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Civil Rights and the Cold War: A Rhetorical History of the Truman Administration and the Desegregation of the United States Army

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Rhetoric is associated popularly with demagoguery, bombast, empty words, "mere rhetoric." In its various emanations from the mouths of politicians, rhetoric is even more suspect—prima facie evidence for immediate and rancorous distrust and disdain. For people disposed to such popular interpretations of rhetoric, it is *deeds*, not words, that matter; and such folk often suggest that this is especially the case in politics. I will take issue with this point of view by arguing that rhetoric is action in the world, a very profound action that forms the basis of all human decision making and enactment. Rhetoric has ideological, social, and material implications. On the strength of persuasive words, people go to war, make peace, strengthen or weaken economies, pass programs or pass them up, act graciously or brutally. To get anything accomplished, one must be persuaded that it is worth doing, worth the risk. Indeed, peaceful social change requires rhetorical struggle. Any prescription for individual or collective change must be *argued for*. And in argument there is *agon*, struggle.

An investigation of rhetorical history is especially suited to trace this peculiarly human contest because it allows us a special kind of knowledge about politics and political actors. By using the unique lens of history-through-speech (and speech-as-history), I hope to demonstrate the proposition that history, politics, and the contemporary presidency are usefully served by documenting and analyzing rhetorical practices. Because rhetorical history "takes rhetoric as its

subject matter and perspective," it concerns itself with the role of persuasion in the history of ideas, politics, and society.¹ Rhetorical history, then, is a special lens for describing and assessing political actors, events, and cultures.

The rationale for doing rhetorical history is itself persuasive. First, rhetorical histories allow us a closer look at political actors as word-smiths in action. The close textual analysis of letters, memoranda, logs, and other forms of recorded documentary evidence often can supply scholars with the best evidence of the individual motives, methods, beliefs, and values of political actors as they wrestle to shape public philosophy and implement public policy. The persuasive appeals launched by and directed at presidents, cabinet members, officers, advisors, friends, enemies, interest groups, and various other public and private constituencies provide an important nexus for the exploration of rhetorical history. It makes a difference who gives the advice, who takes the advice, who ignores it, and why. Second, rhetorical history is a lens for understanding political cultures. Rhetorical histories assess the sociopolitical and cultural legacy of particular administrations and help explain their impact on communal memory. In studying the rhetorical dimensions of past proposals and policies, we chart a common future. In sum, when they are well executed, narrative accounts of contemporary presidencies and administrations based on rhetorical history are sites for the production of further knowledge about the creations, motives, and policies of individual presidents and presidencies, the intricacies of the institutional-administrative arrangements involved, and the cultural significance of such legacies. In short, rhetorical histories mount their own unique narratives that leave us the richer for the telling.

I will demonstrate rhetorical history's utility through a case study of the Truman administration's historic efforts to desegregate the United States Armed Services. My particular focus will be on the Army, where the opposition to an integrated service was most entrenched and therefore the rhetorical struggle most telling.

Harry S. Truman and Civil Rights: Values and Public Philosophy as Discursive Performance

Harry S. Truman's views on civil rights are most accessible in his public address. His words help reveal his character, values, and public philosophy. The discourse also serves as a fair barometer of his expressed civil rights beliefs and therefore helps frame his public ac-

countability. As William C. Berman notes, "Truman never hesitated to pronounce his steadfast loyalty to the ideas of justice and equality."² Moreover, "In practically every speech President Truman made on civil rights, he pointed out the necessity for Americans to practice what they preached, since the world was watching."³ Indeed, the issue of civil rights was important not only in its own right but also because of its perceived consequences in international affairs. As Richard Dalfume contends, "Cold War propaganda against the United States hit hard at the race problem; State Department experts estimated that nearly half of the Russian propaganda against the United States was focused on this issue alone."⁴ With Truman's assistance Jim Crow was transmogrifying into a formidable diplomatic dilemma.

Truman's civil rights philosophy can be adduced in various public speeches and commentaries. During the 1940 election year, for example, Truman stated: "In giving to the Negroes the rights that are theirs, we are only acting in accord with ideas of a true democracy."⁵ Berman judged such discourse "a model of sobriety and good taste," especially "when measured against typical southern utterances on civil rights" at the time.⁶

The Truman presidency was witness to events, however, that seemed to erode both the law and social relations. The president became increasingly convinced of the need for a major civil rights initiative. On June 26, 1946, President Truman sent a message to the NAACP's annual convention. He assured participants that the ballot was a sacred right and that any form of organized terrorism against the franchise was nothing less than intolerable in a free democratic society. Yet the South would not become, by any stretch of the imagination, a willing partner in equal citizenship for African Americans. Indeed, vigilante violence and murder perpetrated by white southern nightriders seemed a chilling reminder of the vengeance of those who opposed the gathering forces of social change.⁷

After the crushing off-year election defeat of Democrats in the 1946 Congress, Truman issued Executive Order 9008, which created a presidential civil rights committee. As Berman indicates, Truman "undoubtedly wanted to see 'fair treatment' extended to all citizens. It is not likely, however, that he wished to upset his working relationships with the South in December, 1946, in order to support such an objective. Yet by establishing a civil rights committee, Truman inadvertently built up political pressure that could spell trouble for him in the future."⁸

In his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1947, Truman announced that present civil rights abuses would require federal legis-

lation: "We have recently witnessed in this country numerous attacks upon the constitutional rights of individual citizens as a result of racial and religious bigotry. . . . I have, therefore, by Executive order established the President's Committee on Civil Rights, with a view to making recommendations to the Congress."⁹ Not coincidentally, in this same address Truman declared that despite having demobilized the armed services in 1946, the nation still would "need well-equipped, well-trained armed forces and we must be able to mobilize rapidly our resources in men and material for our own defense should the need arise." Significantly, the president noted, "We are encountering serious difficulties in maintaining our forces even at these reduced levels." Truman's military advisors were warning him that he might have to reinstitute the draft. The Selective Service law in force at the time was scheduled to expire on March 31.¹⁰

On January 15, 1947, the president commissioned his civil rights committee; on January 16 he announced that the three services had reached an agreement on the plan to unify the armed forces. At first glance these two activities would seem to be unrelated. However, on March 12, 1947, Truman delivered his "Special Message to Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine." Therein Truman declared the United States ready, willing, and able to take up its role as the defender of the free world. As a result the state of military preparedness would become one of the key foreign policy issues of the Truman administration. Because civil rights abuses now constituted an obstacle to an efficient and effective fighting force, they now took on added urgency.

