Perhaps the most prominent revisionist account of the Roosevelt administration on race is provided by Kevin McMahon. He argues the Roosevelt administration set the groundwork for the civil rights movement to come in a number of ways: what he calls “reconstructive legislation, appointments to the federal courts, and Justice Department efforts to extend federal protection of civil rights.”⁷⁴ For my purposes here, the third pillar – Justice Department efforts to protect civil rights through the Civil Rights Section – is most relevant. McMahon’s strongest contribution is highlighting the importance of this relatively little known group. However, when McMahon tries to link President Roosevelt himself as directly as possible to the creation of the Civil Rights Section, the argument becomes less compelling.⁷⁵

This debate about the Roosevelt administration and race correlates temporally with the Second World War, but generally does not take the war itself as an independent variable of particular note. Similarly, the policy focus is generally not on those civil rights policies related to defense industry discrimination or military segregation. There are two prominent exceptions: Philip Klinkner and Rogers Smith’s *The Unsteady March* and Daniel Kryder’s *Divided Arsenal*. The former argues war has been a necessary factor in achieving greater racial equality, while the latter argues war tends to correspond to increases in racial crowd violence. I briefly describe what each text claims about the Second World War in particular, with a focus on unresolved tensions between the two arguments this dissertation hopes to examine.

“Given that the New Deal was largely ineffective in forcing the nation to confront Jim Crow,”

⁷³Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 114. This critical assessment of the G. I. Bill is challenged, however, by Mettler, who argues its implementation was more racially equitable than Katznelson believes. Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For further analysis of this debate, see Ira Katznelson and Suzanne Mettler, “On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue About the G.I. Bill,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6(3), 2008, 519-537.

⁷⁴Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

Klinkner and Smith argue, “it is hard to escape the conclusion that it was instead the emergence of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s that most set the stage of real transformations.” Regarding the struggle for fair employment, they write that the achievement of an executive order to fight defense industry discrimination was possible because their three-part theory of war and civil rights progress was met: (1) “the ideological demands of fighting an enemy who espoused racial hierarchies made more white Americans sensitive to the presence of racial discrimination in America” and “[t]he vision of blacks marching to claim their rights contradicted the image of America as the defender of democracy”; (2) “though America had not yet entered the war, the nation’s defense buildup was of crucial importance since Hitler seemed unstoppable” and “[m]arches and protests threatened to disrupt this buildup”; and (3) “most importantly, blacks actively took advantage of the first two factors to press a still-reluctant government for greater equality.”⁷⁶

Kryder’s account of the Second World War, by contrast, focuses on the increase in racial crowd violence. He argues the executive branch’s primary goal was in maintaining order, which sometimes led to racially progressive outcomes and sometimes led to discriminatory ones. His overall account is negative: Although some short-term advances might have occurred, in the long run World War II was not a broad liberalizing force for American race relations.⁷⁷ Klinkner, interestingly, reviewed Kryder’s book when it was released. In the review, he applauded Kryder for being “aware of the importance of war to state development.” However, he criticized what he saw as Kryder’s attempt to “extrapolate from the case studies to make a larger statement about the effect of World War II on American race relations.” Klinkner sees Kryder’s argument – which he describes as, “the war had little lasting positive influence and, if anything, actually constrained the movement toward civil rights” – as an unfair analysis, “using the civil rights advances of the 1960s as his benchmark of reassessing the achievements of the 1940s, which clearly do not measure up.”⁷⁸

These books make disparate claims in two ways. First, they make divergent claims about the

⁷⁶Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 137, 160.

⁷⁷Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷⁸Philip A. Klinkner, Review of *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, *American Political Science Review* 95(3), 2001, 735.

war and white racial attitudes – as described in previous chapters, Klinkner and Smith assume the war must have led a meaningful number of white Americans to reconsider their racial attitudes, while Kryder explicitly states many Americans were unaware of the relationship between the war and civil rights articulated by Myrdal – yet neither book contains any analysis of public opinion survey data. The preceding two chapters deal with this oversight. Second, the books differ in their analysis of how the war affected actions by the state. This chapter, as well as the one that follows it, considers these divergent perspectives on state action by focusing on the executive branch, trying to offer a middle-ground between the two perspectives in doing so. By offering an alternative perspective on the executive branch – and integrating the study of state institutions with the study of public opinion – this dissertation as a whole offers a more complete analysis of the relationship between the war and civil rights.

Method and Approach

This chapter assesses the hypothesis that World War II led the Roosevelt administration to act earlier and differently on civil rights policies than it would have otherwise. The first part of the hypothesis is temporal: In the absence of war, would the administration have felt similarly compelled to act on the civil rights issues that it did? The second part is substantive: In the absence of war, would the administration have acted on different policies than it did? I am also interested in whether the war led individuals in the administration to change their own beliefs about black civil rights. Such opinion changes could serve as a mechanism through which the shifts noted in the hypothesis might occur.

To assess this, I examine the rhetoric and behavior of the Roosevelt administration, which is defined broadly to include the President, various department secretaries, and presidential assistants both formal and informal. My analysis is divided into three sections. The first section analyzes rhetoric and the wartime policy agenda. I begin by demonstrating that important members of the Roosevelt White House were indeed familiar with the relationship between the war and domestic race relations posited by the rhetoric of civil rights activists. I show how they, in varied ways, engaged with such rhetoric. I then move to an overview of the internal White House

debate over whether the war marked the end of a New Deal social policy focus or a continuation of it. I finally take up one very useful perspective on how administration actors perceived the war and civil rights: their responses to black journalists who directly interrogated them on the relationship between the war and civil rights. The second section considers policy case studies related to lynching, military segregation, job discrimination, and the Detroit race riot. The first issue represents part of the 1930s civil rights agenda; the middle two represent the 1940s civil rights agenda compelled by the war; and the final case represents an issue forced on the administration by events outside of their control. Finally, the third section considers the ideological trajectory of select Roosevelt administration actors once they left office (when they were more likely to talk openly about controversial issues like civil rights).

Rhetoric, Civil Rights, and the Wartime Policy Agenda

Scholarship on the 1940s civil rights movement has described how the Double-V campaign – victory at home *and* abroad – was the rallying cry of activists during World War II.⁷⁹ Much less well understood, however, is the degree to which the White House was aware of, and sometimes engaged with, these rhetorical claims. This section considers this first by looking at how the White House discussed the wartime campaign for civil rights internally, then second by relating this to more general struggles inside the White House over whether to maintain a New Deal social policy focus or turn almost entirely to international affairs. This section concludes by looking at how black journalists pressured the White House to comment on the relationship between the war and civil rights, examining both the silences and, occasionally, responses.

The Wartime Racial Agenda

The Double-V rhetoric was frequently used by civil rights leaders during the war. In mailers sent out to its membership list, the March on Washington Movement declared their motto to be,

⁷⁹See, for example, Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *Journal of American History* 58(3), 1971, 661-681; Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

“WINNING DEMOCRACY FOR THE NEGRO IS WINNING THE WAR FOR DEMOCRACY.”⁸⁰ Such rhetoric was meant to be persuasive, when combined with pressure. There is evidence that civil rights activists were concerned about how the administration would perceive their campaign. For example, Eugene Kinckle Jones of the National Urban League wrote a letter to presidential advisor Samuel Rosenman’s wife on February 10, 1943, laying out his concerns and asking for Rosenman’s opinion. “The Negro stands at the spearhead of forces for social progress, because interracial discord can work such terrific damage to the war effort, both at home and abroad,” he wrote. “Inevitably, and quite properly, Negro spokesmen have not hesitated to point out the need for cleaning up the racial situation on our home front as we go to war to defend democracy abroad.” But Jones was concerned about the pragmatic aspects. Regarding Mr. Rosenman, he wrote, “I believe that is opinion is valuable because he can look at the situation of my organization from his vantage point as an adviser to the President and a man who is thoroughly familiar with the machinery of government.”⁸¹

There is evidence the administration was familiar with such rhetoric. For example, in an October 1, 1942, letter from Lawrence Cramer, executive secretary of FEPC, to Marvin McIntyre, one of Roosevelt’s secretaries, the campaign was discussed quite bluntly:

The argument is frequently advanced that we are fighting Hitler and all of his doctrines, including the doctrine of race superiority, and that there should be a clear and forceful statement by the President pointing out that the doctrine of race superiority is what our enemies are fighting for, not what we are fighting for.

