

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**ROOSEVELT
AND RACE**

TOUCH TO BEGIN

TUPELO, MISS.
MAY 8-1936
LEE CO. TRAINING
SCHOOL WORKERS

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**ROOSEVELT
AND RACE**

During the 1930s, African Americans ended their long allegiance to the Republican Party—which dated back to the days of Abraham Lincoln—and became a reliable Democratic voting bloc. Black voters in northern cities provided crucial support to FDR in the 1940 and 1944 presidential elections.

Yet despite this overwhelming support, FDR did not become a champion of civil rights. Roosevelt recognized the grievances of African Americans, but believed his New Deal reforms would be jeopardized if he took advanced positions on race. There was little active support for civil rights reform among Northern whites and white Southerners were deeply opposed. FDR's ability to get legislation through Congress depended upon the support of long-serving southern Democrats who chaired many key committees. Later, as World War II approached, he would need these same Southern committee chairmen to overcome isolationists in Congress who opposed increased defense spending and aid to Britain.

Increasingly, FDR found himself caught between two important Democratic constituencies with conflicting agendas. His dilemma came into bold relief in 1940, when African American labor leader A. Philip Randolph threatened to lead a massive March on Washington to protest racial discrimination in defense industries. Eleanor Roosevelt supported Randolph and helped arrange an Oval Office meeting with FDR. At that meeting, FDR tried to persuade Randolph to abandon his threat. But when he stood firm, the President agreed to issue an executive order creating the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The FEPC was empowered to investigate and overturn race discrimination in industries engaged in military production.

Roosevelt never agreed to African American leaders' demand that that he end racial discrimination in America's armed forces. But World War II provided FDR with opportunities to take action against discrimination without having to go to Congress and to create an environment in which minorities could advance in the military. In 1940, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. became the army's first black brigadier general. During the war, blacks were admitted to the Marine Corps for the first time and the Army Air Corps ended its ban on black pilots. With strong public support from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, nearly one thousand black pilots were trained at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. Many of the "Tuskegee Airmen" served in North Africa and Europe in the all-black 99th Pursuit Squadron.

Scroll down to view
select documents
from the FDR Library
and excerpts from the
historical debate.

African Americans and the New Deal

The following documents relate to the New Deal and the African American experience in general.

Harry Hopkins's Letter about FDR's Statement on the WPA June 17, 1935

Though the New Deal provided assistance to African Americans, this aid was often administered in a discriminatory manner. FDR felt constrained by the anti-civil rights attitudes of powerful Southern Congressional leaders whose support he needed for his legislative program. Consequently, domestic and agricultural workers (fields in which blacks were disproportionately represented) were often excluded from New Deal reforms such as Social Security and minimum wage laws. Some agricultural reforms unintentionally worsened the plight of Southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Blacks were employed in the Civilian Conservation Corps and other work programs, but they were often segregated in low skill, low paying jobs. Some New Deal administrators were sympathetic to civil rights issues, including Harry Hopkins of the Works Progress Administration, Aubrey Williams of the National Youth Administration, and Harold Ickes of the Public Works Administration. They worked to eradicate discrimination in their programs. In this 1935 letter to White House press secretary Stephen Early, Hopkins suggests some anti-discrimination talking points for President Roosevelt to make in a presentation to WPA administrators.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.

HARRY L. HOPKINS
ADMINISTRATOR

June 17, 1935

Honorable Stephen Early
Secretary to the President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Steve:

// The President is going to see the Works Progress Administrators at 5 o'clock today to say a brief word to them. I think he will want to cover these points.

1. There is to be the closest cooperation with Mayors of Cities, County Officials and Governors. While administratively the whole program is a Federal enterprise, it can never be conducted successfully without the joint efforts of everyone.

2. It is essential that there be no discrimination in this work because of race, religion or politics, with particular emphasis on the latter.

3. The real objective is to take three and a half million unemployed from the relief rolls and put them to work on useful projects.

There will be representatives from all of the states except two, and a half dozen people from our office at the meeting this afternoon.

Very sincerely yours,

Harry L. Hopkins
Administrator

Eleanor Roosevelt's Memo to FDR and Letter to Mary McLeod Bethune November 22-27, 1941

Despite its shortcomings, the New Deal provided opportunities for African Americans to serve in government in small, but unprecedented numbers. Sympathetic New Deal officials appointed African Americans as special advisers to help focus aid efforts on the black community. This so-called “black cabinet” met periodically to steer the administration towards more inclusive policies. Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Youth Administration was a leader of this group and a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. At Bethune’s urging, Mrs. Roosevelt sent this memo to FDR asking him to appoint an African American to a high position in government to advise on issues important to blacks. FDR’s handwritten response reads: “No—any more than I can put in a Jew as such or a Spiritualist as such—FDR”. At the bottom is Mrs. Roosevelt’s instruction to her secretary on drafting a reply Bethune.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 100: Bethune, Mary McLeod, 1941; Box 734

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 22, 1941

MEMO FOR THE PRESIDENT:

I have been asked to call your attention to the importance of having a Negro in a position who can actually confer with the President occasionally on problems that are pertinent to Negroes, and who can have a very close affiliation with the Under-Secretaries of the President as to the Negro's cause.

E.R.

No - may more than I can
put in a Jew as such
or a Spiritualist as such

Explain to White Belt
better to have white person
who is by appointment because of color

HR

elo

100

November 27, 1941

Dear Mrs. Bethune:

I spoke to the President about your desire to have a colored person appointed to a position where he could confer on problems pertinent to Negroes, and he says he feels it unwise to appoint people definitely as of any race or creed. I think, therefore, it is better to have a white person who is sympathetic.

Very sincerely yours,

Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune
NYA

0

FDR and Anti-Lynching Legislation

One of the great stains on FDR's civil rights record is his failure to actively support Federal anti-lynching legislation. As horrific cases of lynching spiked throughout the South and other parts of the country, private organizations worked to prevent them while Eleanor Roosevelt and civil rights leaders urged FDR to take action.

The following documents relate to the subject of FDR and anti-lynching legislation.

Letter to FDR from Walter White of the NAACP May 1, 1934

As the Great Depression deepened, the number of lynchings of African American men increased. Most lynchings took place in the South—although incidents did occur in other parts of the country. Such murders were left to state and local officials to prosecute, but toxic notions of white supremacy and Jim Crow discrimination laws resulted in the failure to bring perpetrators to justice. This crisis led to calls for a Federal anti-lynching law—known as the Costigan-Wagner Bill—allowing Federal law enforcement to step in when state and local officials failed. Walter White, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was one of the bill's strongest advocates. But the legislation needed FDR's support to get a vote in Congress. After consulting with Eleanor Roosevelt, White wrote this impassioned letter to the President.

President's Personal File 1336: NAACP, 1933-1936 FDR did not respond.

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
 ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

69 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: ALGONQUIN 4-6548

Official Organ: *The Crisis*



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 ROY WILKINS ASSISTANT SECRETARY
 DR. W. E. B. DU BOIS EDITOR OF THE CRISIS
 WILLIAM PICKENS FIELD SECRETARY
 DAISY E. LAMPKIN REGIONAL FIELD SECRETARY

May 1, 1934

My dear Mr. McIntyre:

I have been out of the city and that explains my delay in replying to your courteous note of April 24.

I too am sorry it was impossible for the President to see me when I was in Washington on April 19. I had, however, a very satisfactory conference with Mrs. Roosevelt who stated that she would inform the President of the facts which were brought out in our conversation. I wrote Mrs. Roosevelt on April 20. I do not know whether she has had opportunity as yet to place before the President my letter. I enclose copy of it, which will serve as the memorandum you suggest my sending you to be placed before the President.