The convergence of civil rights, the emergent cold war, and U.S. armed forces preparedness is perhaps best elaborated in Truman's historic June 29, 1947, address to the NAACP. In this landmark speech the president would stake out an unprecedented role for the federal government in the civil rights arena. Truman spoke of a "turning point in the long history of our country's efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens." Truman stated, "the extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people *against* the Government, but protection of the people *by* the Government." The president clarified the mission: "Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion, or race, or color." Truman declared emphatically, "Our National Government must show the way!"¹¹ Truman underlined the foreign policy implications of vigilance toward civil rights at home: "Our case for democracy should be as strong as we can make it. It should rest on practical

evidence that we have been able to put our own house in order. . . . We can no longer afford the luxury of a leisurely attack upon prejudice and discrimination."¹² Given Truman's prior public statements and the president's own predilections in foreign affairs, it seemed natural to cast civil rights in this light. As the president saw it the United States's first obligation was to "put our own house in order." Only then could Americans credibly promote Western-style democracy and confidently solicit the allegiance of the world community to democratic principles and practices. The link between practicing civil rights at home and fostering democratic principles abroad would have profound implications for generations of Americans in their thoughts on war, peace, and race relations in the United States.

On February 2, 1948, basing his policy on the recommendations of his October 1947 civil rights committee report, *To Secure These Rights*, the president delivered yet another unprecedented civil rights address. Striking a calm, dignified, humane tone, Truman asked Congress for additional authority to act on pressing issues, which included establishing a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, strengthening existing civil rights laws by securing federal protection against lynching, insuring voting rights protections, impaneling the long-delayed Fair Employment Practices Commission, and enacting measures prohibiting discrimination in interstate transportation.¹³ The president also indicated his resolve to fortify federal non-discrimination policy. Regarding U.S. armed forces, in particular, the president remarked pointedly: "During the recent war and in the years since its close we have made much progress toward equality of opportunity in our armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin. I have instructed the Secretary of Defense to take steps to have the remaining instances of discrimination in the armed services eliminated as rapidly as possible. The personnel policies and practices of all the services in this regard will be made consistent."¹⁴ Recognizing its propaganda potential, the government carried the president's address over Voice of America. Berman observed that "the civil rights message now entered the cold war arena as a document of diplomacy. At home it immediately became a source of major political controversy."¹⁵

Although the president's civil rights legislation would founder on the shoals of powerful, at times virulent, southern opposition in Congress, the military reform he contemplated was a matter of executive responsibility; presidential action required no congressional approval. Truman's authority to issue an executive order would enable him to make his most indelible mark on civil rights policy by targeting continuing forms of discrimination in the military.

The Fahy Committee: A History of Institutional Warfare

On July 26, 1948, a day prior to convening a special session of Congress to attend to ongoing national problems of inflation and housing, Truman issued Executive Orders 9980 and 9981. As Berman notes, both orders were directly tied to the upcoming campaign and election: "The Truman orders were timed perfectly . . . to focus attention on Congress. And, concurrently, to undercut [Progressive Party candidate Henry] Wallace's standing with many Negroes."¹⁶

Executive Order 9980 authorized a federal review board for investigating discrimination in federal government employment practices. The Fair Employment Board was set up as an arm of the Civil Service Commission. It sought to review cases, supervise compliance, and adjudicate appeals. It had no direct enforcement powers—save imploring the president to take additional action whenever and wherever he deemed necessary.¹⁷ Executive Order 9981 directed new efforts at equal opportunity in the armed forces and created the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which was authorized to begin oversight tasks. Significantly, the order made no mention of segregation. It was impossible to tell whether the order was intended to achieve an integrated armed services. The executive orders predictably raised the ire of southern Democrats for going too far and the suspicions of the black community for not going far enough.¹⁸ After issuing the two orders Truman appeared in person before Congress the next day to outline his eight-point legislative package, which also included civil rights provisions. The response was "noticeably cool."¹⁹

At the time Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, "the racial scene in the services was scandalous, if viewed from any perspective of fairness."²⁰ The order read in part: "There shall be equality of treatment for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale." Truman directed his committee "to examine the rules, procedures, and practices of the armed services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order." The committee was charged with executing its duties "until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order."²¹ As Dalfiume notes, "Basically, the President's committee was a liberal one."²²

What came to be known as the Fahy Committee would work with

the various branches of the armed services in planning and implementing a fair and equitable process for eliminating the entrenched apartheid of the status quo. The Navy and Air Force were already making substantial progress toward integration, so the main stumbling block resided with the Army. Whether or not it was admitted, or even foreseen, the president's order would become the opening salvo in a great social experiment. The daunting task before the committee was simple in its complexity: to see if people serving in a democracy could get along with each other and to erase the long-standing color line in the nation's military. As directed by President Truman, this experiment in human relations was now a federal mission and responsibility.

EARLY STIRRINGS OF ARMY OPPOSITION. One month before the formal appointment of the Fahy Committee membership, the Army was preparing to release its own report, "The Negro in the Army." In late August of 1948 the Army pressed to have this report released immediately in an effort to upstage a report with recommendations to be issued by black leaders, such as Lester Granger of the Urban League, who had met with Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal in late April to discuss means of redressing ongoing racial problems in the military.²³ Presidential advisor Philleo Nash informed Clark Clifford that the Army's report was "carelessly executed" and contained "several deficiencies" and "old statistics." Even more damning from Nash's perspective, the Army's report made no mention of the president's newly announced committee.²⁴ Clifford, also fretting over the Army report's contents, timing, and reception, issued a memo to Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall: "Since the Defense Establishment seems to feel strongly that this report should be made public in advance of the recommendations of the Granger group, we will not object . . . provided that it is accompanied by a statement that it covers the situation prior to the issuance of the recent Executive Order on Equality and Treatment of Opportunity in the Armed Services. . . . My personal recommendations would be that the Granger recommendations and this report be released simultaneously."²⁵

Although the Committee would not meet formally until January of 1949, the effect of the president's order was immediate and profound. On the positive side of the ledger, Donald S. Dawson, an administrative assistant, would inform the president, "Since your Executive Order was issued, all important opposition to the draft on the basis of the Army's race policy has disappeared. . . . Negro leaders and their white friends have been universal in their praise."²⁶

Secretary of the Army Royall, however, was worried about the composition of the president's committee. He complained to Truman:

"[A] number of [those] being considered . . . have publicly expressed their opinion in favor of abolishing segregation in the Armed Services. At least one of them, Lester Grainger [sic], has been critical both of the Army and of me personally on this particular matter. I feel strongly that no person should serve on this Committee who has formed a fixed opinion on this subject on either side. . . . I would like an opportunity to discuss this matter with you personally before appointments are made."²⁷