Frequently letter-writers seize upon a statement by the President, or by a high administrative officer of the government directed against the German or Vichy-French government for inhumanities against Jews, religious organizations or minority groups, and argues that if these matters are of concern to our government, inhumanities or differentiation in legal or economic rights of citizens or of residents in this country should be given similar notice by the President or by high administrative officers. Where there is a demand for action by the Federal government in an area where it does not have jurisdiction, it is possible to point out that the matter is beyond the jurisdiction of the

⁸⁰Letter, Negro March-on-Washington Committee, May 15, 1942; Folder: “March on Washington Movement, Circulars, 1941-47”; Box 26; A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Randolph Papers).

⁸¹Letter, Eugene Kinckle Jones to Mrs. Rosenman, February 8, 1943; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-April 1943”; OF 93; FDR Official Files. The archival record also contains a memo to Rosenman from McIntyre and a McIntyre memo to the Attorney General mentioning the letter, further indicating that at least some prominent officials in the executive branch were familiar with it.

Federal government. Where, however, the demand is merely for a statement by the President similar to those made in the case of persecuted church officials in Norway, Poles and Jews in Germany or France, and others, it is more difficult, for me, to answer.⁸²

Prominent members of the Cabinet were likewise familiar with it. Later that year, on December 15, Attorney General Francis Biddle sent Grace Tully, another one of the President's secretaries, a note. "I thought the President might like to see the enclosed November issue of 'Survey Graphic' edited by Professor Alain Locke and devoted to the Negro problem, particularly Negroes in war," Biddle wrote. "It has had wide circulation and has been very favorably commented on."⁸³ Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes was even more clearly in touch with such sentiments. He likely exchanged letters with civil rights leaders more often than any other White House figure, other than perhaps Eleanor Roosevelt.

There is also some indication administration officials understood growing white southern fears that civil rights organizations were using the wartime context as an accelerant for their demands. For example, in a November 25, 1942, memo to the President from administrative assistant Jonathan Daniels about the FEPC investigation of the Capital Transit Company, Daniels wrote that the move is helping to "create Southern fears that the government may be moving to end Jim Crow laws in transportation in the South under the guise of the war effort. It may also lift Negro hopes only to drop them again."⁸⁴ The administration did not want to be seen as a civil rights ally by racial conservatives. On February 22, 1944, Daniels sent a memorandum to presidential correspondence secretary William Hassett about a statement of "negro war aims" submitted to the White House by the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association. "I suggest we duck it," Daniels declared.⁸⁵

Even the most racially liberal members of the administration often weren't willing to take a public stand. On February 10, 1944, Marshall Field, Edwin Embree, and Charles Johnson wrote

⁸²Letter, Lawrence Cramer to Marvin McIntyre, October 1, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁸³Letter, Francis Biddle to Grace Tully, December 15, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁸⁴Memo, Jonathan Daniels to Franklin Roosevelt, November 25, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁸⁵Memorandum, Jonathan Daniels to William Hassett, February 22, 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

a letter to Ickes inviting him to attend a meeting of the Southern Regional Council in Chicago. "The war has forced to the front the question of race and color," the letter began. "This is not a new problem, but its mounting acuteness, as a factor in world civilization, demands that fresh attention be given to what is happening and is likely to happen in America."⁸⁶ On February 17, Ickes responded in a letter addressed to Embree. "What you and your co-signers say in your letter of February 10, is, unfortunately, accurate, and I would love to attend the proposed conference," Ickes wrote. "Unfortunately, I cannot do so." Ickes then proceeded to describe his vacation plans with his wife. "All things considered, and despite my very real interest in the discussion that you are planning, I do not feel that, in justice to myself or in fairness to Mrs. Ickes, I can again disappoint her."⁸⁷

Internal Struggles Over the New Deal and Win-the-War

The debate over wartime civil rights relates to a broader debate that was happening inside the White House. During a December 28, 1943, press conference, President Roosevelt declared that, effectively, "Dr. New Deal" had been replaced by "Dr. Win-the-War."⁸⁸ This turn of phrase came to symbolize the White House's transition from a focus on New Deal domestic policies to one almost entirely dedicated to the military aspects of the Second World War. At the most general level, the debate about what to do – if anything – about civil rights politics during the Second World War can be seen as a subset of this broader question about social vs. foreign policy in the 1940s. This subsection analyzes this internal executive branch debate as a precursor to an analysis of how the White House responded to attempts by black journalists to get the President and his staff to address the wartime claims of civil rights activists.

There was concern that New Dealers were losing prominence in the administration well before the United States entered the war. Half a year before Pearl Harbor, on on April 23, 1941, Rex Tugwell wrote Ickes concerning the relationship between the New Deal and the war. Tugwell

⁸⁶Letter, Marshall Field, Edwin Embree, and Charles Johnson to Harold Ickes, February 10, 1944; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Harold L. Ickes Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington D.C. (hereafter cited as Ickes Papers)

⁸⁷Letter, Harold Ickes to Edwin Embree, February 17, 1944; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

⁸⁸Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Excerpts from the Press Conference," December 28, 1943, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16358>.

had previously served as part of Roosevelt's "Brain Trust," articulating policy ideas for the New Deal economic program.⁸⁹ But as the administration shifted in an internationalist direction, he found his interests less supported. "What is our program? Not to defeat Hitler and humiliate the German people," Tugwell argued. "But rather to defeat him and exalt them with our own ideals." He concluded by stating, "This war will never be won by force. It can only be won as a by-product of carrying the New Deal to the world in word and deed."⁹⁰ Ickes responded on April 24, writing, "The suggestion in your letter of April 23 is an admirable one. The thing that puzzles and distresses me the most these days is that we seem to have a leader who won't lead. The next time you are in Washington, I would like to talk to you about the whole situation. I am more than willing to give all that I have but can anyone make a dent except the President, unless, perchance, someone in direct opposition to the President?"⁹¹

The most prominent advocate of maintaining a New Deal social agenda in wartime was Eleanor Roosevelt. The First Lady was the clearest voice in the President's ear advocating for a continued focus on domestic inequalities during wartime, and her role as an intermediary between civil rights activists and unsympathetic White House figures will play a prominent role later in the chapter. Some other administration officials also seemed to prefer the maintenance of a domestic focus during the war. On November 8, 1944, Biddle sent a letter to Roosevelt congratulating him on winning the election. "I do not think that the great issues of the war can be separated from the domestic issues," he wrote. "International cooperation necessarily involves a tolerant and liberal outlook..."⁹²

In the end, however, this position lost out. The president's focus was almost exclusively on the international arena. The Department of War came to capture more and more of Roosevelt's attention, and – as will be seen in the sections to come – they were staunchly opposed to calls for the military to help alleviate racial inequities. Even Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins agreed.

⁸⁹For a discussion of these advisors, see Elliot A. Rosen, "Roosevelt and the Brains Trust: An Historiographical Overview," *Political Science Quarterly* 87(4), 1972, 531-557. For an articulation of Tugwell's perspective on governance, see Rexford G. Tugwell, "Design for Government," *Political Science Quarterly* 48(3), 1933, 321-332.

⁹⁰Letter, Rex Tugwell to Harold Ickes, April 23, 1941; Folder: "Apr.-June, 1941"; Box 373; Ickes Papers

⁹¹Letter, Harold Ickes to Rex Tugwell, April 24, 1941; Folder: "Apr.-June, 1941"; Box 373; Ickes Papers

⁹²Letter, Francis Biddle to Franklin Roosevelt, November 8; Folder: "Roosevelt, Franklin D."; Box 2; Francis Biddle Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter cited as Biddle Papers).

Regarding the President's shift from emphasizing the New Deal to "win-the-war," she later said, "Well, that was a proper thing to say. What he meant by it was let us temporarily suspend these various humanitarian movements that we have been breathing into the law of this land, and bend all our energies on winning the War. When the War's over, we'll see what we can do then."⁹³

The Baltimore *Afro-American* and the White House

The most direct avenue to explore the degree to which executive branch figures did – and did not – relate the war effort to domestic racial issues comes from examining their replies to black journalists, who frequently encouraged them to make statements on precisely this connection. In particular, Michael Carter, a reporter at the Baltimore *Afro-American*, made a concerted effort to get prominent public officials to address the relationship between American participation in the war and the demands of civil rights activists. Indeed, the list of questions he sent such figures is nearly identical to the ones a contemporary researcher might come up with were they given access to a time machine and a survey firm. Carter's interviews provide a unique – and largely forgotten – window into how national political figures articulated the relationship between the war effort and race relations at home.

