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Pseudo-Democracy in America, 1945-1960:
Anticommunism versus the Social Issues of African Americans and Women

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Fashion S. Bowers
May 2002

Dr. Elwood Watson, Chair
Dr. Stephen Fritz
Dr. Dale Schmitt

Keywords: Anticommunism, African Americans, Women, 1950s

ABSTRACT

Pseudo-Democracy in America, 1945-1960:
Anticommunism versus the Social Issues of African Americans and Women

by

Fashion S. Bowers

During the period 1945 – 1960, the United States developed an intense fervor of anticommunism and strove to prevent the spread of communism to other nations, particularly the Indochina region. As a result, the government ignored or responded inadequately to key social events at home affecting both women and African Americans. This thesis will explore the extent of the active involvement in Indochina to prevent the spread of communism and the effects of that involvement on major social issues at home concerning African Americans and women. The United States had numerous opportunities to discontinue its involvement in Indochina, but it repeatedly chose to remain an important participant in the events that took place in that country from 1945-1960. As our involvement intensified, less attention was given to discrimination, educational, workforce, and civil rights issues that concerned African Americans and women. A slight period of peace allowed these groups to petition the government for help, but the response was often inadequate. As a result, these two groups formed social and political committees that would later become a major factor in the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s.

The research for this thesis included both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include documents from the Eisenhower Public Library (accessed online), the Truman Public Library (accessed online), and personal accounts from those involved in the government and social actions at this time. The majority of the material was available from the Sherrod Library at East Tennessee State University.

The conclusions drawn from this research are: a) the United States government demonstrated the precedence of fighting communism over domestic issues both by the choice to remain an active participant in Indochina and by the extent of involvement; b) African American issues were often ignored unless some type of public demonstration forced the government to take notice and act; c) the anticommunist movement caused the government to overlook issues facing women to the point that the outrage generated by the ambivalence led women to revolt from traditional stereotypes to gain equal rights.

DEDICATION

To the one who has always
supported me, encouraged me,
comforted me, loved me,
and believed in me when I couldn't.

Thank you.

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I would like to acknowledge several people who assisted me directly and indirectly throughout my collegiate career. Professor Elwood Watson provided invaluable assistance as I developed and wrote my thesis and challenged me to not just complete it, but to put forth my best effort. I want to thank Professor Dale Schmitt for the constant encouragement and support he has given me throughout my study in the Department of History. Professor Stephen Fritz greatly assisted as an additional member of my thesis committee. And always, I thank my family for their support as I pursue my degrees in higher education and my friends for being there for me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is important to understand the anticommunist sentiment that arose within the United States after World War II to accept why the United States was concerned about Vietnam. At the same time the government was focusing its resources on communism, both African Americans and women were struggling to retain the civil liberties and freedoms they gained during World War II. In order to comprehend their determination and the importance of later events, it is essential to have knowledge of the newfound freedoms they experienced as a result of the war. Even though both women and African Americans made great strides, they were faced with discrimination. Once the fighting ceased, both groups were expected to return to their traditional roles, relinquishing any progress they had achieved. The government did not acknowledge or respond to the challenges this posed because their focus lay overseas, in Indochina, particularly Vietnam. France was struggling to maintain colonial rule in the country, and the United States feared that if communism were allowed to flourish there, it would have serious consequences on the surrounding countries and on the U.S. economy. As a result, the United States justified involvement in the battle between communist forces and France.

The United States government did not have to be involved in Indochina. There was no real threat to America politically or on the home front. It may have slightly affected economic interests, but so have many other events in history. The government *chose* to be involved, even at critical points where it could have lessened or even removed the majority, if not all, interests and association. It repeatedly chose to remain involved in the war against communism. In so doing, it showed the American people

(even if they were unaware of the extent of our involvement) that foreign issues and preventing the spread of communism in Indochina were more important than issues facing the nation in the social realm. As a result, the two groups – African Americans and women – demanded, in a clear and obvious voice, to be heard.

It cannot be denied that in this time frame, communism was synonymous with Russia and the Cold War refers almost exclusively to this country. Some of the anti-communist sentiment that existed in America was due greatly to Senator Joseph McCarthy. While he was a major player in the domestic and foreign issues dealing with communism, he was not the main focus of the Eisenhower presidency. In a letter to his friend, Eisenhower wrote that McCarthy “wants, above all else, publicity. Nothing would probably please him more than to get the publicity that would be generated by public repudiation by the President...My friends on the Hill tell me that of course, among other things, he wants to increase his appeal as an after-dinner speaker and so raise the fees that he charges.”¹ President Eisenhower did not want to give McCarthy more attention than he felt McCarthy deserved. As the threat of communism seemed to grow, it took on a new meaning for the President and citizens in America.

In the 1950s and 1960s, anti-communism came to mean Vietnam and China, and prevention of the spread of communism to countries in Indochina that were still in some form democratic. To understand the extent of the involvement of the United States in Vietnam during this time, it is imperative to understand how and why the United States became involved and the social issues that were developing during this period. It was the focus of the United States on anti-communism (Vietnam included) that caused the United

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Letter to Harry Bullis, 18 May 1953, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/dl/McCarthy/DDEtoBullis51853pg1.pdf>]: accessed online.

States to overlook these issues, allowing the foundation to be laid for the “rights” movements of the 1960s.

CHAPTER 2

AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNISM & THE ISSUES FACING AFRICAN AMERICANS AND WOMEN

Our involvement in Vietnam began during the late 1940s, when France was struggling to regain control of the country and continued afterwards, when separate governments were established in both North and South Vietnam. The decision to intervene in the political struggle in this country was strictly voluntary. As we entered the next decade, the conflicts intensified and became more violent. At critical junctures within this time frame, the United States could have withdrawn support and made the decision to allow the country to develop as it would. This path, however, was not chosen, and the United States remained heavily involved in Vietnam. The consequence was a seemingly never-ending exertion in a foreign nation that later, in the 1960s, led to an outright “military action” and the death of thousands of men. As a result, the government was unable – or unwilling – to dedicate the amount of attention to domestic issues as its citizens demanded.

In order to understand why the United States chose to become involved in Vietnam, one must first understand the prevailing ideology that existed in the United States after the Second World War. Many actions are born out of fear, and in this instance what the United States feared was Communism. In a memorandum to the Attorney General, Eisenhower described his view of communists:

The Communists are a class set apart by themselves. Indeed I think they are such liars and cheats that even when they apparently recant and later testify against someone else for his Communist convictions, my first reaction is to believe that the accused person must be a patriot or he wouldn't have incurred the enmity of such people. So even when these “reformed” Communists have proved useful in

helping us track down some of their old associates, I certainly look for corroborating evidence before I feel too easy in my mind about it.¹

This excerpt shows clearly how Eisenhower felt about communists, and this sentiment was also reflected in the popular opinion of American citizens.

After defeating Hitler's Nazi regime in Europe, the next danger to American security seemed to be the rise of Communism in the East. The two main advocates of this doctrine were Russia and China. The threat lay not in these countries themselves, but in the countries surrounding Russia and China, which could easily fall prey to the evils of Communism. The concern was not for the welfare of these countries, but for the implications that the spread of communism would have for the United States, both politically and economically. In order to protect these interests, it was the job of the United States to prevent communism from infecting other countries. We were fighting on the side of liberty and individual freedoms to fight communism to the end.

At the same time, two distinct groups of Americans were experiencing freedoms that they had never been allowed to possess. One of these groups was African-Americans. During the Second World War, black soldiers were recruited and utilized in the effort. They faced discrimination but were able to do things they had never been allowed to do before. Many were present at the liberation of Nazi concentration camps and saw the outcome of extreme hate and prejudice. Returning home, they vowed not to let this happen in America. The America that they came home to, however, was still a country embedded with racism and discrimination. "The World War II veterans and traditional black leaders were facing a seemingly impossible task in Mississippi, for despite the wartime upheavals, whites were determined to maintain their supremacy by

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Memorandum to the Attorney General, 4 November 1953, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/dl/McCarthy/MemoDDEtoBrownell11453pg1.pdf>]: accessed online.

denying blacks political, educational, and economic opportunity and by maintaining racial segregation in all walks of life.”² African-Americans were expected to serve their country, but not demand of the rights granted to each citizen by the Constitution of the United States.

