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Inaugurating the Second Reconstruction: President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights

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good intentions
&
model for
Fed. Action.

CHAPTER 4

Inaugurating the Second Reconstruction

President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights



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My dream is that . . . America will come into the full light of the day when all shall know that she puts human rights above all other rights and that her flag is the flag not only of America but of humanity.

—Woodrow Wilson

Immediately after World War II, the United States experienced a heady national ferment to extend the benefits of democracy to citizens both at home and abroad. Having fought for freedom abroad, Americans felt renewed vigilance regarding freedom at home. This was particularly true for the African American veterans. For the black soldiers who returned to the South, the signs of inequality and the continuing segregation were particularly galling, and their persistence was simply unfathomable. Even more ominous was the record of lynchings that continued to accrue. The vigilante violence tore at the American promise and made a mockery of American ideals everywhere. Freedom, equality, and justice might have been espoused for the many, but they often escaped the experience of the few. Thus, right after the war, minorities in the United States were particularly

susceptible to the chasm between promise and performance, and they were hard pressed to articulate, much less experience, the tangible benefits of fighting a world war.

The political climate was also changing. Establishing a vibrant peacetime economy was an enormous challenge. Pres. Harry S. Truman was vexed by inflation and shortages of goods and services. The rocky road to conversion from a wartime to a peacetime economy had spelled defeat for the Democrats in the off-year elections and did not bode well for Truman's future political viability.

For Harry Truman, the challenge was extraordinary. Absorbing all Americans into a prosperous postwar economy was a daunting task. It seemed particularly overwhelming when Truman turned his attention to the African American community, where the distorted face of ongoing violence, segregation, and discrimination was a daily image in the national mirror.

In 1943, during the FDR administration, the riots in Detroit were ominous harbingers that not all was well with race relations in the United States. Truman searched for a way to redress ongoing problems. One of the most enduring actions the president would take in his attempt to alleviate continuing tensions and abuses in civil rights was to appoint the President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR). The PCCR came to represent an unprecedented move by the executive branch to analyze and redress racial intolerance in the United States. Not since Reconstruction had the nation's attention been so focused on race and race relations.

Truman's convocation of the PCCR was not *primarily* a political move aimed at winning the 1948 election (although politics was never out of the equation), as is sometimes argued, but rather was convened because of a complex mix of motivations. Chief among those concerns was President Truman's sense of justice, constitutional duty, and the emerging role of civil rights in Cold War diplomacy. By convening the PCCR, supporting and employing its recommendations in proposing civil rights legislation, and speaking publicly on behalf of a new civil rights agenda, Harry S. Truman distinguished himself as a proponent of human rights both domestically and internationally. In addition, the PCCR was particularly adept at fashioning a process and a product that served as a model for an effective attack on an intractable national problem. At Truman's behest, the PCCR

opened up a national dialogue on race that set a social, legal, and moral agenda for the next fifty years.

Truman's Sense of Justice and Constitutional Duty

On September 20, 1946, Harry Truman wrote Attorney General Tom Clark regarding Issac Woodard, a newly discharged African American veteran who had been blinded by an attack perpetrated by the local police. Truman wrote the following: "I have been very much alarmed at the increased racial feeling all over the country and I am wondering if it wouldn't be well to appoint a commission to analyze the situation and have a remedy to present to the next Congress—something similar to the Wickersham Commission on Prohibition. I know you have been looking into the Tennessee and Georgia lynchings, and also have been investigating the one in Louisiana, but I think it is going to take something more than the handling of each individual case after it happens—it is going to require some sort of policy to prevent such happenings."¹ Truman also sent a copy of this letter to minority affairs assistant David K. Niles. His cover memo reads as follows: "I am very much in earnest on this thing and I'd like very much to have you push it with everything you have."²

On December 5, 1946, President Truman issued executive order 9808, which announced his appointment of the President's Committee on Civil Rights.³ In his informal remarks to the new committee on January 15, 1947, Truman observed, "You have a vitally important job. We are none of us entirely familiar with just how far the Federal Government under the Constitution has a right to go in these civil rights matters. I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact. We have been trying to do this for 150 years. We are making progress, but we are not making progress fast enough." The president continued: "I am a believer in the sovereignty of the individual and the local governments. I don't think the Federal Government ought to be in a position to exercise dictatorial powers locally; but there are certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which I think the Federal Government has a right to protect. It's a big job. Go to it!"⁴

The tasks Truman had set before the committee were vast and infinitely complex. The issues were multiple: a presumed need to reorganize the Justice Department; development of codes for efficient

and effective criminal civil rights enforcement; antilynching legislation; poll-tax legislation; housing covenants; segregation in education, housing, and health care; establishment of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission; minority rights of non-African Americans—the list went on and on. The president was demanding proposals that could be sent to Congress immediately. It was a tall order by any standard.⁵

Committee members agreed that they would neither engage in public statements on controversial issues nor make public appearances. This was in conformance with the president's wishes.⁶ Robert L. Carr, the executive secretary of the committee, repeatedly maintained that the report itself would be the closest the committee would get to real "action" on civil rights matters. It was sometimes hard for the public and even the committee members to understand this point. The issues were so pressing and the pain so real that a blue-ribbon panel could seem nothing more than window dressing. Outsiders were worried that certain issues would be neglected. There was trepidation that the president's committee would simply conduct business as usual in an effort to fend off substantive progress. However, as William E. Juhnke observes, "While political considerations were certainly behind the PCCR project, there is no reason to believe that the creation of an advisory committee was a cynical political maneuver designed primarily to delay or avoid action."⁷ The civil rights initiatives the committee drafted were always contemplated within a larger context that had come to include a fierce fight for moral and ideological superiority in the newly developed but increasingly long tentacles of Cold War diplomacy.

Domestic Civil Rights and National Security

As the United States continued to stake its position in the newly emerging postwar era, the cornerstone doctrines of the Cold War were also in the making. Competition for the hearts and minds of the world community began in earnest. The United States was determined to cast international light on its newly defined role as a worldwide beacon of liberty. As a signatory to the newly formed Charter of the United Nations, the United States was hoping to attract more nations to the democratic camp. The Soviets, in due course, became the chief rivals to the United States' vision, and the ideological warfare

soon became intense. Article 55 of the UN Charter committed the United States and other signatories to "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples," and the United Nations as a body therein committed itself to higher standards of living; full employment; solutions to international economic, social, and health-related problems; and cultural and educational cooperation. Moreover, the signatories pledged "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."⁸

Just as important, "[t]he postwar decolonization movement among Third World peoples put the question of race in an entirely new light, one that many traditional Americans found unsettling. Decolonization efforts provided Afro-Americans with models of initiative that challenged existing racial assumptions and jeopardized long-standing racial arrangements that whites had taken for granted."⁹ The global dimensions of the black civil rights movement had repercussions in America.