His requests were often denied. For instance, he tried twice to secure an interview with President Roosevelt. The first inquiry came on August 31, 1942. Carter justified the request using fairly nationalist rhetoric. "The basic ideas behind these interviews is to interpret, through a channel which Negroes respect and use, the war and our relationship to it," he wrote. "The interviews combat the dangerous Axis serving and perhaps Axis inspired propaganda that is trickling into urban Negro communities. Armed with your answers to the enclosed questions the Negro would be encouraged to even greater efforts toward total victory." He also mentioned how he was directly helped by the Federal Writers' Project.⁹⁴ The second request came in the aftermath of the Detroit race riots on June 25, 1943. He acknowledged his previous request was declined. But, Carter declared, "[n]ow, something else, something terrible has happened. Those riots have sapped Negro

⁹³Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 527, in the Oral History Research Office Collection of the Columbia University Libraries (hereafter cited as Perkins Oral History).

⁹⁴Letter, Michael Carter to Franklin Roosevelt, August 31, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) July-Aug 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

morale, changed Negro attitudes towards the war, America, democracy and race relations. If it were possible for you, as it is for me, to over hear conversations in pool parlors, beer gardens, beauty parlors, YMCA's barracks etc. you should really understand the nature of the body blow to Negro morale." He used this set-up to frame his request. "I beg you to grant me an interview – a statement – a talk with a White House representative, anything to antidote the poison, to assure the Negro that this is still his war and that his most murderous enemies are in Berlin," Carter wrote. "Such an interview would be equal to gunpowder. It would rebuild confidence in the Negro."⁹⁵ Stephen Early replied to Carter on June 29 to say the President still could not break the policy of not granting exclusive interviews, but suggested he talk to Francis Haas, who had recently been appointed chairman of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice.⁹⁶

Carter also unsuccessfully requested an interview with one of Roosevelt's secretaries, Marvin McIntyre. "I would like your advice as to what I ought to do about this," McIntyre wrote William Hassett. "Naturally, I want to turn it down but I don't want to hurt any feelings." McIntyre politely declined Carter's request a few days later. "Were it not for the fact that I have very consistently refrained from press interviews and from any writing, I would be glad to cooperate with you," he wrote. "As you know, my work as Secretary is entirely divorced from the public relations, and I have always felt that I should refrain from public expression of my personal views."⁹⁷

However, Carter had better luck with Ickes. "May I arrange an interview with you on the Negro and the war?," Carter asked. "The Negro people are avidly interested in anything you have to say about or to them. Therefore an interview with you would be of particular interest in this morale building series. We are motivated by a desire to increase the Negroes' interest in an knowledge of the war. Anything you have to say on this would be important." He submitted a list of questions, although indicated a preference for an in-person discussion.⁹⁸ "I regret that my

⁹⁵Letter, Michael Carter to Franklin Roosevelt, June 25, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), May-June 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁹⁶Letter, Stephen Early to Michael Carter, June 29, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), May-June 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁹⁷Memorandum, Marvin McIntyre to William Hassett, January 20, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-April 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁹⁸Letter, Michael Carter to Harold Ickes, March 30, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

schedule is so heavy that I am unable to find time for an interview on the subject of the Negro and the war," Ickes responded. "I shall, however, try to answer your questions by this letter." In response to the question, "Should the Negro continue his drive for ethnic freedom during the course of the war, or should such activity be postponed until a victorious peace?," Ickes wrote, "In my personal opinion, yes – provided that it does not seriously interfere with the prosecution of the war, which must come first." Similarly, when asked, "Can the war be considered won if at its conclusion the status of the Negro, in American life, remains unchanged?," Ickes responded, "This is a question of definition. We must not confuse the winning of the war, which is a military problem, with the winning of democratic rights. We can win the war on the battlefield and still have to go on fighting to protect or preserve certain rights." Notably, one question asked by Carter was, "The last war was punctuated by a series of race riots. To date there have been none, or at least, but few. To what do you attribute the happy change? Need Negroes fear a repetition of riots against them?" Ickes responded, "I believe that the absence of race riots in this war is largely the result of President Roosevelt's consistent policy of attacking discrimination against Negroes, particularly in plants that do war work."⁹⁹ Two months later, a race riot erupted in Detroit. In his *Afro-American* write-up of the interview, Carter noted that Ickes "hedges a little" on military segregation. "In war time questions concerning army policy should be decided purely on the basis of what would produce least friction and most military success," Ickes said. "This is for the War Department and the general staff to decide." "That's buck passing," Carter wrote, "but if it came to a vote I suspect I know where he would stand."¹⁰⁰

A few days earlier, on March 27, 1943, Ickes received a letter from John H. Johnson, managing editor of the *Negro Digest*, asking him to write an article addressing the question, "Have you ever thought about what you would do if you were a Negro?" Ickes responded on April 15, 1943:

I regret very much that lack of time makes it impossible for me to contribute an article on the subject, "If I Were a Negro," to your magazine. I have always felt that discrimination on the basis of race, color, or religion, is a disgrace to any country where it exists. The treatment of the Negro in this country is nothing for any American to be proud of, but I am happy to say that the situation is definitely improving. The road to

⁹⁹Letter, Harold Ickes to Michael Carter, April 13, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁰⁰Michael Carter, "I Have Done Everything to Abolish Discrimination," *Afro-American*, June 5, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

equality of opportunity is still long and hard, and "If I Were a Negro" I would not stop until I had reached the goal.¹⁰¹

Carter also secured a response from Eleanor Roosevelt, although it was less positive than he would have liked. Carter led the article with her response to the question, "Should the colored man take advantage of the present crisis to further his own ends?" The First Lady responded, "No one who realizes why this war is being fought and no one who knows that the loss of freedom means, should take advantage of this crisis in history to further his own ends unless in furthering them he does so with the interest of the whole country in mind... Surely nothing will be gained by colored people's efforts to advance themselves at the expense of the total war effort, unless we all work together for the one end; peace and a chance to build a better world." To be clear, she did criticize racially discriminatory policies – but did not articulate the war as a means of overcoming them.¹⁰² It is possible she felt uncomfortable stating her private beliefs in a public setting inasmuch as they clashed with the administration's focus on winning the peace internationally.

Carter also interviewed Vice President Henry Wallace, who made a number of generally racially liberal comments. However, Wallace was not entirely optimistic about the future. As Carter wrote in the *Afro-American*:

The interview ended on a depressing tone. I told the Vice President that there was a democratic awareness in America. White people I thought, were becoming more conscious of the fact that we were denied normal American privileges and that we deserved better treatment. The Vice President had no such optimism. He said:

"I only hope you are right. I wish there were a greater spirit of fair play and a greater knowledge of the real spirit of this war. The need for fraternity and unity is still great."¹⁰³

Carter also interviewed two figures in the War Department. The first was Paul McNutt. He mostly talked about the necessity of using black workers, although the article's conclusion quotes McNutt as saying, "Democracy must not only be won. Democracy must be re-won. It must be

¹⁰¹Letter, Harold Ickes to John H. Johnson, April 15, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁰²Michael Carter, "U.S. Must Give Vote and Equal Pay to Everyone—Mrs. FDR," *Afro-American*, July 18, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰³Michael Carter, "No Freedom Here: Colored People, says V-President Wallace 'We Haven't Solved Problem Anywhere'," *Afro-American*, October 23, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

defended every day in the year. And by striving for it we shall approach it. This is our battle."¹⁰⁴ Truman Gibson, in his position as civilian aide to the Secretary of War, also provided comments to Carter. Many of the points were banal and factual. He also offered a defense of the Army, stating, "We must not stop hitting at jim crow. I think the army is as much opposed to injustice as anyone else. I know what they are doing against brutality."¹⁰⁵ As will be described in the next chapter, however Gibson was less restrained in criticizing the military in internal documents than he was in this public statement.