In an effort to end the racism that had permeated American life since the founding of the country, blacks in the United States began what later became known as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This time period is well documented, but this movement can hardly be molded to fit into the time period of a single decade. Much of the roots of this movement began during and after World War II and extended through the 1950s. It was during this time that the foundation was laid and actions taken by blacks and the United States government that allowed the leaders to emerge and the movement to come forth. Many of these actions were not deliberate steps to create consternation, but simple acts of defiance against the Jim Crowism that had existed throughout their lives. At each and every instance, the American government responded, either with silence or with action, helping to shape the Movement it would later try to control.

African Americans have fought in every war the United States government has been involved in since the founding of the country. They have fought with valor and pride, yet at the time of World War II, the United States military was still segregated. Those who were allowed to serve their country were often “forced into a handful of segregated units in the Army, confined to messmen in the Navy and baited completely from the Air Corps and Marines.”³ Some blacks were able to overcome this obstacle to participate in the fight, such as the Tuskegee Airmen, Navy messman Dorie Miller at

² John Dittmer, “Rising Expectations, 1946-1954,” In *The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings and Interpretations*, Raymond D’Angelo. (Guilford: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001), 78.

³ Kevin Chappell, “Blacks in World War II,” *Ebony* 50 (September 1995): accessed online.

Pearl Harbor, and the 761st Tank Battalion (the first all-black battalion to fight in combat in World War II). Considering the discrimination and racism that African Americans faced not only in the military, but at home too, one wonders why they wanted to fight for freedoms they did not possess themselves. The answer, according to Tuskegee Airman Robert L. Martin, was simple, “I could envision worse conditions and treatment of Negroes in America if the Nazis were to win the war in Europe and to some how conquer America and enforce their doctrines here. I felt I had to fight to stop a worse government from taking over the world; to stop it over there before it could try to come over here.”⁴

In addition to these African Americans who found liberation from traditional roles, women also enjoyed more freedoms during World War II. The campaign for equality in women’s rights is an exertion that has existed since the beginning of time and since the inception of the Declaration of Independence in the United States. Women have continually struggled to gain acceptance in the eyes of men as equals deserving of the same rights and freedoms as those possessed by men. Progress has been made along the way, but oftentimes not as fast or as far-reaching as many women would like. During World War II, women were encouraged to step outside the boundaries of home life in an effort to support the war effort. Because of this, women experienced a new and profound freedom that they had never before been allowed to come into contact with. After the war ended, however, these same women were expected to return to their traditional roles as housewife and mother in the home. Despite all the effort placed in the campaign to induce women to return to their previous submissive roles, women refused. This, combined with all the other events occurring during the 1960s, caused women to stand up

⁴ Quoted in John Adelman, “Victory at Home and Abroad: The Tuskegee Airmen Research Project and Seminar,” *Social Education* 64 (October 2000): accessed online.

and demand that they finally be recognized as one under the law. In order to understand the intensity of the women's rights movement, as it came to be known, it is essential to understand the history of the struggle.

Women in the nineteenth century were involved in various labors outside of the home. Many women worked in industrial organizations, such as textile mills and the garment industry, as well as the agricultural field. These women, however, earned substantially less than their male counterparts. "It was among these women, working in slum dwellings under conditions similar to those of the modern sweatshop, that the desire first emerged for contact with one another and joint action to better their condition."⁵ Out of this came various labor organizations, however short lived, that worked towards improving the working conditions of women. Although the campaign for higher education for women was in place and more women were beginning to be employed outside the home, change was still very slow in coming.

The struggle for women to gain the right to vote lasted for the next 50 years. During this time, women were increasingly becoming a part of the working force and organizing and joining trade unions. As a group, they participated in strikes for better pay and working conditions. Still, though, without the right to vote and subsequently influence the laws before which they wished to be equal, the women were hindered in their progress. Woodrow Wilson, "the president (1913-1921) most identified with the promotion of worldwide democracy, opposed giving American women the vote."⁶

⁵ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 54.

⁶ "There Will Be no Going Back for the Female of the Species; Indeed There May be Quite a Lot More Going Forward," *The Economist* 352 (11 September 1999): 7.

Despite the vast amount of opposition that permeated the United States at this time, women finally won the right to vote in 1920 with the 19th Amendment.

After this important victory, the formal women's rights movement was not as active as it had been in previous years. Although it is noted that "the proportion of married women in the female workforce was rising between the wars, particularly in the women-dominated industries" many were still expected not to do paid work.⁷ Birth certificates at this time listed, among the information for the child, other items deemed important: residence of parents, name of father and mother, birthplace of father and mother, and occupation of the father. No mention is made of the occupation of the mother. This was not deemed important or expected.⁸

This "two-decade eclipse" of little activity ended with the outbreak of World War II. "When Mars turned his red glare on the United States of America in December of 1941 woman was at her historic post – the same post at which she stood during the first World War and the Civil War and all other wars. The Kitchen."⁹ Women's involvement in the Second World War began mostly with volunteerism. Unfortunately, there were often few jobs available, so the government glorified housework and encouraged these women to do their traditional chores better. Their usual tasks were given a glorified new name in support of the war effort. As the United States became more heavily involved in World War II, however, more jobs were left vacant with only women to fill them.

⁷ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (Dover: Croom Helm, 1984), 16.

⁸ Birth Certificate of Theodore Gregory Parker, 25 July 1942, Copy obtained in client file, Johnson City, TN.

⁹ Susan B. Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen – Into the War: Woman's Winning Role in the Nation's Drama* (New York: Stephen Day, Inc., 1943), 1.

The decision to recruit more women to fill these gaps in employment was not one that the government came by lightly. “In essence the problem was whether the demands of wartime production for an increased supply of female labour should be allowed to take precedence over the demand for women’s labour in the home, or whether the intrusion upon women’s conventional domestic roles, particularly those of married women, should be avoided.”¹⁰ The war needs, however, usurped these concerns and women left their traditional roles in the kitchen to enter the nation’s workforce. In fact, “With the mobilization of the U.S. economy for war...some 6.5 million women entered the work force. At the national level, the number of working women increased from 25 percent of American women at the beginning of the war to 36 percent at the war’s end.”¹¹

The roles of women in the working industries varied from a wide range of tasks. Women moved from the more domestic industries (textile) to the more ‘essential’ war industries. “By the thousands women are going into aircraft machine shops, metal fittings, sheet metal, precision and detailed assembly, tool crib work, drilling, dimpling, spar and frame building, filing and burring.” Other employers of women during the war include small arms ammunition, communications equipment, and shipbuilding industries.¹² One of the most prominent images of propaganda from World War II is “Rosie the Riveter,” encouraging women to step out of their traditional roles to help out with the war industry production.

In fact, so many single women were entering the workforce at increasing rates that Washington and the industries realized they soon might exhaust this reserve of

¹⁰ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 1984), 29.

¹¹ Judy Barrett and David C. Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” *The Historian* 57 (Winter 1994): 352.

