

For Democracy and a Caste System?

World War II and American Racial Politics

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Abstract Scholars of American politics often assume World War II liberalized white racial attitudes and prompted a liberal shift in the federal government's position on civil rights. This conjecture is generally premised on the existence of an ideological tension between a war against Nazism and the maintenance of white supremacy at home, particularly the southern system of Jim Crow. However, while intuitively plausible, this relationship is not always well-verified. This writing sample consists of the first and fourth chapters of a book project. The first chapter provides a framework for thinking about the potentially heterogeneous effects of the war on different political arenas. The fourth chapter turns to national political institutions and asks how the wartime context shaped the FDR administration's response to civil rights demands.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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 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 a group of 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 President Franklin 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 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 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,

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

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.

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 sponsorship, 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. Civil rights leaders like Walter White of the NAACP and A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters used the wartime context to reshape the nature of their arguments and the structure of their policy agenda. Fighting white supremacy abroad, they thought, might finally give them the tools needed to make a real dent in white supremacy at home.

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,

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

⁶ *Ibid.*: 169-70; for criticism, see, e.g., Leo P. Crespí, “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).

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

These stories are not just interesting historical anecdotes, but rather reflective of the ambiguities of academic scholarship on World War II’s effect on racial 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 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.”¹¹

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

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 articulated 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.

¹¹Richard M. Dalfiume, “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution,” *The Journal of American History* 55(1), 1968, 90-106.

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.”¹² More cynical perspectives can also be found in the work of some political scientists. Daniel Kryder highlights the correlation between war and instances of racial crowd 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.¹³

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 book asks the following questions: Did World War II alter the racialized limits of American democracy? If so, how? Were all political arenas affected equally, or were some affected more (or less) than others? And after assessing the war’s potentially heterogeneous effects, what were its potential legacies for twentieth century racial politics more broadly? Stated in its most extreme form, I am interested in what a world with the New Deal but no World War II looks like in terms of racial politics, public opinion,

¹²Kevin 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 war and civil rights as well. *Ibid.*, 5, 13f6.

¹³Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2002), 251; Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

and political institutions. 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 several constitutive parts. How did social movements use the logic of wartime to their advantage, and what tradeoffs did this involve for the civil rights agenda? Which claims did it privilege, and which claims did it hinder? 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? Did the war lead the Roosevelt and Truman administrations to address civil rights differently and earlier than when they would have otherwise? What about Congress and the Court? The questions about the mass public necessitate the quantitative study of public opinion more common to behavioral researchers, while many of the other questions require 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 effects on race and American politics were profound yet uneven, dependent to a degree not generally acknowledged on the political arena in question. Civil rights organizations used the framing opportunities provided by the war to advance a domestic policy agenda that both reframed pre-existing claims as well as introduced new ones made salient by wartime. These claims were received in varied ways by different mass and elite audiences. The war's effect on mass white racial attitudes was ultimately more limited than many assume. While there is some evidence of decreases in racial prejudice, this liberalizing trend does not seem to link to liberalization in racial policy attitudes. Perhaps not surprising given the relative lack of attitude shifts by the dominant voting group, relatively little was changed in terms of congressional accomplishments. It was the executive branch where the response was most interesting and nuanced, and therefore most central to this project. The lack of mass attitudinal change led to a greater emphasis on unilateral action by the executive branch, culminating in prominent moments in civil rights history like Roosevelt's

FEPC executive order and Truman's executive order that led to the gradual desegregation of the armed forces. Yet even these successes, as this project will go on to highlight, were often paradoxical, fraught with tension, and had complicated legacies for the eventual trajectory of race and twentieth century civil rights politics.

Before turning to this evidence, however, this chapter frames the larger project in several ways. I first provide an overview of what is missing from current scholarly accounts of World War II and civil rights politics. Some relationships between the war and civil rights (particularly a link between the war and a liberalization of mass white attitudes) are often simply taken for granted due to inductive plausibility, rather than any particular evidence. Other relationships (such as the war's effects on the presidential response to civil rights demands) have a more robust literature, but one with unresolved tensions and conflicts. I suggest a full depiction of the war's effects on civil rights requires bringing multiple institutional venues to the fore. I second ask what it means to treat an event like World War II as an explanatory variable. I also break down "the war" into three theoretically constitutive elements and discuss how each engenders different possibilities and constraints for racial politics. I conclude with a roadmap of chapters to come.

Background

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*."¹⁴ 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 example.¹⁵ This

¹⁴Anthony 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).

¹⁵David R. Mayhew, "Wars and American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 3(3), 2005, 482.

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.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

My interest in writing about World War II in particular – not so much as a case study of the broader category “wars,” but rather as a potential “critical juncture” for outcomes of interest related to race and civil rights politics in itself – initially developed after reading work by Eric Schickler and colleagues offering a re-periodization of the civil rights “realignment.” When, why, and how did the Democratic Party become more racially than the Republican Party outside of the southern states? Challenging us to look further back than the 1964 Goldwater campaign, they pointed instead to the mid-1940s. But despite the temporal correlation with the war, their work focuses entirely on domestic mechanisms – constituent pressures and what Schickler and Feinstein call “the ideological logic of the New Deal” – to explain the growth of racial liberalism. And while I thought they were quite right about the re-periodization, I found the mechanisms to be potentially incomplete. Without downplaying the role of domestic demographic and ideological factors, World War II, I thought, might merit a more central role, not just in that theoretical debate, but in our understanding of race and American political development more generally.¹⁸ In that

¹⁶Peter Gourevitch, “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).

¹⁷Elizabeth 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.

¹⁸A similar treatment of the war can be found in another research agenda examining race and American political development during this time period, Robert Mickey’s analysis of Deep South states’ varied “paths out of Dixie” after the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* case. “Of course, the transition was a highly complex period that featured many acute challenges from ‘abroad’ – important ‘exogenous’ shocks such as World War II,” he notes. The war, he later writes, “disrupted agricultural labor markets and sparked divisive mill strikes, and the national party appeared increasingly unreliable on these and other matters.” Yet while acknowledging the war’s importance, his article is likewise not about the war in any sustained way. The war is instead noted in passing before turning to other variables. My sense is that such acknowledgements of the war’s importance are correct, but that scholars ought to go further in assessing precisely in what ways the war did and didn’t matter. Robert W. Mickey, “The Beginning of the End for Authoritarian Rule in America: *Smith v. Allwright* and the Abolition of the White Primary in the Deep South, 1944-1948,” *Studies in*

sense, while this project grew out of an engagement with one particular research agenda, it is not centrally framed as a direct response to that line of work in itself. Rather, my project builds on a range of work about racial politics during this era and asks how a study of the Second World War might contribute to a broader understanding of the development of twentieth century American racial politics.

Trying to piece together a broad picture of World War II's effects on American racial politics from existing literatures would result in an uneven, often contradictory, and occasionally even empty patchwork of analyses. While much work by Americanist political scientists has tended to ignore international factors, those that have not have varied in the care of their argumentation. Most obviously open to revision are common assumptions about the war's effects that, when the footnotes are carefully analyzed, are largely reducible to arguments about plausibility, rather than any particular empirical evidence.