While Carter was less successful with President Roosevelt, he did secure an interview with Wendell Willkie. The 1940 Republican presidential candidate was much more willing to link the war against the Axis to the fight against racial discrimination at home. "Yes siree," he said, "I do not think that the colored man should stop his honest struggles for democracy because of the war. I see absolutely no inconsistency in the two aims. That is part and parcel of what we are fighting for on a national scale. There is no contradiction of purpose in that."¹⁰⁶ Carter also secured a 1942 interview with Thomas Dewey, who would be the Republican presidential candidate in 1944 and 1948. Dewey described how he felt discrimination was interfering with the war effort. "A large portion of our population is being thwarted in its patriotism and deprived of its right to take full part in the national effort," he said. "This is not only ugly and hateful; it is downright stupid. It is not simply a blunder; it is a crime." Carter also wrote that Dewey "displays a considerable knowledge of the colored race's history." This tied into nationalist rhetoric. "He knew, for instance, that Garveyism was a backbone of the back-to-Africa movement and that these movements were utilized—to a degree—by the Jap agents," Carter wrote. "I've been struck by the similarity between Marcus Garvey and Mussolini," Dewey commented. "The philosophy of one is identical with that of the other."¹⁰⁷

Carter's efforts elucidate several aspects of how prominent executive branch figures did and

¹⁰⁴Michael Carter, "U.S. Not Using Enough Colored War Workers, Warns Paul V. McNutt," *Afro-American*, December 12, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁵Michael Carter, "An Interview with: Truman K. Gibson Civilian Aide to Secretary of War," *Afro-American*, July 17, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁶Michael Carter, "America Will Lose the Peace Unless It Gives Equal Duties and Opportunity to Everyone," *Afro-American*, August 15, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁷Michael Carter, "Race Hate Choking All of Nation—Dewey," *Afro-American*, October 24, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

did not engage with the wartime civil rights rhetoric. The declined requests directed at the President and his secretaries hint at Roosevelt's general frustration with civil rights activists during the war. The War Department responses indicate a sense that some engagement was necessary, but they did not want to say too much. The responses by Ickes and Eleanor Roosevelt show how even sympathetic figures were hesitant to go on the record against the administration's line. Wallace's open cynicism is an interesting exception. Finally, the more adamant support offered by Willkie and Dewey is indicative of the broader electoral pressures facing the White House in responding to black demands.

Policy Case Studies

This section considers a series of policy case studies: the the anti-lynching campaign at the close of the 1930s, the struggle against military discrimination, Executive Order 8802 and defense industry employment discrimination, and the White House's response to the Detroit race riot. Of particular note is how the 1940s civil rights policy agenda came to be largely dominated by war-specific measures: the successful attempt at pressuring Roosevelt to draft an executive order combatting defense industry discrimination (rather than industry more broadly), and the unsuccessful (at least during Roosevelt's tenure) push to desegregate the military, rather than tear down segregation in society more broadly.

Anti-Lynching Legislation and the Beginnings of Internationalist Rhetoric

Anti-lynching legislation was perhaps the most prominent civil rights policy issue of the 1930s, comparable only to the anti-poll tax campaign.¹⁰⁸ It began to lose steam in the 1940s, partly as the result of legislative roadblocks in the Senate and partly because other issues came to dominate the racial agenda during the war. However, the debate about lynching in the lead-up to the war contains interesting hints of the rhetoric to come.

In 1936, Senator Edward Costigan cosponsored an anti-lynching bill and told his fellow Sen-

¹⁰⁸For a discussion of anti-lynching legislation advocacy in the 1930s, see Robert L. Zangrando, "The NAACP and a Federal anti-lynching Bill, 1934-1940," *Journal of Negro History* 50(2), 1965, 106-117.

ators bluntly that the bill gave the country “a choice between Hitler and Mussolini on the one side, and Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Henry Grady, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the other.”¹⁰⁹ Like all such bills, however, it never became law. On February 5, 1938, Carl Murphy of the *Afro-American* newspapers wrote to presidential secretary Marvin McIntyre. “Our people feel keenly the fact that the President has made no public statement on the anti-lynching bill since it has been in Congress,” he said. “They feel that such a public word will bring encouragement to advocates of the measure and dismay to those who are opposed to it.” He acknowledged the coalitional issues related to southern Democrats. However, he compared Senate rhetoric to the totalitarian regimes of Europe. “It is not doing us as a party any good to have the Congressional Record and the public press filled, day after day, with anti-Negro propaganda matching in bigotry and prejudice anything published in Germany, Russia or Italy against Jews, Catholics and aliens,” he wrote.¹¹⁰

Lynching did not completely exit the agenda during the war. On December 11, 1942, Biddle stayed after a Cabinet meeting to talk with Roosevelt. “I suggested to the President that he direct me, to which he agreed, to call a group of the outstanding people interested in the Negro situation to work out with them a more competent handling of the whole problem. I reported to the President our investigation of and authorization of a grand jury proceeding in the recent Mississippi case of Howard Walsh, a negro who was lynched as a result of the jailer leaving unlocked the door of his cell so that the mob entered and dragged him out. The President was pleased with the way we handled it.”¹¹¹ The issue, though, certainly declined in prominence as the war pushed other issues onto the agenda like military segregation and defense industry discrimination, and the congressional anti-lynching campaign started to falter. However, the rhetorical trajectory of the decade began to emerge in the late 1930s anti-lynching campaign; its pinnacle would be reached in the 1940s as the issues on the agenda themselves became more explicitly linked to the war.

¹⁰⁹Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 138-139.

¹¹⁰Letter, Carl Murphy to Marvin McIntyre, February 5, 1938; Folder: “Lynching 1938-1944”; OF 93a; FDR Official Files.

¹¹¹Meeting Notes, Francis Biddle, December 11, 1942; Folder: “Cabinet meetings, July-Dec. 1942”; Box 1; Biddle Papers.

Race and Troop Policy Debates Before U.S. Entry

One issue that emerged as a result of the war was the debate over the segregated military. Troop policy debates emerged well before U.S. entry into World War II. This was partially the result of the black experience serving in the First World War, which activists like W. E. B. Du Bois thought – incorrectly, it turned out – would lead to major civil rights advances. This led to major concerns as the lead up to the Second World War unfolded. For example, on March 9, 1939, Roy Wilkins wrote the President enclosing an article in *The Crisis* titled “Old Jim Crow in Uniform,” as well as a copy of a letter to Secretary of War Harry Woodring. The editorial was about military discrimination during World War I. McIntyre acknowledged receipt of the editorial on March 13, but there is no indication the White House took it particularly seriously.¹¹²

In personal correspondence prior to U.S. entry, Ickes took a positive stance in favor of greater black integration in the military. On May 27, 1940, Paul H. Douglas – then of the Chicago City Council – wrote Ickes. “I have noticed from the track meets and boxing contests that the colored people have generally a high degree of physical and nervous coordination, which must mean that there are a large number of very capable potential pilots in their ranks,” Douglas wrote. “The country will benefit from their services.” On May 31, 1940, Ickes responded, writing, “Personally, I see no reason why competent Negroes should not be trained to be pilots, and if they are competent they ought to be given their chance.”¹¹³ Eleanor Roosevelt also became concerned about anti-black discrimination in the military. In 1940, she accepted an invitation from A. Philip Randolph to speak at the Convention of Sleeping Car Porters, which according to Goodwin, “set into motion a chain of events that would carry her into the center of a convulsive battle for racial equality in the armed forces.”¹¹⁴ She would play an even more important role after the United States formally entered the war.

Perhaps the most prominent event related to race and troop policy prior to U.S. involvement

¹¹²Letter, Roy Wilkins to Franklin Roosevelt, March 9, 1939; Folder: “Lynching 1938-1944”; Box OF 93a; FDR Official Files.

¹¹³Letter, Paul H. Douglas to Harold Ickes, May 27, 1940; Folder: “Negroes, 1933-1945”; Box 213; Ickes Papers; Letter, Harold Ickes to Paul H. Douglas, May 31, 1940; Folder: “Negroes, 1933-1945”; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹¹⁴Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 161.

came on September 27, 1940, when civil rights leaders met in the White House. Civil rights activists had pressed White House secretaries for the meeting, but only succeeded when they submitted the request through the more sympathetic First Lady. The eventual meeting consisted of Randolph, NAACP Secretary Walter White, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Assistant Secretary of War Robert Patterson, and the President. In his diary, Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote that he sent Patterson “because I really had so much else to do.” Patterson apparently told him it was “an amusing affair – the President’s gymnastics as to politics. I saw the same thing happen 23 years ago when Woodrow Wilson yielded to the same sort of demand and appointed colored officers to several of the Divisions that went over to France, and the poor fellows made perfect fools of themselves.” His overall assessment of black capacities was blunt. “Leadership is not embedded in the Negro race yet,” he wrote, “and to try to make commissioned officers to lead the men into battle is only to work disaster to both.”¹¹⁵

Randolph and White pressed the administration for meaningful policies to address civil rights. The President was jovial, if noncommittal and, at times, slightly demeaning (in response to Randolph’s inquiry about the rank about black members of the Navy, Roosevelt said, “There’s no reason why we shouldn’t have a colored band on some of these ships, because they’re darn good at it”).¹¹⁶ However, most accounts suggest Randolph and White left thinking some progress had been made.