But it was Harry Truman himself who best articulated the new national importance of civil rights in his landmark address on June 29, 1947, to the NAACP: "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." It was now time for the federal government to "show the way," and the president was emphatic in detailing the grave problem that domestic civil rights abuses posed for foreign policy. It was necessary to best our enemies by a clear demonstration of our commitment to freedom: "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 a leisurely attack upon prejudice and discrimination."¹⁰

The need to "put our own house in order" did not escape the attention of the State Department. As a July, 1947, State Department memorandum suggests,

By seizing upon and exaggerating in every way possible such defects as exist in the observance of human rights in the United States, the effort is made to destroy the idea of the United States as the land of freedom. . . . [Moreover,] [s]ince the moral posi-

tion of the United States in the world is based on respect for human rights, and since the continued existence of totalitarian regimes depends upon the suppression of human rights, this may be said to be the central issue of present-day world politics. The United States should not, therefore, take a passive attitude toward its problems in the field of civil liberties. Even without aggressive use, this issue forms perhaps the greatest natural weapon in the contest and should be recognized and used wherever the opportunity avails. Similarly, the free institutions of the United States should be improved and strengthened in every way possible.¹¹

With civil rights abuses in the United States now characterized as *the central issue* in world politics, civil rights and Cold War diplomacy were now inextricably intertwined, and their tangled relationship was increasingly looked upon as a serious matter. Thus the Cold War propaganda of the early postwar years recognized the pivotal role of civil rights in the United States as an important rhetorical platform in defining the struggle between East and West and between democratic and totalitarian states. The iconic role of the United States as a beacon of liberty was jeopardized by any report to the contrary, and it was the multiple contrary reports stemming from reported abuses in civil rights, especially those emanating from the South, that both fascinated and soured the foreign presses from various world capitals. The United States was smarting under a tarnished image, and it was most desirous of immediate, long-term image repair. As Mary Dudziak observes, "President Truman and his aides sought change in the domestic policies and practices that fueled international outrage."¹²

Ironically, the negative foreign press helped the administration take special cognizance of the problem of "freedom at home." Attending to civil rights at home for eyes abroad would soon become the "greatest natural weapon" in the U.S. propaganda arsenal. In short, the United States could not be the "leader of the free world" and fix its guiding star while simultaneously trampling the human rights of her own citizens. To the extent that this occurred, it was a blemish on the national reputation; at the time, this concern seemed to eclipse even matters of national conscience. By directing "moral action" in the civil rights arena as a necessary corollary to "winning" the Cold War, the president, the committee, and the State Depart-

ment fashioned an argument and forged a commitment that would have complex repercussions for decades to come.¹³

“To Secure These Rights”

In his introduction to the final report, Charles E. Wilson states that “Civil rights is a national problem. The world is today confused by differing and often contradictory uses of the language in which free men express their ideals. It is our hope that our Report will help in the continuing rededication of our people to the historic principles which have made us great. We also hope that it will help other nations to judge our capacity for vigorous self-criticism and improvement through the normal processes of democracy.”¹⁴

Ideological Rationale

The request for action was premised on fundamental moral, economic, and international convictions. Morally, the committee reasoned, “We need no further justification for a broad and immediate program than the need to reaffirm our faith in the traditional American morality. The pervasive gap between our aims and what we actually do is creating a kind of moral dry rot which eats away at the emotional and rational bases of democratic beliefs.” Economically, there was a need for “maximum production and continued prosperity.” Indeed, “A sort of vicious circle is produced. Discrimination depresses the wages and income of minority groups. As a result, their purchasing power is curtailed and markets are reduced. Reduced markets result in reduced production. This cuts down employment, which of course means lower wages and still fewer job opportunities. Rising fear, prejudice, and insecurity aggravate the very discrimination in employment which sets the vicious circle in motion.” The “separate-but-equal” policy is cited as a cause of “the wasteful duplication of many facilities and services.” Internationally, “domestic civil rights shortcomings” were perceived as an “obstacle” to “mak[ing] the United States an enormous, positive influence for peace and progress throughout the world.” Moreover, the negative propaganda stemming from civil rights violations and abuses was a primary impetus to the committee’s rationale for action: “We cannot escape the fact that our civil rights record has been an issue in world politics. The world’s press and radio are full of it. The Committee

has seen a multitude of samples. We and our friends have been, and are, stressing our achievement. Those with competing philosophies have stressed—and are shamelessly distorting—our shortcomings. They have not only tried to create hostility toward us among specific nations, races and religious groups. They have tried to prove our democracy an empty fraud, and our nation a consistent oppressor of underprivileged people. This may seem ludicrous to Americans, but it is sufficiently important to worry our friends.” The rationale concludes: “The United States is not so strong, the final triumph of the democratic ideal is not so inevitable that we can ignore what the world thinks of us or our record.”¹⁵ With this rationale securely in place, the committee could advance its recommendations.

Recommendations

The final report submitted to the president recommends presidential, congressional, state, and educational remedies and action. Recommended executive actions include enlargement of the civil rights section of the Department of Justice, establishment of a special investigative unit in the FBI specifically for civil rights, establishment of a permanent commission on civil rights, review of the wartime evacuation of Japanese American citizens, administrative action to eliminate all vestiges of discrimination in the armed services, clarification of loyalty obligations of civil servants, issuance of a presidential mandate against discrimination in federal employment, Department of Justice court intervention on restrictive housing covenants, and an executive order directing the Federal Bureau of the Budget to review all governmental programs for nondiscrimination policies and actions. This last point reflects the closely contested sanctions discussion in areas such as education. Twenty-one items were earmarked for *congressional action*. Among the most important were an increase in funding for the Justice Department’s civil rights section; new legislation to supplement Sections 51 and 52, which increased fines and penalties for civil rights violations, and Sections 443 and 444, which covered involuntary servitude under Title 18 of the United States Code; a call for an antilynching act; an end to poll taxes; legislation for ensuring voting rights; legislation on the aforementioned Japanese American evacuees; local self-government for the District of Columbia; the elimination of segregated housing through restrictive covenants; modification of laws for naturalized

citizens; legislation to end segregation in the Panama Canal Zone; legislation to end discrimination in the military; sanctions on federal grant-in-aid programs for noncompliance with civil rights law; a disclosure law covering all groups who sought to influence public opinion; and the enactment of a Fair Employment Practices Act. Recommendations for state action followed similar directives and were to be employed at the local level. Action on education included a call for a public-education campaign on civil rights and one specifically targeted at governmental employees and the military services.¹⁶

President's Statement upon Receiving the Report

Almost one month after the official due date, on October 29, 1947, the president received the committee's report. He said:

I am going to read this report with great care and I recommend to all my countrymen that they do the same thing. I created this Committee with a feeling of urgency. No sooner were we finished with the war than racial and religious intolerance began to appear and threaten the very things we had just fought for.

I notice that the title of this report ["To Secure These Rights"] is taken from the Declaration of Independence. I hope this Committee has given us as broad a document as that—an American charter of human freedom in our time. The need for such a charter was never greater than at this moment. Men of goodwill everywhere are striving, under great difficulties, to create a world-wide moral order, firmly established in the life of nations. For us, here in America, a new charter of human freedom will be a guide for action; and in the eyes of the world, it will be a declaration of our renewed faith in the American goal—the integrity of the individual human being, sustained by the moral consensus of the whole nation, protected by a government based on equal freedom under just laws. The members of this Committee are busy men and women. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. I feel I am speaking for all Americans when I thank them for their unselfish, devoted service.¹⁷

Reaction to the report was unavoidably mixed. In the North, there was positive acceptance; in the South, predictable angst and disgust.