Consider the extent to which World War II liberalized white racial attitudes by bringing into relief an ideological tension between a war against Nazism abroad and the maintenance of Jim Crowism at home. Philip Klinkner and Rogers Smith's *The Unsteady March*, perhaps the most influential text in American politics on the role of war in motivating civil rights advances, makes several striking off-handed comments about the relationship between the war and white attitudes. However, the authors do so without offering any original analyses of public opinion data that might be used to substantiate such claims. Klinkner and Smith claim, for example, that it is "hard to escape the conclusion" that the "Nazi menace forced at least some white Americans to begin to reexamine the racial inequalities in their midst."¹⁹ This is a very clear claim, but not verified with reference to survey data. Later, they fill in the causal processes. "[T]he ideological demands of fighting an enemy who espoused racial hierarchies made more white Americans sensitive to the presence of racial discrimination in America," they argue. "The vision of blacks marching to claim their rights contradicted the image of America as the defender of democracy."²⁰ Klinkner and Smith do offer some willingness to concede that white opinion in the South did not liberalize,

American Political Development 22, 2008, 150, 157.

¹⁹Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 137.

²⁰*Ibid.*: 160

and perhaps even hardened in its white supremacist resolve.²¹ But in general, their claim about a shift in white attitudes is fairly strong. This claim about public opinion affects not only their assessment of the public, but also normative assessments of other actors like President Roosevelt. “Roosevelt’s unwillingness to take a stronger stand on racial issues was, in hindsight, regrettable and costly,” they argue. “True, white Southerners were becoming more restive, but it seems clear that in the context of the war, nationally public attitudes on race had shifted enough that he could have been more outspoken for reform.”²² However, this claim is not cited, nor do they refer to any public opinion data.

This account has notably been itself cited as evidence for such claims in more recent work. Saldin, for example, refers to Klinkner and Smith as an authority in asserting an “undeniable growth of racial liberalism link[ed] to World War II.”²³ As such, even while Klinkner and Smith’s research is not centrally concerned with public opinion, it has had the effect of strengthening the view that World War II liberalized white racial attitudes.²⁴

This tendency to make argument’s about the war’s effects also extends to judicial decision-making. For instance, it is often taken for granted that the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* case outlawing the white primary was motivated, at least in part, by the ideological logic of the Second World War. Yet the evidence for this claim is surprisingly lacking. The legal scholar Michael Klarman is perhaps the clearest example. While Klarman gives some credit to “Roosevelt’s virtually complete recomposition of the Court,” he argues this explanation is “missing something more fundamental – the significance of World War II.” His argument, however, is surprisingly vague. “This is necessarily a point of speculation,” he acknowledges, “because nothing in the *Smith* opinion or the surviving conference notes refers to the significance of the war. Still, the Justices cannot have failed to observe the tension between a purportedly democratic war fought against the Nazis, with their theories of Aryan supremacy, and the pervasive disenfranchisement of Southern blacks.”²⁵

²¹Ibid.: 168

²²Ibid.: 199

²³Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898*, 114. Elsewhere, Saldin is somewhat more nuanced than Klinkner and Smith in his assumptions about public opinion. See pp. 114-15.

²⁴Daniel Kryder likewise makes assumptions about the white public, albeit somewhat more negatively than Klinkner and Smith. Kryder suggests Americans were “less familiar with the aims of the war and their relationship to democratic ideals than Myrdal believed.” See Kryder, *Divided Arsenal*, 10.

²⁵Michael J. Klarman, “The White Primary Rulings: A Case Study in the Consequences of Supreme Court Decision-

Klinkner and Smith make a similar argument. “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.”²⁶ However, neither source provides direct evidence that the *Smith* case was affected by the war – these sources contain *arguments* along those lines, but not *findings* substantiating them – yet they are treated as though they do.²⁷

While it is easy to object to these sorts of arguments – and this project makes an attempt at offering empirical correctives to them – other areas of inquiry require far more nuance. The debate about the war’s effects on the presidency and executive branch is the clearest example of that. Why did FDR act as little as he did? Why did Truman, a native Missourian prone to racial slurs, act as much as he did? And to what extent, if any, did World War II shape these varied responses to civil rights actors?

Historians and sociologists have increasingly emphasized international factors, but more focused on pressures related to the Cold War than World War II. Historians like Mary Dudziak first emphasized the strategic incentives State Department officials faced in trying to win over “third world” audiences who were also being engaged by the Soviet Union. White supremacy in America, they discovered, proved a hindrance in convincing such audiences of the American

making,” *Florida State University Law Review* 29, 2001, 64. Klarman’s discussion of how increases in southern legal challenges were partly a result of “the greater black militancy spawned by World War II” is more convincing. *Ibid.*, 76. Such a claim fits with Parker, *Fighting for Democracy*.

²⁶Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 193.

²⁷As Ian Lustick writes, “[T]o the extent social scientists use the work of historians (historiography) as a vehicle for access to the past, it is not access to the variety of possible behaviors and patterns that historiography offers, but access to the variety of behaviors and patterns that historians, governed by their own implicit theories, commitments, and access to evidence, have identified... What is required, though, is recognition that background narratives are constructed, not discovered...” Ian S. Lustick, “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias,” *American Political Science Review* 90(3), 1996, 613.

government's sincerity.²⁸ In rethinking traditional structuralist accounts of the American civil rights movement, sociologists of contentious politics have been influenced by such work. In the introduction to the second edition of *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, Doug McAdam clearly points to the Cold War as the important difference maker for the civil rights records of Roosevelt and Truman. In his words, "the otherwise puzzling contrast between Truman's actions and FDR's inaction becomes entirely comprehensible when placed in the very different international contexts in which they occurred."²⁹ However, despite his interest in extending the timeline of the civil rights movement backwards in history – and his growing attention to international factors in doing so – McAdam seems to actively downplay any importance of the Second World War. Indeed, this focus is inherent in McAdam's description of the case as the "American civil rights movement of the *post-World War II period*."³⁰ This shorthand use of "post-war" to define time boundaries inherently leaves out the wartime period itself as a relevant era for analysis.³¹

Among political scientists, the most prominent account of war's effects on racial politics is Klinkner and Smith's *The Unsteady March*. Klinkner and Smith's account is consistent with McAdam's, but with greater emphasis on World War II. "Given that the New Deal was largely ineffective in forcing the nation to confront Jim Crow," 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

²⁸Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*

²⁹Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970: Second Edition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982], xxi.

³⁰Ibid., viii. My italics. Later, in urging social movement scholars to look back further than the Montgomery bus boycotts, McAdam writes that "the broader civil rights episode began early in the postwar period and certainly by the time of the Dixiecrat revolt in 1948." Ibid., xxvii. At another point, he argues "our models of social movements need to be as attuned to, and predictive of, the crucial period of institutionalized conflict over federal racial policies which followed World War II as they have previously been to the events of 1955-56 in Montgomery." Ibid., xxxi, my emphasis. McAdam even refers to Gunnar Myrdal's predictions – written very much in the cultural context of World War II – in a positive way, but seemingly interpreted as being relevant to the Cold War, not World War II. Ibid., xxxvi.