On October 8, 1940, Patterson sent a memo to President Roosevelt about black participation in national defense. He included a statement of War Department policies, which had been informally approved by the Secretary of War and Chief of Staff. The policies included black soldiers serving in black units with black officers; some training of black soldiers as pilots, mechanics, and technical specialists; and an explicit statement that the policy of the War Department is against attempts to “intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel” in the same units. Stephen Early returned the memo on October 9 with the President’s penciled in approval; a statement of the policy was released to the press on that same day.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Ibid., 169.

¹¹⁶William Doyle, *Inside the Oval Office: The White House Tapes from FDR to Clinton*, (New York: Kodansha International, 1999), 15.

¹¹⁷Memo, Robert Patterson to Franklin Roosevelt, October 8, 1940, Box OF 93b, Folder “Segregation, 1933-45,” Official

The press release infuriated civil rights activists, who felt it implied they agreed with segregation policies. The NAACP sent out its own press release with the headline, "White House charged with trickery in announcing Jim Crow policy of Army." White wrote a letter to Ickes, attaching the release and stating, "I want you to see the enclosed story on an issue of very great importance not only to the Negro but to many white people who are fair-minded and who believe in practicing democracy as well as talking about it." Ickes forwarded the letter to the President, although it is unclear if Roosevelt read it himself.¹¹⁸

On October 21, David Niles wrote to Early regarding a proposed statement responding to the controversy. "I think this statement is restrained, makes no commitment, and may do the trick," Niles wrote.¹¹⁹ On October 25, 1940, the President sent letters to White, Randolph, and Arnold Hill. "I regret that there has been so much misinterpretation of the Statement of War Department Policy issued from the White House on October ninth," the letter began. "I regret that your own position, as well as the attitude of both the White House and the War Department, has been misunderstood." He went on to promise better use of black troops. He also wrote that William Hastie – a prominent black legal figure – had been appointed as Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War.¹²⁰ The letter was received favorably by the civil rights leaders.

None of this necessarily led to meaningful shifts in the military, particularly the War Department. On November 13, 1940, Stimson sent Roosevelt a statement of War Department "policy in regard to Negroes." The last point stated in part, "The policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations. This policy has proven satisfactory over a long period of years and to make changes would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparations for national defense." Stimson concluded forcefully, reiterating the main point. "It is the opinion of the War Department that no experiments hold be tried with the organizational set-up of these units at this critical time."¹²¹

Files.

¹¹⁸Letter, Walter White to Harold Ickes; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹¹⁹Letter, David Niles to Stephen Early, October 21, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁰Letter, Franklin Roosevelt to Walter White, October 25, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²¹Letter, Henry Stimson to Franklin Roosevelt, November 13, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

In February 1941, Truman Gibson – a black lawyer in Chicago – was brought into the Executive branch as an assistant to Hastie. His initial experiences left him slightly skeptical of his role. On February 7, Gibson wrote his wife. “Today, the Youth Congress has been picketing the War Department, with the pickets marching around chanting, ‘Down with Jim Crow’. I had to go out and see these fifty or so kids, mostly Negroes. While I was out, about a half dozen army officers called up in high dudgeon saying the picketers were not informed etc. One, on the General Staff left word for me to hold myself in readiness—for what I don’t know. Maybe he wanted me to rush out and stop them with my bare hands.”¹²²

Activists attempted to pressure the White House for further results. On March 13, White wrote President Roosevelt to suggest a conference on racial exclusion in national defense. His request was declined.¹²³ In September, the President did order an examination of federal civil service discrimination. However, the response from agencies largely consisted of platitudes and there is little evidence it had much effect.

Race and Troop Policy During U.S. Participation

The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred on December 7, 1941, and the United States formally declared war the following day. The participation of African American troops in international combat formalized the structure of the debate. Activists were able to visit military bases and hear about discriminatory treatment firsthand. On the other hand, the War Department became even more frustrated with activist pressures as they focused exclusively on the military aspects of the conflict. The situation for the wartime civil rights activists was compelled and constrained in complex ways.

Stimson’s resistance to giving black soldiers equal responsibilities as white ones – highlighted earlier by his response to the September 1940 White House meeting with civil rights activists – would be a consistent theme during U.S. participation in the war. The War Department combatted

¹²²Letter, Truman Gibson to Isabelle Gibson, February 7, 1941; Folder: “Family papers, correspondence, Jan-Mar 1941”; Box 1; Truman K. Gibson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Gibson Papers).

¹²³Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, March 13, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-May 1941”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

critiques by highlighting poor performances in the First World War and what Stimson called a black inability “to master efficiently the techniques of modern warfare” – something civil rights activists took to calling the “Negro is too dumb to fight” policy.¹²⁴

Eleanor Roosevelt butted heads with Stimson over the issue, and when that happened the President tended to side with Stimson. In October 1942, for example, the First Lady left for a trip to England inspecting military camps. Prior to leaving, she had written Stimson after hearing from various sources about racial tension due to white southern soldiers being “very indignant” at relations between black American soldiers and white English women. “I think we will have to do a little educating among our Southern white men and officers,” she wrote. In his diary, Stimson wrote that he went to see the President prior to the First Lady’s trip, asking him to warn his wife not to make any public statements about “the differential treatment which Negroes receive in the United Kingdom from what they receive in the U.S.” Despite the concerns raised in her letter, Eleanor Roosevelt said nothing about race relations during the trip.¹²⁵

Walter White maintained the NAACP’s pressure campaign. On October 28, 1942, White wrote the President, attaching letters he had sent to Stimson and Ovetta Hobby, director of the Women’s Army Corp, which was particularly dedicated to racial segregation. “I have written Colonel Stimson and Mrs. Hobby after I have had opportunity to see at first-hand at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, how well this experiment is working out,” White explains. “But, unfortunately, in a Northern City, at Des Moines, in the training of WAACs, there is just the reverse of the situation in the South. The segregation at Des Moines is, in my opinion, both unnecessary and distinctly hurtful of morale.” It is, White declared, contrary to “the ideals for which the war is being fought.”¹²⁶ White kept this up in 1944, reporting from his visits to Europe. An April 22 memo to the War Department from White about North African and Middle Eastern Theatres shows his attempts at selling his perspective to the military establishment.¹²⁷ In November, he tried to convince the President and Secretary of War to give “special recognition of Army personnel who have taken a decent attitude

¹²⁴Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 566.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 383.

¹²⁶Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, October 28, 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁷Memorandum, Walter White to War Department, April 22, 1944; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes), Apr-May 1944”; OF 93; Official Files.

on the matter of race and color."¹²⁸ They were not amenable.

McNutt and other figures became increasingly concerned with defusing potential problems related to race relations and the military. For example, on February 17, 1943, McNutt sent a letter to the Secretaries of War and Navy in his position as chairman of the War Manpower Commission. He also sent a memo to Tully asking her, "Will you see that the President receives the attached letter." The letter opened by declaring, "The problem of induction of Negroes into the Army and the Navy is acute." McNutt proceeded to go through the percentage of the population that was black compared to the percentage of various armed forces branches that were black, and talked about the use of separate black and white Selective Service calls for enlistment. "The practice of placing separate calls for white and colored registrants is a position which is not tenable," he concluded, "and it is now necessary to begin delivering men in accordance with their order number without regard to race or color."¹²⁹

Other administration figures also took note of the increased pressures brought by U.S. participation in the war. For example, on July 23, 1943, in the aftermath of the Detroit race riot, Ickes wrote John McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, regarding issues surrounding segregation and Native women in Alaska at dances with white soldiers. "We are getting some hot race relations questions these days, aren't we?"¹³⁰ Truman Gibson aided in bringing such pressures. On November 3, 1943, Gibson sent a memo to the Assistant Secretary of War. "There is in fact every present indication that the treatment of Negroes in the armed forces will constitute the most important issue in the general effort to capture the Negro vote." Gibson concluded with a list of suggestions, including moving black troops out of the South ("... little, if anything, can be expected when men are constantly subjected to the types of practices they run into in many southern communities").¹³¹

On December 29, 1943, John Stengstacke, President of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, wrote the President requesting a conference about "the status of the Negro in the United

¹²⁸Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, November 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Oct-Dec 1944"; OF 93; Official Files.

¹²⁹Letter, Paul McNutt to Henry Stimson, February 17, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-April 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³⁰Letter, Harold Ickes to John McCloy, July 23, 1943; Folder: "1943-1946"; Box 376; Ickes Papers.