Harvard Law School Dean Erwin N. Griswold wrote to Robert L. Carr to laud the committee's accomplishment: "I think you have done much to educate the public, and it is, in large measure, only by education, only by bringing about a deep-seated awareness of the problem, that we can make progress in this field. The contribution of the report to that progress seems to me to be as great as any which has been made in our time."¹⁸ Truman historian and biographer Alonzo L. Hamby credits the president with spearheading a "bold and far-reaching document." Hamby asserts, "A half-century later, with those objectives all achieved, it is hard to conceive of just how path-breaking and controversial the report was."¹⁹

On to Civil Rights Legislation

It had become increasingly clear that a host of minority-associated, civil rights violations and concerns in the new postwar era including lynching, violence, voting rights, and fair-employment practices was slowly filling the national cup to the point of overflow. The committee's report tends to magnify the problem in a particularly graphic way.

Truman's sense of justice, his keen recognition of his constitutional duty as president, his political instincts stemming from the stunning 1946 off-year election defeat of the Democrats, his anticipation of a tough, uphill battle for the 1948 campaign, and his desire to deflect international opprobrium by smoothing the pathways of democratic propaganda—all coalesced, if not conspired, to convince the president that civil rights legislation was the only real cure. He knew he needed the South and was fearful of the breakup of the traditional Southern Democratic coalition. He knew the Dixiecrats might threaten to break away if he moved forward with his plans. Nevertheless, he determined that he could not turn his back on civil rights; this was a significant, domestic national problem that, in the emerging Truman-doctrine-inspired era, had come to be seen as an impediment to Cold War diplomacy. A civil rights package was necessary to begin a dialogue that would help circumvent national chaos and preserve national security. Firm in the conviction that the selection of a morally righteous path in civil rights would ultimately help the United States prevail at home and abroad, the president seemed primed to trumpet his legislative goal with an unprecedented rhetorical virtuosity.

State of the Union Address

On January 6, 1948, Truman recorded the following in his diary: "Congress meets—Too bad too. They'll do nothing but wrangle, pull phony investigations and generally upset the affairs of the nation. I'm to address them soon. They won't like that address either."²⁰ Truman was referring to his January 7, 1948, State of the Union speech. In an election year, the State of the Union message always receives a bit more attention and perhaps more than the normal fair share of criticism. This election year was no different, except that the president's proposals seemed especially out of sync with the mood on Capitol Hill. Truman also used the occasion to announce his intentions for civil rights: "The recent report of the President's Civil Rights Committee points the way to corrective action by the Federal Government and by state and local governments. Because of the need for effective federal actions, I shall send a special message to Congress on this important subject."²¹

For Harry Truman, given his already precarious position in the public-opinion polls, the negative reaction to this address would be a clear warning of tough times ahead.²² If many people were unimpressed, if not offended, by the president's State of the Union address, they would be even more distressed by his upcoming speech to Congress on civil rights. Truman's administrative aides began to fashion this address approximately one week after the State of the Union message.

Preparing the February 2, 1948, Civil Rights Speech

Truman's speechwriter George Elsey asked Milton D. Stewart, chief researcher and writer on the report for the PCCR and an employee at the New School for Social Research in New York, and Robert L. Carr, the PCCR's executive director and professor at Dartmouth's Department of Government, for their comments as he contemplated the president's upcoming civil rights message. Since Stewart and Carr had been the primary writers on the president's report, there was great interest in their opinion about what the president should highlight. Stewart observed that a strategy should be drawn up that was cognizant of the following context: The Republicans, he argued, have taken up the "poll-tax, anti-lynching, FEPC [Fair Employment

Practices Commission] refrain." The "Wallace crowd is planning its major appeal to the urban low-income voter. It is common gossip here that they are sold on Walter White's view that the Negro vote will spell victory or defeat in the next election—for the President, at least." Stewart continued, "There is no doubt in my mind about the strength of the president's position with minority groups. His stand on the Palestine question until now, his NAACP speech, the work of the civil rights committee—all of these add up to a solid backlog of strength. But it must be finally secured." Stewart advised that what was needed was "a clear, penetrating image of the president himself as the unquestioned leader of the nation in the civil rights field. This is an opportune moment to get it across. The essential themes are: 'Everybody else fumbles around; the President knows what to do'; 'Everybody else talks and talks; the President acts.' Decisiveness and determination should keynote the speech. If these assumptions are true, then the speech should be pointed, straightforward and very brief." Stewart also advised the president to announce some presidential action as "the clincher." His suggestions included ordering desegregation of the armed forces within a year, forming an FBI civil rights squad, ending segregation in the Panama Canal, or some other immediate executive action that would demonstrate presidential leadership. All of these recommendations were contained in some form in the PCCR's report.²³

Carr responded as follows: "The President is confronted with something of a dilemma: it would be utterly unrealistic of him to recommend everything that is contained in the Report of the Civil Rights Committee; on the other hand, he must not disappoint those people who have had their hopes aroused by the Report. I think he can solve this dilemma by recommending a substantial, but minimum, program for immediate action and then call for further study of many additional items." Carr added the following: "I think it would be good psychology to show awareness of the fact that all of our present shortcomings are not due to the lack of legislation, and indicating that he proposes to take action himself immediately whenever that is within his power." Finally, Carr felt that the president should perhaps call for "a new statutory 'Bill of Rights'" or, failing that, at least stir "popular imagination" by announcing a "unified program, as opposed to a series of unrelated and piecemeal enactments."²⁴

In preparing for the address, some of the administration's advisers

were concerned that the president would be condemned not so much for what he said (although there was some fear there as well) as for what was left unsaid. Items that the committee called for would look conspicuous in their absence from the president's speech.

February 2, 1948, Address to a Joint Session of Congress on Civil Rights

On February 2, 1948, Harry S. Truman made the following entry into his diary: " I sent the Congress a Civil Rights message. They no doubt will receive it as coldly as they did my State of the Union message. But it needs to be said."²⁵ Indeed, President Truman had consciously and irretrievably delivered a strong civil rights message to friends and foes alike. Striking a "dignified and responsible" tone redolent of his historic NAACP speech, Truman invoked foundational principles he believed crucial to the American heritage.²⁶ His litany included equality; equal justice under the law; equal opportunity for jobs, homes, health, and education; voice in government; and government protection of the rights of the citizenry. Such ideals, he argued, had inspired people to come from all over the world to escape tyranny and join in the blessings of democracy conferred by the United States. He told Congress, "Unfortunately, there still are examples—flagrant examples—of discrimination which are utterly contrary to our ideals. Not all groups in our population are free from the fear of violence. Not all groups are free to live and work where they please or to improve their conditions of life by their own efforts. Not all groups enjoy the full privileges of citizenship and participation in the government under which they live." The president referred directly to the committee's findings, which had uncovered "a serious gap between our ideals and some of those practices. This gap must be closed." Truman argued assiduously that the protection of civil rights was a duty that obtains for every government "that derives its power from the consent of the people." Therefore, "[t]he Federal Government has a clear duty to see that Constitutional guarantees of individual liberties and of equal protection under the laws are not denied or abridged anywhere in our Union. That duty is shared by all three branches of the Government, but it can be fulfilled only if the Congress enacts modern, comprehensive civil rights laws, adequate to the needs of the day, and demonstrating our continuing faith in

the free way of life." Truman then introduced a ten-point legislative plan that included proposals for the following items: (1) a permanent commission on civil rights; (2) the strengthening of existing civil rights statutes; (3) antilynching legislation; (4) the strengthening of voting rights by elimination of the poll tax; (5) establishment of a permanent FEPC; (6) prohibitions against discrimination in interstate-transportation facilities; (7) home-rule suffrage for residents of Washington, D.C.; (8) statehood for Hawaii and Alaska; (9) equal opportunity for naturalized citizens; and (10) settlement of the evacuation claims of Japanese Americans.