From reports which come to us from authentic sources in various parts of the country, the recent strenuous efforts to prevent lynchings in Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi and other places has been due almost entirely to fear of federal legislation. These reports give ground for belief that should the Costigan-Wagner Bill fail of passage there will be new and bloody outbreaks which may result in a situation as terrible as that of last summer and fall.

It is our conviction that the bill can be passed if it is only brought up for a vote. We strongly urge that the President make the request of the leaders of Congress that the bill be voted on prior to adjournment. We do not believe that there need be any fear of a sustained filibuster. The remarkable support of southern white people of the bill, especially in the resolution passed unanimously by the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church South endorsing the Costigan-Wagner Bill, has materially lessened opposition by southern members of Congress.

Ever sincerely,

Walter White
 Secretary

Mr. Marvin H. McIntyre
 Assistant Secretary to the President
 The White House
 Washington, D. C.

WW/RR

How do your Senators and Congressmen stand on the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill?

ENDORSED BY THE NATIONAL INFORMATION BUREAU, 215 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE — OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA., June 27 - July 1, 1934

Text of Proposed NAACP Press Release **May 11, 1934**

As the 1934 congressional session neared its end, NAACP leader Walter White desperately sought a meeting with FDR to gain his support for anti-lynching legislation. Eleanor Roosevelt arranged a White House tea with her and FDR on May 7, 1934. The President told ER and White that while he privately supported the bill, he would do nothing to stop an expected Senate filibuster. He could not challenge his party's Southern leadership in Congress on this issue, he said, without risking his entire New Deal program. Refusing to be discouraged, White focused on FDR's personal support for the bill. He sent this draft press release to White House press secretary Stephen Early for approval. Instead, Early had the draft filed without reply. No further action was taken on the bill before the 1934 session ended.

Official File 93a: Colored Matters: Lynchings, 1933-1935

If there is any objection to this statement being printed in the 200 colored newspapers of the country, you can wire Walter White, N.A.A.C.P., 69 - 5th Avenue, N.Y.C. He had to leave on 12:00 o'clock train. White is Secretary of the Natl. Assn. for Advancement of Colored People.

file
5/11/34
L.C.

X
The President received Walter White at the White House on Sunday, May 7th and discussed with him for an hour the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill and the race problem generally. The President expressed keen interest in and knowledge of the facts regarding lynching and reiterated his abhorrence of the evil. He asked many questions regarding various features of the Bill.

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93

At the close of the interview, certain doubts which the President had had regarding the enforceability of some parts of the measure appeared to have vanished. He promised Mr. White he would consult with Senators Wagner and Costigan as soon as possible and would urge upon the leaders of Congress that the Bill be brought up and voted on before Congress adjourns.

93a

Memorial (Petition) to FDR to Support Anti-Lynching Legislation December 1934

As the 1935 Congressional session approached, Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter White of the NAACP renewed their pressure on President Roosevelt to back the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching legislation. To demonstrate that the bill had broad public support, White circulated this petition—or memorial—among sympathetic governors, mayors, college presidents, newspaper editors, pastors, judges, and private organizations. White hoped to present the petition in person to the President in late December 1934 before the opening session of the new Congress. The meeting never took place, and the petition was buried in the White House files.

President's Personal File 1336: NAACP, 1933-1936

MEMORIAL TO PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT:

The killing and burning alive of human beings by mobs in the United States is a reproach upon our nation throughout the civilized world. The recent shameless abduction of a prisoner, and transportation across the State line from Alabama to Florida to be lynched, with the crime advertised throughout the nation twelve hours in advance, is a notorious example of the complete breakdown of the machinery of justice which has grown out of the lynching evil. Since 1882, 5,068 human beings have been lynched in the United States, with less than a dozen convictions; in each of these cases only nominal prison terms were given the lynchers.

During 1934 the total of lynchings has already reached the alarming number of 18. While the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill was pending in the Congress there was a complete cessation of lynching for a period of six months but since June, when Congress adjourned without voting on the Costigan-Wagner bill, 16 mob murders have taken place.

We, the undersigned, urge respectfully that you as President of the United States in your opening address to the Congress place the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill on your "must" program. Only unequivocal action by yourself as the leader of American opinion can overcome the objections even to a vote on the measure by a small group in the Senate who prevented a vote during the last session of Congress. In behalf of the good name of America we respectfully urge immediate action upon the convening of Congress to the end that the Federal Government may give aid, as it has in the case of kidnapping, to the State in stamping out this notorious American crime.

Memorandum for Stephen Early

April 25, 1935

On January 4, 1935, FDR introduced an ambitious legislative agenda for the year. The NAACP's Walter White was bitterly disappointed that it did not include an anti-lynching bill. Still, White continued his efforts to pass the bill when it was reintroduced in the new Congress. Throughout the spring, he and Eleanor Roosevelt unsuccessfully urged the President to prevent another Senate filibuster. When the filibuster began in late April, White appealed to the White House for a presidential meeting. However, FDR's staff—sensitive to the damage Southern Democrats could do to the President's agenda—blocked White's access. As this memo reveals, White's request first went to press secretary Stephen Early. Presidential political secretary Marvin McIntyre—known as Mac—also weighed in, recommending that FDR not meet with White. The President responded “Mac is right. FDR.” Anti-lynching legislation did not pass in 1935. But the Social Security Act, National Labor Relations Act, and other hallmark New Deal reforms did.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Mac

4-25-35

Memorandum for Mr. Early:

Walter White,^x Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people, wants to see the President as soon as possible, tomorrow, about a situation which has arisen in connection with Lynching Bill. Says to call him at Costigan's office, or Senator Wagner's office.

RB

*Mac says
you should not see
him as he wants to
discuss pending legislation
ML*

*Mac is right
JWR*

Letter from Mary McLeod Bethune to FDR January 18, 1940

Anti-lynching legislation was repeatedly introduced in Congress only to fail because of a Senate filibuster by Southern Democrats. In a dramatic moment in 1937, Eleanor Roosevelt sat in the Senate galleries throughout a seven-day filibuster before the bill once again went down to defeat. By 1938, the NAACP and Walter White concluded that a federal anti-lynching law simply would not pass and gave less priority to it. However, other groups continued to push for the law, as seen in this 1940 letter from Eleanor Roosevelt's close friend and civil rights leader, Mary McLeod Bethune. Anti-lynching legislation never became law during Roosevelt's presidency.

Official File 93a: Colored Matters: Lynching, 1938-1944

7

National Council of Negro Women of the United States, Inc.

Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, *Founder and National President*

My

Executive Secretary

Mrs. Carita V. Roane
2303 Seventh Avenue
New York City

January 18, 1940

My

File

Telephone
Edgecombe 4-2629

93-a

Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of
The United States of America
Washington, D. C.

Honorable Sir:

^x
The National Council of Negro Women of the United States, Inc. representing five million women, would appreciate some public utterance from you on the Anti-lynching Bill. We have watched with interest your great humanitarian program and we are sure that you are vitally interested in all minority groups. Despite this assurance, we feel that since there are interests which are opposed to the passing of this very necessary piece of legislation, that you, as President of the United States, could do the Negro group a service that would never be forgotten, if some word could be said on this matter.