¹³¹Memorandum, Truman Gibson to John McCloy, November 3, 1943; Folder: "Subject File, Politics, 1940-43, 1957, 1965"; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

States Navy.” This exchange is most revealing for the response it generated by military officials. Sengstacke’s concluding paragraph chided various figures in the Navy Department for responses that “indicate a wide gap between the thinking of the top men in the Navy and the Negro people. We also believe they indicate a failure on the part of Navy officials to appreciate the importance of the issue.” He closed by appealing to the war effort. “No one knows better than you, Mr. President the pernicious effect this situation has on national unity,” he wrote. “No one knows better than you how it weakens our cause before the entire world.”¹³²

Administration officials sent the letter around for comments; the response from the Chief of Naval Personnel is especially revealing. He blamed the black press for problems with black morale, as well as offering substantial concern about what whites will think: Will they be okay with integration? If not, no integration. “The individual negro finds it difficult to sublimate his race consciousness and become an integral part of the established Navy program. The Navy will continue to effect integration only to the extent that the attitude of both negroes and whites indicates that integration is practicable. To do otherwise would ignore the fact that racial prejudices on the part of both negroes and whites do exist on a national scale.” He wrote in conclusion: “Until the national attitude has been so conditioned that these prejudices no longer exist on a national scale—and it is believed that the attitude of the negro press in deliberately developing race consciousness and undue sensitivity to discrimination on the part of the negro in the Navy is retarding national progress in this direction—the Navy cannot undertake in time of war a program which will be detrimental to its war effort and serve only to further the interests of a racial minority.”¹³³

Such negative military sentiments toward civil rights activists were fairly common. On December 30, 1943, Jeanette Welch Brown, Executive Secretary of the National Council of Negro Women, requested that Mary McLeod Bethune be sent to war fronts to see black soldiers. President Roosevelt asked the First Lady for advice. “A young woman would have to go with her and a man would have to go on a tour such as was planned by Walter White, but I think it would be

¹³²Letter, John Stengstacke to Franklin Roosevelt, December 29, 1943; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³³Document, Chief of Naval Personnel, January 5, 1944; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944”; OF 93; Official Files.

very good," she replied. The President then asked Jonathan Daniels, who responded by attaching a draft letter declining the request. "The Army does not want her to go," Daniels stated quite concisely.¹³⁴

By early 1944, some important institutional developments began to take place. The Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Training was established, with its first meeting taking place on February 29. The meeting was held in McCloy's office and began with a discussion of black troops, before turning to blood donor policies. "The Red Cross gets the blood, and the Army uses it. This is the policy of the Red Cross," Gibson said. "The Surgeon General made the request to segregate the blood." The blood segregation "offends the colored people," acknowledged one general in attendance. However, the Committee decided to take no action on the blood donation policy.¹³⁵ On April 26, the committee met again. McCloy noted that race relations in England seemed to be going well, then they moved on to the primary focus of the meeting: a conference with Walter White, who, as usual, pressed the military to alleviate racial inequities in its midst. "There is too much pressure on the Army to change conditions in the United States," an exasperated General Porter stated at one point.¹³⁶

In the last months of Roosevelt's tenure in office, Gibson remained active. On March 12, 1945, Gibson sent a report on his visit to the 92nd Division black troops to Major General Nelson. Gibson talked to about 800 officers and grouped some general themes in their remarks in his report.¹³⁷ On March 31, Gibson sent a report of his visit to the European Theater of Operations to General Lee.¹³⁸ The next month, on April 12, Roosevelt died. The push for racial equality in the armed forces picked up steam in the Truman administration, a subject that is examined in detail in the next chapter. This chapter, however, turns now to fair employment.

¹³⁴Memorandum, Jonathan Daniels to Franklin Roosevelt, January 15, 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³⁵Meeting Notes, February 29, 1944; "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹³⁶Meeting Notes, April 26, 1944; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹³⁷Report, Truman Gibson to Major General Nelson, March 12, 1945; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹³⁸Report, Truman Gibson to General Lee, March 31, 1945; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

Executive Order 8802 and the March on Washington Movement

The second issue that came to dominate the racial agenda during the war was discrimination in the defense industry. Concerns about discriminatory employment practices had of course been raised in the past, but the defense industry provided a more concrete target. Because it could be directly tied to the anti-fascist rhetoric of the war, it was easier to criticize discrimination there. And because it was focused on the defense industry, not necessarily all employment, it was an easier sell than a broader anti-job discrimination agenda targeting private business.

President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, which established the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice as a means of combatting racial discrimination in the defense industry. This action was hardly a profile in presidential courage. It was almost entirely a response to a threatened march on Washington organized by A. Philip Randolph in conjunction with other civil rights leaders.¹³⁹ This was another clear example where the war constrained the civil rights trajectory in the 1940s. FEPC and concerns about defense industry discrimination – and military segregation – rose to the top of the civil rights policy agenda, downgrading the drive for anti-lynching and anti-poll tax legislation of the 1930s. Yet in bringing economics to the fore, rights claims were limited to war-specific measures.

Randolph's March on Washington Movement developed in early 1941. The more active stance was in no small part a result of the dissatisfaction with the September 1940 meeting at the White House and its ensuing controversies. The public announcement of the organization's motives came on January 15 and in the ensuing months Randolph worked to build support for a massive march to protest racial discrimination. The White House eventually took note. On May 7, Early sent a memo to Wayne Coy about a statement by the President regarding national defense employment segregation. "Confidentially, the President did not want to issue the statement himself but was agreeable to the idea of exchanging letters with Hillman."¹⁴⁰ By June, Roosevelt was expressing displeasure at the proposed march. In a June 7 memorandum to Marvin McIntyre, the

¹³⁹Louis Coleridge Kesselman, *The Social Politics of FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948); Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC*, (New York: Atheneum, 1973).

¹⁴⁰Memorandum, Stephen Early to Wayne Coy, May 7, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-May 1941"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

President wrote, "Tell [Dr. F. O.] Williston that the President is much upset to hear (yesterday) that several negro organizations are planning to March on Washington on July first, their goal being 100,000 negroes [sic] and I can imagine nothing that will stir up race hatred and slow up progress more than a march of that kind and the best contribution Williston can make is to stop that march." A June 16, 1941, memo to the President from "G." said Williston "has been to see [Roosevelt secretary Marvin McIntyre] several times and he told [McIntyre] that your action is having a marvelous effect and that he has talked with several Negro leaders, who were in favor of the 'march', but he feels now that there is a good chance that nothing will happen."¹⁴¹ This, however, turned out to be too naive.

On June 18, the President held a White House conference with Randolph, White, Stimson, Knox, and several others. Stimson was not pleased by the meeting. He wrote in his diary that it was "one of those rather harassing interruptions with the main business with which the Secretary of War ought to be engaged – namely, in preparing the Army for defense."¹⁴² In the meeting, Randolph promised to bring one hundred thousand people to march on Washington if the President did not issue an executive order abolishing defense industry discrimination. When Roosevelt looked to White, thinking Randolph was bluffing (and he probably was), White nonetheless backed up Randolph's number. The President eventually agreed and the drafting of the order began.

On June 24, Patterson, on behalf of the War Department, sent a memo to the President regarding the coming executive order. "While we are in sympathy with the policy, we are not in favor of this step," he wrote. He gave five reasons for the Department's objection: first, the order "would be a dead letter" in the South; second, since some labor unions discriminate against black workers, contractors working under a closed shop with such unions had no choice in the matter; third, contractors might fear litigation and not make bids on war contracts; fourth, it would be difficult to administer, as the "[t]he only effective remedy for breach would be cancellation of the contract," which he argued would be "most unwise"; and fifth, "prejudices might be aroused, rather than

¹⁴¹Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Marvin McIntyre, June 7, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) June-July 1941"; OF 93; Official Files.