³¹Other sociologists have been less sure of any effect of international politics whatsoever. Joshua Bloom points instead to pressures by black anti-colonial activists, who allied themselves with the broader Progressive Challenge to Truman. This alliance, Bloom argues, compelled Truman to "adopt civil rights advocacy as part of broader concessions to progressives. Truman's civil rights advocacy, in turn, allowed him to consolidate moderate black support, as part of a Cold War liberal alliance, and readily repress the Black Anti-colonialist threat." See Joshua Bloom, "The Dynamics of Opportunity and Insurgent Practice: How Black Anti-colonialists Compelled Truman to Advocate Civil Rights," *American Sociological Review* 80(2), 2015, 393. Here, the guiding force is not structural opportunities presented by the Second World War or the Cold War, but rather political calculations. World War II is largely absent from Bloom's account, while he argues the Cold War had no direct influence (its indirect influence being that it was partly responsible for the Progressive Challenge in the first place, which gave black anti-colonialist actors a relevant coalition to join with).

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.”³²

Klinkner and Smith’s account can be usefully contrasted with Daniel Kryder’s, which instead emphasizes the executive response to racial politics during World War II as being primarily about maintaining social order amidst racial conflict in order to more effectively use military power. Such policies “may have appeared progressive, but other purposes – the full mobilization of industrial production and the maintenance of the party coalition – outweighed in importance the principle and the goal of egalitarian social reform.”³³

Klinkner and Smith’s account of Truman builds on their account of Roosevelt.³⁴ When it comes to Truman, Klinkner and Smith can be most usefully contrasted with Ronald Krebs’s compara-

³²Philip 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.

³³Kryder, 4.

³⁴Although framed in a chapter dedicated to the Cold War, they give place substantial emphasis on the role of post-war violence against black veterans in motivating Truman’s civil rights actions in the years to come. They first note the similarities between 1919, the first year after First World War came to an end, and 1946, the first year after the Second World War came to an end. “Clearly, the outbreak of racial violence after World War II suggested a repeat of the Red Summer of 1919, when blacks’ wartime aspirations were met with bloody rebuffs,” they write. “Yet despite real similarities, 1946 was not 1919.” While giving at least some “real credit” to Truman as an individual, they point to structural factors in their theoretical framework that made “this most recent wave of racial violence less acceptable to many national leaders and most U.S. citizens.” First, there were the ideological conflicts: “After nearly four years of hard-fought struggle against fascism and especially after learning of the enormous evils of the Holocaust, it became harder and harder for Americans to justify their own racial hierarchies,” Klinkner and Smith argue. “Instead of imposing new forms of racial subordination, the brutal treatment of Isaac Woodard and other African Americans in this era thus worked to heighten pressures for reform.” Second, the war required black manpower. But beyond black manpower, the war effort had also “depended upon the cooperation of nonwhites around the world.” Here they transition from World War II to the Cold War (“If America’s leaders hoped to win the hearts and minds of the world, it could not ignore what discrimination was doing to the hearts and minds of black Americans at home”). Finally, there was pressure in the form of the “aggressive activism of black Americans, inspired by their war experiences, to achieve truly equal rights within an inclusive society, not a segregated one.” See Klinkner and Smith, 204-205.

tive analysis of military service and minority rights claims. ‘Though persuasive,’ Krebs argues, “this account leaves a number of questions unanswered.” In particular, Krebs notes that the moments of civil rights progress under the Truman administration did not occur during total war. He argues, “[I]n such cases, wartime rhetoric per se mattered less than the postwar rhetorical context.” Further, Klinkner and Smith, he argues, “divide the universe of citizenship discourse into inclusive (liberal) and exclusive (racist),” whereas Krebs argues, “the fate of African American claims-making can be understood only if one is sensitive to the differences *within* the inclusionary category – that is, between liberalism and republicanism.”³⁵ Notably, the two chapters about black civil rights in Krebs’s book do not centrally consider World War II. The first of his U.S. chapters considers the black experience of World War I, while the second skips forward to the Truman administration, which Krebs considers principally in terms of the Cold War. World War II, for Krebs, is not particularly central. This is reflected in Krebs’s description of the Double-V campaign. While “often portrayed as indicative of blacks’ conditional loyalty,” he argues it instead “channeled mass anger in safe directions.”³⁶ However, he does place value on the rhetorical context of the postwar period that led into the Cold War era. “African Americans enjoyed greater influence in part because the way they framed their claims was compelling in the postwar milieu,” he argues. “Soon after the war, African Americans drew on a rejuvenated liberal tradition, hammering on the contradiction between racism and human rights.” Yet in arguing racism at home aided Soviet propaganda abroad, Krebs raises a trade-off. Since activists were “wary of being painted as Communists, they concentrated their energies on formal civil and political rights, setting aside the deep political economy of race.” The country, he argues, “is still coping with the implications of that choice.”³⁷

In contrast to plausible conjectures about the war’s effects on mass white attitudes or the decision-making calculus of judges, these accounts of civil rights politics in the executive branch are deeply grounded in various forms of evidence. Yet while they share certain similarities, they

³⁵Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 120. See also Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

³⁶*Ibid.*, 151. This is similar to Finkle’s account, which Krebs cites. Lee Finkle, “The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 60(3), 1973, 692-713.

³⁷Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*, 153-54.

also present points of tension and disagreement. To what extent should we understand 1940s' relatively war industry- and military-centric civil rights advances as "limited" in some way, particularly by comparison to the 1960s civil rights landmarks? Or were these outcomes "like the dog that could dance – that he did so poorly is far less significant than the fact that he did it at all"?³⁸ In moving from Roosevelt to Truman, what analytical value is gained by cleanly distinguishing between "World War II," what Krebs calls "the postwar milieu," and the "Cold War" era soon to come? Or is such a clean delineation between these three periods too parsimonious for the complicated reality of the era? To what extent were "Cold War civil rights" politics formed in the context of the Second World War? Ultimately, was the era of the Truman administration as pathbreaking as Klinkner and Smith suggest, or is Krebs right to call it a "sobering" one?

Related to this, what should we make of the fact that these advances were primarily centered around unilateral actions by the executive branch? In contrast to these actions by the executive branch, why was the war an insufficient juncture for moving congressional inaction past institutional limits like the southern filibuster?³⁹ Part of the answer, I suggest, has to do with the differential relationship between public opinion shifts and political behavior by members of Congress (relatively more constrained by the electoral connection) and the president (relatively less constrained, particularly when politics can be worked out behind the scenes).⁴⁰ Moving beyond prior assumptions about the war's effect on public opinion based on plausibility and towards a more empirically-grounded assessment of whether such an effect exists and what its contours might be is a part of this. In conjunction, then, this project aims to offer an assessment of the war's heterogeneous effects on race and American political development by both filling obvious gaps in the

³⁸Philip A. Klinkner, Review of *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State*, *American Political Science Review* 95(3), 2001, 735.

³⁹While 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." Julian 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. The war, Zelizer writes, "did not bring progress on the legislative front." *Ibid.*, 3. See Schickler and Pearson for

⁴⁰While recent scholarship has demonstrated far less policy responsiveness than an earlier era of research indicated, even earlier arguments about "dynamic representation" distinguished between units of representation, with Congress being the one expected to be more responsive to opinion. Gilens and Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics"; Stimson et al., "Dynamic Representation."

literature in some areas (e.g., public opinion) as well as adjudicating between points of tension and disagreement in others (e.g., the presidency). Doing so, however, requires a solid theoretical framework for thinking about World War II as a relevant contextual and perhaps even causal event.