Very respectfully yours,

Mary McLeod Bethune

Mary McLeod Bethune
President

x

MMB/bmc

FDR and the Poll Tax

African Americans were almost universally disenfranchised in Southern states. As late as 1940, less than 5% of eligible black voters were registered. A common tool used to keep African Americans from voting was the poll tax, which placed an economic burden on poor blacks. If they could not pay the tax, they could not vote.

The following documents relate to FDR and the poll tax issue.

Petition to the President of the United States 1942

Throughout the 1930s, FDR was frustrated by the conservative Southern wing of his party. Roosevelt believed that the poll tax was a major cause of the continued dominance of conservatives in the South. It disenfranchised African Americans who were supportive of the New Deal. In a March 1938 speech in Gainesville, Georgia, FDR condemned the South's "feudal system," likening it to fascist movements in Europe: "If you believe in the one, you lean to the other." As America's entry into World War II began to break down existing social barriers, a campaign to abolish the poll tax gained strength, as reflected in this petition sent to the White House in 1942.

Official File 1113: Voting: Poll Tax, 1942-1945

A PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, PRESIDENT:

To Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt and all fair-minded Liberty Loving people of this good old U.S.A.; we the undersigned do earnestly ask that you, Mr. President, Mr. Senator and Mr. Congressman, get something started that will stop and abolish the collection of the poll tax for the privilege of voting in any election in the United States and make it as early as possible.

We the Southern people of this United State love and cherish the constitution of Our Land just as much as our neighboring states. We are sending our men to the far-off battle fronts of the world to fight corruption to protect this constitution. Wouldn't it be nice "in the sight of god and man" to offer these men a free vote while their lives are at stake? Just to pet some greedy politician when these same men would understand and think of having to pay that poll tax when they returned home, if they ever return. We are again asking that our constitutional rights be respected by abolishing the poll tax.

Respectfully yours,

W H Holcomb
H D Higgins
J R Kemmett

Macon Faulkner	Chester Faulkner
Ruby E. Neal	James Bruner
L.W. Cunningham	V J Turner
B.L. Datch	Clintz Wain
J. McCaughey	Charles Hager
J.F. Hunter	F.O. Wilson
C.H. Bell	J.W. Blackburn
J.H. Taylor	John B. Gillespie
Tommy Farley	Opal Gillespie
Beck Faulkner	Chas E Gillespie
John Lady	J.H. Meason
Taylor Price	Bill Gillespie
Duster Pais	Harry Hafford
Royal Faulkner	Joe Lauer
M.C. Orr	Mack Mcarty
A.N. Duff	Sally Tippin
P.T. Luntchuld	R.F. Swedholm
J.M. Reynolds	Mase Mcarty
J.R. Kimbrell	M.M. Lamb
Howard Bond	Doued Howard
Noel Lewis	Nellis Davis
Wayman C. Baldwin	Edna Noel
Marion Kingston	J.F. Baldwin

Memo from Malvina C. Thompson to Jonathan Daniels March 11, 1945

In November 1942, FDR sent a memo to Attorney General Francis Biddle suggesting that poll taxes were unconstitutional because poor people who could not pay the tax were denied access to the voting booth. If Congress would not abolish the poll tax nationwide, he wrote, then each state's poll tax restrictions should be challenged in court. The President suggested that "the question of race need not be raised in any way, on the ground that in poll tax States, a very large number of whites, as well as Negroes, are, in effect, denied the right to vote." The Attorney General did not pursue FDR's suggested court actions. However, both FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt supported ongoing efforts to repeal the poll tax at the state level. In this 1945 memo to White House secretary Jonathan Daniels, Eleanor's personal secretary Malvina C. Thompson informs the President of a new anti-poll tax campaign in Alabama.

Official File 1113: Voting: Poll Tax, 1942-1945

MEMO FOR MR. DANIELS:

1113
Poll Tax folder
SIT
File
x pp 7.2

Margaret Fisher had lunch with Mrs. Roosevelt last Friday and in view of the success in Georgia, she thinks that Col. Harry Ayers, of the Anniston, Alabama, STAR, could be encouraged to call a meeting of publishers of Alabama papers, including the weeklies, to do a similar job in Alabama on the poll tax. It should be exclusively Alabama people and perhaps Senator Hill could be induced to attend.

She also thinks that Mr. Dabney of Virginia could be pushed a little.

M. C. Thompson

March 11, 1945

The March on Washington and Executive Order 8802

As war mobilization began to lift the nation out of the Depression, discrimination by industry and labor excluded many African Americans from the full benefits of the economic boom. Civil rights leaders threatened a March on Washington. In response, on June 25, 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802 barring racial discrimination in defense industries.

The following documents relate to FDR, the March on Washington, and Executive Order 8802.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**ROOSEVELT
AND RACE**

FDR's Exchange of Memos with William Knudsen May 26-28, 1941

One of the most influential civil rights leaders of the 1930s and 1940s was A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an all black union of railroad workers. Outraged by stories of new defense plants refusing to hire qualified African Americans over less qualified whites, Randolph was determined to take action. In early 1941, Randolph announced his intention to organize a March on Washington. When FDR learned from Eleanor Roosevelt of well-educated blacks only finding work as janitors and cleaners in defense plants, he sent this memo to William Knudsen and Sidney Hillman at the Office of Production Management, the agency overseeing the defense industry. Knudsen replied that OPM would “quietly” try to get plant managers to increase the number of African American workers.

Official File 93: Colored Matters, 1941

75/27/41

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The following is a copy of the President's handwritten memorandum:

"KNUDSEN - HILLMAN
O.P.M.

x4245

To order taking negroes
up to a certain % in
factory order work.
Judge them on quality -
The 1st class negroes are
turned down for 3rd
class white boys?

?

F.D.R."

The original of this handwritten memorandum sent to Mr. Knudsen;
copy sent to Mr. Hillman.

5/26/41

hm

HENRY L. STIMSON
SECRETARY OF WAR

FRANK KNOX
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

WILLIAM S. KNUDSEN
DIRECTOR GENERAL

SIDNEY HILLMAN
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR GENERAL

OFFICE OF PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D. C.

8

6/4/41

May 28, 1941

The President
The White House

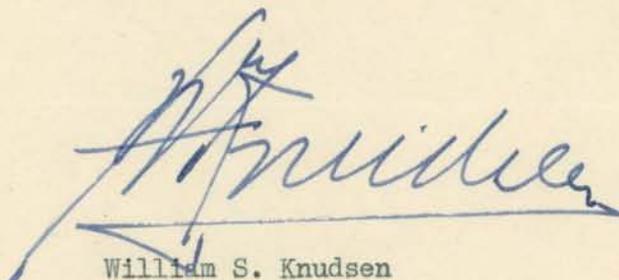
My dear Mr. President:

Referring to your memorandum regarding Negro workers in defense plants, I have talked with Mr. Hillman and we will quietly get manufacturers to increase the number of Negroes on defense work.

x172

If we set a percentage it will immediately be open to dispute; quiet work with the contractors and the unions will bring a better result.

Respectfully yours,


William S. Knudsen

FDR's Memo for Marvin McIntyre

June 7, 1941

The Administration's promise to "quietly" increase the number of African Americans in defense plants failed to satisfy A. Philip Randolph, Eleanor Roosevelt, and others. FDR felt more and more pressure as the July 1st date for the March on Washington neared. Dr. F. O. Williston, a prominent black leader in Washington, D.C., contacted the White House and asked for a meeting to discuss African American issues in the military and in defense work. In this memo to presidential political secretary Marvin McIntyre, known as "Mac," FDR expresses his increasing frustration at the situation and recommends telling Williston that the best contribution he could make to relieving tensions over race issues "is to stop that march."