¹² Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen – Into the War*, 76-77.

workers. As a solution, “The Government, industry, and the unions began to eye that vast untapped reservoir of labor, America’s twenty-eight million non-farm housewives.”¹³ It no longer became frowned upon for married women to enter the workforce, because in supporting the war effort, they were working to bring their boys back home. World War II also brought more farmwomen into the war effort “as six million agricultural laborers departed from rural America to don military uniforms or seek more lucrative work in war industries.”¹⁴

Women also joined military and civilian agencies to serve their country during this time of crisis. Women “saw duty with the Army, Nurse Corps, Women’s Army Corps, Navy WAVES, Marine Corps Women’s Reserves, Coast Guard SPARS, etc.” Some of these women served under dangerous conditions. Reba Whittle was the only American nurse captured and imprisoned by the Germans during the war, and Alice Neilstockel ran a Red Cross “club-mobile that followed U.S. troops as they fought their way across Europe.”¹⁵ Although not all women were directly involved in fighting, their entrance into other positions of the military released men to go to the Front.

Women also supported and participated in the war effort in ways other than joining the industrial workforce or entering military service. Letters written by women during the war provide “commentary about rationing, war-bond rallies, salvage campaigns, blood drives, civil defense work, planting and harvesting victory gardens, Red Cross work, hostessing at United Service Organizations (USO), and many other volunteer activities championed by women.” In addition, women in the agricultural sphere played a “crucial role...in the planting and harvesting of the nation’s wartime

¹³ Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen – Into the War*, 58.

¹⁴ Barrett and Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” 353.

¹⁵ “They Also Served: American Women in World War II,” *Publishers Weekly*, 13 March 1995, 53.

crops” which “is evidenced as the proportion of women engaged in agricultural work increased” from 1940 to 1945.¹⁶ Aside from all the work that women in America were doing to support the involvement in World War II, they were still expected to maintain their duties in the household.

The increased responsibilities that women were forced to accept during this time influenced a change in the way that many of these women viewed themselves.

“Unprecedented numbers of women emerged from the private sphere into areas of the public realm previously closed to them... Women moved into ‘male’ jobs, wore pants in public, frequented places of commercial entertainment unaccompanied by men, and challenged in a variety of ways both gender relations and standards of sexual morality.”¹⁷

War work gave women a new sense of independence and confidence previously not experienced in America. One of the most important changes is “the new sense of self experienced by war time women... the exigencies of war necessitated that women develop a new sense of who they were and of their capabilities.”¹⁸

Women found pride in their new work and were enthusiastic about their newfound responsibilities. Edith Speert wrote to her husband, “I must admit I’m not exactly the same girl you left – I’m twice as independent as I used to be and to top it off, I sometimes think I’ve become as ‘hard as nails’ – hardly anyone can evoke any sympathy from me.” In addition, women were forced to cope with the tragedies of war – the deaths of husbands, fathers, and sons. Finding out that a loved one was a prisoner-of-war, missing-in-action, or killed in battle “required women to draw on a previously untapped

¹⁶ Barrett and Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” 350.

¹⁷ Marilyn E. Hegarty, “Patriot or Prostitute? Sexual Discourses, Print Media, and American Women During World War II,” *Journal of Women’s History* 10 (Summer 1998): 112.

¹⁸ Barrett and Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” 351.

inner strength.” Letters written by women indicate that they had an increased awareness of political activities and the war’s progression. These women felt a need to be cognizant of the occurrences in order to know where their loved ones were and their condition.¹⁹

Regardless of their importance in contributing to the United States’ war effort and their newfound realization of self, women were still discriminated against in the workforce and military. In industries, “women’s services were being used to do the very many “lesser” jobs in almost the same way as a white man can find employment for native servants...though considerable increases occurred in the numbers of women at work, still it could not be said that the main industries of the country were carried on chiefly by women.”²⁰ In jobs that women could procure, the starting wages for men were found to be at least ten cents higher than for women, even though the jobs were the same. The Army and Navy held a ban on women doctors “not so much from a desire to guard male modesty, as from the rigid anti-woman attitude of the medical profession, and its reflection in the armed forces.” Women were allowed to serve as medical officers in these branches after 1943, but women still faced a tough fight. “The higher a profession stands in public esteem the greater are the barriers erected to prevent the ‘lowly’ female from entering it.”²¹

The discriminations faced by women during World War II, along with their higher self-esteem, led these women to once again campaign for equality and women’s rights. They realized “they were without full participation in the rights and privileges of citizenship, including the citizen’s privilege to work for his country, equally with all

¹⁹ Quoted in Barrett and Smith, “U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II,” 352, 354.

²⁰ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 152.

²¹ Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen – Into the War*, 111, 191.

other citizens, according to his capacity.”²² Women were deprived of policy-making and administrative jobs in the war effort. The labor unions in industries and the camaraderie felt due to the fact that many of these women were sharing in the same ordeal led them to come together once again as a group in order to promote their efforts. As before, however, many of their efforts led to little or slow change.

Many of the women performing industrial tasks were in dangerous positions. Often, women were either permanently injured or killed. “Less than sixty thousand service men were reported dead, wounded, and missing in that year [1942], but there were more than two and one-half million industrial casualties ranging from minor loss-of-time accidents to deaths...*Fifty thousand workers died in industrial accidents.* Almost two hundred thousand workers will never work again.”²³ Unfortunately, much of the time, these accidents were the result of a lack of training. Susan B. Anthony II tells the story of Esther, who was assigned to the task of inspecting cartridges at a small arms ammunition plant with no training. After her first day of inspecting by herself, she was found lying on the floor soaked in blood. No one had warned her not to wear jewelry of any kind while performing her job or given her safety shoes or clothes. Luckily, protective goggles saved her eyesight, but she lost many days of work because of her burned arm, hand, and face.

As the Second World War came to an end, these two groups – African Americans and women – were again deprived of their freedoms as guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States. Both African Americans and women were allowed to participate in the war effort in capacities they had thus far been denied. Although discrimination was

²² Ibid, 23.

²³ Ibid, 91.

rampant in almost every sector, still the gains they had made were of significance to each group. As the threat of Nazism was being eliminated, the United States government attempted to return the nation to the status quo for those white male soldiers returning home. Women were expected to leave the workforce and their newfound freedoms to make room and jobs for the soldiers returning home. African Americans were to forget that for a brief time they were worth as much and possessed the same capabilities as their white counterparts. The government expected the transition to be completed without much monitoring, because now a new concern arose within the nation – communism.

The concern over the spread of Communism, which later became known as the “domino theory,” affected foreign and domestic policy decisions by the American government and demanded a great amount of attention. In his “Chance for Peace” speech, President Eisenhower related that “Any nation’s right to form of government and an economic system of its own choosing is *inalienable*... Any nation’s attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government is indefensible.”²⁴ In a letter to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he also discussed the issue of U.S. control over specific islands in the Pacific Ocean. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, “Such control is necessary not only so that we can project our own offensive forces against the Asiatic mainland, but also so that we can deny an enemy access to the Western Hemisphere by way of the Pacific Ocean.” They were concerned not only about the present, but also about a predicted point in the future, when “an enemy force may exist in East Asia which has the capability of rapidly projecting itself and its new munitions by sea or air to the eastward, thus threatening our

²⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Chance for Peace Speech,” 16 April 1953, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/chance.htm>]: accessed online.

security.”²⁵ Any form of aggression in Southeast Asia caused by communism was a threat not only to that region but also to the entire free world.

This threat of Communism slowly moving westward was evident in many areas. In a letter to Joseph McNarney, Eisenhower responded to McNarney’s request for troop buildup in Europe. Eisenhower wrote, “Public pressure to reduce the Army, and especially to reduce expenditures for the Army, is such that we cannot raise the presently planned Army strengths to cover these added forces.” McNarney had requested these troops due to a fear that there was a “possibility of a successful Communistic uprising in France, a circumstance which could set off a chain of events leading to war with Russia. Particularly, there is the danger that events anywhere in the world may lead to aggression by the Soviet Union.”²⁶ France itself was involved in a bitter struggle to combat Communism, but not on its home soil.