Theorizing World War II and American Racial Politics

World War II was a landmark event in many respects. Over fifty million people died in the war.⁴¹ 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.⁴² The war had wide-ranging effects on American politics. Its impact on the American state was profound. In 1939, the national government spent \$1.1 billion on 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ 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,

⁴¹John 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.

⁴²Anne-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.

⁴³Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 147-148.

⁴⁴James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

national attitudes became more internationalist in nature.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

What, though, does it mean to treat something as big and seemingly amorphous as “World War II” as an explanatory variable, particularly for domestic outcomes related to racial politics? In this section, I attempt to answer this question in five parts. First, I begin with a consideration of the historical concept of “the event” using World War II as my example, with the outcome of interest being American race politics.⁴⁸ Taking this as my starting point, I second turn to a discussion of sequencing with respect to the temporal ordering of World War II with reference to other major periods of the twentieth century: World War I and the isolationism and disappointment for civil rights left in its wake; the “logic” of the New Deal for a more liberal, diverse Democratic coalition; the Cold War and the strategic attention to domestic civil rights it engendered, which privileged moderates at the expense of radicals; and the Vietnam War and its severing of the mid-century link between the domestic goals of moderate civil rights actors and the foreign policy goals of the executive branch.⁴⁹ Third, I consider the temporal horizon that constitutes the World War II era, adjudicating between both conventional and more open-ended alternatives for defining the period in question.⁵⁰ In an attempt to break the amorphous concept of “the war” into something more analytically and conceptually manageable, I fourth break down World War II as a theoretical construct into three constitutive parts, each of which have their own theoretical logics, potentials, and limitations: the war in an ideological sense, the war as a massive social upheaval, and the exigency the war produced. Finally, I conclude by noting how the theoretical influence of the

⁴⁶Benjamin 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.

⁴⁷Morton 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.

⁴⁸This discussion takes inspiration from William Sewell’s notion of “the event,” which used the taking of the Bastille as the event in question. William H. Sewell, Jr., “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” *Theory and Society* 25(6), 1996, 841-881.

⁴⁹On World War I and civil rights, see Rosenberg; for a discussion of the public’s isolationism in its wake, see Page and Shapiro. On the “logic of the New Deal order,” see Feinstein and Schickler. On Cold War civil rights, see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; on Vietnam and civil rights, see Daniel S. Lucks, *Selma to Saigon: The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

⁵⁰In particular, I compare William G. Howell, Saul P. Jackman, and Jon C. Rogowski, *The Wartime President: Executive Influence and the Nationalizing Politics of Threat*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) to Dudziak, *Wartime*.

war can be better understood when different political arenas are allowed to be unevenly affected: what's true of the executive branch might not be true of other national political institutions or the contours of mass public opinion, for instance.⁵¹

First, then, to what extent did World War II constitute a theoretically relevant event in the development of twentieth century American racial politics? Shifts in racial politics over the course of the twentieth century are of course attributable to several long-term factors, among them the decline of the traditional southern economy and the rise of industrialization, the migration of black southerners out of the region, and the nature of coalition politics in electorally competitive states where black southerners migrated and found themselves able to vote. This project seeks to build on previous work that has given central attention to these domestic factors by considering the theoretical possibilities of an event like World War II: its potential to hasten and refine, or stall and erase, the claims of varied civil rights actors. Certainly the pre-existing civil rights agenda of the 1930s shaped the terrain of wartime civil rights politics: issues like lynching and the poll tax remained on the agenda, although violence against returning black veterans proved to be politically mobilizable in a different manner than prewar racial violence. But beyond simply extending issues raised prior to the war, the war raised new issues, or at least new variants of old issues: not job discrimination broadly speaking, but the specific case of job discrimination in war industries; not segregation broadly speaking, but the specific case of segregation in the U.S. armed forces, which seemed particularly egregious when black men were asked to fight in a war against racial totalitarianism abroad. In this sense, the war was an "event" that "transform[ed] social relations" in theoretically relevant ways not necessarily predictable from the vantage point of the mid-1930s.⁵² Yet this should not be taken to imply such a juncture was unidirectional in the di-

⁵¹This discussion draws from Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59(3), 2007, 349. It also draws from Orren and Skowronek's approach to multiple institutions.

⁵²Sewell defines a historical event as " (1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures." Sewell, 844. What, though, do historical events do? "While the events are sometimes the culmination of processes long underway, events typically do more than carry out a rearrangement of practices made necessary by gradual and cumulative social change. Historical events tend to transform social relations in ways that could not be fully predicted from the gradual changes that may have made them possible. What makes historical events so important to theorize is that they reshape history, imparting an unforeseen direction to social development and altering the nature of the causal nexus in which social interactions take place." Sewell, 843

rection of liberalism and progress. Much like Cold War politics to come, the international context privileged some claims, while making others seem outside the realm of respectable politics.

A second issue of note is the importance of sequencing: not just that certain events took place independently (or even in conjunction), but that they took place in a certain ordering.⁵³ The temporal location of World War II within twentieth century American domestic and international politics is important here: two decades after the ravages of the first World War and the isolationist turn it engendered (combined with the lack of a positive effect on race politics); in the political and ideological aftermath of the New Deal and its “logic”; before the Cold War redefined America’s place in the world and, to some degree, the relationship between domestic politics and international politics; and long before the Vietnam war fractured a mid-century alliance between the domestic goals of moderate civil rights actors and the foreign policy goals of Democratic presidents. World War II reframed and justified what total, international war meant; its possibilities built upon the institutional and ideological structures of the New Deal; and all this prefigured the Cold War civil rights order to come in the following decades. Twentieth century racial politics – both its positive and null outcomes – cannot be adequately understood without a proper sense of how World War II did – and did not – reshape race and American democracy. A consideration of sequencing, then, builds on an understanding of World War II as an event by pointing to the theoretical importance of its temporal location with respect to other periods. Had the New Deal not happened, wartime civil rights actors would have been working with a different toolbox. Similarly, had wartime civil rights actors not utilized the war in the specific ways in which they did, Cold War civil rights politics would have not proceeded the same way.

Third, a definitional issue arises: When exactly was “World War II”? 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

⁵³Pierson, 54-78

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. Recent quantitative political scientists studying American politics have tended to define World War II as December 7, 1941, to August 14, 1945: that is, from the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor to the signing of a formal peace treaty.⁵⁴ This approach has several benefits: it fits with conventional textbook understandings of the war and, for quantitative work, allows for a clear beginning and end to the analysis.