Official File 93: Colored Matters, 1941

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 7, 1941

MEMO FOR MAC

On this Williston matter, we are accomplishing an enormous amount for negroes in the Army and accomplishing a little in the defense industries. But we expect to accomplish more and on the whole progress has been relatively rapid.

x25-Mad
x25

Tell 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 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.

x391

F. D. R.

x335-Mad.

Memorandum for the President

June 14, 1941

As pressure mounted on the White House and the March on Washington neared, FDR asked Aubrey Williams—the liberal head of the National Youth Administration—to organize a meeting in New York City with Eleanor Roosevelt, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, Anna Rosenberg of the Social Security Board, and black leaders A. Philip Randolph and the NAACP’s Walter White. Williams’s job was to get the March on Washington stopped. From FDR’s point of view, the results were unsatisfactory, as can be seen in this memo to the President from secretary Edwin M. Watson. Watson relays Mayor LaGuardia’s opinion that the only thing that could stop the March would be a high level meeting at the White House attended by the President and other officials. FDR agreed, and a meeting was scheduled for June 18, 1941.

Official File 391: Marches on Washington

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

6-14-41

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

I talked to Anna Rosenberg and she tells me that Fiorello LaGuardia's message was a recommendation that you have Stimson, Knox, Knudsen and Hillman meet with you, and at the same time invite White and Randolph to come in and thresh it out right then and there.

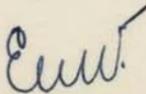
x4025

x4422

Fiorello says he thinks this will stop the march and nothing else will, except the President's presence and direction.

I told Anna to tell the Mayor I would call him up early Monday morning and let him have a message.

Anna, at the same time, said Mrs. Roosevelt was in full agreement with the Mayor as to this joint meeting.



E.M.W.

Proposals of the Negro March-on-Washington Committee to FDR ca. June 18, 1941

At the June 18, 1941 meeting at the White House, FDR first tried to distract his visitors with anecdotes and stories. A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the March on Washington effort, would have none of it, stating simply, "Mr. President, time is running out." He asked the President to issue an Executive order banning discrimination in the defense industry. FDR countered that he couldn't do anything until the March on Washington was cancelled. Randolph replied that it could not be called off and that he expected 100,000 marchers to arrive in Washington in less than two weeks. With talks at an impasse, New York Mayor LaGuardia suggested that they begin working on a formula that would resolve the issue. The black leaders and government officials adjourned to the Cabinet room to work on a proposed solution. Among the sticking points, as can be seen in this document, was the civil rights leaders' demand that any Executive order not just ban discrimination in the defense industry, but also in the military and the Federal government. The President told LaGuardia that this was a deal breaker.

6/21/41

File

PROPOSALS OF THE
NEGRO MARCH-ON-WASHINGTON COMMITTEE

TO
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT
FOR
URGENT CONSIDERATION

391

- POINT 1. An executive order forbidding the awarding of contracts to any concern, Navy Yard or Army Arsenal which refuses employment to qualified persons on account of race, creed or color. In the event that such discrimination continues to exist, the Government shall take over the plant for continuous operation, by virtue of the authority vested in the President of the United States, as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and as expressed in the Proclamation declaring a state of unlimited national emergency, May 27, 1941.
- POINT 2. An executive order abolishing discrimination and segregation in the Army, Navy, Marine, Air Corps, Medical Corps and all other branches of the armed service.
- POINT 3. An executive order abolishing discrimination in vocational and defense training courses for workers in National Defense whether financed in whole or in part by the Federal Government.
- POINT 4. That the President ask the Congress to pass a law forbidding the benefits of the National Labor Relations Act to Labor Unions denying Negroes membership through Constitutional provisions, ritualistic practices or otherwise.
- POINT 5. That the President issue instructions to the United States employment Services that available workers be supplied in order of their registration without regard to race, creed or color.
- POINT 6. An executive order abolishing discrimination and segregation on account of race, creed or color in all departments of the Federal Government.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**ROOSEVELT
AND RACE**

Executive Order 8802

June 25, 1941

One week after the White House meeting, a compromise was reached: FDR would issue an Executive order banning racial discrimination in the hiring of workers in all industries engaged in defense production. The order also would contain general—but not legally binding language—opposing discrimination in the Federal government. This carefully crafted wording satisfied most sides, including Eleanor Roosevelt who encouraged A. Philip Randolph to accept the deal. FDR signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. In return, Randolph canceled the March on Washington. Although EO 8802 was issued grudgingly by FDR, it is viewed today as an important step in the early civil rights movement and helped bring the economic benefits of the war boom to the nation's African American citizens.

Official File 4245g: Committee on Fair Employment Practices (OPM), 1941

EXECUTIVE ORDER

8802

1852

REAFFIRMING POLICY OF FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE DEFENSE PROGRAM BY ALL PERSONS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN, AND DIRECTING CERTAIN ACTION IN FURTHERANCE OF SAID POLICY.

WHEREAS it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

WHEREAS there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in industries engaged in defense production solely because of consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin, to the detriment of workers' morale and of national unity:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations, in furtherance of said policy and of this order, to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;

And it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin;
2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin;
3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a chairman and four other members to be appointed by the President. The chairman and members of the Committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall be entitled to actual and necessary transportation, subsistence and other expenses incidental to performance of their duties. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this order.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE,

June 25, 1941.

A. Philip Randolph's Letter to FDR June 30, 1941

An important part of banning discrimination in defense industries was the manner in which such a ban would be enforced. Executive Order 8802 included a provision establishing a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) authorized to investigate and remedy any discriminatory practices. In this letter to FDR sent after EO 8802 was signed, March on Washington leader A. Philip Randolph was grateful that the FEPC had been established but concerned about the committee's membership. Randolph asked that he and NAACP executive secretary Walter White be allowed input on appointees to the FEPC. The five member Committee appointed by FDR on July 18, 1941 included two African Americans.

Official File 4245g: Committee on Fair Employment Practices (OPM), 1941

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH
DIRECTOR

EUGENE DAVIDSON
ASST. DIRECTOR

WARREN BROWN
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

HENRY K. CRAFT
TREASURER

Negro March-on-Washington Committee

2289 SEVENTH AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y.

EDGEcombe 4-4341

SPONSORING COMMITTEE

WALTER WHITE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION FOR ADVANCEMENT
OF COLORED PEOPLE

REV. WILLIAM LLOYD IMES
ST. JAMES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

LESTER B. GRANGER
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

FRANK R. CROSSWAITH
CHAIRMAN OF NEGRO LABOR
COMMITTEE

LAYLE LANE
VICE-PRESIDENT AMERICAN
FEDERATION OF TFACHERS

RICHARD PARRISH
PRESIDENT ASSOCIATION OF
NEGRO COLLEGE STUDENTS OF
NEW YORK

DR. RAYFORD LOGAN
CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL & STATE
COMMITTEE FOR PARTICIPATION
OF NEGROES IN NATIONAL
DEFENSE

J. FINLEY WILSON
GRAND EXALTED RULER
I.B.P.O.E. OF W.

REV. ADAM C. POWELL, JR.
ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

NOAH A. WALTERS
LAUNDRY WORKERS JOINT BOARD
OF GREATER NEW YORK, C.I.O.