Truman had made his list shorter than his committee's list, but this was a practical and a political necessity. The president framed his legislation as "a minimum program if the Federal Government is to fulfill its obligation of insuring the Constitutional guarantees of individual liberties and equal protection under the law." He also mentioned the executive actions he was undertaking that would put his own house in order by bringing consistency to nondiscrimination policy in the federal civil service and the armed forces.

Finally, Truman, true to earlier form, linked both his present legislative proposals and his own ongoing efforts on behalf of civil rights through executive action to what he described as the unique "position of the United States in the world today," which made adoption of these measures "especially urgent." It was important to build "a world family of nations," and he referred to the UN Commission on Human Rights, which was at that very hour preparing an international bill of human rights. The president told the American people that the United States had played a leading role in that endeavor. "To be effective in these efforts," Truman argued, "we must protect our civil rights so that . . . we shall be a stronger nation—stronger in our leadership, stronger in our moral position, stronger in the deeper satisfactions of a united citizenry." He concluded on a plaintive note, summoning the mantra of an increasingly familiar, new Cold War rationale for addressing civil rights: "If we wish to inspire the peoples of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy, if we wish to restore hope to those who have already lost their civil liberties, if we wish to fulfill the promise that is ours, we must correct the remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy. We know the way. We need only the will."²⁷ Truman's speech was audacious and unprecedented. Never before in the history of the United States

had any president delivered a special message to Congress devoted entirely to civil rights.

While Truman set his compass on restoring the moral order in his defense of civil rights and his call for legislation, not everyone was pleased with his efforts. Some were puzzled, and others were openly disdainful. An editorial in *The Christian Century* offers the following assessment: "It is hard to know how to treat President Truman's message to Congress on the protection of civil rights. Considered simply as a presidential utterance, it is one of the finest in many years. The President nobly reaffirms the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In striking contrast to the usual drabness of his literary style, there are several passages in this document which student orators should be quoting for years to come. Most of the proposals, also, are just and progressive. However, it is unhappily probable that by lumping all ten together—making them, as it were, part of one package—the President has adopted a legislative strategy which will result in the defeat of all."²⁸

The South was threatened by the president's message as well as his civil rights package. In particular, there was fierce anger over Truman's attempt to overturn the doctrine of white supremacy in the South by calling for equality in civil rights, jobs, and education. Whites in the South were reportedly "bitterly opposed" to the president's call for a Fair Employment Practices Commission. As Truman's blatant attempt to overturn segregation and undermine discrimination was greeted with contempt, some even called for a Dixiecrat revolt. It was suggested that the Southern governors should mount a march on Washington. In addition, there was immediate talk of holding a separate convention to elect a Southern presidential candidate.²⁹ The president, however, had his defenders. For example, Walter White and PCCR member Channing Tobias were eloquent and forceful apologists for the president's cause.³⁰

The president had raised the ante on civil rights; this divisive issue posed personal political danger to him and threatened to widen as much as to narrow the social fissures. As Alonzo L. Hamby observes, "the political consequences of presidential support for civil rights were as likely to be negative as positive. In moving as he did Truman followed his best instincts."³¹ Nonetheless, many at the time and since then felt those instincts were overly political and perhaps largely insincere.

Regardless of the debate over Truman's political motivation, the combination of the distribution of "To Secure These Rights" and the president's proposed legislation, while certainly controversial, led to a new dialogue on race in the United States. As David K. Niles reported to the president, "Since the publication of the Committee's report, daily press coverage has never ceased entirely; but for eight consecutive days following the Message to Congress, the program was on the front page, top center, in news, features, editorials, and cartoons. The minority press has given the Message extensive, favorable coverage and comment. . . . The program as a whole was hailed as the strongest civil rights program ever put forth by any President. The message was referred to as the greatest freedom document since the Emancipation Proclamation. The language of the message was described as 'Lincolnesque.'" Niles reported that every major radio network was developing some kind of program highlighting civil rights issues, that the Voice of America gave the message full coverage, and that a host of state and local activities were in the planning to solve the civil rights dilemma. One development that had not been anticipated by the president's committee was the evolution of municipalities that were beginning to conduct civil rights audits as a result of the president's counsel. A series of promotional advertising spots was also developed by the Advertising Council, which had as its theme "Group Prejudice Is a Postwar Menace." Finally, Niles told the president that more than 1 million people had already visited the Freedom Train, which celebrated the American heritage at a number of whistle-stops across the nation, and that 3-3.5 million people were expected to visit the train before its run was finished. Before the Freedom Train's arrival in each town, the municipality would hold a Rededication Week, which fostered support for national pride and the celebration of civil liberties. The educational mission that was presumed as primary by many of the architects of the president's program got a substantial boost from reports like the one Niles passed to the president.³²

Truman's Commitment to Civil Rights: Doing What Is Right

President Truman demonstrated presidential character and leadership in commissioning the report, following it up with a direct call for congressional legislation, and continuing to press for his civil

rights program both substantively and symbolically throughout the 1948 campaign and beyond. In all three efforts he maintained consistency and steadfast resolve. Although some have questioned Harry Truman's commitment to civil rights legislation, I submit that his commitment to civil rights was sincere and unequivocal.³³ While the arguments presented thus far give evidence for this point of view, I employ this final section of the chapter to reinforce a point I believe has been a bit overlooked, that is, the *intensity* of Truman's resolve. Such intensity may be somewhat surprising coming from a man whose grandmother considered herself an unreconstructed Southerner, whose home state had decidedly Southern sympathies, and whose own language sometimes contained racist epithets. Harry Truman, like John F. Kennedy, who would follow him in the lineage of Democrats who occupied the Oval Office, grew on the job. Both his constitutional duty and his personal sense of justice seemed to be at play here.