France’s struggle with Communism was in the region of Indochina, particularly Vietnam. France had maintained control of the area for much of the century, until a man named Ho Chi Minh stood before the Vietnamese people and in 1945 proclaimed independence for his country. France was determined not to lose control of this empire it had built. France tried to negotiate with the Vietminh (the political organization of the Independence Movement), but the two sides were unable to come to an agreement on their differing goals. “For a time during World War II, the United States actively opposed the return of Indochina to France...Some U.S. officials perceived the growth of nationalism in Vietnam and feared that a French attempt to regain control of its colony

²⁵ Quoted in Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The Chief of Staff: VII*, edited by Louis Galambos, et al., 4 June 1946, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 1100.

²⁶ Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 17 April 1946, 1011-1012.

might provoke a long and bloody war, bringing instability to an area of economic and strategic significance.”²⁷ A main advocate of this line of thought was President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who disliked France and its leader, Charles de Gaulle. After his death in April 1945, however, the next President changed America’s stance on this area of the world.

²⁷ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 7.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNITED STATES' SECRET WAR: 1945-1954 – DOMESTIC ISSUES TAKE SECOND PLACE

“In May 1945, the Truman administration gave France its approval to resume colonial authority in Indochina, Truman hoping that France would liberalize its rule there.”¹ Before the war, the Vietminh had opposed French rule in favor of independence from foreign rule. The endorsement the United States gave to France came with little doubt about France’s ability to rule there successfully. It was believed that “the nationalistic movements in Southeast Asia...[would]...diminish as economic conditions return to normal and the people received greater political privileges. Minor disturbances probably will continue. The French will have reestablished control in French Indo-China, economic conditions will be normal and native political activities will be slight.”² This was to happen when France regained control of Indochina. Truman’s support of France’s efforts in Vietnam was the first decision of many that resulted in serious consequences for the United States.

This positive outlook on the situation in the east failed to anticipate the extent to which the United States would become involved in France’s struggle in Vietnam. It was expected that “The extent of our influences as indicated upon the French policy in Indo-China should be so restricted as to preclude any possibility of our military involvement other than through United Nations action in the affairs of that country. It is doubtful also whether a forceful policy in that direction should be applied at the hazard of the good-

¹ Frank E. Smitha, “Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam,” *The 20th Century: Conflict, Attitude, and Changing Religions*, 1998, [<http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/index.html>], accessed online.

² Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 9 January 1946, 744.

will of France.”³ Regardless of our wish for the situation in Indochina, “The French tried to force their way back in Vietnam, and a war between the French and the Vietminh began in December 1946.”⁴

The fighting itself was limited to the two nations at war – France and Vietnam – but there were other nations involved in this conflict. The United States provided assistance, both economic and advisory, to France during its struggle. The U.S. felt justified in its participation because it was limiting the spread of Communism in the East for the sake of democracy in the West. The United States assumed that the Vietminh, led by Ho Chi Minh, was being financed and supported by Communist Russia and China. As a result, “During the first three years of the Indochina war, the United States maintained a distinctly pro-French ‘neutrality.’ Reluctant to place itself in the awkward position of openly supporting colonialism, the Truman administration gave France covert financial and military aid.” In addition, funds provided to France via the Marshall Plan allowed the country to use its own resources to fund the war in Vietnam.⁵ In providing this vast amount of aid, the U.S. committed itself to a struggle that it was not able to end for over a decade.

While the United States was involving itself in the struggle against communism, many domestic issues were given slight consideration, even though signs were clear that Americans demanded the attention of the national government on these issues. The effort to defeat Hitler had succeeded, but America was still a land of segregation and racism. African Americans returned home and “vowed to retain the advances made during the war and to achieve additional rights and privileges... The challenge was full inclusion in

³ Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 18 February 1946, 879.

⁴ Smitha, “Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam,” accessed online.

⁵ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 10.

the American society, a challenge that fueled the beginning of the civil rights movement in the late 1940s.”⁶ One of the first acts to try to achieve equality was not on the battlefield or in the halls of Congress. It began on a baseball field, when Jackie Robinson stepped onto the grass at Ebbetts Field in April 1947 as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He was the first black man to play major league baseball, and as a result, he often had to withstand taunting on the field, as well as death threats and hate mail off the field. Ironically, this was not Robinson’s first brush with racism.

Robinson, or rather Lieutenant Jackie Robinson, was a member of the 761st Tank Battalion during World War II. He was one of the 761st’s few black officers, yet that did not prevent white soldiers from treating him with contempt. He was riding a bus on July 6, 1944 from Camp Hood, Texas to a nearby town and refused to move to the rear of the bus when told to do so by the bus driver. “Court-martial charges ensued but could not proceed because the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Paul L. Bates, would not consent to the charges. The top brass at Camp Hood then transferred Robinson to the 758th Tank Battalion, whose commander immediately signed the court-martial consent.”⁷ After trial, Robinson was acquitted of the charges, but the United States military had made its point – blacks in the military were inferior to whites.

Three years later, Robinson may have thought of that incident as he broke the color barrier on the baseball field. Although he may not have been the best player in the Negro league, he went on to excel in the white major leagues. Robinson was named Rookie of the Year, and “his dignified carriage and his brilliant play bore into the souls if

⁶ Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, “African Americans and World War II: a Pictorial Essay,” *Negro History Bulletin* 51 (December 1993): accessed online.

⁷ Joseph E. Wilson, Jr., “The 761st ‘Black Panther’ Tank Battalion was the First African-American Armored Unit to See Combat,” [http://www.thehistorynet.com/WorldWarII/articles/1998/01983_text.htm]: accessed online.

virtually every American male and millions of white minds about who blacks were and what we might be able to accomplish.” His “success energized the civil rights movement, which the ballplayer strongly endorsed, and America moved on to tackle the issue of race in neighborhoods, on the job, in schools.”⁸ This would not be the last time that Jackie Robinson campaigned for civil rights.

Truman’s focus at this time was obviously not the integration of a baseball team or the racism in the military. In discussing why he ran for President, he stated he wanted to help. “The world was undergoing a major readjustment, with revolution stalking most of the ‘have-not’ nations. Communism was making the most of this opportunity, thriving on misery as it always does.”⁹ He did, however, take the time to commission a report on segregation in the Army. It recommended legislation and action from the administration to end discrimination and segregation in every branch of the Armed Forces immediately. As a small sign of support, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, eliminating segregation and discrimination against African Americans in the Armed Forces.

Even though this Executive Order officially notified the public of the government’s stance on discrimination within the military, in practice, it accomplished very little to almost nothing. Units that were all black still existed in 1951, three years after the order to disband segregated parts of the military. Black troops were still often considered lazy, unreliable, and inept at fighting. Reading Executive Order 9981, one Lieutenant General stated, “Now, gentlemen, as long as I am in command, there will be

⁸ Jerelyn Eddings, “A Grandfather’s Greatest Gift: Jackie Robinson Fought to Play; His Grandson Doesn’t Have to,” *U.S. News & World Report* 122 (24 March 1997): accessed online.

⁹ Harry Truman Memoirs, “Truman Talks About Why He Ran in ’48,” Vol. 2, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/student_activities/sta8-1.htm]: accessed online.

no changes. There'll be Officers Club No. 1 and Officers Club No. 2; NCO Club No. 1 and No. 2; swimming pool No. 1 and No. 2.”¹⁰ Was the government aware that the military was not carrying out the orders of the President of the United States? Undoubtedly. Did they do anything to ensure that the orders would be followed and units desegregated? That is debatable. There were other matters at hand.

By 1950, the confidence that France had exuded about its ability to win the war with Vietnam began to wane, and the possibility of a Communist victory seemed feasible. At this same time, the Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The United States became involved in this conflict, once again with the goal of defeating the spread of communism, which could threaten the cause of democracy. After the successful landing at Inchon in the Fall of 1950, the United States “changed its objective from one of repelling aggression to one of rolling back communism by seeking to unify Korea by force.”¹¹ Although Korea and Vietnam were different fronts, it was still considered to be the same war against communism in Asia. Korea did take precedence over Vietnam at this time, but Indochina was still within the realm of consideration in diplomatic relations.