E. E. WILLIAMS
SECRETARY-TREASURER
PLASTERERS AND DRILLERS
UNION, LOCAL 29, A.F.L.

June 30th, 1941

Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

In the name of the officers and members of the Negro March-On-Washington Committee and the Negro people generally, I wish to express our deep and sincere appreciation for your forthright and statesmanlike action in issuing the executive order banning discrimination in defense industries on account of race, color, creed or national origin. It is definite, clear and unmistakable in its meaning and purpose.

Now, in conference with you Wednesday, June 18th, you suggested that you had not made up your mind with respect to the composition of the Committee of Five on Fair Employment Practice. You were not sure whether it should be made up of all white persons or whether it should be mixed, but you indicated that you would be willing to listen to suggestions on the matter.

Therefore, may I request you to permit Mr. Walter White, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and myself to discuss this matter with you before you take action in appointing the personnel of this Committee?

We should appreciate this immensely.

Very sincerely yours,

A. Philip Randolph
A. Philip Randolph
Director

apf/mf

Presidential Memorandum to Government Department Heads September 3, 1941

As the work of the FEPC began to reduce discrimination in defense industries, it made discrimination in some parts of the government all the more glaring. Although FDR was resistant to issuing an Executive order banning discrimination outright throughout the Federal government, on September 3, 1941, he issued this memorandum to all the heads of government departments and agencies. It urges them to review their work practices to ensure that “in the Federal Service the doors of employment are open to all loyal and qualified workers regardless of creed, race, or national origin.”

Official File 4245g: Committee on Fair Employment Practices (OPM), 1941

(2)

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 3, 1941

TO HEADS OF ALL DEPARTMENTS AND INDEPENDENT ESTABLISHMENTS:

It has come to my attention that there is in the Federal establishment a lack of uniformity and possibly some lack of sympathetic attitude toward the problems of minority groups, particularly those relating to the employment and assignment of negroes in the Federal Civil Service.

With a view to improving the situation, it is my desire that all departments and independent establishments in the Federal Government make a thorough examination of their personnel policies and practices to the end that they may be able to assure me that in the Federal Service the doors of employment are open to all loyal and qualified workers regardless of creed, race, or national origin.

It is imperative that we deal with this problem speedily and effectively. I shall look for immediate steps to be taken by all departments and independent establishments of the Government to facilitate and put into effect this policy of non-discrimination in Federal employment.

Correspondence is filed in 93.

The Detroit Race Riots of 1943

The war boom and Executive Order 8802 drew African American workers to Northern cities and Southern workplaces in unprecedented numbers. Racial tensions increased as blacks and white competed for jobs and housing. In the spring and summer of 1943, race riots broke out across the country—the worst in Detroit in June 1943.

The following documents relate to FDR and the 1943 Detroit race riots.

FDR's Memorandum to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson June 21, 1943

The race riot in Detroit began on Sunday, June 20, 1943 in a public park known as Belle Isle that was frequented mostly by African Americans. On that hot summer day, the park was filled to capacity with nearly 100,000 people. Fights began to break out between white and blacks on the approaches to the park. Rumors began to circulate of black women and children being killed. Roving gangs of both blacks and whites roamed the streets. Michigan Governor Harry Kelly insisted that local police could handle the crisis, but by the next day it was obvious that the situation was out of control. He asked President Roosevelt for Federal assistance to end the riots. In response, FDR issued an anti-insurrection proclamation and then sent this memorandum to Secretary of War Henry Stimson directing that Federal troops be used to bring order to Detroit. 3,800 troops arrived at 11:00 a.m., and by late afternoon peace had been restored. By the time the violence ended, nearly 1,000 people had been injured and 25 African Americans and nine whites were dead.

93-6

June 21, 1943

Detroit
Riots - Official
Folder

To Honorable Henry L. Stimson, ^{x25}

Secretary of War.

I have this date issued a proclamation under the provisions of Section 5297, Revised Statutes, commanding all persons engaged in unlawful and insurrectionary proceedings in the State of Michigan to disperse and retire peaceably to their respective abodes and immediately and thereafter to abandon all insurrection, domestic violence, and combinations leading thereto.

You are hereby directed to take all necessary measures, including the use of Federal troops, to effect the purpose of said proclamation.

x1188

I am enclosing a copy of the telegram received from the Governor of Michigan requesting that Federal troops assist State authorities in maintaining law and order, preserving peace and protecting life and property within the State of Michigan.

I am also enclosing a copy of the proclamation.

x161

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

reprocepiats #

x93

copy filed 62.

Letter to FDR from New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia June 27, 1943

After Federal troops had calmed the situation in Detroit, the press and public officials began to explore the causes of the riots. In this letter to FDR, New York City mayor Fiorello LaGuardia urged the President to leave troops in place in Detroit so that the discontent would not spread to other population centers. In reality, many issues came together to cause the outbreak of violence. In particular, Detroit's population had grown exponentially as a result of the defense industry. In just two years, the city had added 250,000 people, including 150,000 African Americans, to its population of over two million. Because of this growth, blacks and whites competed over inadequate housing, transportation, and recreation sites. Eleanor Roosevelt was particularly disturbed by the Detroit riots and by increased racial violence everywhere, telling a friend, "Detroit should never have happened." However, FDR's fear of alienating Southern Democrats in Congress prevented him from speaking out or taking corrective action, and racial tensions continued to simmer throughout the war.



CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

93-C
Detroit Rpts. - Official file

June 27, 1943.

Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The President of the United States,
The White House,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chief:

x# 2538

I think you should see Walter White at the earliest possible moment. Just as we would expect from Walter, the minute trouble started in Detroit, he was on a plane and was there. I consider his advice to the Governor the saving point of the whole disgraceful situation. It is not over. The situation is still tense. Time will disclose whether or not this was instigated, and from what source. The important matter right now is to avoid a recurrence, or the spirit becoming contagious and going to other centers.

As you know, I am leaving with the Permanent Joint Board on Defense on July 1st. I can come any moment with Walter, but he knows the story. I am watching the New York situation. Thank God, so far as conditions are concerned, I believe we have done more than any other city in the country. All sorts of viewpoints will be presented to you. In the meantime, from what Walter as told me and from what I have heard from my own observers that I sent there immediately at the outbreak, I beg of you not to permit the federal troops to be withdrawn. Walter urges this very strongly. It is better to keep them a few weeks longer than to take them away one day too soon.

I will await to hear from General Watson.

Sincerely yours,

Fiorello

~~Mayor~~

x PPF.
1376

African Americans in the Military

Before and during World War II, FDR was pressured to allow African Americans to serve in the military on an equal basis with whites. Facing strong opposition from military leaders and Congress, FDR refused to desegregate the armed forces. But the war did provide him—and Eleanor Roosevelt—with opportunities to take action against discrimination.

The following documents relate to FDR and African Americans in the military.

Eleanor Roosevelt's Memorandum to FDR September 1940

In September 1940, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Walter White of the NAACP, and Arnold Hill of the Urban League asked Eleanor Roosevelt to help arrange a meeting with the President. They wanted to press FDR to eliminate discrimination in the armed forces. In this memo, Eleanor urges FDR to meet with the black leaders immediately. A meeting was arranged in the Oval Office for September 27, 1940, with Navy Secretary Frank Knox and Assistant Secretary of War Robert Patterson in attendance. The black leaders left with the impression that FDR agreed with them, at least on some points. They were disappointed when, days later, the government announced it would continue its discriminatory practices in the military, with only minor changes.

President's Secretary's Files; Eleanor Roosevelt; Box 159

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

RSP
ER

mark
3

MEMO FOR THE PRESIDENT:

I have just heard that no meeting was ever held between colored leaders like Walter White, Mr. Hill and Mr. Randolph, with the secretary of War and Navy on the subject of how the colored people can participate in the services.