¹⁴²Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 252.

allayed, by such a measure,” and “[t]he substantial progress toward eliminating prejudice might suffer a setback.” However, if such an order were administered, Patterson suggested the language be toned down. “[W]e suggest that the clause be to the effect that the contractor will observe, so far as practical and consistent with the expeditious performance of the work, the policy of the Government that there be no discrimination because of race, creed, or color,” he said. “Any board set up to hear grievances should not have the power to direct cancellation of any defense contract.”¹⁴³

The executive order was released the next day, and debates ensued about what the order would mean in practice. Civil rights leaders were initially quite celebratory. However, this later turned slightly more cynical, as many activists felt the committee would not live up to its potential. On August 20, Mark Ethridge wrote to Stephen Early. “As you know, the Negroes wanted the executive order as a sort of second Emancipation Proclamation. They wanted the setup entirely outside of OPM with La Guardia as chairman and, I suppose, somebody like Winston Churchill would have satisfied them as executive secretary,” he stated. “I think the agitators have got themselves into such a position with a threatened march that they wanted to make the abandonment of the march appear to come as the result of a great victory.”¹⁴⁴

Detroit Race Riot

Federal response to wartime race riots provides a final case study. As described in the first chapter, the Detroit race riot took place from June 20-22, 1943. Thirty-four people died, more than 700 were injured, and there was over two million dollars worth of property damage.¹⁴⁵ The administration soon realized this was not just a local issue, but rather one that required a federal response. On June 24, Roosevelt apparently sent a memorandum to Stephen Early asking, “Don’t you think it is about time for me to issue a statement about racial riots?”¹⁴⁶ On June 27, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia wrote a letter to the President. “I think you should see Walter White

¹⁴³Memorandum, Robert Patterson to Franklin Roosevelt, June 24, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) June-July 1941”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁴⁴Letter, Mark Ethridge to Stephen Early, August 20, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Aug-Dec 1941”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁴⁵Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 43.

¹⁴⁶Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Stephen Early, June 24, 1943; Folder: “Detroit Race Riots 1943-45”; OF 93c; FDR Official Files.

at the earliest possible moment," he wrote. "I beg of you not to permit the federal troops to be withdrawn," he added. "Walter urges this very strongly. It is better to keep them a few weeks longer than to take them away one day too soon."¹⁴⁷ On July 7, Grace Tully sent the President a message about a phone call received from the Vice President. "Mr. Wallace says that the Negroes are waiting for Pres. Roosevelt to act. They think he should give a fireside chat."¹⁴⁸

Ickes and others in the Department of the Interior took a particular interest in the riots. Ickes had just a few months earlier told readers of the *Afro-American* that President Roosevelt's actions had played a key role in preventing race riots during the war. Many assistants in the Interior Department took an interest, but perhaps no one more than Saul K. Padover. On June 29, Padover wrote Ickes analyzing the riots. "The recent race riots were neither accidental nor unexpected," he began. "Race tensions throughout the country are such that it may be said that the race disease is endemic. Observers in the field are convinced that further outbreaks, with their consequent destructiveness and lasting bitterness, may be expected anywhere, any time. For the sake of the country's morale health, thorough action on a national scale is urgent." Padover urged more centralized federal government engagement with the issue. "Several federal agencies deal with minorities, but none of them has a program and none of them has real responsibilities," he wrote. "The Fair Employment Practices Committee is the best of all, but it is confined to job-defense activities. Others, such as the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (interested in the Mexicans in the Southwest), are limited in scope and action." He proposed the President set up an Office of Race Relations. Notably for the purposes of this project, Padover concluded by clearly relating race relations to the war effort. "A democratic solution of the race problem in this country will have favorable repercussions among our Allies and friends," Padover wrote. "It will also deprive Axis propaganda of one of its most effective anti-American arguments."¹⁴⁹ Also notable is his observation that wartime measures like the FEPC were limited to war-specific matters.

Also on July 29, William A. Neilson of the NAACP asked Ickes to sign onto a statement about

¹⁴⁷Letter, Fiorello LaGuardia to Franklin Roosevelt, June 27, 1943; Folder: "Detroit Race Riots 1943-45"; OF 93c; FDR Official Files.

¹⁴⁸Memorandum, Grace Tully to Franklin Roosevelt, July 7, 1943; Folder: "Detroit Race Riots 1943-45"; OF 93c; Official Files.

¹⁴⁹Memorandum, Saul Padover to Harold Ickes, June 29, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

the riots. The statement, attached to the letter, used wartime rhetoric: “The Detroit riot embodied all the cruelties which have been practiced by Nazi Germany and her partner, the Japanese empire.” On August 3, 1943, Ickes sent an interesting response declining the request. “I am in full sympathy with the idea underlying your letter to me of July 29 and I subscribe to what you say in the draft of ‘A Statement,’” he wrote, seemingly aligning himself with such rhetoric. However, he then switched frames. “I would sign this gladly and without reservation as you request if it were not that I doubt the propriety of my joining in a call ‘upon our President and Governments, federal, state and local, to use all wisdom, etc.’ I may be overfinical, but it seems to be that a member of the Cabinet cannot, with propriety, publicly urge any action upon the President.”¹⁵⁰ This document is indicative of Ickes’ general strategy of agreeing with such sentiments, but using his office to deflect calls for action.

Stimson, however, was surprisingly affected by the riots. In a June 24 diary entry, Stimson blamed “the deliberate effort that has been going on on the part of certain radical leaders of the colored race to use the war for obtaining the ends which they were seeking, and these ends are very difficult because they include race equality to be social as well as economic and military and they are trying to demand that there will be this complete intermixing in the military.” But by July 5, he had changed his mind, in part by photos in *Life* magazine showing blacks beaten by whites. According to his diary, he told General Somervell he had arrived at “the conclusion that we have got to do something... or there will be real trouble in the tense situation that exists among the two races throughout the country.”¹⁵¹ Stimson was still far from a racial liberal, but there was finally a crack in his armor.

Ideological Trajectories Post-Roosevelt Administration

President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. The next chapter picks up the analysis of the issues raised in this chapter in the context of the Truman administration. Some figures find their way into that chapter. Patterson, for example, became Secretary of War under Truman, and Gibson re-

¹⁵⁰Letter, William A. Neilson to Harold Ickes, July 29, 1943; Folder: “Negroes, 1933-1945”; Box 213; Ickes Papers. Letter, Harold Ickes to William A. Neilson, August 3, 1943; Folder: “Negroes, 1933-1945”; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁵¹Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 446.

mained a prominent figure advocating for civil rights inside the administration. Many, however, did not stay on, at least not for long. Frances Perkins, for instance, stepped down from the Cabinet on June 30, 1945, and Harold Ickes resigned on February 15, 1946. However, the ideological trajectories of these prominent Roosevelt administration figures did not necessarily stop with the president's death.

Perhaps the most extreme example is Perkins. Perkins said little about civil rights in the 1940s. In her book *The Roosevelt I Knew*, published in 1946, African Americans are effectively invisible. She does at one point describe the exclusion of farm and domestic workers from social security legislation as "a blow," although she does not reference race directly.¹⁵² The archival collection of her papers is likewise lacking in references to civil rights. On October 13, 1944, she delivered an address to the National Council of Negro Women's Post-War Institute and Workshop titled "Women Workers – Today and Tomorrow." However, the speech made no explicit reference to race or civil rights, focusing instead on female workers more generally. Her main points were to argue against the Equal Rights Amendment and use survey data to encourage the notion that women wanted to return to housework after the war was over.¹⁵³ Speaking to an audience of black women is as far as the papers go in enlightening contemporary analysts to her perceptions of race and civil rights. However, one source does allow for a more detailed analysis of Perkins and civil rights, both generally and pertaining to the World War II period more specifically: her lengthy oral history interview at Columbia University.

Along with her commitment to a military-centric focus during the war, Perkins seemed to see racism as "deeply ingrained," perhaps not malleable by war. Reflecting on a strike by white workers in Baltimore refusing to work with African Americans, she said, "Finally we did just exactly what the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People recommends against doing, which was that we showed the employer how to make a kind of segregation in the factory, particularly with regards to toilets. You were running there so deeply into prejudice that you had

¹⁵²Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, (New York: The Viking Press: 1946), 298.