Before turning to the episodes that speak powerfully to Truman's resolve, however, I would like to point out that his sincerity in the area of civil rights can also be deduced by an interesting chronological fact. On July 26, 1948, Truman issued executive orders 9980 and 9981. The former prohibited discrimination in federal employment, and the latter called for the desegregation of the armed forces. These orders were signed immediately following the divisive 1948 Democratic convention and slightly more than three months prior to the national election. This action led Ronald Sylvia to conclude that the president "reacted to events based on his personal belief in basic fairness and equality" rather than on political expediency.³⁴

Other significant episodes also reveal evidence of Truman's intense feelings on civil rights. When an old friend wrote Truman to encourage him to "go slow" on civil rights, Truman replied, "I am going to send you a copy of the report of my Commission [*sic*] on Civil Rights and then if you still have that antebellum proslavery outlook, I'll be thoroughly disappointed in you." The president offered a few personal examples to reinforce the kinds of injustice he felt his committee was trying to alleviate. The following example is representative: "On the Louisiana and Arkansas Railway when coal burning locomotives were used, the [N]egro firemen were the thing because it was a backbreaking job and a dirty one. As soon as they turned to oil as a fuel it became customary for people to take shots

at the [N]egro firemen and a number were murdered because it was thought that this was now a white-collar job and should go to a white man. I can't approve of such goings on and I shall never approve it, as long as I am here, as I told you before. I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause."³⁵

Robert Ferrell notes that Truman promised to make a public statement on the abuse of civil rights in the South and that he kept his word by broaching the subject with an integrated audience in Dallas, Texas, at Rebel Stadium and by shaking hands with an African American woman in Waco, Texas, whereupon Truman was summarily booed for this gesture by the local citizenry. In arguing for equal rights in the South, Truman stepped forward boldly and courageously.³⁶ This was an early precursor to Lyndon Johnson's advice to John Kennedy to talk about civil rights to Southerners in their own territory, with the rationale that even if they did not agree with him, at least he could garner their respect for a brave and forthright stand.

Harry Truman's attempt to pass civil rights legislation was tempered not only by Republican and conservative Democratic members of Congress but also by Truman's legitimate concerns regarding foreign policy and political timing. In April of 1949, Eben A. Ayers recorded the following in his diary: "At our staff meeting this morning Clark Clifford brought up the matter of civil rights legislation to be introduced to the Congress, particularly the timing. The president said that we could not let anything interfere with U.S. foreign policy now before Congress—the appropriation of the European Recovery Program, the Atlantic Pact or treaty, and the reciprocal trade agreement legislation. If civil rights is introduced—and there are four separate measures contemplated—it will plunge the Congress into protracted debate and possible filibuster in the Senate by Southerners who may imperil foreign policy legislation. The president expressed the belief that [this was] about all that will be accomplished along the civil rights program this session, but that some of it will be lined up and some progress will be made."³⁷ What some may have interpreted as a sure sign of "going slow" on civil rights may have been interpreted by others as an act of prudence at a critical juncture. At the least, a careful balance of foreign and domestic policy had to be entertained.

In June of 1952, toward the end of his presidency, Harry Tru-

man delivered a commencement address at Howard University. He reflected on his civil rights initiatives: "Back in 1947, a good many people advised me not to raise this whole question of civil rights. They said it would only make things worse. But you can't cure a moral problem, or a social problem, by ignoring it. . . . It is no service to the country to turn away from the hard problems—to ignore injustice and human suffering. It is simply not the American way of doing things. Of course, there are always a lot of people whose motto is 'Don't rock the boat.' They are so afraid of rocking the boat, that they stop rowing. We can never get ahead that way. . . . If something is wrong, the thing to do is to dig it out, find out why it is wrong, and take sensible steps to put it right. We are all Americans together, and we can solve our hard problems together, including the problem of race relations."³⁸

Truman's finely honed sense of right and wrong, his innate pragmatism, and his ability to rhetorically impart a principled vision of a just democratic society can certainly be adduced in these remarks. His resolve in the civil rights arena has had lasting implications.

Conclusion

Some people have argued that Harry S. Truman's civil rights program was merely a ploy to win the 1948 election.³⁹ Others have vigorously maintained that Truman truly felt his constitutional duty to protect and defend the rights of minority citizens.⁴⁰ Still others have come to the conclusion that Truman had mixed personal and public motives in this area and that those motives might never be plumbed fully or satisfactorily.⁴¹ I contend that Truman's intentions were clear from the outset and that he never wavered. Those motives were precipitated by his personal outrage at mob violence and his sense of constitutional duty. Those aims were instantiated in the committee's work, and they were productive of a most remarkable outcome.

Certainly the pressures on Truman to turn his attention to civil rights were many, and a number of them were political, including, but not limited to, restoration of a thriving postwar economy, the revamping of a sagging defense establishment, and restoration of military preparedness in a post-World War II, postdraft era; victory in the 1948 campaign; compliance with ongoing, international human-rights agreements such as the UN Charter; and an early Cold War

philosophy. These were perhaps best articulated in the emerging Truman doctrine, which, not without some hubris, demanded that the United States—as the designated leader of the free world—undertake an unprecedented, global, democratic experiment, thus launching what would become known as the American Century.

Perhaps the greatest, tangible civil rights achievement of the Truman administration can be found in President Truman's desegregation of the armed forces.⁴² Clearly, Truman was unable to usher his civil rights legislation to fruition.⁴³ The president also weakened his case for civil rights with his government-imposed, civil-service loyalty program. Nonetheless, I maintain that we must not overlook the evidence presented here of Truman's own deep commitment to civil rights and the effectiveness of the PCCR report in sustaining that commitment. This certainly must temper our evaluations of Harry S. Truman.

Whatever suspicions we might have of the president's "true" motives, the evidence amassed here underscores Alonzo Hamby's modest claim that Truman's "civil rights program was a noble resolution of contradictory impulses," which certainly included a host of concerns, including those with personal, constitutional, political, economic, military, and international dimensions.⁴⁴ David McCullough evaluates Harry Truman's accomplishments in civil rights with the following observation: "He had achieved less in civil rights than he had hoped, but he had created the epoch-making Commission on Civil Rights, ordered the desegregation of the armed services and Federal Civil Service, done more than any president since Lincoln to awaken the American conscience to the issues of civil rights."⁴⁵

Truman's character and leadership set the standard and the tone for the PCCR. He was responsible for picking the membership, and he was responsible for their charge. He was responsible, then, for the committee's success or failure. Although he may have given short shrift to some of its recommendations and ignored others, I find the mere existence of the PCCR a most tangible achievement—one all the more remarkable for its scope and boldness in its time. Moreover, "To Secure These Rights" still stands as a major document in the annals of human rights. It was and remains a model of principle and action in public service, and it would later be emulated by Lyndon Johnson when he commissioned the Kerner Commission Report.⁴⁶ For it was Truman's direct charge to his committee and the committee's

progressive, far-sighted response that became the impetus for the most indelible series of advances in human rights in the twentieth century. Long before *Brown vs. Board of Education* or the boycott in Montgomery and the modern inauguration of the civil rights movement in the United States represented by Martin Luther King Jr., the committee's work was a touchstone in setting off a climate for social, legal, and moral revolution.