There is a growing feeling amongst the colored people, and they are creating a feeling among many white people. They feel they should be allowed to participate in any training that is going on, in the aviation, army, navy, and have opportunities for service.

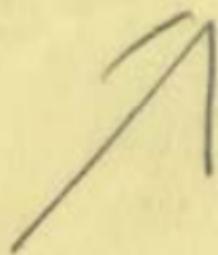
I would suggest that a conference be held with the attitude of the gentlemen: these are our difficulties, how do you suggest that we make a beginning to change the situation?

There is no use of going into a conference unless they have the intention of doing something. This is going to be very bad politically, besides being intrinsically wrong, and I think you should ask that a meeting be held and if you can not be present yourself, you should ask them to give you a report and it might be well to have General Watson present.

E.R.

THE PRESIDENT SAID HE WANTED
THIS ON HIS DESK TODAY (~~WEDNESDAY~~)

Friday -



file

(a conference was arranged)

Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt from F. D. Patterson, President of Tuskegee Institute, July 26, 1941

Eleanor Roosevelt was a longtime supporter and patron of the Tuskegee Institute, a black college in Tuskegee, Alabama founded by Booker T. Washington. After FDR's meeting with African American leaders at the White House in September 1940, the Army established an aviation training program for blacks at Tuskegee. Mrs. Roosevelt was keenly interested in this program, as can be seen in this letter to ER from Tuskegee Institute's president, F. D. Patterson. Earlier that year, Mrs. Roosevelt had traveled to Tuskegee and taken a ride in a Piper Cub airplane with Charles A. Anderson. The photographs of her flight with a black pilot caused a sensation in both white and African American press outlets. The 99th Pursuit Squadron—known as the Tuskegee Airmen—served with great distinction in North Africa, Italy, and Germany.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 100: Pa, 1941; Box 747

File

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 EDMUND E. DAY

Tuskegee Institute

FOUNDED BY BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, 1881

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE, ALABAMA

Washington, D. C.
July 26, 1941

100



Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt
The White House
Washington, D. C.

JUL 28 1941

My dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am deeply grateful for the conference you were kind enough to grant me at the White House on Wednesday, July 23rd.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to report to you the progress made to date in aviation, and phases of the defense program in which you have such a warm interest. Likewise I was happy to talk over the possibility of increasing the usefulness of Tuskegee Institute in connection with National Defense, as well as bring to your attention the need in Florida which, I feel, should be met for the best interest of Negro soldiers. I have followed up contacts in connection with both of these matters, and feel that satisfactory progress is being made.

Those concerned in the programs under consideration will, I am sure, be greatly heartened to know of your sympathetic interest.

Respectfully yours,

F. D. Patterson
President

PATTERSON

Eleanor Roosevelt's Exchange of Letters with Cecil Peterson May 28-July 7, 1942

Eleanor Roosevelt continued her support of the Tuskegee Airmen after the United States entered the war. In 1942, she began corresponding with a young African American trainee at the Tuskegee Institute, Cecil Peterson. Mrs. Roosevelt had met Peterson years before while visiting a New Deal project in Quoddy, Maine. They continued their exchange of letters throughout the war, and Mrs. Roosevelt was even able to meet Peterson on one of her trips to visit troops overseas.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 100: Pe-Pf, 1942; Box 770

100

May 28, 1942

Dear Mr. Peterson:

See → Miss Ilma has given me your name because I am a member of the board of the Young Men's Vocational Foundation and she suggested that you might like to have an occasional letter and packages sent you.

I am so much interested that you are at the flying school in Tuskegee, because I have seen it. I also understand that you were at Quoddy and because I have seen that, too, I can tell a little bit what your background of training has been.

I am sending you some hard candy and a book which I thought might interest you, and if you will write me what kind of things you are interested in, what you would like to have sent you, and keep me in touch a little bit with what you are doing, I hope I can be a more intelligent correspondent.

I hope you get on well in the Army and that you will write me.

With all good wishes, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Mr. Cecil Peterson
Recruit Detachment
Air Corps Advanced Flying School
Tuskegee, Alabama

MCT:HY



83 Interceptor
Control Squadron

SOUTHEAST AIR CORPS
TRAINING CENTER
July 7, 1942

TUSKEGEE ARMY
FLYING SCHOOL

TUSKEGEE
ALABAMA

*Very gratulating
of yourself - Tell something
about the plane etc.*

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Since you last wrote, I have been lucky in three ways. My transfer to the new squadron was effected, secondly, I was promoted to Private First class and since then given charge of a squad and am now an acting corporal.

Your letters and gifts have been very inspiring and have prompted me to try to be a better soldier.

My work is very interesting. Information regarding the squadron functions is restricted otherwise you would be interested to know some of its operations. I hope I could be able to tell you personally after the war.

Soon this short radio course will be over and I'll be of some service to Uncle Sam.

I wish that you would do something for me. Just tell the President that there's a private down here rooting for him by the name of C.P. and that I do wish him very much luck.

Hoping you and he both are well,

I am,

Very sincerely yours
Ceil Peterson

867

Eleanor Roosevelt's Letter to Evans C. Johnson September 18, 1942

The war changed the traditional social structure in the United States. As African Americans began to press for equal treatment in defense work, military service, housing, and other areas, many whites grew increasingly uncomfortable. They searched for someone to blame for causing this massive change, and Eleanor Roosevelt—whose sympathy for black civil rights was well publicized—became a target of their anger. In this reply to an outraged citizen, Mrs. Roosevelt explains her support for African Americans in the context of the war being fought overseas. Paralleling FDR's Four Freedoms, ER states her own four fundamental rights for African Americans at home: the right to an education, to earn a living, and to equal justice before the law, and the right to vote.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 100: Joh-Ju; Box 765

September 18, 1942

100

Evans C.
My dear Mr. Johnson:

I am not letting my ideals, as you call them, blind me to the facts. I am afraid that many people are letting their prejudices blind them to the real facts.

No one, certainly not I, is trying to reform any one either overnight or in any way. There are certain fundamental facts which must be faced in this country as well as in the world.

The unrest among the colored people is a part of the world revolution of all colored peoples against the domination of the white people. The colored people in the South, those who have had an opportunity to obtain an education, know that they have never been given their rights as citizens of the United States. They represent ten percent of our population and they are drafted into the Army and expected to fight for a country which denies them the rights guaranteed to every citizen in our Constitution.

I am not afraid that there will be riots unless we refuse to grant four fundamental rights: the right to an education according to ability; the right to earn a living according to ability; the right to equal justice before the law and the right to participate in Government through the ballot.

The fact that does not seem to penetrate is that our treatment of the colored people has made them a fertile field for enemy

Memos to the President on Treatment of Returned Negro Military Personnel September 20-21, 1944

African American servicemen—many of whom had fought next to white soldiers in combat—expected to be treated with dignity and respect when they returned to the United States. But the military's segregationist policies extended to the return and redistribution centers set up to help veterans transition to civilian life. In this memo to FDR, Secretary of War Henry Stimson makes the case for separate but equal facilities for returning black servicemen. Because Stimson's memo came in the midst of the 1944 election campaign, presidential adviser Jonathan Daniels wrote a counter memo to make sure that FDR was aware of the politically sensitive nature of the issue.

Official File 93b: Colored Matters: Segregation, 1933-1945

September 18, 1942

100

Evans C.
My dear Mr. Johnson:

I am not letting my ideals, as you call them, blind me to the facts. I am afraid that many people are letting their prejudices blind them to the real facts.