¹⁵³Speech, Frances Perkins to National Council of Negro Women's Post-War Institute and Workshop, October 13, 1944; Folder: "[Washington]; 10 t.p., 9 t.p. (carbon): Address, 'Women workers –today and tomorrow,' To National Council of Negro Women's Post-War Institute and Workshop"; Frances Perkins Papers, Columbia University, Rare Books & Manuscript Library, New York, NY.

to do something. You were dealing with something so deeply ingrained in people, a fear, that you couldn't stop right then to cope with it."¹⁵⁴

These two characteristics – her commitment to military victory and her belief that racism was something impermeable by government interference – make it difficult to expect the wartime civil rights rhetoric to have an effect on her, and indeed this is the case. She viewed the wartime FEPC – perhaps the most prominent, although certainly limited, policy victory by civil rights advocates during Roosevelt's tenure – as a “nuisance” and a presidential order that “[d]idn't have any standing.”¹⁵⁵

Perkins was cynical about progress on segregation. Just after the *Brown* case, she said it would take twenty or thirty years for desegregation to be achieved. She also, unprompted, brought up the *Brown* case itself. “Well, I wouldn't like to tell you what I think of the Supreme Court decision on the matter,” she said. When asked if she disagreed, she replied, “Why, I think it was terrible. It was a purely political decision, and I think it should never have been made. I do indeed. I don't know how they got it. I mean, Earl Warren is a very diplomatic fellow, and he talked them into it. But there's more to be said on it than they did.” When the interviewer replied that it seemed to him “that the thing is so darned long overdue,” Perkins was adamant. “Oh my dear fellow, now look here,” she said. “No – it's not overdue. It's just begun to loom up as due – as nearly due. No, wait! Nobody ever heard that segregation was wrong until about five years ago,” Perkins insisted. “I never heard such a thing. I never heard of such a thing. Certainly we should be nice to the Negroes. Certainly we should treat them right.”¹⁵⁶

“Oh gee whiz,” responded the interviewer, “all during the war, with my training –” Perkins cut him off there, and shifted emphasis from the war to NAACP leader Walter White. “Well, you were in the war and the training,” she said. “It began to come up then. But after Walter White began to agitate, it began to be raised. See, he was a smart agitator.” The interviewer pressed her on the point. “Gosh, he's been agitating for twenty years,” he said. “No, not for twenty years,” Perkins said. “He didn't have a chance to. He didn't do any agitating until well into the Roosevelt

¹⁵⁴Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p.149, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁵⁵Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 909, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁵⁶Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 336, Perkins Oral History.

administration. It was well into the Roosevelt administration before the word 'segregation' was mentioned. Yes, it was." Perkins maintained her focus on White, while the interviewer raised the war more generally. "But I remember during the war it was a boiling point," he said. "Well, during the war, you see, it was being raised," Perkins acknowledged. "The Northerners were coming South and finding something that was pretty hideous?" the interviewer asked. "Well, Walter White was agitating," Perkins reiterated, "and he was putting his finger on the places where it mattered – the recruiting, the – " The interviewer interjected. "So help me," he said, "I had never heard of Walter White. All I saw was two drinking fountains side by side, and I got the word." Perkins acknowledged that she "always used to feel queerly" in segregated facilities like waiting rooms for trains. When the interviewer brought up the issue of "get[ting] in the back of the bus," Perkins said, "Yes, but they got on the bus after all. The bus hauled them where they wanted to go."¹⁵⁷

She offered a surprising level of deference to white southern autonomy. The interviewer asked quite bluntly at one point, "Do you mean to tell me in all your life you've never considered the proposition that there was something perhaps a little awry about this system of separate schools, sitting in the back of the bus, separate drinking fountains–?" That was in the South; it was a "way of life in the South," Perkins insisted. When asked if she "accepted it," she said, "No, I didn't accept it. I didn't live in the South." The interviewer pushed a bit further. "But you went there," he said. "You went there in the campaign of 1948. You saw these things." Perkins replied: "Yes, and they didn't vote, and we knew they didn't vote. I went there. When Eugene Talmadge told me that in the State of Georgia, we had a hundred percent Anglo-Saxon population, I did say, 'Well, what were those strange black things I saw walking around the streets? If they weren't population, what were they?' I mean, that startled me a little it. But, the way I regarded it, and the laws of the South are quite separate in their thinking, and it's the way we've gotten along, and I always regarded it was not my function to tell the South what to do. It was my function to do what I thought was right, where I lived, and not try to solve the problems that they had."¹⁵⁸

Overall, Perkins seemed to not understand the importance of race, feeling more comfortable

¹⁵⁷Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 336-338, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁵⁸Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 342, Perkins Oral History.

with issues of class and labor economics. The war certainly seemed to have no impact on this.

Ickes took a more positive stance than Perkins in his later years. On June 28, 1946, Malcolm Ross, Chairman of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, sent Ickes a summary of the Final Report of FEPC to the President "represent[ing] the Committee's conclusions on five years of a difficult but rewarding experience." On July 1, Ickes wrote back, thanking him for the letter. "You certainly have had rough sledding and I want to express my conviction that you have done a fine and worthwhile job in sticking it out to the bitter end."¹⁵⁹ Ickes, in contrast to Perkins, spoke favorably about the FEPC order.

However, his deference to the presidency seemed to persist even after leaving the executive branch. On August 2, 1946, Vincent Sheean and George Marshall of the Civil Rights Congress wrote Ickes a letter asking him to sign a petition to President Truman urging the federal government to investigate a police raid in Columbia, Tennessee. Ickes was away until September 1. He responded September 19, writing, "I have very strong feelings on the subject matter with which your letter deals. I have spoken vigorously in the past about lynchings and Negro persecutions, and I shall again in the future. However, I do not feel like joining in the proposed petition to President Truman."¹⁶⁰

He also expressed concern about alienating the white South. On April 7, 1947, Oliver Harrington, Director of Public Relations at the NAACP, wrote to Ickes asking him to help them with their membership drive through one of his columns. On May 10, Ickes responded to Harrington. He began by apologizing for delay, then stated, "I am glad to hear that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is now campaigning for a million members. I have long been a member of your organization. I believe in its objectives and I like its spunk. But whether I will be able to write a column or two about the organization is another question. I would not want to run the risk of establishing a precedent so that all of the organizations in whose principles I believe and whose work I support would feel that they, too, were entitled to a column."¹⁶¹ However, an earlier memo suggested a different concern. He used the line about liking the NAACP's "spunk,"

¹⁵⁹Letter, Harold Ickes to Malcolm Ross, July 1, 1946; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

¹⁶⁰Letter, Harold Ickes to Vincent Sheean and George Marshall, September 19, 1946; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

¹⁶¹Letter, Harold Ickes to Oliver Harrington, May 19, 1947; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

but then said, “However, I wonder whether I ought to write a column about it. There must be a lot of opposition to it in the south and I have a number of subscribers among the southern newspapers.”¹⁶²

Ickes, then, provides a clear contrast with Perkins. However, despite efforts by civil rights activists who viewed him as an ally in their causes, Ickes did not take a proactive stance in pushing the racial agenda forward, either during or after his service in the executive branch.

Conclusion

The historical narratives presented in this chapter provide evidence with which to assess the hypothesis set out at the beginning of the chapter: that the Second World War led the Roosevelt Administration address civil rights earlier and differently than it would have otherwise. In terms of the temporal component of the hypothesis, there is clear evidence that the war was a critical factor in pushing the administration to do anything at all on civil rights. The clearest supporting example is the emergence of FEPC driven by the March on Washington Movement. There is little evidence to suggest President Roosevelt would have used an executive order to lessen job discrimination of any sort in the absence of this wartime activism. Regarding the substantive aspect of the hypothesis, the war constrained the civil rights agenda by focusing it on issues related to defense industry discrimination – and military segregation – rather than job discrimination and segregation more broadly.

Civil rights activists at times found themselves constrained rhetorically by the wartime context. On the one hand, the Double-V campaign allowed them to link their agenda to the goals of the war, which was undoubtedly helpful in some areas. However, activists felt compelled to tone down more radical claims. Some even felt the need to preempt criticism from moderates. For example, on June 8, 1942, A. Philip Randolph wrote Mary McLeod Bethune. “May I also say that the meetings which we are holding are not in any way intended to undermine the war. I want to see the war won by the United Nations and the wiping out of Hitler, Hirohito, and Mussolini. But I think it is proper for Negroes to insist upon their democratic rights of being permitted to play

¹⁶²Memorandum, Harold Ickes to Dr. Clark; Folder: Negroes, 1946-1951”; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

their part into the Army, Navy, Air and Marine Corps, defense industries, and the government as equals with the White people in this country. This will help rather than weaken America in the prosecution of the war.”¹⁶³

The best theoretical assessment of the Second World War’s impact on civil rights in the Roosevelt administration assesses both the compelling aspects of the war (pressures for something to happen rather than nothing), as well as the constraining aspects (narrowing the realm of the agenda to war-specific issues). In a sense, this period was a precursor to the form of “Cold War civil rights” that would emerge in the 1950s. As Mary Dudziak demonstrates, the Cold War would “simultaneously constrain and enhance civil rights reform,” as well as “frame and thereby limit the nation’s civil rights commitment.”¹⁶⁴ This tendency has clear roots in the Second World War, and this earlier period also has similarly restrictive aspects complementing the more liberating ones.

¹⁶³Letter, A. Philip Randolph to Mary McLeod Bethune, June 8, 1942; Folder: “March on Washington Movement, Correspondence, A-B 1942”; Box 26; Randolph Papers.

¹⁶⁴Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11, 13.