Many military leaders were against direct action in Vietnam, but international events soon intensified the Cold War and the United States' involvement in it. This amplified fear of the threat of communism took its effect on the United States, as “Secretary of State Dean Acheson persuaded Truman to increase U.S. assistance to the

¹⁰ Joseph L. Galloway, “The Last of the Buffalo Soldiers: a New Look at the Army’s Last All-Black-Unit,” *U.S. News & World Report* 120 (6 May 1996): accessed online.

¹¹ Michael A Lutzker, “Presidential Decision Making in the Korean War: the British Perspective,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (Fall 1996): 979.

French, and the United States recognized France's puppet king in Vietnam, Bao Dai."¹² Army Chief of Staff J. Lawton Collins warned against a military buildup in Indochina with the goal of limiting the influence of Russia in Southeast Asia, but it went unheeded. NSC-64, "which pressed for 'all practicable measures' to protect Indochina, and then NSC-68 further expanded the American commitment to Vietnam."¹³

As our commitment to fighting communism in Indochina increased, the commitment to social issues at home decreased. Women, in particular were stripped of the gains they had made during the war. Many women wanted to keep their jobs after the war ended, but they lost their positions to returning veterans. "The few child care facilities that had been established by the federal government during the war closed, and mothers of small children faced even more intense pressures to stay home."¹⁴ Women who had served were entitled to benefits, but "Most of the veterans' benefits were geared toward men, not to formerly enlisted women. Like their civilian sisters, female veterans were expected to become wives and mothers after the war. There they would, presumably, best serve the needs for the returning soldiers, rather than competing with them for jobs and training programs."¹⁵

Women, however, insisted that the advances in employment they had made (however small) during World War II must continue after the war. "We must recognize that woman's place is in the world as much as man's is. Woman's place is in the factory, in the office, in the professions, in the fields and at the council table – wherever human

¹² Smitha, "Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam," accessed online.

¹³ Robert Buzzanco, "Prologue to Tragedy: U.S. Military Opposition to Intervention in Vietnam, 1950-1954," *Diplomatic History* 17 (1993): 205.

¹⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Pushing the Limits: American Women 1940-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 56.

¹⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 68.

labor, human effort, is needed to produce and create.”¹⁶ Even though the number of women working in industries increased during the war and was at a much higher rate in 1950 than in 1939, women had still not gained equality. “A few dissentient voices...cast doubt on the idea that the war had put women on an equal footing with men, let alone allowed them to get the ‘whiphand.’”¹⁷

Popular media emphasized the fact that the progress women had made should still be held accountable to the standards of men. “Magazine articles, stories, and advertisements offered such normative advice to wartime women as how to dress, how to remain feminine while working, how to act in public (especially without a male escort), and how to meet their obligations to the war effort.” For example, *Good Housekeeping* published an article on the acceptable limits of public behavior without an escort and defined the rules for a woman to maintain a good reputation. It advised women on the necessity of preserving a “ladylike demeanor.”¹⁸ Even though women had a new place in the world, they were still encouraged to look back to the ideals of the past and modify their behavior to fit this ideal.

After the war was over, women were encouraged to return to the positions they held in the home before the United States entered the fighting. As the government demobilized the nation and cut wartime production, campaigns – many endorsed by the government – started emphasizing the need for women to return to the home so that their beloved soldier returning from the war would have a place to work. “After the war women were generally expected to step aside from the jobs they had held during the war. As had happened after World War I, emphasis was placed on a return to traditional

¹⁶ Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen – Into the War*, 244.

¹⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 152, 187.

¹⁸ Hegarty, “Patriot or Prostitute,” 116, 121.

roles.”¹⁹ Women who wished to remain in the workforce were accused of taking away jobs from all the brave soldiers coming home from defending this nation – and her – from the threat of Nazi Germany. The policies “of the government, private sector employers, and even labor unions made it difficult for women to avoid economic dependence on their husbands or their fathers even if they continued to hold jobs.”²⁰ Now that the war had been won, women were needed no longer in industry, but in the home to make sure that the men were rewarded for their time and service.

Those women who managed to remain in the workforce and were not laid off were often discriminated against. During the war, women were desperately needed to fill positions in traditionally male dominated work industries. No laws were in place, however, to prohibit employers from refusing to hire older women or married women or from refusing to employ women at all. As a result, many jobs retained male classifications and were temporarily staffed by women until more “appropriate” persons could be found. “More ‘appropriate’ persons were quickly found when the war ended. Within two months, almost 800,000 women had lost their jobs in the aircraft industry alone.”²¹ At the 1951 Conference on Women in Defense, it was concluded that “the primary effort of women in a defense period, after supplying from their numbers the ones needed in the armed services, *should be directed toward protection of the human relations in the home, the family unit.*”²² In returning to the domestic chores, however, women would potentially be sacrificing many of the gains they had made during the war

¹⁹ Rita J. Simon and Gloria Danziger, *Women’s Movements in America: Their Successes, Disappointments, and Aspirations* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 19.

²⁰ May, *Pushing the Limits*, 55.

²¹ Simon and Danziger, *Women’s Movements in America*, 37.

²² Susan M. Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 89.

for equality. The government failed to see this, however, because of its preoccupation with foreign aid to countries at risk from the threat of communism.

“Two major themes on the purpose of foreign aid are expressed throughout the literature... The first is that foreign aid is (and should be) one instrument of foreign policy used to advance the goals of the donor in the world arena. The second theme is that foreign aid should be given generously to promote economic development in poor countries.”²³ The United States provided aid on the basis of the second theme, but in reality, the first theme holds truer to our purpose. “Indochina was considered intrinsically important for its raw materials, rice, and naval bases, but it was deemed far more significant for the presumed effect its loss would have on other areas.” The lessons learned in World War II were prominent on the minds of American leaders, who felt that if Vietnam ‘fell’ to Communism, much of Southeast Asia would soon follow. The leaders therefore ended the illusion of neutrality in this conflict and made a commitment to furnish France with aid. “It also established principles that would provide the basis for U.S. policy in Vietnam for years to come and would eventually lead to massive involvement.”²⁴ The insistence on maintaining a presence in Indochina allowed long-standing traditions of racism (called Jim Crowism or Jim Crow laws) to flourish throughout the nation, particularly in the South, with little to no intervention from the government to protect those discriminated against.

Ray Sprigle, a reporter for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, posed as a black man and traveled throughout the south in 1948 to experience, firsthand, what it was like for the millions of people living under the Jim Crow system. “I quit being white, and free, and

²³ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22.

²⁴ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 14.

an American citizen when I climbed aboard that Jim Crow coach...From then on, until I came up out of the South four weeks later, I was black, and in bondage – not quite slavery but not quite freedom, either.”²⁵ Sprigle did see what not only life was like, but also the inherent falsity of the separate but equal doctrine practiced at that time. In Madison County, Mississippi, the Negroes outnumbered the white population four to one, owned 90 percent of all the land and therefore paid 90 percent of the taxes, and yet they had no say in how the money was spent. Their “new” school building “is just a big square box with two partitions breaking it up into four rooms. Only one of the rooms has desks. They are hammered together out of the scrap lumber left over from the building of the school. The scraps were picked up out of the mud.”²⁶ Education was so important to African Americans that they had to endure detestable conditions, less pay for teachers, and absence of transportation to school in order to obtain a basic education. The government did not interfere in these matters, often upholding the segregation of facilities, because it was easier than taking direct action. Involvement would detract from the more important issue of fighting communism – a more serious threat to our nation.