On October 21, 1948, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal notified the military service secretaries of the Fahy Committee plans. At that time the president's committee expected to meet for the first time in mid-November and anticipated completing its work within two months. Meanwhile, as chair, Judge Charles Fahy had requested background materials. Forrestal directed "each Department [to] designate one of its Assistant Secretaries as the official point of contact for the Department with Mr. Fahy's Committee." He also advised the assistant secretaries to work with "one ranking Negro officer" and with the members of the Armed Services Personnel Board.²⁸

A NEW PLAN. On December 2, 1948, after a series of delays, Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall submitted to Defense Secretary Forrestal an experimental Army integration plan: "I propose, but only if similar action is taken by the Navy and the Air Force, to establish a completely non-segregated Army post with approximately 5,000 officers and enlisted personnel assigned to the following units: (1) One infantry regimental combat team. (2) One engineer battalion. (3) One station hospital and medical complement. (4) One post headquarters. Of the enlisted men, roughly 10% will be Negro, this being approximately the average proportion in the Army at present." Royall thought it important to create "widespread understanding of the project" while simultaneously preventing "too much publicity or non-representative publicity." He advised Forrestal to limit press visits. The experiment, which became known as the Royall Plan, was meant to test the willingness of troops to serve in integrated units, the efficiency and combat value of such an arrangement, the implications for the command structure, any ensuing social, morale, or discipline problems, opportunities for African American advancement, and finally, whether the experiment could be generalized to the Army as a whole.²⁹ Designed to demonstrate "progress" on the race issue and to counteract the Fahy initiatives, the Royall plan was distributed to the other branches of the service for review and comment.

Secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington, in responding to the Royall Plan, was less than enthusiastic. In a memorandum to Forrestal he observed: "The experiment will not be conclusive. There are

so many artificial features involved that success or failure of this experiment would not be predictive of success or failure under other conditions. . . . The public relations aspects . . . are particularly undesirable. By its very nature, the attention and searching scrutiny of the Negro press and various pressure groups would be focused upon this activity which, through its artificiality, is of minimal military significance but of major significance in the current public controversy on purely racial issues." Symington contended, on the other hand, that the Air Force was in a position to conduct such an experiment because it already had trained black technicians in place to meet the call for 10 percent representation and he anticipated no social or morale difficulties.³⁰

Acting for the secretary of the Navy, John Nicholas Brown's response was similar to that of the Air Force. The Navy felt the experiment "will certainly create widespread publicity . . . [that would be in] large portion . . . adverse and non-constructive in nature. With regard to the Navy the assignment of Negro personnel is made without reference to the race of the individual. [Indeed,] very satisfactory progress has been made in the Navy and the Marine Corps without creating problems of morale and discipline or lowering the esprit de corps."³¹

Because both the Air Force and the Navy seemed to be moving forward on the president's executive order without much prodding, even before the Fahy Committee formally convened, the Army seemed, by contrast, all the more mired in the so-called "Negro problem." Much of its trouble seemed to stem from inflexibility. The officers themselves seemed most intransigent. Whether Secretary of the Army Royall knew his plan would be unacceptable to his sister services is unknown. Royall may have insisted that the Air Force and the Navy had to go along with *his* plan knowing that, given their different situations, there would be little agreement. In this way the "experiment" would be scuttled.³²

The Rhetorical Battles of 1949

The symbolic import of Executive Order 9981 was widespread. Yet the mere proclamation of equality in the armed forces did not make it a reality. Six months had passed and it was still unclear whether Truman had partial or total desegregation in mind. Nor was it entirely clear what impact the order might have on the armed services. Another hard round of persuasion was about to begin as the Fahy Committee began the arduous task of implementing Truman's order. The president met with the Fahy Committee on January 12. A text

drafted for Truman's use in addressing the committee is instructive regarding the administration's philosophy:

Our total national economy demands the most effective utilization of every citizen. Likewise it is the privilege and responsibility of every citizen to make the maximum possible contribution to our national strength. The concept of democracy that our nation represents to the peoples of the world demands that there be equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed services as well as in other phases of our national life. The Committee will wish to make a comprehensive survey of the past and present status and service of the Negro citizen in the armed services. . . . It is my profound desire that the work of this Committee shall yield results which will not be simply a report, but a set of operable plans, a blueprint, for constructive action. The national security requires that you make your contribution, consistent with the fundamental rights of all men, toward the full development of the strength of our country.³³

In highlighting the economic and national security aspects of the committee's responsibilities, Truman rhetorically subordinated individual civil rights to the collective national welfare. Post-World War II national pragmatics trumped the larger moral questions. These arguments also were uniquely tailored to counteract military opposition.

At the actual January 12 meeting, which lasted ten minutes, Truman told the committee: "I have asked you . . . to serve on this commission in an effort to expedite the thing in the Government Service so that you can actually carry out the spirit, as well as the letter of the order [no. 9981]. . . . I'm satisfied that with this sort of setup we can get the thing working as it should work." In requesting a unified and consistent policy, Truman seemed to have in mind something beyond a simple concern with the armed services. His vision for civil rights in America was expansive: "I want this rounded out a little bit. I want the Department of the Interior, the Commerce Department, the Treasury Department, interviewed on the subject [of] why you are in existence, and let's make it a Government proposition, as well as an Armed Services [one]." Indeed, Truman's expressed intention was decidedly not to merely "limit it to just one branch of the Government. That's what I have in mind all the way down the line. Not only that, I think we've got to go further—not at this time, but later—and see that the state and local governments carry out the spirit of the laws which we hope to get on the books down here during this session of Congress." As envisioned by the president at the time, the armed services would become a model for the nation.

The president appeared wary of the negative publicity that could follow the committee's formal and informal investigative work: "I

want it done in such a way that it is not a publicity stunt. I want concrete results—that's what I'm after—not publicity on it. I want the job done and I want to get it done in a way so everybody will be happy to cooperate to get it done. Unless it is necessary to knock somebody's ears down, I don't want to have to do that, but, if it becomes necessary, it can be done. But that's about all I've got to tell you."

Truman's was a tall order given the history of the services and their demonstrated lack of cooperation with each other in prior encounters over the desegregation issue. Still, the tone had been set. A no-nonsense approach would be adopted by the Fahy Committee. The president "hoped" the committee could get back to him with a report by June 1, "and then," he said, "if it is necessary to continue, why, we can go on from there, in order to give you plenty of time. I'd like to have the outline of the situation before the Congress adjourns in case we need to ask for any legal amendments to the law because, in that hearing, at that time, we will endeavor to pass the Civil Rights Program as outlined in my message on the subject in the last Congress. I hope to get some concrete results of that in the Eighty-first Congress."³⁴

On January 18 E. W. Kenworthy, executive secretary of the Fahy Committee, voiced confidence in the ongoing informal developments since the issuance of the president's executive order: "I think the President's Committee has done pretty well on this. The Army has now accepted three of our four recommendations—on opening schools and jobs, and on assignment to any unit—and there remains now only the fourth recommendation, the elimination of the 10 per cent quota. I am sure we will get that too."³⁵ Kenworthy had engaged in a bit of wishful thinking; a much longer struggle lay ahead. This was brought home most forcefully to the Fahy Committee at its March 28 meeting.