In short, the committee's report set a tone and fostered a climate that spurred both words and deeds on race not heard since the nineteenth century. It spun a chrysalis of dialogue and action in the United States that not only made government and people vital but also engaged actors in a national effort to frame fuller, more humane lives. It was Harry Truman who reintroduced the nation to the problem of race, not merely as a divisive civic problem fraught with tension, animosity, and political peril or as a vexing Cold War menace that had created propaganda disaster, but also (and, I believe, more importantly) as a test of high moral character—one that would ultimately define the American character. It was Harry Truman who invited both citizens and government to begin a long, arduous, but necessary process of educating each other and themselves about the stakes involved in difference, about the meaning of identity, about how to put a human face on an institution or a society—in short, about how to achieve equality and justice for all and redeem America's well-recognized but oft-broken promises. As a result of the Truman impetus, both proponents and opponents of civil rights engaged a national debate that continues today and is still shaping our tomorrows.

Carl M. Brauer credits John F. Kennedy with seeking civil rights legislation that entreated both Congress and the nation to create what Brauer calls the Second Reconstruction, which he defines as "a coherent effort by all three branches of the government to secure blacks their full rights."⁴⁷ According to Brauer, this process began with the famous June 11, 1963, address. Kennedy did not introduce all of his legislative proposals on June 11, but he mentioned a few items as he carefully prepared the common ground on which all of his proposals would be based, and he promised he would send a message to Congress the following week. However, I submit that Kennedy's premises in that address were the same as those of Truman's committee and, by proxy, of Truman as well. The ideals and the idealism expressed in

Kennedy's address had a prior establishment. Long before the inroads paved by John F. Kennedy and the legislation that Lyndon Johnson would finally sign into law, the key principles had been fashioned. The blueprint for action was already mightily forged. It was the PCCR that inaugurated the clear moral, economic, and international principles that sustained the dialogue on and concern over improving the civil rights of minorities. Truman's efforts on civil rights not only placed emphasis on race relations in the United States but also firmly and irretrievably centered better relations as important domestic and international policy concerns. If, as Brauer argues, "Kennedy both encouraged and responded to black aspirations and led the nation into its Second Reconstruction," then it is surely President Truman's civil rights committee that was responsible for its inauguration.⁴⁸

In sum, Truman's charge and the PCCR's execution would refocus the nation's attention on minority issues, force the majority to enlarge its vision, set the social and legislative agenda for the next half century, and ultimately, I believe, help inaugurate the celebrated "second reconstruction." We have Harry S. Truman's audacious leadership and steadfastness to thank for our national invitation to embark on that momentous journey.

Notes

1. Letter, Harry S. Truman to Tom Clark, Sept. 20, 1946, Civil Rights and Minorities, 1937-1947, Niles Papers, box 26, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter HSTL).
2. Memo, Harry S. Truman to David K. Niles, Sept. 20, 1946, Civil Rights and Minorities, 1937-1947, Niles Papers, box 26, HSTL.
3. Press release, Dec. 5, 1946, Ayers Papers in *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, vol. 2: *The Report of the Committee on Civil Rights and President Truman's Message to Congress of February 2, 1948*, ed. Dennis Merrill (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1996), document 56, pp. 197-99.
4. Informal remarks of the president to the members of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Jan. 15, 1947, Civil Rights and Minorities, 1937-1947, Niles Papers, box 26, HSTL; press release, Jan. 15, 1947, Ayers Papers in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, document 67, p. 264. The committee that Truman ultimately selected comprised two corporate heads, General Electric Chair Charles E. Wilson and Lever Brothers Pres. Charles Luckman; two labor representatives, Secretary-Treasurer of the CIO James B.

Carey and AFL economist Boris Shiskin; two college presidents, University of North Carolina's Frank P. Graham and Dartmouth's John Dickey; two African Americans, Sadie Alexander, solicitor of Philadelphia, and Channing Tobias, who served as a senior officer in the YMCA and was the director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund; two Jewish representatives, ACLU lawyer Morris L. Ernst and New York Rabbi Roland B. Gittlesohn; two Catholics, Omaha corporate lawyer Francis P. Matthews and Michigan Bishop Francis J. Hass; and two Protestants, Massachusetts Episcopal Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill and Methodist philanthropist Dorothy M. Tilly. The youngest member of the committee was Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr., who was also a lawyer. Roosevelt missed the first eight committee meetings but was still able to play a key role. The twosomes represented seemed so pronounced that some members of the press began to call the committee "Noah's Ark." On the whole the committee was liberal, moderate, and well balanced. For an excellent history of the committee's deliberations, see William E. Juhnke, "President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights: The Intersection of Politics, Protest, and Presidential Advisory Commission," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19 (1989): 593-608, quotation 594.

Wilson served as chair of the committee. Roosevelt and Dickey served as members of Wilson's executive committee. All of the members were ably assisted by Robert L. Carr, the committee's executive secretary. Carr and Milton D. Stewart, the lead researcher for the committee, would ultimately be chiefly responsible for writing the final report.

The committee was subdivided into three subcommittees: (1) legislation, composed of Sherrill as chair, along with Mathews, Graham, Dickey, and Alexander; (2) broad, national social, economic, and educational aspects of promoting civil liberties, composed of Luckman as chair, along with Haas, Carey, Tobias, and Gittelsohn; and (3) the role of private organizations in fostering civil rights, with Ernst serving as chair, along with Tilly, Shiskin, and Roosevelt. See minutes of the meeting of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Feb. 5 and 6, 1947, Niles Papers in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, document 70, pp. 268-71.

5. As testimony in the minutes of the Mar. 6, 1947, meeting reflects, "Everyone agrees that since this committee was set up by President Truman, in all courtesy to him the committee ought to report in time to let him do something about it [civil rights] while he is still President of the United States. Congress, as you know, operates on a two-year cycle and is now in the first session of a two-year period. Many people feel that if you really expect Congress to pass any legislation as a result of recommendations made, the Presidential message ought to go to Congress at this session. Now, that limits

the time very drastically indeed, because under the Reorganization Act, Congress is supposed to adjourn July first. That means if the President is going to send a message to Congress on the basis of your report, the report would have to go to him some time in May." Members quickly determined that this request was "impossible," but they were nevertheless struck by the enormity and urgency of their charge. Transcript of the minutes of the meeting of Mar. 6, 1947, President's Committee on Civil Rights (hereafter PCCR), reading files, box 12, HSTL.

6. See, for example, the minutes of the meeting of Apr. 3, 1947, PCCR reading file, box 12, HSTL.
7. Juhnke, "President Truman's Committee," p. 594.
8. Charter of the United Nations, June 26, 1945, Department of State Publication 2353, conference series 74, chap. 9, "International Economic and Social Cooperation," p. 19, in UN Conference on International Organizations, PCCR reference file, S-Y, box 28, HSTL. Interestingly, by 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt had become a member of the board of directors of the NAACP. She had also stood on the same platform and addressed the same audience as Truman at the Lincoln Memorial at the famous NAACP plenary session on June 29, 1947. As one who had helped craft the UN Charter, she emphasized in her NAACP address that civil rights performance in the United States was then in a global fishbowl and a flashpoint in the Cold War struggle to win hearts and minds. She declared that "We have . . . to make sure that we have civil rights in this country . . . [because] it isn't any longer a domestic question—it's an international question. It is perhaps the question which may decide whether democracy or communism wins out in the world." Joanna Schneider Zangrando and Robert L. Zangrando, "Eleanor Roosevelt and Black Civil Rights," in *Without Precedent: The Life and Career of Eleanor Roosevelt*, ed. Joan Hoff-Wilson and Marjorie Lightman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 101–102.