The NAACP made an obvious and clear effort to show the United States government that integration of schools was a major issue for African Americans. The head lawyer for the NAACP at the time, Thurgood Marshall, advocated a gradual, but indirect attack against the laws enforcing segregation. Instead of pushing for integration of elementary and high schools, his idea was to integrate colleges. He felt the American people and government were not as opposed and upset by integration at this level. The idea was that it would be too costly for the states to establish colleges solely for African

²⁵ Ray Sprigle, “I Was a Negro in the South for 30 Days,” *Post-Gazette.com Special Reports* (1997-2002), [<http://www.post-gazette.com/sprigle/>], accessed online.

²⁶ Sprigle, “I Was a Negro,” Chapter 16, accessed online.

Americans, which would be necessary to abide by the “separate but equal” ruling. In 1950, Texas attempted to establish a special school for a Negro student rather than admit him to the public college, but the Supreme Court ruled “that if states wanted to establish separate-but-equal institutions, they must factor in the prestige of the university that would be bestowed on the graduates, along with the library and faculties.”²⁷ The time had come, however, when integrating colleges was no longer enough and the African American population forced the American government to take a stance.

The first real action of the government concerning civil rights began in 1951, when the NAACP requested an injunction to prevent the segregation of Topeka, Kansas public schools. Oliver Brown had tried to enroll his black daughter in an all-white school seven blocks from his home because he did not want her to have to walk one mile through a railroad switchyard to attend the all-black elementary school. The white school refused to admit Linda Brown, thus resulting in the now famous *Brown vs. Board of Education* case of 1954. The NAACP argued that by not associating with white children, comprising a majority in society, the black children were receiving an inadequate education. The Board of Education argued that the segregated school systems were equal and “were not necessarily harmful to black children; great African Americans such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver had overcome more than just segregated schools to achieve what they achieved.”²⁸

The dilemma the court was facing related to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established that separate facilities for blacks were constitutional as long as they were

²⁷ Luther Brown Jr., “Black Monday: The NAACP’s Finest Hour,” *The New Crisis* 106 (July/August 1999), accessed online.

²⁸ Quoted in Lisa Cozzens, “Brown v. Board of Education,” 1995, [<http://www.Watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/early-civilrights/brown.html>]: accessed online.

created equal. The court was divided on the issue and requested the opinion of the Eisenhower administration. They asked Attorney General Herbert Brownell to appear, and Brownell knew that he would be asked if the administration thought that school segregation was constitutional. If the administration did not answer the question outright, Brownell felt the consequences would be disastrous. “The President then asked my professional opinion and I answered that public school segregation was unconstitutional, and that the old *Plessy* case had been wrongly decided.”²⁹ After three years of hearings and deliberation, the court ruled in favor of Brown. The court decided that in public education, “the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”³⁰

Even though the court ruled unanimously in favor of Brown, it was clear to the nation that the decision was not going to be strictly enforced. The headline for the *New York Times* on May 18, 1954 read, “High Court Bans School Segregation; 9-to-0 Decision Grants Time to Comply.” In addition, the decision did not apply to private schools – only public schools. The decision was applauded by numerous individuals in the educational field as well as the general public. But this may have much to do with the fact that no regulations were given on how to desegregate schools. That decision was held off until the next general session convened later that year. The decision the court

²⁹ Herbert Brownell, “Eisenhower’s Civil Rights Program: A Personal Assessment,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1991): 237.

³⁰ Quoted in Cozzens, “Brown v. Board of Education,” accessed online.

made was, in effect, merely “show” at this time because it did not establish any guidelines to enforce its decisions or punishment for non-compliance with its decision.

The government also tried to put forth a façade of concern with the issues facing women at this time. The government and media tried to make the domestic sphere as attractive as they could for the women previously granted a taste of independence and freedom. In so doing, the government would relinquish the greater chance that they would have to pay attention to domestic matters. In encouraging the workforce, they would be forced to deal with matters of wages, discrimination, and working hours, and the government did not have time to do this. The government’s attention was focused on preventing the French from losing Vietnam, and it could not spare time or resources to women’s issues. The easier route was to encourage an image of womanhood that would mean less future involvement for the government.

The image of the 1950s housewife that was promulgated was the loving and caring mother and wife who made sure that all in the house ran smoothly. According to Vice President Nixon, “I think that this attitude toward women is universal. What we want is to make easier the life of our housewives.”³¹ These June Cleaver stereotypes were to be role models for all women to strive to imitate. Women should be happiest caring for their family in their suburban home with no other loftier aspirations. Tending to housework, making sure the children made it to school on time with an adequate lunch, shopping, and preparing meals were fulfilling for the typical mother. The only problem is that these duties were not enough for women who had become accustomed to working in a factory 8 to 12 hours per day, making their own wages and their own decisions. The

³¹ Quoted in May, *Homeward Bound*, 10.

truth is that very few women during the 1950s fit this ideal stereotype of the desired woman.

This misconception of the typical woman during the 1950s has led many to believe that family life was simple, happy, and prosperous. While some revel in this nostalgia, “For others, it is an ironic story of declension, in which the housewife finds herself trapped in a domestic cage after spreading her wings during World War II.” While some women did fit the stereotype of the suburban middle-class married woman, there are just as many others who did not. In fact, “in the years following World War II, many women were not white, middle-class, married, and suburban; and many white, middle-class, married suburban women were neither wholly domestic nor quiescent.”³² It is true that many embraced the conservatism that was affluent during this time as a defense from the fear of communism and as a stabilizer for those returning from war. Those who felt contained within these traditional bounds often challenged these postwar conceptions of domestic life, however. The government did not recognize this due to its distraction in other political arenas, allowing the discontent to grow to the point that women felt obligated to become involved in the government and politics to demand attention to their needs and issues.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, an ever-increasing number of women became involved in American politics. While much of the interest stemmed from a desire to be better informed as to the activities of loved ones overseas, many of the women were continuing their involvement after the war. Glen Jeansonne describes the plethora of women involved in the Far Right during and after World War II. These

³² Joanne Meyerowitz, “Introduction” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1-2.

women vehemently opposed the United States involvement in the war and “published books, pamphlets, and newsletters... They testified before Congress, picketed the White House, collected petitions, and participated in political campaigns.”³³ Even though the participation in the Far Right declined after the end of the war, many of its leaders, such as Elizabeth Dilling, remained active in politics for many years afterwards. More moderate groups also remained active after the end of the Second World War.

In the years following the war, the political sphere of the women’s movement had divided into three main groups. The first included the National Women’s Trade Union League and the National Consumer’s League. During World War II, these groups campaigned to improve conditions for industrial workers, trying to ensure a safe and adequate workplace for women. “After the war, however, they generally concurred with the social consensus of the time that married women should be supported by their husbands.” The second group centered around the National Women’s Party (NWP), whose main goal was to fight for legislation and labor laws that would guarantee women complete equality with men. The third group was composed of women active in party politics (the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee) and aimed to make sure that women were elected to government positions. Within all, “The battle over the Equal Rights Amendment dominated women’s political activities after World War II.”³⁴ This political involvement in order to change the social conditions of women did not meet the approval of the government. Although there were other factors involved, “the anti-communist crusade discredited individual women and

³³ Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

³⁴ Simon and Danziger, *Women’s Movements in America*, 18, 19.

induced caution among women leaders and organizations.”³⁵ “According to the experts, political activism was not likely to keep the world steady. They advocated adaptation rather than resistance as a means of feeling ‘at home.’ The modern home would make the inherited values of the past relevant for the uncertain present and future, but it had to be fortified largely from within.”³⁶

The government had a very distinct purpose in encouraging the domestic life for women and discouraging political involvement. According to William J. Levitt, developer of Levittown, “No one who owns his house and lots can be a Communist. He has too much to do.”³⁷ Therefore, the cry for social equality for women was ignored because the concern for communism took precedence. Vice President Nixon believed that the suburban ideal “would diffuse two potentially disruptive forces: women and workers.” The home was a refuge from the chaotic world, and it also aided in the fight to suppress communism abroad. In demonstrating the ideal home life of women in the United States, our government was protecting itself from negative views concerning its actions abroad, which made it easier to justify its actions.