"EXCEPTIONALLY AND PECULIARLY QUALIFIED." On March 28, 1949, Judge Fahy's committee was anxious to talk with the service secretaries on a number of items, including (1) whether the earlier Gillem Report (WD Circular 124) "envisage[d] the eventual elimination of segregation"; (2) the secretaries' interpretation of Executive Order 9981; (3) whether there was a need for a "unified policy on utilization of Negro manpower"; (4) whether the Fahy Committee should hear testimony from the joint services' Personnel Policy Board; (5) the secretaries' ideas and suggestions regarding administration and implementation of new policy; and (6) specific questions for Secretary Royall on the "policy and practice" of Generals Clay and MacArthur.³⁶

At the meeting Secretary Royall, armed with a lengthy statement,

reiterated Army arguments for continuing segregation. He rehearsed the long-standing racist viewpoints common at the time:

The Army is not an instrument for social evolution. . . . Applied to the question of segregation, the criteria must be what produces the greatest and most effective use of all our manpower . . . so that we may place a winning Army on the battlefield. . . . The history of two wars has demonstrated that in general Negro troops have been less qualified than white troops for the performance of certain types of military service, for example, service with the infantry or with other units requiring troops "close with the enemy."

On the other hand, there are undoubtedly other functions for which Negro troops are exceptionally and peculiarly qualified. Motor or ship transport service might be given as examples. It follows that in the interest of efficient national defense certain types of units should be entirely or largely confined to white troops, and that where Negroes are assigned to any of those units, they should be carefully selected.

Royall also maintained that an integrated Army posed morale problems. He argued that troops engaged in war must "have confidence both in their leaders and in the men that are to fight by their sides"; thus, "in close personal relationships such as exist in an Army unit, voluntary segregation is normal in ordinary civilian relations. And this is true even in those localities where no type of segregation is required by law." Royall contended, "In this connection we must remember that a large part of the volunteers in the Army are southerners—usually a larger proportion than from any other part of the country. Whether properly or not, it is a well known fact that close personal association with Negroes is distasteful to a large percentage of Southern whites." Therefore, "abandonment" or "sudden change in . . . the Army's partial segregation policy would . . . adversely affect enlistments and reenlistments not only in the South but in many other parts of the country, probably making peacetime selective service necessary." Royall thus raised the specter of racial resistance weakening military preparedness.

According to Royall one of the "most difficult" problems was getting white soldiers "to serve under Negro officers or particularly under Negro non-commissioned officers." He argued that black enlistments did not suffer under the present policy and that the Army was taking steps to improve opportunities for advancement. "As a matter of fact," Royall boasted, "the progress of the Negro in the Army—and his present status—is superior to that which he occupies in any other department of the Government—military or otherwise. Nowhere else does the Negro hold as many positions of importance and responsibility." This latter argument had been an old saw.

Despite his negative declamations, Royall said the Army was still

willing to make "such adjustments as are necessary from time to time to meet changing conditions." Royall concluded that the Army had initiated "the best practical method of handling—and gradually narrowing—the segregation problem." He thought it inappropriate "to force a pace faster than is consistent with the efficiency and morale of the Army—or to follow a course inconsistent with the ability of our Army, in the event of war, to take the battlefield with reasonable assurance of success."³⁷ Royall's testimony must have shaken all but the most inveterate optimists on the Fahy Committee. Members had thus far demonstrated themselves to be steely-eyed realists, however, so it was also highly unlikely that they would fold up their tents. They were committed for the duration. And change was in the wind.

That same day, March 28, Louis A. Johnson formally replaced an ailing, overworked, and increasingly befuddled James Forrestal, who had submitted his letter of resignation as Secretary of Defense on March 1, 1949.³⁸ On April 6 Secretary Johnson issued a memorandum to all secretaries of the armed services and the chair of the personnel policy board announcing some "supplemental" policies pursuant to equal opportunity. Provision 1b. (3) seemed to add a new wrinkle: "Some units may continue to be manned with Negro personnel; however, all Negroes will not necessarily be assigned to Negro units. Qualified Negro personnel shall be assigned to fill any type of position vacancy in organizations or overhead installations without regard to race."

The new policy proved controversial. The pivotal word here was *organizations*. Army policy had previously limited the employment of blacks in desegregated units to "overhead" tasks, which included menial duties such as housekeeping, laundry, commissary duty, and the like. The word *organizations* could be interpreted as increasing opportunities, and as written the new directive seemed at odds with existing Army policy; however, the Fahy Committee only learned of its existence from Johnson on April 18, when he declined an invitation to testify at the committee's April 26 meeting. Johnson argued that his appearance would be "premature" and "unprofitable" because he had not had time to assimilate "the details of this difficult problem." Johnson did promise to examine present policies, to solicit statements from the service secretaries, and to have them reviewed by the personnel board "to determine their adequacy."³⁹

Johnson's new order proved vexing to the Fahy Committee, which not only suffered such unilateral action but now risked being preempted. Johnson's directive inspired increased vigilance as the committee pondered counter moves and carefully calibrated the public relations ramifications involved. Johnson's order also induced a healthy

skepticism toward continuing the present course of action, a skepticism further encouraged by the evolution of the negotiations with the Army, the suspicion that the numbers submitted by the Army did not convey the full extent of the ongoing problems, and the Fahy Committee's own investigations. As one thoughtful person in an unsigned memorandum to Charles Fahy suggested, "I now think that we better jump from battalion to man-to-man integration. . . . The new policy is nothing but the old practice in small print. . . . Our visit to Meade convinced me that while Negroes are indeed being put into overhead installations, they are not being assigned in anything like the numbers they could be." The author seemed to have his hand on the true pulse of the dilemma:

Secretary Johnson's memo raises real problems for the Committee. . . . Except for a flat statement eliminating all segregated units, there is not much by way of a policy statement that the Committee could make which would go beyond the Secretary's. Therefore, the Committee must concentrate on procedural matters in its recommendations. I do not know what procedures the three services will propose in reply to Johnson's memo—I daresay nothing very revolutionary. But I think it would be very bad if the Fahy Committee proposed concrete steps which seemed to fall short of the Johnson policy. . . . Perhaps it isn't a policy. . . . But the press and the public think it is a policy, and they think it is a promise. . . . We have been put in a tough spot.