NAACP Executive Director Walter White, who introduced the president to the throng at the Lincoln Memorial, also took up the cause of democracy at home and abroad. He fully subscribed to the doctrine that what was good for American democracy was good for the world: "If we Americans assure that no man is denied any right of citizenship because he is dark of skin or worships his God in a different place or was born elsewhere, then democracy can never be destroyed. But we also know that human freedom must be in the hearts of men and not solely on paper. To this high objective we rededicate our every energy. We welcome to this struggle, whose outcome will help to determine the future of mankind, every citizen who believes that the Bill of Rights means what it says." Address by Walter White, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., June 29, 1947,

Clifford Files in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, document 91, pp. 331–33. Indeed, African Americans, long tired of redress denied, ultimately sought to bring their case for human-rights violations against the United States to the United Nations, but their efforts were ultimately rebuffed because of opposition from the United States.

9. Zangrando and Zangrando, "Eleanor Roosevelt," p. 101.
10. Address by Pres. Harry S. Truman, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., June 29, 1947, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1947* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 312. For an excellent interpretation of this unprecedented address see Garth E. Pauley, "Harry Truman and the NAACP: A Case Study in Presidential Persuasion on Civil Rights," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2 (1999): 211–41. Pauley argues that in this remarkable address Truman labels civil rights a "crisis," thus fashioning a seminal event in the annals of the modern U.S. presidency. Certainly one part of the crisis to which Truman was referring was the fact that civil rights abuses added to international anti-U.S. propaganda. For a helpful comparative approach to presidential address on civil rights, see Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency and Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race from Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

After President Truman's address, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* observed: "Other peoples throughout the world are watching this country for signs of weakness in our democracy. It's the claim of our kind of system that it is best suited and best able to give every individual an equal chance, according to his ability and character. So long as whole groups are arbitrarily deprived of that chance our critics will attempt to hold us up to scorn as hypocrites. And those who have consistently championed us may turn away in discouragement." News editorial, "Against Racial Injustice," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 1, 1947, Truman's speeches (press clippings), Correspondence and Administrative Records, PCCR, box 4, HSTL.

As the *Detroit Free Press* summarizes the matter, "With our democracy under the world's microscope, the time has come for a determined, all-out movement to exorcize the seeds of race prejudice from our hearts and minds." A drawing accompanies the editorial that depicts Uncle Sam posing with his back to a mirror. The reader is exposed to a number of patches on the back of his jacket that read "abuse of minorities," "hate," and "race bias." The editorial cartoon is captioned as follows: "As the World Sees Us." News editorial, "Rights of All," *Detroit Free Press*, July 1, 1947, Truman's speeches (press clippings), Correspondence and Administrative Records, PCCR, box 4, HSTL.

Evidence that the foreign press was wary of U.S. claims to up-

hold democracy was rather easy to amass. On May 3, 1947, for example, Moscow's *Pravda* published a half-page cartoon that depicts "Churchill, DeGaulle, [and] Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam[s] . . . pockets [are] full of atom bombs strangling a chained [N]egro on whose back he rides." In February, 1947, the *National Call*, a small New Delhi newspaper, cited the lynchings in the United States as proof of the failure of America to "look at the beam in their own eyes before pointing to the mote in those of others." Memo, Ottemiller to Krould, "Recent Foreign Comments on Civil Rights in the United States," June 19, 1947, Correspondence with Government Agencies: State Department, PCCR, box 6, HSTL.

Not surprisingly, Robert L. Carr wrote Secretary of State George C. Marshall that the president's civil rights committee was "disturbed by the oft-repeated suggestion that our country's bad record in the field of race relations is being used against us in other parts of the world." Accordingly, Carr asked Marshall whether he felt that foreign policy was being harmed by poor performance on domestic civil rights. He also requested actual data to this effect that could be reported to President Truman. Moreover, he outlined "two dangers" that had surfaced in witnesses' testimony to the committee: "One of these is the use of our bad race record against us by the Soviet Union and the Communist Parties in the Near East and in China." The other problem stemmed from potential damage "done to American interests in Latin America because of our bad civil rights record in the treatment of the Spanish-speaking minority in the United States." Letter, Robert L. Carr to George C. Marshall, May 23, 1947, PCCR reading file, box 11, HSTL.

11. Report, *Motivation of Propaganda on Civil Liberties*, July 17, 1947, Correspondence with Government Agencies: State Department, PCCR, box 6, HSTL.
12. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 79.
13. I have made a similar argument elsewhere. See Steven R. Goldzwig, "Civil Rights and the Cold War: A Rhetorical History of the Truman Administration's Desegregation of the United States Army," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1998), pp. 143-69. Here I merely observe that making civil rights "the central issue" in the ongoing trade of Cold War propaganda chips would have significant, perduring national and international repercussions—both material and psychological. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, I suggest that the focus on civil rights has also diminished. Ironically, so-called totalitarian regimes played at least an indirect role in helping to ensure that American presidents paid attention to the health of civil rights in the United States.

Of course, upholding civil liberties was also a fundamental part of many of the United States' international agreements. Examples include (but certainly are not limited to) the following: the United States as a signatory body to the Moscow Agreement of 1945; the Charter of the United Nations (as indicated earlier); the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the reorganization and consolidation of the Inter-American System; the Act of Chapultepec; and a host of agreements with international labor organizations. Each of these agreements had provisions protecting human and civil rights.

14. *"To Secure These Rights": The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), unnumbered.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 141, 144, 146-48.
16. Letter, C. Girard Davidson to J. Howard McGrath, Dec. 6, 1947, McGrath Papers in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, document 116, pp. 610-18. For a complete account of the committee's recommended actions, see *"To Secure These Rights,"* chap. 4, "A Program of Action: The Committee's Recommendations," pp. 139-73.
17. Press release, statement by the president, Oct. 29, 1947, OF 596, box 1509, HSTL.
18. Letter, Erwin N. to Robert L. Carr, Dec. 3, 1947, in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, documents 117 and 118, quotation, p. 620.
19. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 433-34.
20. Robert H. Ferrell, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 122.
21. Harry S. Truman, annual message to the Congress on the State of the Union, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 1-10, quotation 3.
22. As one *New York Times* reporter describes the reaction, "[T]he State of the Union message gained a distinctly hostile reaction from Congress. Both in their stunted applause at the time of delivery, and in their unrestrained comments in private later, a good majority of members indicated varying degrees of displeasure. Republicans almost to a man, and many conservative Democrats as well, said plainly that they would not embark on another New Deal, which they construed to be the President's intention." A *Washington Daily News* editorial derides the message bluntly: "Much of the long document is a catalog of New Deal objectives, not attained by Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Truman in 14 years of Democratic Congresses, on which Mr. Truman asks action right now by a Republican Congress." From fair-employment practices to social security to farm