In aiding France in her struggle against communism in this region, the United States feared that it would be perceived as advocating French imperialism. France had requested military power from the U.S. “The U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, conferred with congressional leaders, and Congress wished to help, but it wanted France to declare Indochina independent so that the United States would not appear to be fighting for colonialism.”³⁸ In an attempt to make it easier for the United States to justify

³⁵ Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal,” 85.

³⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 22.

³⁷ Quoted in May, *Homeward Bound*, 143.

³⁸ Smitha, “Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam,” accessed online.

foreign aid as well as remove the association with colonialism, it established governments, headed by natives of the country, in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (headed by Bao Dai, whom the U.S. had recognized). U.S. support by no means guaranteed victory in these areas, but it was clear that without it, the chance of defeat was much greater. In his first inaugural address in January 1953, President Eisenhower claimed that it was our destiny to secure the “free world’s leadership...we Americans know and we observe the difference between world leadership and imperialism.”³⁹ It was our duty to become and stay involved in Indochina until the threat of communism was gone.

The aid given to France steadily increased to the point where the United States seemed to be the main participant. This “distant and undeclared war became established in the minds of both the public and public officials as a showdown between the forces of Communism and anti-Communism, vital to the ‘Free World’”⁴⁰ By the end of 1950, the United States was funding more than 40 percent of the cost of the war. The amount of money that Truman and Eisenhower appropriated to the fight in Vietnam demonstrates the importance our government attached to the region: \$10 million in mid-1950, \$130 million in funding and material by late 1950, and \$785 million in military assistance in 1953.⁴¹ Chinese aid to the Vietminh also increased. France was losing its stronghold in much of South Vietnam, and neighboring countries were plagued with insurgencies (instigated in part by Chinese influence) against governments supported by the United States.⁴² “After Eisenhower took office in 1952, U.S. aid to the French effort in Vietnam

³⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Inaugural Address*, 20 January 1953, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/1stinaug.htm>]: accessed online.

⁴⁰ Val Noone, ed, “Arguments About Australia and the Vietnam War: Document 1,” [<http://www.his.Latrobe.edu.au/histres/vce/vcetitles/austvietext/doc1.html>]: accessed online.

⁴¹ Buzzanco, “Prologue to Tragedy,” 206-209.

⁴² Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 24.

increased, and by 1954, U.S. aid amounted to 80 percent of the costs of the French effort.”⁴³ There is no mention of spending anywhere near this amount of funding in the United States to benefit either African Americans or women. American dollars were better spent fighting communism abroad.

President Eisenhower best summed up the American position in 1953:

Now let us assume that we lost Indochina. If Indochina goes, several things happen right away. The Kra Peninsula, the last little bit of land hanging on down there, would be scarcely defensible. The tin and the tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming. But all India would be out-flanked. Burma would certainly, in its weakened condition, be no defense. So you see, somewhere along the line this must be blocked. It must be blocked now. Now that’s what the French are doing. So when the United States votes \$400 million to help that war we’re not voting for a give-away program; we’re voting for the cheapest way that we can prevent the occurrence of something that would be of the most terrible significance to the United States of America. Our security!⁴⁴

Regardless of the amount of aid provided to the effort in Southern Vietnam, however, the struggle seemed destined to fail.

It was clear at this time that the issues facing African Americans were not of great importance to the government or the American people. The government showed its indifference through its verdict in the Brown case; the American public showed its indifference through its focus. In the year 1954, *The New York Times* index lists less than two pages of references to the topic of Negroes. There were almost eighteen and a half referencing French Indochina. The situation on the other side of the world was a better news story and more important than issues facing the citizens at home. Because *The New York Times* is one of the nation’s most popular newspapers, it will like all private

⁴³ Smitha, “Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam,” accessed online.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Elizabeth Deane (writer and producer), “VIETNAM: A Television History. America’s Mandarin (1954-1963) Transcript,” [<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/Vietnam/103ts.html>]: accessed online.

enterprises, print what the people want to read and will buy. Still, African Americans were adamant that their concerns were important.

It was more than apparent that during the period 1945-1954, African Americans and women wanted and fought to maintain the advances they had made during World War II. Both groups were heavily involved in the war effort, and they expected their role in the government and industry to continue during this period. The government, however, gave little effort to ensuring that these gains were upheld. Civil liberties for these two groups were not as important as guaranteeing that men who fought in the war returned home to find all the same. Truman made a gesture with Executive Order 9981, but as with the Brown case, nothing was done to make certain that the provisions were followed until years later. At a time when domestic issues were crying for attention, where was the mindset of the United States government? Once again, it was with communism and Indochina, fighting its private war.

It soon became obvious that France would not succeed in its quest to make Vietnam part of its colonial empire. “By 1954, Ho [Chi Minh] was receiving substantial aid from both communist China and the Soviet Union...In early 1954, Ho’s increasingly powerful military forces dealt the French a decisive defeat at Dienbienphu and forced the French government to the conference table.”⁴⁵ The result was the Geneva Accords of 1954, to which the United States was not a participant. The Accords divided Vietnam into half, along the seventeenth parallel. France was to be allowed to maintain an administration in the country for the next two years, at which time elections would be held to determine the fate of the country – whether or not Vietnam would reunify.

⁴⁵ David L. Snook, “The Vietnam Era: History of the Iowa National Guard,” [http://www.guard.state.ia.us/pages/Pub_Affair/history/Vietnam_Era.html], accessed online.

At this juncture, it seems that the involvement of the United States should be minimal or erased. The U.S. again made a critical decision that would later have dire consequences. The military divisions of the government debated about the forces that would be needed in order to fight in Vietnam. It was decided that the commitment would be too great for the United States government at this time, and the United States did not intervene. “Neither, however, did the United States dissociate itself from Vietnamese affairs. Indeed, American political leaders immediately began to assume the French role in Vietnam.”⁴⁶ By not ending involvement in Vietnam with the defeat of France, the nation imbedded itself in a national struggle that it could have avoided. As a result, the nation’s focus remained in Southeast Asia and domestic issues took second place to those abroad.

But for a short period of time, the effort exerted in foreign issues in Indochina had lessened. Although the United States was still greatly concerned with communism in Indochina, this short lull of activity allowed the government to turn to domestic issues. Women and African Americans petitioned the government for change, but even though they were heard, the response was more for the appearance of concern and action than for actual change. The threat of communism in Indochina was still considered to be a threat, and it was an issue that the government would return its focus to in years to come.

⁴⁶ Buzzanco, “Prologue to Tragedy,” 217.

CHAPTER 4

A PERIOD OF PEACE: 1954-1955 – WE MUST AND WILL BE HEARD

Although the fighting had officially ended between France and the Vietminh, the United States was still fearful of the Communist threat in the area. A wealthy leader of the Roman Catholic minority in Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, lived in the United States from 1950-1954. The French leader in Vietnam, Bao Dai, appointed Diem as Prime Minister while Diem was studying at a New Jersey seminary. The United States saw Diem as a powerful force to combat communism and began providing him with financial support. In 1954, after returning to Vietnam, Diem ousted Dao from power, and therefore weakened France's influence in the country.

Diem was not a well-liked leader in Vietnam. "He was not popular with common people, but he was a man of courage, stubbornness and honesty. Unfortunately he was also inept. He surrounded himself with friends and family and failed to cultivate relations with local leaders and the various political and religious groups in the South [Vietnam]."¹ Diem often sided with the wealthy and large landowners. He was especially unpopular with the Buddhist population in Vietnam. Later, in 1963, Buddhist priests began setting themselves on fire in protest of the Diem regime. The most famous incident was that of Thich Quang Duc, aided by a monk in pouring gasoline on himself and setting himself on fire. "During the Reverend Quang Duc's cremation, everything was burned except for his heart, which remained intact. His heart was set on fire two more times, but it still did not burn."² The United States was well aware of Diem's

¹ Smitha, "Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam," accessed online.