In anticipating an upcoming interim report for President Truman, the writer advised Fahy to issue "recommendations on the Army only. The reason . . . is that our thinking is likely to be pretty conclusive on the Army. Therefore, if there are leaks—and there are bound to be—at least the recommendations will stand examination. I would want to know a lot more about the Navy and the Air Force before I submitted any recommendations, even in an interim report."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, under the committee's continuing pressure, the "yeast . . . [seemed] to be working." The Army was now "considering the abolition of quotas." Moreover, "if men . . . [were] assigned on the basis of their MOS [Military Occupational Specialties], regardless of race," then reason argued that segregation would "come tumbling of its own weight."⁴¹

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND INTERIM REPORT. The initial recommendations drafted by the Fahy Committee on May 24 detailed the process of prying open the closed opportunities in the present system. Perhaps most important, and most difficult of all, was the committee's call for the abolition of racial quotas as promulgated by WD Circular 124 (a.k.a. the Gillem Board Report) and the substitu-

tion of intelligence test classifications (a.k.a. General Classification Tests, or GCTs). As the Fahy Committee noted, "The [present] quota system does not implement, but goes far to defeat, the Army's declared policy in Circular 124." The Army complained that the higher enlistment scores required by the Navy and the Air Force resulted in the Army's securing a higher percentage of men in the two lowest test score categories (Class IV and Class V). One preferred solution was simply to make "the entry intelligence score for the three services . . . the same."⁴²

Responding to Defense Secretary Johnson's call to reexamine service policies, Acting Secretary of the Army Gordon Gray, who served as Royall's successor, issued a vigorous defense of Army implementation of policies under the Gillem Board regulations. Gray was especially wary of changing the quota system based on test scores, arguing that this would reduce the number of recruits dramatically: "The Army currently limits Negro enlistments to their civilian population ratio, about 10 percent. . . . There is a definite limit to the number of men with low GCT's that the Army can absorb. . . . Without a quota system of any kind, Negro membership could rise easily to 30 or 40 percent." Gray advised Johnson: "There is a growing concern among many senior officers . . . that we are weakening to a dangerous degree the combat efficiency of our Army. These officers are familiar with the combat performance of Negro troops during war and feel that we have already gone too far in inserting colored organizations in white combat units."⁴³

On June 7, in a follow-up report to the president, the Fahy Committee indicated it had made "considerable progress." Admitting that the Army's second plan "did not go beyond the framework of its present policy and practice," the committee assured the president that it "[expected] to have further conferences" and asked for a delay in issuing their required interim report while they tried to negotiate pending matters. Truman granted this request.⁴⁴

Army intransigence was much more serious than the progress report indicated. As Kenworthy complained to Fahy, "The Army is determined to do nothing about guaranteeing that Negroes completing school courses will be used regardless of race." Kenworthy lamented, "I do not see how the Army can expect to keep its segregation policy inviolate when the Navy and the Air Force have abandoned segregation as a policy. The beginning on integration which the Committee has recommended, it seems to me, is modest, gradual, and calculated to improve the Army's use of manpower. I cannot see how it could cause the Army any embarrassment or lower its efficiency."⁴⁵

Kenworthy's frustration was based on both short-term and long-term concerns. Achieving cooperation on desegregating the services

was in the interest of African Americans and in the national interest of efficient use of personnel; however, this issue also had a direct bearing on the reorganization of the postwar military establishment.⁴⁶ The monumental postwar restructuring of the American defense system was materially jeopardized by an unfathomable, unwieldy, and, for many, embarrassing resistance to change. At the dawn of the cold war the Army's recalcitrance created an immobilizing effect. In rejecting a third Army plan, dated July 6, the Fahy Committee informed the secretary of the Army that, among other flaws,

the abolition of quotas to major commands for school selection is profligated by the retention of quotas in assignment to units, and thereby intensifies rather than eliminates *unequal treatment* and *opportunities*. . . . The proposed improvement of numerical utilization of Negroes in MOS of each field is dissoluted by the *restricted utilization of the individual* to the opportunities offered on a fixed basis to persons only of his race. . . . It is this Committee's best judgment that the . . . proposal fails to meet in any reasonable manner the spirit and letter of the President's Order.

This intransigence was accompanied by an annoying tactical delay. The Army had proposed appointing a board to look into ongoing matters and encouraged the committee not to make a report to the president until it convened and issued its own recommendations. From Kenworthy's perspective this request was a slap in the face: "Now suddenly the Army suggests that the problem, which was being discussed at what amounts to a cabinet level, be turned over to a board of Army officers for review. The plain intimation is that the Army can handle this matter unilaterally, without further interference from the President's Committee."⁴⁷ Given the meager prospects indicated by these stifling developments, it was anyone's guess how long true conversion to a fully integrated Army might take. By July of 1949 Kenworthy and Fahy were taking no bets.

The Fahy Committee sent Truman its interim report on July 27. The committee advised the president that the Army had met "some parts of our recommendations" but had not yet met the full requirements of Executive Order 9981. The committee had proposed four major revisions in the Army's present policy:

- 1) Open up all classes of Army jobs to qualified personnel without regard to race;
- 2) open all courses in Army schools to qualified personnel without regard to race;
- 3) assign and use personnel upon completion of school courses without regard to race;

4) abolish the racial quota, substituting a quota system based on the distribution of mental grades as determined by the General Classification Test.

This four-point program, long the benchmark for Army compliance with Executive Order 9981, continued as the basis for controversy. The fourth demand remained least amenable to change.

The committee informed the president that the racial quota issue had proven particularly vexing because the Army had previously agreed to drop the quota only if all three services were to adopt the same minimal standards of acceptance. Nevertheless, the interim report remained adamant on this issue: "The Committee is of the opinion that the Army should abolish the racial quota now."⁴⁸

The Army's continued resistance may have given the committee pause for additional reflection. On August 8, 1949, Kenworthy assured Fahy that the committee's proposed policy was appropriate. After going over the files of the old McCloy Committee operations during World War II, the Fahy Committee's executive secretary, perhaps self-servingly, said he had found "a history of unrelieved headaches." He lamented: "I cannot understand how the Army can defend its racial policy by appealing to experience. I was never more certain that we are on the right track. If our recommendations had been in effect in the twenty years between the wars, I feel certain that the Army would have had more efficient Negro troops."⁴⁹ The committee still understood itself as making no more than sensibly moderate demands. Its Army directives were never meant to "break up immediately its segregated units." All proposals were merely directed at "getting the best utilization out of more highly qualified Negroes in the Army."⁵⁰ This rhetorical tack was repeated over and over.