Mary Dudziak, by contrast, argues the definition of World War II is “fuzzier around the edges than we usually imagine.”⁵⁵ Dudziak’s assessment highlights several deficiencies in arguments that cleanly delineate war/not-war as a dichotomous feature of the world. Culturally, both the American public and American politicians were attuned to events overseas, and the possibility of U.S. engagement in the war, prior to Pearl Harbor. Similarly, the wartime era did not cleanly end with the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Even if the fighting came to an end for U.S. troops, wartime on the home front is not so easily ended. The immediate post-war era was marked by several politically important incidents of racial violence against returning black veterans of the war, as well as notable shifts on race policy.⁵⁶

This project examines what might be considered the “long” World War II era. The 1941-1945 period of direct American engagement in the war might comprise the most direct wartime period,

⁵⁴William G. Howell, Saul P. Jackman, and Jon C. Rogowski, *The Wartime President: Executive Influence and the Nationalizing Politics of Threat*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 65-66. See also

⁵⁵Dudziak, *Wartime*, 62. Her description of the ending and beginning of the war highlights how: “From these events, it would seem clear that the war was over in 1945, as we usually assume. But the cessation of hostilities was not declared by President Truman until December 31, 1946, and even then he noted that ‘a state of war still exists.’ If a state of war continued, then what had changed to justify a cessation of hostilities? It was ‘in the public interest to declare, that hostilities have terminated,’ the president suggested, but even as late as 1951, ‘as a legal matter,’ the nation was still in a state of war against Germany. Truman didn’t call for an end to this state of war until July 1951, but also stressed that this would not affect the occupation of Germany. A peace treaty with Japan went into effect on April 28, 1952, although its restrictive terms left the nation ‘free, yet not free,’ as the *New York Times* put it. . . In contrast with the murkiness of World War II’s ending, its beginning would seem to be clearer, with the attack on Pearl Harbor seared in American memory as the beginning of World War II. But the historian Waldo Heinrichs has written that the war ‘crept up, stage by stage, over many years.’ World War II is often regarded as the last time in U.S. history that war powers were properly contained within a declared war, but the beginning of the war illustrates an enduring dynamic: the use of executive branch war-related powers outside of a declared war.” Dudziak, *Wartime*, 37-38, 40

⁵⁶Howell et al., for example, err in this regard. “Most of the civil rights advancements that built upon Roosevelt’s wartime actions occurred during times of peace,” including “the 1948 desegregation of the military,” they write. However, defining Truman’s military desegregation order as a peacetime outcome is technical to a fault and misses relevant features of the postwar milieu that are different from peacetime. Howell et al., *The Wartime President*, 2.

but the lead-up to war – and the postwar milieu that followed leading into the eventual Cold War era – are critical features of properly understanding World War II's role in race and American political development. As such, the story begins with the 1930s civil rights agenda of lynching and the poll tax, notes the creeping up of war and the response of civil rights actors who reshaped the agenda in strategic ways, then considers the postwar period as a relevant feature of the World War II era, interpreting Truman's military integration actions as the borderland between the World War II and Cold War eras (with their origins clearly being in the political and structural context of World War II, rather than appearing out of thin air in the late 1940s as a response to changing international incentives).

Still, even situating a lengthier time horizon says little about what it takes to assess the effects of such an era. Fourth, then, what does it mean to ask about the effect of something like "World War II"? To be a useful analytical concept, "the war" must be unpacked into its constitutive elements, each of which can have different compelling and constraining aspects. I focus here on three aspects of World War II: (1) the ideological sense of the war; (2) the war as a massive material undertaking; and (3) the war as a particular type of structural element distinguished by its exigency. Each of these three aspects of the war carry their own theoretical possibilities.

The *war in an ideological sense* most obviously describes the anti-racist logic of a war against Nazism so many have linked it to. Within academic work, this line of thinking has its origins in Myrdal's book, which emphasizes the contradiction between American ideals of democracy and realities of American racism, a contradiction that might have theoretically been highlighted even more by the existence of an explicitly racist enemy like Nazi Germany. Klinkner and Smith offer a more modern articulation of this argument when they emphasize the importance of enemies that require the U.S. government to frame the conflict in egalitarian terms. Yet the war's ideological was contested. For many white southerners and conservative elites, it was a war fought in factor of the status quo: of America's place in the world, with its internal federalist system of strong states' rights intact.⁵⁷

The *war as a massive material undertaking* means shifts related to wartime industrialization and

⁵⁷The "white supremacist Double-V" Ward describes fits here.

military build-up, including migration related to the former and manpower needs related to the latter. Industrial and military institutions were thus faced with new pressures as a result. Industrial job surplus created a situation where black workers were more in demand, in turn opening possibilities and points of leverage for the civil rights movement on issues of anti-discrimination. Yet the potential transformation of social relations created a backlash – hate strikes, for instances – that constrained. The need for manpower similarly pressured the military on its quota system and the use of black troops. More generally, black migration out of the South into the urban North where they could be mobilized in electoral politics had implications for party politics, even presidential politics in 1948, though this is more a secondary than primary impact of the war.⁵⁸

Finally, the *war as a particular type of structural element defined by its exigency* provides the most constraining aspect of the war variable. War has an implied time frame: war must be won. This exigent nature of wartime interacted with individuals and groups in terms of how they oriented themselves to social politics during the war. War was often used as a hammer against civil rights: We need to fight the war and fight it well, so we can't deal with those issues now because it might be disruptive to morale. This logic was particularly common in the War Department, which often pushed back against the "social experimentation" of integration.

This tripartite distinction highlights the complexity of "the war" for civil rights. While suggestive of the difficulties of assessing the effect(s) of something so heterogeneous, it nonetheless begins to frame how one might operationalize the broad inquiry of this project into a series of assessable claims.⁵⁹ Attention to the ideological sense of the war and the exigency it produced illustrates the ways in which the war both compelled and constrained civil rights. Not simply in the difference between the two – the ways in which liberal interpretations of the war's ideology compelled and the exigencies of military strategy constrained – but also in the differences within each category. Even within the more seemingly positive ideological sense of the war, there was important variation. Some rights claims took the form of liberal calls for greater democratic inclusion across all of society. Others, by contrast, took a more republican form, emphasizing the military

⁵⁸Balance of power arguments; before second electoral capture

⁵⁹This project focuses more on the first and third elements of wartime, while acknowledging the important ramifications of the second, which I believe has been better captured by existing literatures.

service of black men and the limited sets of rights this service “earned” them, such as serving in an integrated military or being free from racial violence upon their return (Truman, in particular, found this to be a compelling argument). Of course, the most ardent white supremacist defenders of the status quo responded with appeals to ascriptive hierarchies. Many southern white elites viewed the war as a fight for America as it existed, white supremacy and all: not to fight Nazi racism, but to protect the American way of racism. As different actors battled out, even seemingly liberating aspects of the war could be used in defense of the status quo as well.⁶⁰

Finally, this political struggle took place in multiple political arenas, and, as such, treating World War II as an explanatory variable in this way requires distinguishing between units of analysis. Identification of the relevant units is important because “a historical moment that constitutes a critical juncture with respect to one institution may not constitute a critical juncture with respect to another.” One cannot “identify relatively brief periods of momentous political, social, or economic upheaval and assert that these are critical junctures in a general sense.”⁶¹ This fits with Skowronek’s view of politics as “structured by persistent incongruities and frictions among institutional orders.”⁶² Distinguishing units of analysis – and allowing that some might be more, less or even not at all affected by a particular juncture like the war – is thus a crucial part of setting up this theoretical framework.