No one, certainly not I, is trying to reform any one either overnight or in any way. There are certain fundamental facts which must be faced in this country as well as in the world.

The unrest among the colored people is a part of the world revolution of all colored peoples against the domination of the white people. The colored people in the South, those who have had an opportunity to obtain an education, know that they have never been given their rights as citizens of the United States. They represent ten percent of our population and they are drafted into the Army and expected to fight for a country which denies them the rights guaranteed to every citizen in our Constitution.

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The fact that does not seem to penetrate is that our treatment of the colored people has made them a fertile field for enemy

propaganda and the enemy is working very hard to convince them that they have no obligations to the United States.

I know that the majority of white people in the South have been kind and benevolent to the colored people, but they are human beings brought to this country against their will and, as such, entitled to the same rights as we accord aliens who become citizens.

I do not seek any support for myself as an individual because I am only a private citizen, but in this situation I am convinced that the Southern liberals will agree with me, as many of them do at present.

Very sincerely yours,

Mr. Evans C. Johnson
Sigma Alpha Epsilon
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

ds

WAR DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON

93-B

September 20, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Subject: Treatment of Returned Negro Military Personnel.

The recently published decision to provide separate Redistribution Stations for colored returnees was based on the War Department's long-standing policy not to force the intermingling of races but to provide equality of treatment to all those who wear the uniform of the United States Army.

x
The hotels selected are the best obtainable for the purpose. Although their recreational facilities are not of the same type as those available at white Redistribution Stations, they are essentially equivalent and will provide all the mental and physical diversion necessary for the effective rehabilitation of colored veterans. x2138

It has been found from experience that the most difficult problem in handling men returned from overseas combat is to assist them in making a proper mental readjustment. The successful completion of this process requires a period of rest and relaxation amid congenial surroundings. The placement of Negro Redistribution Stations in the vicinity of large Negro populations will afford the individual soldier an opportunity to be received and entertained by his own people. Conversely, their placement at resort cities largely populated by whites might well subject the returning soldier to conditions unfavorable to his mental and physical rehabilitation. x4675

It has been our consistent policy to provide equivalent facilities for all Army personnel and to insure that no man receives better treatment than another because of the race to which he belongs. In the instant case, we are continuing this policy and we believe that our action is taken in the best interests of the Negro veteran.

Henry H. Stimson
Secretary of War. x25

file

93-B

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 21, 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
FROM: Jonathan Daniels *JD*

I understand that you are receiving a memorandum from the War Department with regard to the use of the Teresa Hotel in New York and the Pershing Hotel in Chicago as Redistribution Stations for returning Negro soldiers.

Next to the FEPC issue, this is the hottest issue among the Negro voters today. I have been discussing this with people in the War Department and I hope very much that before you take any action in this matter I may have the opportunity to speak to you about it.

x2158
x93

Petition to Bury Jim-Crowism **October 1944**

Throughout the war, African American leaders continued to press for an end to discrimination at home and in the armed forces. They believed that discrimination in the military and at home—including the Jim Crow laws of the South—were inconsistent with the ideals for which the United Nations were fighting. During the 1944 presidential campaign, A. Philip Randolph and his March-on-Washington Movement circulated petitions like this one urging the President to use his powers as Commander in Chief to ban discrimination and segregation in the government and military, abolish the poll tax, and protect the right to vote.

Official File 93b: Segregation, 1933-1945

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Four years after Franklin Roosevelt's death, Eleanor Roosevelt remembered her frustrations when racial issues, such as the antilynching bill and the abolition of the poll tax, reached her husband's desk. "Although Franklin was in favor of both measures, they never became 'must' legislation. When I would protest, he would simply say: 'First things come first, and I can't alienate certain votes I need for measures that are more important at the moment by pushing any measure that would entail a fight.'" A powerful southern congressional bloc influenced the executive treatment of race relations during the Depression and World War II. To the chagrin of many civil rights leaders, the support of this southern contingency always outweighed the administration's commitment to endorsing measures that would explicitly improve political, economic, and social conditions of black Americans. Still, the federal government did not completely ignore civil rights in this politically explosive atmosphere. One important method that the Roosevelt administration employed to acknowledge African Americans and to involve them in the president's "New Deal" was through federally sponsored cultural programs. Initially conceived under the Works Progress Administration's Federal Arts Project and then continued under wartime agencies such as the Office of War Information and the War Department, fine art and media-based programs represented an important strand of civil rights policy during the Roosevelt era. Through [these programs]..., liberal administrators demonstrated a sustained commitment to addressing the concerns of black Americans when political pragmatism prevented official support for structural legislation.

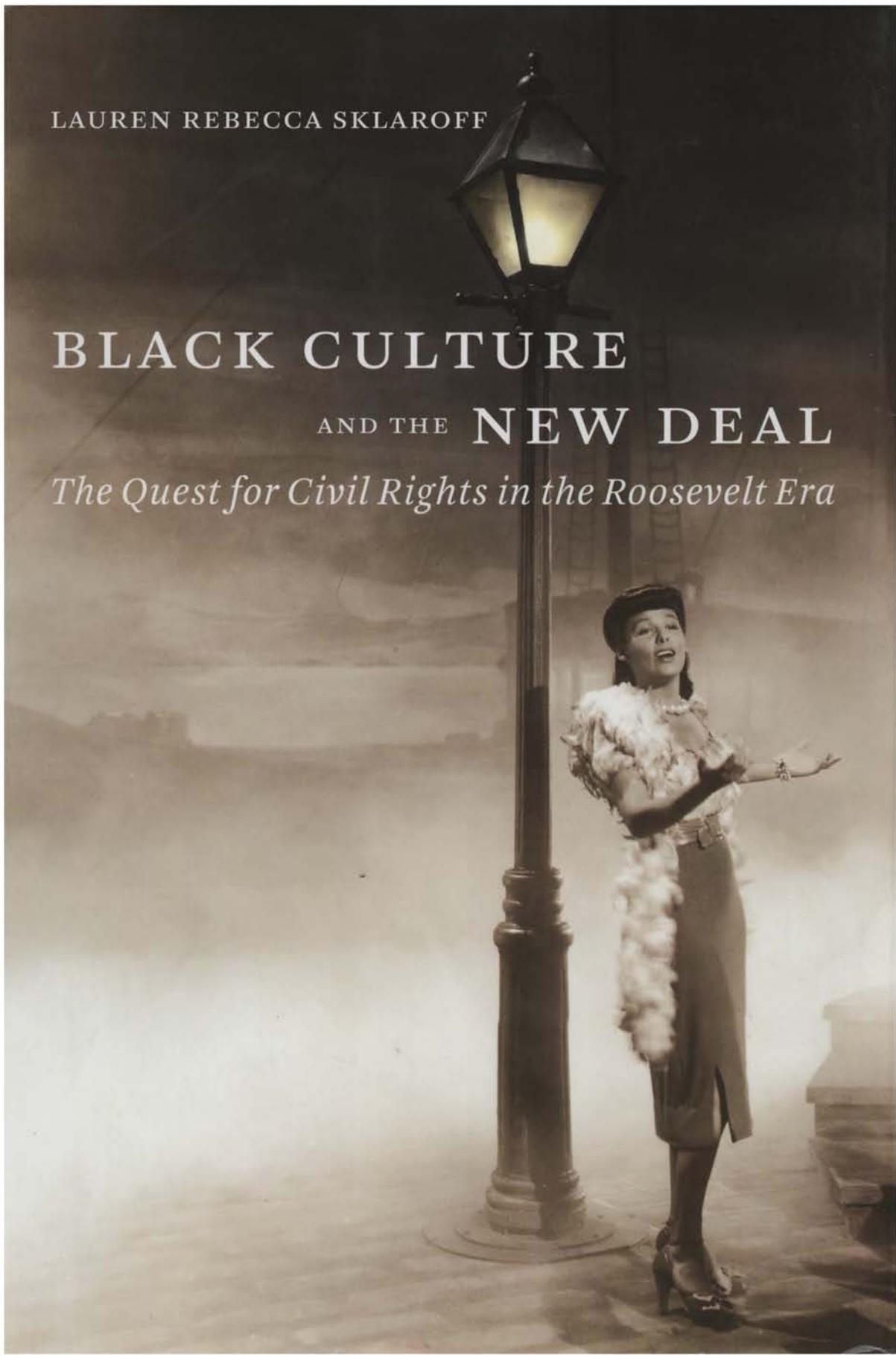
Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era (University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 1-2