- price supports, the list Truman developed was allegedly so vast that it left out "practically nothing but the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments." The *Daily News* editorial concludes as follows: "In general, this is a message of which Mr. Truman has little reason to be proud. One of its most unfortunate aspects is the strong temptation, if not justification, it offers Republicans to retaliate by making this session of Congress a political Donnybrook Fair." Cabell Phillips, "Capital Sees 'New Deal' Trend in Truman Plan," *New York Times*, undated, and "An Unfortunate Message," editorial, *Washington Daily News*, Jan. 8, 1948, both in "State of the Union Message, 1948," Murphy Files, box 3, HSTL.
23. Letter, Milton D. Stewart to George M. Elsey, Jan. 19, 1948; civil rights message, Feb. 2, 1948, drafts and suggestions, Elsey Papers, speech files, box 20, HSTL.
 24. Letter, Robert L. Carr to George M. Elsey, Jan. 16, 1948; civil rights message, Feb. 2, 1948, drafts and suggestions, Elsey Papers, speech files, box 20, HSTL. Whether based on the offered advice or not, the administration began to prepare an omnibus civil rights package.
 25. Ferrell, *Off the Record*, p. 122.
 26. William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970), p. 83.
 27. Harry S. Truman, special message to Congress on civil rights, Washington, D.C., Feb. 2, 1948, in *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 121-26.
 28. "Civil Rights and the Election," editorial, *Christian Century* 65(7) (Feb. 18, 1948). In Feb. 2, 1948, Civil Rights, presidential speech file, Clifford Papers, box 31, HSTL.
 29. See, for example, "Gauging the South's Revolt," *U.S. News and World Report*, Mar. 26, 1948, pp. 22-23; civil rights message, Feb. 2, 1948, press releases and drafts for bills; Elsey Papers, speech file, box 20, HSTL; "Says Truman 'Stabbing South in the Back,'" *Mobile Press*, Feb. 3, 1948, p. 1; "Sparks Lays Turn-about to Truman," *Montgomery Advertiser*, Feb. 4, 1948, p. 1, PPF 200, speeches, box 306, HSTL.
 30. Walter White, "The President Means It," Feb. 12, 1948, in Merrill, *The Truman Administration's Civil Rights Program*, document 139, pp. 726-29; statement by Channing H. Tobias on President Truman's Message on Civil Rights, Feb. 11, 1948, Civil Rights/Negro Affairs, 1949-1952, Niles Papers, box 27.
 31. Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 434.
 32. Memo, David K. Niles to Harry S. Truman, Feb. 16, 1948, Civil Rights/Negro Affairs, 1949-1952, Niles Papers, box 27, HSTL. The Freedom Train was a red, white, and blue, three-boxcar traveling museum containing 150 documents and flags representing a historical depiction of the development of liberty in the United

States. Among other items, the Mayflower Compact and Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence were prominently displayed. The train, whose purpose was to conduct an educational campaign for the American people, was slated to visit every state in the union during a twelve-month period beginning in September of 1947. It was sponsored by the president and the attorney general and financed by the American Heritage Foundation. Its mission was attached to the Cold War and loosely followed the PCCR's recommendation for more public education on civil liberties and civil rights. The train actually ended up taking a thirty-six-thousand-mile, sixteen-month tour that ended in January of 1949. I would like to thank the HSTL archivists with supplying me with this information. One student of the Freedom Train effort has written the following: "With old-style partisanship in decline, the Freedom Train and the American Heritage Foundation program was a venture into the modern, ultrasymbolic, national political culture during the Cold War. In the uncertain and dangerous postwar era powerful leaders experienced for themselves and helped to create for the general public the idea that the whole foundation of America and thus the American way of life were threatened. In the process they offered participation in a democratic society which restricted rather than enlarged political discourse." See Stuart Jon Little, "The Freedom Train and the Formation of the National Political Culture, 1946-1949," master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1989, p. 149.

33. A couple of interesting examples help support this claim. Civil rights aide Philleo Nash relates the following story regarding a Truman campaign speech in Harlem in October of 1948: "I had written a speech which rather stressed unity and [Truman] took the 'unity' out and said, you know, 'It's more important to be right than it is to be united.' [He continued:] 'Unity is a weak concept. Mr. Dewey has been talking about unity. I want to do what's right even if we can't be united on it.'" Here, Truman's sense of justice and fairness seems to outweigh his political instincts. In reference to the role of civil rights and the 1948 election, Nash contends, "Civil rights was the touchstone of the Truman election in 1948. It was via the civil rights route that he first showed he was the master of his own party . . . [I]t showed that he could get the nomination in spite of his strong stand on civil rights. . . . [Truman's] integrity had been called into question by his opponents. Does he really mean the things he says? What kind of guy is he? And everybody expected him to fold on this issue." When he stayed the course on this divisive issue, Nash argues, he demonstrated his character. To many voters, the president had displayed "good faith, strength, and courage." Philleo Nash Oral History, interviewed by Jerry Hess, Washington, D.C., Aug. 19, 1966, pp. 1:227, 335.

34. Ronald D. Sylvia, "Presidential Decision Making and Leadership in the Civil Rights Era," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25 (1995): 391-412. For a similar conclusion on Truman and the triumph of principle over politics in civil rights, see Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002). Concrete evidence of Truman's commitment to civil rights can also be gleaned from the actions of the Supreme Court in crucial cases prior to the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. See, for example, Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, especially pp. 90-107; Gardner, *Harry Truman*, pp. 163-97.
35. Ferrell, *Off the Record*, pp. 146-47.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
37. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Truman in the White House: The Diary of Eben A. Ayers* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 301-302.
38. Harry S. Truman, commencement address delivered at Howard University, Washington, D.C., June 13, 1952, in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, July 1, 1952, pp. 551-53; quotation, p. 551.
39. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights*.
40. Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973).
41. Pauley, "Harry S. Truman and the NAACP."
42. Goldzwig, "Civil Rights and the Cold War."
43. Most of 1945 and 1946 had been taken up largely with trying to make legislative advances on a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, which Truman considered essential to his war-reconversion program. The permanent FEPC had foundered in the House Rules Committee and by way of Senate filibuster, where a cloture vote could not be sustained. A similar fate met a Truman-endorsed poll-tax bill. Nonetheless, Truman continued his rhetorical support for advances in civil rights. In 1947, there was relative "relaxation" on civil rights initiatives. Truman focused on executive actions, including working with the defense establishment to desegregate the military services. But it was the appointment of the PCCR and its subsequent report that set the climate and sustained the arguments for Truman's introduction of specific civil rights legislation in 1948. The Republican-controlled Eightieth Congress would yield little by way of concrete civil rights legislation. In 1949, Truman challenged the Eighty-first Congress with similar legislation without success. While Truman was criticized by some for not doing all he could to support his civil rights legislation, both parties in Congress ignored a number of the president's requests. None of this precluded very real gains at the state and local levels, which were inspired

- by the president's words and actions. See, for example, McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, especially pp. 116, 154–55, 159–70.
44. Hamby, *Man of the People*, p. 641.
 45. David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 915.
 46. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968).
 47. Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 260.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 320.