World War II was a theoretically important juncture for American racial politics, but the extent to which it was a “critical” one should be open to inquiry, and potentially variable by institutional arena. This leads to a set of questions that can be applied differentially to various political arenas: How did social movements use the wartime context to frame a unified “civil rights agenda,” and which agendas did this privilege and hinder? Was white mass opinion amenable to these claims, or did the war instead coincide with a preference for defending the status quo? Did national political institutions respond to the wartime demands of civil rights actors, and, if so, to what extent did this response vary by institution? Overall, and in interaction, what were the effects of

⁶⁰For a broader discussion of liberalism, republicanism, and ascriptivism, see Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals*. For a discussion of the extent to which liberalism and ascriptivism, in particular, can co-exist, see Ira Katznelson, review in *Political Theory*.

⁶¹Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism,” *World Politics* 59(3), 2007, 349.

⁶²Cited in *Ibid.*, 350. Stephen Skowronek, “Order and Change,” *Polity* 28(1), 1995, 95.

Roadmap

This book uses this theoretical framework to “drive[] the construction of the narrative.”⁶³ Each chapter considers one of the units of analysis, and traces that unit with respect to the theoretical framework provided here.

Chapter 2 examines social movements. Civil rights organizations, labor organizers associated with the CIO, black newspapers, and individual African Americans from across the country drew a connection between a war against Nazi racism and the domestic struggle for racial equality. This chapter links this discussion to the “contentious politics” literature examining the American civil rights movement, which has at times theorized an effect of international politics on domestic political opportunities, yet has had relatively little in the way of substantiation or explication of the precise manner in which it occurred. This chapter also frames the tension between the war abroad and racism at home, which then allows for an assessment of whether and how other units responded to it.

Chapter 3 gathers the available survey evidence to assess two theoretical expectations regarding white opinion. 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.

Chapter 4 turns to the executive branch and considers the Roosevelt administration’s record

⁶³Capoccia and Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures,” 357.

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 examine how wartime activism compelled Roosevelt to issue an executive order to combat defense industry discrimination, while similar efforts to integrate the armed forces proved unsuccessful.

Chapter 5 examines the Truman administration's record on civil rights. 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 limits 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.

Chapter 6 turns to Congress and the Supreme Court. Key themes involve the ultimate failure of the congressional civil rights agenda during the 1940s and the difficulty of linking Supreme Court decisions regarding black civil rights to the war effort. I show how this fits with previous scholarship, as well as how it highlights the importance of a presidency-centered analysis for the study of World War II's effects on race and American political development.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by analytically summarizing the evidence from the empirical chapters into a coherent narrative of the war's heterogeneous effects on American social movements, public opinion, and political institutions. I emphasize how the lack of change in white public opinion inhibited congressional action, and necessitated a move by civil rights activists to emphasizing unilateral action by the executive branch in the form of executive orders. 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: in particular, how civil rights actors in the 1960s grappled with the connection between the domestic goals of civil rights organizations and the foreign policy goals of the executive branch when the war in Vietnam raised new tensions in such a relationship. The overall goal of this book – 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 analysis.

Chapter 4

The Roosevelt Administration and Civil Rights During the Second World War

A week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Ralph Knox, a black man living in Philadelphia, decided to join the Army. His grandfather had served in the Civil War, and Knox felt it was his “duty to do something to uphold those rights and privileges for which he made possible for me.” When he arrived at the custom house to volunteer, however, he was told no “colored units” were available for enlistment. “I am going to do everything in my power to keep steadfast inspite of this obstacle,” he wrote Congressman John E. Sheridan. “[N]evertheless, I am terribly hurt.”⁶⁴

Representative Sheridan forwarded his letter to President Roosevelt. “I could take the Floor of the House and go off in a lengthy tirade,” he wrote, “but I feel this would not be beneficial to the national unity which we now have and desire to hold, but I do have inherent belief in your fairness and that immediate steps will be instituted to correct this grave error.”⁶⁵ Marvin McIntyre, one of Roosevelt’s advisors, took note of the letter’s potential importance. “I hate to bother you with this but it looks important,” he told Roosevelt. “Either the Secretary of War or someone should give it attention in my opinion.”⁶⁶

The President decided to respond to the letter in his own name. Mark Ethridge, one of Roo-

⁶⁴Letter, Ralph Knox to John Sheridan, December 15, 1941; 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).

⁶⁵Letter, John Sheridan to Franklin Roosevelt, December 17, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁶⁶Memorandum, Marvin McIntyre to Franklin Roosevelt, December 19, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

sevelt's advisors, was tasked with drafting a reply.⁶⁷ In his draft, Ethridge called for the heads of the armed service to meet with the President, who would "advise them that it will be necessary for them to revise the policies of their departments at once to accept as volunteers or as selected service men all Americans on the basis of their qualifications and fitness and without regard to their race, creed, or color." The letter then turned to the ideology of the 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," he wrote. "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."⁶⁸

This blunt acknowledgment of the discrepancy between the ideals of the war effort and the reality of Jim Crowism was striking. It echoed the calls of civil rights organizations and black newspapers, who regularly drew attention to the seeming contradiction between the expressed aims of the war effort abroad and the maintenance of the racial status quo on the homefront. However, this statement was never formally made. Ethridge was clearly aware of the political delicacy of the matter. "I have drafted a proposed letter which you may not care to send," he told the President. "As you will see, it calls for some discussion of the matter. The situation has been intensified by the Pearl Harbor incident and it is such that I feel the Army and Navy will have to face it realistically sooner or later."⁶⁹ When McIntyre read the letter, he told Grace Tully, the President's secretary, he doubted Roosevelt would want to sign it. "[I]t has some dynamite in it," he wrote.⁷⁰

McIntyre's assumption was correct. When he saw Ethridge's draft, Roosevelt told McIntyre to "answer the letter yourself and tone it down."⁷¹ On January 19, 1942, Representative Sheridan finally received a reply. However, it came from McIntyre, rather than Roosevelt, and the calls

⁶⁷Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Mark Ethridge, December 22, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁶⁸Letter Draft, Mark Ethridge, Undated; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁶⁹Letter, Mark Ethridge to Franklin Roosevelt, January 5, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁷⁰Memorandum, Marvin McIntyre to Grace Tully, January 12, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁷¹Letter, Franklin Roosevelt to Marvin McIntyre, January 13, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

for “eliminating internal inconsistencies” were entirely absent. The tone was rather more formal, perhaps even dismissive. “Mr. Knox should be informed that the number of voluntary enlistments for both white and colored units which can be accepted for the Army at any moment depends upon the vacancies present or anticipated in existing troop units. The troop basis, in turn, depends upon appropriations, equipment, and other similar considerations. On December 11, the War Department authorized a new increase in enlistments for colored men in each corps area as the previous allotments were known to be nearly exhausted. Apparently word of this increase had not reached the recruiting office where Mr. Knox applied; hence his enlistment was turned down in the application of routine administrative procedure for reasons wholly apart from considerations of race. Mr. Knox can, of course, volunteer at any time for induction under the Selective Service Act.”⁷²

Knox’s plea, and the administration’s internally divided response regarding how to handle it, is reflective in many ways of broader trends in how the Roosevelt administration dealt with race and civil rights during the Second World War. This chapter examines the Roosevelt administration’s record on race and civil rights through the lens of wartime civil rights activism. 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 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.