A NEW INITIATIVE. On September 26 Judge Fahy informed the president that there seemed to be agreement on all issues except the quota, and if actual implementation proceeded in accordance with the committee's intentions, then "great progress" was within reach. On September 30 Secretary of the Army Gray advised Secretary of Defense Johnson that he had developed new regulations, subject to the service secretary's concurrence, that would accede to the Fahy Committee's demands. Military Occupational Specialties would seemingly be opened to qualified personnel regardless of race; quotas for attending Army schools would ostensibly be abolished; promotions would be handled on an "equal merit" system; ROTC students would train and remain together without racial reference; and a new board of senior Army officers would meet on a regular basis to review progress on the new policies. This new policy initiative did not immediately break up existing segregation; rather, it seemed to assure

equal opportunity for qualified enlistees and personnel in existing units. Johnson issued a press release announcing these changes. The Fahy Committee, however, was unsure whether the new Army directive went "far enough" and implored the president not to comment publicly until a full committee assessment could be undertaken.⁵¹

Trying to sort out the implications of the newest Army proposal and the defense secretary's subsequent public endorsement proved, like everything else associated with these efforts, to be a bit of a trial, as minority affairs aide David K. Niles made clear in an October 5 memorandum to Truman: "Fahy[s] committee reached an agreement with the army that assignment of qualified personnel to specialist occupations would be on the basis of merit and fitness without regard to race or color. Yet the Army's program is evasive on this point, which the Fahy Committee feels is key to their entire objective. . . . [Moreover,] Secretary Johnson's [press] release, covering this program, is arousing a good deal of controversy, and has resulted in inquiries from a number of reporters, and letters and telegrams from interested organizations."⁵²

A "Further Interim Report to the President" reinforced Niles's assessment. Issued on October 6 by Fahy on behalf of the committee, this report was directly occasioned by Johnson's announcement of the new Army policy. Fahy observed, "It is true that the new program is a step forward, but its effectiveness is seriously impaired by the omission to provide that, after the men have acquired their Military Occupational Specialties and have completed their school courses, they shall be assigned according to their qualifications and without regard to race or color." Although all parties anticipated a "slow process," Fahy argued, "that should not be a deterrent to the adoption of the assignment policy we have urged."⁵³

The Further Interim Report addressed the problem of assignments bluntly. The opening of the Military Occupational Specialties would

be nullified to a considerable degree by the failure of the program to provide that personnel, to whom these opportunities will be accorded, will be assigned without regard to race or color. Unless assignments are so made, and are not restricted as at present to Negro and overhead units, the principle of equality of treatment and opportunity is not carried forward and the manpower of the Army is not utilized to best advantage. The Committee feels that this further logical step is required to effectuate the President's Executive Order 9981 and the statement of the Secretary of Defense of April 6, 1949.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, abolition of the quota system was still a bone of contention. The intricacies of abolishing the racial quota are perhaps

best exemplified in Kenworthy's memorandum of October 29. He told the committee he was now in "an impossible situation" and described a breakdown in the "firm understanding with Gray and [Special Consultant to the Secretary of the Army] Bendetsen and MacFadyen [*sic*] that P & A [Army Personnel and Administration] would work with the staff to try to solve the quota problem. The bottlenecks are General Brooks, Director of P & A, and his number two, Colonel MacFadyen [*sic*]." Probative evidence of Army obstructionist policies was found in a "statement sent out by P & A to all commanding generals forbidding them to use Negroes except in Negro units and in 'Negro spaces' in overhead installations." Kenworthy concluded: "I know from the best authority within P & A that its hope is that the Committee will submit its final recommendations—what its recommendations are they don't much care—and disband."⁵⁵

"A SLOW AND PRACTICAL PROCESS." An immoral and nefarious policy had become an albatross for the executive secretary. His enthusiasm and creativity in trying to circumvent, if not overcome, the forces against change were beginning to wear thin. Kenworthy and company were determined, however, to make sure that the long, hard road traveled thus far would indeed lead to the destination they had targeted. The import of their duties had been reinforced by a demonstratively committed and straightforward president. Because each skirmish in the battle had been hard won, there was little else to do but press ahead.

Neither the utilization and assignment problem with Army occupations and schools nor the general racial quota would slip away into the quiet night. Gray wrote Fahy on November 17: "I have repeatedly declared that the Army is prepared to adopt a substitute for the numerical quota if one could be devised which afforded assurance against a disproportion between Negro and other personnel within the Army in peace as well as in war time. After a most careful examination into the subject, I am compelled to conclude that nothing has been suggested by your committee which approaches this requirement."⁵⁶

Kenworthy remained adamant on the continuing inadequacy of the Army's schools policy: "The Committee very definitely stated to the President in its interim report of 11 October that it opposes further creation of Negro units and that its objective is 'the beginning of integration by a slow and practical process.'" Furthermore, Kenworthy complained, "The officer detailed to write the . . . special regulation has conceded that the regulation does not affect appreciably the Army's present policy on assignment and does not reflect the Committee's recommendations to the Army."⁵⁷ Kenworthy argued that

"the only way to make the opening of MOS and schools effective is to infiltrate gradually the qualified, school-trained Negroes into white units." The only remaining question was, "Does the Army intend to do this by the revised 124?"⁵⁸

RAW POWER POLITICS. The intense wrangling continued until it sometimes spilled over into raw power politics pitting military against executive authority in particularly vexing, and sometimes excruciating, encounters. For example, Karl Bendetsen telephoned Charles Fahy on November 27 to inquire whether the committee

would agree that the revision of 124 accurately reflected the policy statement issued by Secretary Gray and approved by Secretary Johnson on September 30. Mr. Fahy replied . . . that he would by no means agree to such a procedure, and he added that if the Army issued a revision of 124 to commanders, he would notify the White House of the Committee's disapproval; and furthermore he would issue a statement to the press making it clear the Committee had not approved the Army's policy. If this were done, Mr. Fahy said, then a situation would arise which had so far been successfully avoided; i.e., a controversy in public.

After this exchange,

Mr. Bendetsen then asked whether Mr. Fahy meant that the Committee had the authority to prevent the Secretary of Defense from approving the Army's policy. Mr. Fahy replied that he was not trying to usurp the prerogatives of either Secretary Gray or Secretary Johnson, and that they, of course, had the right to issue an approved policy statement. The point he wished to make, however, was that the Committee operated under an executive order of the President, and that in the Committee's view the Army's policy did not meet the requirements of the policy expressed in the president's Executive Order 9981.⁵⁹

As November 1949 drew to a close committee members were increasingly anxious to produce public results. They feared additional encroachments on their power, not only through the now continuous Army subterfuges but also by the second-guessing they were receiving from Truman's advisors and an increasingly impatient Congress. It was a delicate, damnable, precariously frustrating enterprise. The committee's presidentially mandated low profile was now proving a liability rather than an asset. Many committee members pined for a public relations counteroffensive.