LAUREN REBECCA SKLAROFF

BLACK CULTURE

AND THE **NEW DEAL**

The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

By the 1930s, African Americans were in dire need of a “New Deal,” and many black leaders eagerly looked to the Roosevelt administration for the support they needed to achieve economic, political, and social equality. Roosevelt inspired many blacks when he appointed a number of men as agency heads who openly and aggressively committed themselves to the cause of social justice and civil rights for black Americans....African Americans expected the Roosevelt administration to support their continuing struggle for increased employment opportunities, economic security, and the protection of civil rights; however, the implementation and effects of many early New Deal programs did not always reassure them....Discriminatory implementation of many programs [at the local level] circumscribed material progress, but the psychological benefits that accrued to the black community as a whole were extensive....[F]or the first time they saw the federal government hiring African Americans for a number of important positions. The Roosevelt Administration hired black professionals as architects, lawyers, statisticians, economists, and engineers within the federal government. Non-professionals filled positions as stenographers, secretaries, messengers, elevator operators, and clerks. FDR appointed more black leaders to important posts than ever

*Joyce A. Hanson, Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism
(University of Missouri Press, 2003) 125-126, 131*

Mary McLeod Bethune
& Black Women's Political Activism

| Joyce A. Hanson |

University of Missouri Press
Columbia and London

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

How did African Americans become discriminated against through the Social Security Act?... African Americans were discriminated against, not because they were targeted by “racist intent,” but because Social Security rewarded those who were already privileged....It gave priority to the dignity and economic security of the working class’s top tier, those who were most secure in jobs from which African Americans were barred....The study of discriminatory treatment of African Americans through public policy in the 1930s has been framed as a fight primarily waged between groups of white people, one group with altruistic motives, defending the rights of African Americans, the other group self-interested, seeking to limit those rights. But this model does not fit the story of the Social Security Act. The act was designed by reformers whose intent was primarily altruistic; they did not set out to enhance their own power and wealth. Nevertheless, they benefited from the policy that they created as “white” men and women. The salvation of white industrial workers was predicated on constructing them as something other than welfare recipients and other than black workers. By enhancing the value of whiteness of industrial workers, the Act’s framers enhanced the value of their own whiteness. The discriminatory policy created through the Social Security Act resulted more from the positioning of the Act’s framers within the U.S. racial hierarchy than their intent.

Mary Poole, The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 174-176

The Segregated Origins of Social Security

African Americans and the Welfare State

Mary Poole

The University of North Carolina Press

Chapel Hill

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

[T]he activities of the Roosevelt Justice Department did much to shape judicial doctrine in the postwar era. With its calls for activism to federally secure and protect the rights of African Americans, the department helped the Roosevelt court...to lay the precedential cornerstone of its new civil rights doctrine....To be sure, FDR was neither a consistent nor a vocal proponent of civil rights reform. His pro-civil rights decisions were often buffered by others in which he balked at progressive efforts in order to ease tensions within the Democratic Party. In sum, he displayed what might be described as “fits of courage” in dealing with the challenge to the “southern way of life” and the corresponding drive to secure civil rights. When civil rights proposals appeared to also advance his broader institutional goals of a national government dominated by a progressive presidency or electoral goals of a more liberal coalition, he often supported them energetically. When they did not, he took few public chances, preferring instead to work subtly, which usually meant slowly, behind the scenes or not at all. Nevertheless, the full story of FDR’s successes in civil rights is more elaborate than the one typically told....[D]espite the presence of the Dixiecrat-dominated leadership in Congress and the South’s significance in the New Deal electoral coalition, the Roosevelt administration was able to help forge the Supreme Court’s mission after 1937. In turn, the Roosevelt justices sought to carry out what the president had failed to achieve in the 1938 elections. Southern Democrats survived FDR’s purge, but southern democracy would not escape the rulings of the Roosevelt/Warren Court.

Kevin J. McMahon, Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown (University of Chicago Press, 2004) 175-176

RECONSIDERING ROOSEVELT ON RACE

How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown



Kevin J. McMahon

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The continued isolation of black Americans was made achingly obvious as war mobilization began to lift the pall of the Depression. Management and labor joined arms to exclude black workers from the benefits of the war boom....[A threatened March on Washington by 100,000 African Americans led to FDR's] Executive Order 8802, issued on June 25, 1941. "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin," it declared, adding that both employers and labor unions had a positive duty "to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries." A newly established Fair Employment Practices Commission was empowered to investigate complaints and take remedial action....It would be too much to say that Executive Order 8802 was a second Emancipation Proclamation. Yet, however grudgingly, Franklin Roosevelt had set the nation back on the freedom road that Abraham Lincoln had opened in the midst of another war three-quarters of a century earlier. For seven decades it had remained the road not taken. Now, for the first time since Reconstruction, the federal government had openly committed itself to making good on at least some of the promises of American life for black citizens. Coming at a moment that was kindled with opportunities for economic betterment and social mobility, Executive Order 8802 fanned the rising flame of black militancy and initiated a chain of events that would eventually end segregation once and for all and open a new era for African Americans.

David M. Kennedy, Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (Oxford University Press, 1999) 765-768

The Oxford History of the United States

DAVID M. KENNEDY

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

The American People
in Depression and War,
1929-1945

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The African American experience in World War II clearly had enormous significance in shaping developments in the coming decades....Neither a beginning nor an end in civil rights history, the war took further issues raised in the 1930s and beyond and paved the way for future developments. The war years brought massive economic, demographic, and ideological shifts in in the makeup of the American population. The removal of millions of men and women into the armed forces and their service overseas in itself generated considerable upheaval. The war boom accelerated the movement of populations into the defense industries, precipitating huge growth in urban centers, new and old, and intensifying problems in the workplace, housing, and public recreation. For African Americans all these things carried an additional dimension: military service raised questions that had been posed throughout American history concerning segregation, limits to service, and their significance in relation to black claims for citizenship and equal rights....Black service personnel returning from Alaska and the Aleutians, from Europe and Asia, arrived back on American soil expectant and determined to see change, as were the men and women who had contributed to the war effort at home....If the war did not bring total, overwhelming, and complete change, it brought enough to establish the preconditions for another generation to demand that the United States indeed practice the very principles it espoused at home and continued to defend abroad. The achievement of so much in terms of presidential action and changing federal policy during and immediately after the war seemed to indicate a new commitment to racial equality.

The African American

EXPERIENCE

during **World War II**



Neil A. Wynn