I first discuss rhetorical and strategic debates about the wartime policy agenda. This agenda was rather contested. Some in the Roosevelt administration wanted to maintain a New Deal focus on social policy during wartime. Others – who eventually won out – wanted to focus almost entirely on the military aspects of the conflict. Within this broader debate, civil rights groups came to call victory on the homefront as well as abroad, and there is evidence the administration

⁷²Letter, Marvin McIntyre to John Sheridan, January 19 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-Feb 1942”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

was very familiar with this rhetoric. I'll then look at four specific policy areas: the anti-lynching campaign, which dominated the agenda in the immediate prewar period; the struggle against military discrimination, which became a central issue as black soldiers were asked to fight Nazi racism in segregated units; defense industry employment discrimination, which saw the first and perhaps only real civil rights accomplishment of the Roosevelt presidency; and the White House's response to the Detroit race riot.

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."⁷³ 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

⁷³Richard Hofstadter, "From Calhoun to the Dixiecrats," *Social Research* 16, 1949, 150.

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.”⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶ 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.”⁷⁷ 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 Congress and “deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow.”⁷⁸ 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

⁷⁴V. 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.

⁷⁵Sean 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.

⁷⁶Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7.

⁷⁷Key, *Southern Politics*, 358-59

⁷⁸Ira 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.

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.”⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰

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 book hopes to examine.

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

⁷⁹Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

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.”⁸¹

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.⁸² 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.”⁸³

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

⁸¹Philip 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.

⁸²Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸³Philip A. Klinkner, Review of *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II*, *American Political Science Review* 95(3), 2001, 735.

with the study of public opinion – this book as a whole offers a more complete analysis of the relationship between the war and civil rights.

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.⁸⁴ 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, “WINNING DEMOCRACY FOR THE NEGRO IS WINNING THE WAR FOR DEMOCRACY.”⁸⁵ 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

⁸⁴See, 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).

⁸⁵Letter, 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).

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.”⁸⁶

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 of or 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 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.⁸⁷

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.”⁸⁸ Secre-

⁸⁶Letter, 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.

⁸⁷Letter, Lawrence Cramer to Marvin McIntyre, October 1, 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁸⁸Letter, Francis Biddle to Grace Tully, December 15, 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

tary 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.”⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

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 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.”⁹¹ 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

⁸⁹Memo, Jonathan Daniels to Franklin Roosevelt, November 25, 1942; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁹⁰Memorandum, Jonathan Daniels to William Hassett, February 22, 1944; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

⁹¹Letter, 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).

you are planning, I do not feel that, in justice to myself or in fairness to Mrs. Ickes, I can again disappoint her.”⁹²

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.”⁹³ 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 April 23, 1941, Rex Tugwell wrote Ickes concerning the relationship between the New Deal and the war. Tugwell had previously served as part of Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust,” articulating policy ideas for the New Deal economic program.⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ Ickes responded on April 24, writing, “The suggestion in your letter of April 23 is an admirable one. The thing that puzzles

⁹²Letter, Harold Ickes to Edwin Embree, February 17, 1944; Folder: “Negroes, 1933-1945”; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

⁹³Franklin 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>.

⁹⁴For 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.

⁹⁵Letter, Rex Tugwell to Harold Ickes, April 23, 1941; Folder: “Apr.-June, 1941”; Box 373; Ickes Papers.

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?"⁹⁶

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..."⁹⁷

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. 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."⁹⁸

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

⁹⁶Letter, Harold Ickes to Rex Tugwell, April 24, 1941; Folder: "Apr.-June, 1941"; Box 373; Ickes Papers.

⁹⁷Letter, 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).

⁹⁸Reminiscences 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).

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.⁹⁹ 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 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."¹⁰⁰ Stephen Early replied to Carter on June 29 to say the President still could not break

⁹⁹Letter, Michael Carter to Franklin Roosevelt, August 31, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) July-Aug 1942"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁰⁰Letter, Michael Carter to Franklin Roosevelt, June 25, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), May-June 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

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.¹⁰¹

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."¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³ "I regret that my 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

¹⁰¹Letter, Stephen Early to Michael Carter, June 29, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), May-June 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁰²Memorandum, Marvin McIntyre to William Hassett, January 20, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-April 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁰³Letter, Michael Carter to Harold Ickes, March 30, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

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."¹⁰⁴ 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."¹⁰⁵

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 equality of opportunity is still long and hard, and "If I Were a Negro" I would not stop until I had reached the goal.¹⁰⁶

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

¹⁰⁴Letter, Harold Ickes to Michael Carter, April 13, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁰⁵Michael Carter, "'I Have Done Everything to Abolish Discrimination,'" *Afro-American*, June 5, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁶Letter, Harold Ickes to John H. Johnson, April 15, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

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.¹⁰⁷ 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."¹⁰⁸

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 defended every day in the year. And by striving for it we shall approach it. This is our battle."¹⁰⁹ 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."¹¹⁰ 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

¹⁰⁷Michael Carter, "U.S. Must Give Vote and Equal Pay to Everyone–Mrs. FDR," *Afro-American*, July 18, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁸Michael Carter, "No Freedom Here: Colored People, says V-President Wallace 'We Haven't Solved Problem Anywhere'," *Afro-American*, October 23, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁹Michael Carter, "U.S. Not Using Enough Colored War Workers, Warns Paul V. McNutt," *Afro-American*, December 12, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹⁰Michael Carter, "An Interview with: Truman K. Gibson Civilian Aide to Secretary of War," *Afro-American*, July 17, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

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."¹¹¹ 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."¹¹²

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

¹¹¹Michael Carter, "America Will Lose the Peace Unless It Gives Equal Duties and Opportunity to Everyone," *Afro-American*, August 15, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹²Michael Carter, "Race Hate Choking All of Nation—Dewey," *Afro-American*, October 24, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Policy Case Studies

This section considers a series of policy case studies: 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.¹¹³ 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 Senators 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."¹¹⁴ 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

¹¹³For 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.

¹¹⁴Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 138-139.

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.¹¹⁵

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."¹¹⁶ 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.

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

¹¹⁵Letter, Carl Murphy to Marvin McIntyre, February 5, 1938; Folder: "Lynching 1938-1944"; OF 93a; FDR Official Files.

¹¹⁶Meeting Notes, Francis Biddle, December 11, 1942; Folder: "Cabinet meetings, July-Dec. 1942"; Box 1; Biddle Papers.

indication the White House took it particularly seriously.¹¹⁷

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.”¹¹⁸ 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.”¹¹⁹ 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 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

¹¹⁷Letter, Roy Wilkins to Franklin Roosevelt, March 9, 1939; Folder: “Lynching 1938-1944”; Box OF 93a; FDR Official Files.

¹¹⁸Letter, 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.

¹¹⁹Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 161.

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."¹²⁰

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 of 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").¹²¹ 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 was 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.¹²²

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.¹²³

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

¹²⁰Ibid., 169.

¹²¹William Doyle, *Inside the Oval Office: The White House Tapes from FDR to Clinton*, (New York: Kodansha International, 1999), 15.

¹²²Memo, Robert Patterson to Franklin Roosevelt, October 8, 1940, Box OF 93b, Folder "Segregation, 1933-45," Official Files.