The intricacies of the power relations are best revealed in the ongoing correspondence. Committee member Dwight R. G. Palmer wrote Kenworthy:

There is every evidence that Secretary Gray and all his people think along the line of a "disproportionate" number of Negroes vs. whites. Well, this is the quota business. We discuss elimination of quota and they pull this "disproportionate" angle. If you are going to continue to hold sessions with the Army people (and I think you should) keep us advised in report form and look out you don't even halfway commit us to any subtle schemes of the Army. To date I have not seen a revised "124" nor any further comments since Judge Fahy referred to remarks by a Mr. Nash. Frankly, I am not sold on these "second string opinions." Such fellows have no responsibility to us nor can we sit by and let them "opinionize" about how we ought to handle our job. We have members who believe some publicity must be forthcoming. Is such a suggestion to die on the vine? We ought to do something.⁶⁰

Palmer's misgivings did not preclude White House advisors from issuing opinions on unresolved matters. The administration still favored quiet diplomacy. On December 9, 1949, Nash advised Kenworthy that "a public statement should be avoided" and that if the committee were still intent on making one, "then it should be as mild as possible." The committee's dissatisfaction with the matter of "assignment" in the proposed revisions to WD Circular 124, Nash advised, should be addressed in a memorandum to the Army and copied to the White House, whereupon the White House "would indicate to the Army that it should move to meet the recommendations of the President's Committee."⁶¹

Having publicly commissioned the Fahy Committee and having defined its mission, the president, of course, ultimately was held accountable for the impasse. For example, Senator Ralph E. Flanders of Vermont wrote Truman: "From various sources I get the impression that your plan for doing away with racial segregation in the armed services is not making very much headway, particularly in the Army." Flanders issued what amounted to a threat: "The matter should, I believe, be looked into by a Congressional investigation if conditions are as I understand them to be and if they continue. It would seem better if you could make another effort to have your desires followed so that a public investigation would be unnecessary." The president issued a curt reply: "I read your letter of the 13th with a great deal of interest. For your information, the program as outlined in the matter to which you refer, is proceeding very satisfactorily. Efforts are being made, of course, to cause us all the trouble possible in getting the plan to work. There are certain conditions which have to be met on a gradual basis. Eventually we will accomplish the purpose, if the busybodies will let us alone."⁶² Other "busbodies" entered the fray. Appearing on *Meet the Press*, Secretary Gray was asked to explain why the Army, unlike its two sister services, had failed to reach resolution with the Fahy Committee. In a somewhat

self-serving defense, Gray denied he was making "trouble" for the president and argued forcefully that he was actually trying to revivify a process that had reached a "virtual standstill."⁶³

Denouement—1950

With the growing public perception that the president's committee seemed stymied, Congress moved to resolve the matter on its own. Truman and the defense establishment steeled for additional rhetorical pressure. On January 12, 1950, Representative Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.) introduced a resolution to create a Congressional Select Committee investigation of discrimination and segregation in the armed services. Javits complained that the services had been developing separate policies: "Persistent charges have been made that practices of segregation and discrimination continue in the Army. Nothing could be more useful as propaganda material to the Communist propagandists in the 'cold war.'" In particular Javits maintained that communist propagandists in West Germany, Western Europe, Asia, and Africa were having a field day over the dispute. And, he noted pointedly, "With Communist China as a propaganda base, segregation and discrimination on grounds of race, creed or color in the United States can be used to win tens of millions to the Communist cause."⁶⁴

On January 16, 1950, the Army finally acquiesced, announcing its long-awaited revisions on WD Circular 124. The committee was pleased with the final wording of section 10 and subsections 10a, 10b.1, and 10b.2, which addressed the contested issues of assignment and utilization. Fahy informed the president of these latest developments and attached the Army's revision. Three of the committee's four major recommendations had now been adopted. The final obstacle to full implementation was the Army's racial quota system.⁶⁵

Secretary of Defense Johnson felt the Fahy Committee, having served its purpose, should now be abolished. Johnson asked Truman to turn the remaining issues over to the Defense Department, which would be responsible for submitting "semi-annual progress reports." Opposed to abolition, the president's advisors issued a spirited defense. Clark Clifford offered the president the following advice: "The elimination of racial quotas upon enlistment is still under discussion between the Committee and the Army. Even after a successful solution to that problem is agreed upon, Dave Niles and I think that the Fahy Committee should be continued, possibly on an advisory rather than an operating basis, for an indefinite period, so that it will be in a position to see that there is not a gap between policy and an ad-

ministration of policy in the Defense Establishment." Truman, in a marked demonstration of leadership, decided to continue the committee's mission until the quota issue was resolved.⁶⁶

On February 7, 1950, David Niles informed the president of "friendly and encouraging talk on the Fahy Committee's remaining recommendation—the substitution of an achievement quota for the present racial quota." Niles reported the latest committee proposal would now require all recruits to score a minimum of 90 on the GCT test, make it difficult for low-score personnel to reenlist, and eliminate the racial quota of "one Negro for every nine whites." Niles deemed the proposal "fair," "sensible," and "gradual" because "Negro units . . . would not be abolished overnight." Such rhetorical characterizations were in keeping with Truman's stated goals. Thus, this latest report must have been most welcome.⁶⁷

Truman, however, seems to have hedged his bet a bit regarding the outcome of the final agreement between the Fahy Committee and the Army. Secretary Gray seems to have requested and received approval from the president and Secretary Johnson to return to the old system if it became necessary. On March 1, 1950, Gray wrote Truman: "If, as a result of a fair trial of this new system, there ensues a disproportionate balance of racial strengths in the Army, it is my understanding that I have your authority to return to a system which will, in effect, control enlistments by race."⁶⁸

Nonetheless, on February 24, 1950, even before the final agreement between the committee and the Army was reached, Kenworthy would exuberantly inform Eric Severeid of CBS News that

What is going on is a kind of quiet social revolution about which the country knows nothing. We feel that over a period of time this opportunity for whites and Negroes to live and work together is going to have an incalculable effect upon the civil population. And it has all been done by concentrating on the business of job opportunities, and also by not making a public hue and cry, but sitting down with the services and persuading them that they were making inefficient use of the manpower they had. The Committee maintained that the services could not afford this human wastage.⁶⁹

On March 13, 1950, Fahy informed Niles that a confidential agreement had been reached with the Army on March 6 to abolish the racial quota and that the committee was now in the process of preparing its formal final report.⁷⁰

The final Fahy Committee report, *Freedom to Serve*, outlined the monumental struggle to desegregate the armed forces and the Army in particular. By defending and supporting the Fahy Committee, Truman helped overturn Jim Crow in the federal government. The

president's victory demonstrated a pronounced acumen: "politics and morality merged to produce justice."⁷¹ Dalfiume summarizes:

Truman's issuance of the executive order and his insistence that its purpose was to end segregation weakened resistance in the armed services. Furthermore, the President's backing for all of the Fahy group's recommendations to the Army enabled the committee to overcome the almost total opposition to integration in this service. Throughout this period it was the support of civilian leaders within the military establishment for integration that proved decisive. The significance of the committee's achievements is that at its beginning the Army had an official policy of segregation and at its conclusion the Army was officially committed to integration.⁷²

The president was quite pleased with the Fahy Committee's accomplishments. Truman observed that equality of opportunity in the armed forces would improve "military efficiency" and "strengthen . . . our entire national life." This was a decisive step because it helped establish the fledgling Truman Doctrine: "The free nations of the world are counting on our strength to sustain them as they mobilize their energies to resist Communist imperialism."⁷³ Thus opened the widening gyre of civil rights and the cold war.