¹²³Letter, Walter White to Harold Ickes; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

trick," Niles wrote.¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵ The letter was received favorably by the civil rights leaders.¹²⁶

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."¹²⁷

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."¹²⁸

¹²⁴Letter, David Niles to Stephen Early, October 21, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁵Letter, Franklin Roosevelt to Walter White, October 25, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁶Letter, Arnold Hill to Franklin Roosevelt, October 31, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files. Letter, A. Philip Randolph to Franklin Roosevelt, October 31, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁷Letter, Henry Stimson to Franklin Roosevelt, November 13, 1940; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Oct-Dec 1940"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹²⁸Letter, Truman Gibson to Isabelle Gibson, February 7, 1941; Folder: "Family papers, correspondence, Jan-Mar

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.¹²⁹ 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 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.¹³⁰

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

1941”; Box 1; Truman K. Gibson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Gibson Papers).

¹²⁹Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, March 13, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-May 1941”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³⁰Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 566.

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.¹³¹

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."¹³² 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 advocating his perspective to the military establishment.¹³³ 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 on the matter of race and color."¹³⁴ 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

¹³¹Ibid., 383.

¹³²Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, October 28, 1942; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) [in Box 5]"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³³Memorandum, Walter White to War Department, April 22, 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Apr-May 1944"; OF 93; Official Files.

¹³⁴Letter, Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, November 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Oct-Dec 1944"; OF 93; Official Files.

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."¹³⁵

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?"¹³⁶ 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").¹³⁷

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 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."¹³⁸

¹³⁵Letter, Paul McNutt to Henry Stimson, February 17, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-April 1943"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹³⁶Letter, Harold Ickes to John McCloy, July 23, 1943; Folder: "1943-1946"; Box 376; Ickes Papers.

¹³⁷Memorandum, Truman Gibson to John McCloy, November 3, 1943; Folder: "Subject File, Politics, 1940-43, 1957, 1965"; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹³⁸Letter, John Stengstacke to Franklin Roosevelt, December 29, 1943; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

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."¹³⁹

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 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.¹⁴⁰

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

¹³⁹Document, Chief of Naval Personnel, January 5, 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944"; OF 93; Official Files.

¹⁴⁰Memorandum, Jonathan Daniels to Franklin Roosevelt, January 15, 1944; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes), Jan-March 1944"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

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.¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

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.¹⁴³ On March 31, Gibson sent a report of his visit to the European Theater of Operations to General Lee.¹⁴⁴ 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.

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 Pres-

¹⁴¹Meeting Notes, February 29, 1944; "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹⁴²Meeting Notes, April 26, 1944; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹⁴³Report, Truman Gibson to Major General Nelson, March 12, 1945; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

¹⁴⁴Report, Truman Gibson to General Lee, March 31, 1945; Folder: "Subject File, War Department, Correspondence & Related Materials, 1944-65, nd."; Box 3; Gibson Papers.

ident'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.¹⁴⁵ 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."¹⁴⁶ By June, Roosevelt was expressing displeasure at the proposed march. In a June 7 memorandum to Marvin McIntyre, the 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."¹⁴⁷ This,

¹⁴⁵Louis 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).

¹⁴⁶Memorandum, Stephen Early to Wayne Coy, May 7, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Jan-May 1941"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁴⁷Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Marvin McIntyre, June 7, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) June-July

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.”¹⁴⁸ 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 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.”¹⁴⁹

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

1941”; OF 93; Official Files.

¹⁴⁸Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 252.

¹⁴⁹Memorandum, Robert Patterson to Franklin Roosevelt, June 24, 1941; Folder: “Colored Matters (Negroes) June-July 1941”; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

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."¹⁵⁰

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.¹⁵¹ 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?"¹⁵² On June 27, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia wrote a letter to the President. "I think you should see Walter White 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."¹⁵³ 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."¹⁵⁴

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

¹⁵⁰Letter, Mark Ethridge to Stephen Early, August 20, 1941; Folder: "Colored Matters (Negroes) Aug-Dec 1941"; OF 93; FDR Official Files.

¹⁵¹Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 43.

¹⁵²Memorandum, Franklin Roosevelt to Stephen Early, June 24, 1943; Folder: "Detroit Race Riots 1943-45"; OF 93c; FDR Official Files.

¹⁵³Letter, Fiorello LaGuardia to Franklin Roosevelt, June 27, 1943; Folder: "Detroit Race Riots 1943-45"; OF 93c; FDR Official Files.

¹⁵⁴Memorandum, Grace Tully to Franklin Roosevelt, July 7, 1943; Folder: "Detroit Race Riots 1943-45"; OF 93c; Official Files.

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."¹⁵⁵ 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 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."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵Memorandum, Saul Padover to Harold Ickes, June 29, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁵⁶Letter, William A. Neilson to Harold Ickes, July 29, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

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 go to do something...or there will be real trouble in the tense situation that exists among the two races throughout the country."¹⁵⁷ 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 remained 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.¹⁵⁸ The archival collection

Letter, Harold Ickes to William A. Neilson, August 3, 1943; Folder: "Negroes, 1933-1945"; Box 213; Ickes Papers.

¹⁵⁷Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 446.

¹⁵⁸Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, (New York: The Viking Press: 1946), 298.

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.¹⁵⁹ 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 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."¹⁶⁰

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."¹⁶¹

Perkins was cynical about progress on segregation. Just after the *Brown* case, she said it would

¹⁵⁹Speech, 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.

¹⁶⁰Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p.149, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁶¹Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 909, Perkins Oral History.

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."¹⁶²

"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 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

¹⁶²Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 336, Perkins Oral History.

the bus,” Perkins said, “Yes, but they got on the bus after all. The bus hauled them where they wanted to go.”¹⁶³

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.”¹⁶⁴

Overall, Perkins seemed to not understand the importance of race, feeling more comfortable 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.”¹⁶⁵ 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

¹⁶³Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 336-338, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁶⁴Reminiscences of Frances Perkins (1961), Interview 8, Session 1, p. 342, Perkins Oral History.

¹⁶⁵Letter, Harold Ickes to Malcolm Ross, July 1, 1946; Folder: “Negroes, 1946-1951”; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

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."¹⁶⁶

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."¹⁶⁷ However, an earlier memo suggested a different concern. He used the line about liking the NAACP's "spunk," 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."¹⁶⁸

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.

¹⁶⁶Letter, Harold Ickes to Vincent Sheean and George Marshall, September 19, 1946; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

¹⁶⁷Letter, Harold Ickes to Oliver Harrington, May 19, 1947; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

¹⁶⁸Memorandum, Harold Ickes to Dr. Clark; Folder: "Negroes, 1946-1951"; Box 75; Ickes Papers.

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 their part in 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.”¹⁶⁹

This chapter demonstrates the theoretical utility of reconsidering the Roosevelt administration’s record on civil rights in light of the Second World War. It is not a revisionist account. The Roosevelt administration did relatively little to advance black civil rights. However, putting aside

¹⁶⁹Letter, A. Philip Randolph to Mary McLeod Bethune, June 8, 1942; Folder: “March on Washington Movement, Correspondence, A-B 1942”; Box 26; Randolph Papers.

the normative shortcomings of this fact, this chapter focuses on the few changes that did occur and the empirical underpinnings of these shifts. Prior research on the racial agenda of the Roosevelt years largely misses the simultaneously compelling and constraining aspects of World War II in this realm, as well as the link between the various racial policies of the wartime period.

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."¹⁷⁰ This tendency has clear roots in the Second World War, and this earlier period also has similarly restrictive aspects complementing the more liberating ones.

¹⁷⁰Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11, 13.