Sociopolitical and Cultural Legacy

Powerful political and social forces in effect at the end of the Second World War made it impossible to ignore or perpetuate the *status quo* in U.S. race relations. Blacks were becoming an important political force at the ballot box and were growing increasingly unhappy with the abrogation of their civil rights at home and abroad. Their pleas for civil rights soon became entangled in the larger propaganda chips of cold war diplomacy. This process was a creation of presidents, advisors, politicians, and black leadership alike. For Truman these developments had profound consequences. Even if his political instincts told him to avoid African American rights, historical fortunes flung him into the vortex.

Truman, palpably aware that his presidential responsibilities called him to a new and greater accountability, understood that constitutional protections had to be afforded to each and every American regardless of race, creed, or color. Early on the president seemed to sense that the separate-but-equal doctrine was a method of enshrining discrimination and, therefore, had become a "contradiction" that had no place in contemporary American society. Truman's role in the

federal government's extension of civil rights to its citizens was clarified in his efforts to introduce civil rights legislation and, failing the substantive congressional hurdles at the time, was codified through executive action ensuring equal opportunity in the armed services. Civil rights legislation almost cost Truman the 1948 election. Executive action earned him an eminent place in civil rights history.

With the May 22, 1950, issuance of its final report, *Freedom to Serve*, the Fahy Committee disbanded at the president's request. The Korean War began in June of 1950. During that war, unlike those that preceded it, the old bugaboo of inferior black units was displaced as field commanders pushed *toward*, rather than away from, integration. As William Pemberton recounts, "By October 1953, 95 percent of black soldiers served in integrated units."⁷⁴ The groundwork laid by the Fahy Committee made this significant development possible. For all practical purposes, "by the end of 1954, segregation and discrimination were virtually eliminated from the internal organization of the active military forces."⁷⁵ As Berman summarizes, Executive Order 9981 "was undoubtedly President Truman's greatest civil rights achievement—and it illustrates the intelligent use of executive power to change, within admittedly narrow limits, a racist structure."⁷⁶ As Milton Konvitz notes, "in the history of civil rights in the United States this order ranks among the most important steps taken to end racial discrimination."⁷⁷

Just as important, the move to reorganize and unify the military service to set up the postwar defense establishment, when writ large, became a test of the United States's ability not only to rebound from the war but also to assume its *symbolic* role as the undisputed leader of the emerging new world order. Under the heady aegis of a dawning Pax Americana, successive administrations assumed that if democratic principle ruled, then global democratic participation would follow. In hindsight, this political premise proved a recurrent, sometimes monstrously hazardous, rhetorical theme in much cold war diplomacy. For in Truman's inauguration of the cold war, we find one of the early rhetorical links to U.S. civil rights as central to the image and consistency of American foreign policy. This argument was introduced by Truman, used in his rationale for his appointment of the Fahy Committee, and employed by successive administrations and civil rights advocates alike. Preserving human rights at home became a linchpin for the attractive presentation of Western-style democracy and rhetorical themes underlining, if not exacerbating, the emerging global competition with the Soviets. Thus, the familiar dualist nature of cold war foreign policy address, and the attendant bipolarities of arguing good and evil systems of government, received some of their

first rhetorical rehearsals in the struggle to integrate the armed services.⁷⁸ Civil rights was a part of the cold war before *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In the great tradition of American pragmatism, the president, the Fahy Committee, and the Army would finally converge on rhetorical values all parties held in high esteem: maximum efficiency as the key to national security. The effective utilization of manpower reigned uppermost in the arguments from all directions. Such normative criteria helped push principle into implementation and action. The integration of the armed forces, perhaps little understood for its enormity at the time, is now perceived as a monumental step that paved the way for the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

On the other hand, the Achilles' heel of contemporary civil rights discourse is perhaps also traced to the cold war. The cold war imperatives toward "maximum efficiency" and the preservation of "national security" no longer buttress today's civil rights arguments. The contemporary assault on affirmative action programs, for example, may be a part of the post-cold war, post-Soviet Union environment. Without an "enemy" to hate, we may be prone to lose our grounding. When Americans are persuaded to moral action based on xenophobic and nationalistic sensibilities, the moral moorings securing civil rights seem rather tenuous. Moreover, once the "enemy" is vanquished or disappears, the individual may have a hard time supporting a positive personal ideology and endorsing any governmental program of action. And the collective, having grown weary of the discourse of individual civil rights, may retreat from any discussion of human rights. Having known for so long what to be against, it may be decidedly harder now for Americans to discern what one can and must be for, individually and collectively. The recent court cases signaling a rollback on affirmative action may be harbingers that we as a nation are ready to fold our social tent on civil rights and traverse a long desert of the soul that may have little to do with the so-called abuses in the present system. Of course, such speculation needs further development, refinement, and support.⁷⁹

Arguments against desegregating the armed services bear similarities to contemporary arguments against having gays in the military, women in combat roles, and, of course, affirmative action and the use of quota systems. What is perhaps startling is that many of these arguments have changed little in over fifty years. The rhetorical history documented here echoes the early roots of discussions on affirmative action and the use (and abuse) of quota systems. It also helps explain how affirmative action, as a concept, gradually but perceptibly gained a foothold in the country's conscience and in its institutions as a viable method of ensuring equality of opportunity

for all Americans. Finally, I would like to address briefly a larger cultural legacy. With the fiftieth anniversary of the age of thermonuclear weaponry, inaugurated by the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Harry Truman and his administration became the subjects of renewed controversy, especially under the recent scrutiny of revisionists. But one might contrast those disputes with Truman's accomplishments as outlined in this chapter and reflect a bit further. The nation also recently celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Truman presidency. Like most people, Harry S. Truman experienced success and failure—and mostly with mixed results. On his efforts to integrate the armed services, however, there was a particularly happy alchemy. Both immediate and long-term good was achieved, and that is a legacy anyone can applaud.