² "VIETNAM: A Television History," accessed online.

unpopularity in Vietnam, yet we still provided aid at his request. With France as an example, the U.S. should have realized the consequences of supporting a government that the people did not favor. The U.S. could have discontinued aid and involvement in Vietnam at this point, but once again it continued on the path to destruction.

“Although Diem was soon to be toppled from power, three American presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson) would respond with ever increasing aid, both weapons and military advisers, to shore up a succession of shaky military governments in South Vietnam.”³ President Eisenhower dispatched several envoys to Vietnam. Eisenhower sent Air Force Brigadier General Edward Geary Lansdale in May 1954, after the French surrender at Dienbienphu. “Lansdale’s initial assignment was to plan and execute a campaign of covert warfare against the new communist regime in Hanoi. Although this effort was unsuccessful, he stayed on through 1956 and became a close friend and confidant of Ngo Dinh Diem”⁴ Eisenhower also sent another World War II veteran, General J. Lawton Collins, to Vietnam. “Collins, instructed to help train an army for Diem, recommended \$100 million in aid for the new government.” This was, of course, only as long as the leaders agreed with what their benefactors advised. Collins later stated, “I liked Diem, but I became convinced that he did not have the political knack, nor the strength of character, politically, to manage this bizarre collection of people in Vietnam.”⁵

How did the United States justify this continued presence and influence in Vietnam after the Geneva Accords? The American government reiterated that our nation

³ Snook, “The Vietnam Era,” accessed online.

⁴ Richard H. Shultz, Jr., “The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy’s and Johnson’s Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam,” [http://www.kimsoft.com/1997/cia-nam.htm], accessed online.

⁵ Quoted in “VIETNAM: A Television History,” accessed online.

had not signed the accords and was therefore still open to fighting the spread of communism in the region. “Now, if you can couple that with strong moral ground to support somebody else in the world, and free – democracy and freedom, and things like that, that we are doing in support of Formosa, it makes the policy much stronger.”

Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs James P. Richards stated in an interview in 1955 that “so far as Southeast Asia is concerned, unless the French get out of Indo-China and get out lock, stock, and barrel, and leave a more favorable atmosphere for us to bolster the economy and the military there, that we are going to lose.” According to Richards, there was little hope of holding Vietnam as long as France interfered.⁶

It is obvious that Vietnam and Indochina were of extreme importance to our government. James Hagerty, the White House Press Secretary under Dwight D. Eisenhower, recorded entries in his diaries of his meetings with the President. In three separate entries, he records the President as stating that Indochina was of “vital” significance. The situation was deteriorating, and “The French attached so much importance to Dien Bien Phu that its fall has had a terrific psychological effect, not only in France but even in Indo-China among their fighting troops.” Eisenhower feared that the Vietminh would soon take over vast amounts of territory, but the British were still opposed to any type of collective action against them. Without British help, it would be nearly impossible to succeed. “The British unfortunately are trying to save Hong Kong and Malaya and are closing their eyes to the fact that if Indo-China goes, they are next on the list without much of a prayer to do anything about it.”⁷ There was still the fear that

⁶ James P. Richards, “Face the Nation,” Interview by Ted Koop (23 January 1955), *Face the Nation – 1954-1955: The Collected Transcripts from the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts*, vol. 1 (1972), 96-97.

⁷ James Hagerty, Diary Entry, 14 May 1954,

[<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/McCarthy/Diaryentry51454.pdf>]: accessed online.

had been present before that if one country “fell” to communism that others would soon follow.

Our continued involvement in Vietnam also rested, still, on the shoulders of this infamous “domino theory.” Senator William F. Knowland, in an interview with Ted Koop: “Personally, I was sorry to see Northern Vietnam pass into Communist hands, with its 15 million people. I think we must frankly acknowledge that that was a defeat for the free world, when 15 million more people passed behind the Communist Iron Curtain.” Our participation was valid, however, even though “the French had not officially asked us to come in. It was then a colonial problem, which it is not today. I think there were factors there which made the decision very difficult for the Government of the U.S. Personally, I am not in favor of Communism being able to extend its area any more, any place in the world.”⁸

This notion was prevalent with many of the world’s leaders. Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo, Special Envoy of the President of the Philippines to the United States, commented, when asked about the situation in Indochina, that it “is a very dangerous situation, a very dangerous situation. In fact, I would say that as of today, Indo-China is being nibbled away from us slowly, and so I would like to call the attention of the American people to the danger.” Strong support for Diem was needed, “By everything we can think of, because Diem represents the real nationalism in Vietnam, and to beat Ho Chi Minh he’ll have to out-nationalist Ho Chi Minh.”⁹ Whether or not Diem could do this, however, soon came into question.

⁸ William F. Knowland, “Face the Nation,” Interview by Ted Koop (27 March 1955), *Face the Nation – 1954-1955: The Collected Transcripts form the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts*, vol. 1 (1972), 167.

⁹ Carlos P. Romulo, “Face the Nation,” Interview by Ted Koop (26 June 1955), *Face the Nation – 1954-1955: The Collected Transcripts form the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts*, vol. 1 (1972), 273.

During this time of fragile “peace” that Vietnam experienced, several key events occurred in the United States that would not allow the government to feign indifference. It was forced for a short period of time to focus some attention on events at home and in some manner deal with them to the satisfaction of the citizens. In Alabama, a woman stood up to the racist, Jim Crow laws that prevented African Americans from enjoying the civil liberties they were promised. As a result, this community united, and women joined action groups in large numbers, uniting to secure their own civil liberties. And in Mississippi, unfortunately, a young teenager was murdered, forcing the government to hear the outcry of the African American community and a call to the end of violence towards blacks. Immediately after the peace, however, the government was forced to revisit the Brown case to enforce its decision and demand compliance.

Although the issue of the legality of school segregation had been decided, the issue of how to enforce the decision had not. In fact, this question held the Brown case in limbo for an entire year, until *Brown II* was decided in 1955. The original Brown decision was passed at the crux of the French-Vietnamese conflict and Dien Bien Phu. Therefore, only the decision was passed and the rules for ensuring it was carried out was slated for a later date. At that time, “Power of enforcement was given to Federal District Courts but with no timetable for presentation of plans or for their completion. Desegregation was to take place ‘with all deliberate speed.’ This was interpreted by political leaders in the South as being so ambiguous as to mean ‘at some indefinite date in the future.’”¹⁰ President Eisenhower immediately desegregated the schools in the District of Columbia as a signal to the nation that the *Brown* decision should be obeyed. The lack of direct order by the government, however, would later result in defiance of its words.

¹⁰ Brownell, “Eisenhower’s Civil Rights Program,” 238.

Education was also an important issue to women during this time. More women were entering colleges and universities than ever before. The National Manpower Council, established in 1951 at Columbia University to study men in the workforce, saw the need to study womanpower also. It offered recommendations to the government based on its findings. It became concerned about the low number of women professional graduates and “aimed at changing popular attitudes” and “raising the consciousness of women.”¹¹ The government still did not heed the suggestions. In his commencement address at Smith College in 1955, Adlai Stevenson encouraged each graduate to become a mother and inspire “in her home a vision of the meaning of life and freedom...help her husband find values that will give purpose to his specialized daily chores.”¹² Women were given no more consideration in the end than were African Americans.

Even though the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision “is considered the 20th century’s most important Supreme Court case,” there is much it did not do.¹³ It did not abolish segregation in other public areas, such as restaurants or restrooms. It did not affect the Jim Crow laws that still permeated much of the South. It did not provide for safe passage of black students to these schools, nor did it ensure that African Americans would be treated with equality. It did, however, equate to a victory for African Americans in their struggle for civil rights. In legally having the right to obtain an equal education, blacks would have a better chance to defend their rights in the future. This was something they would desperately need as the 1950s progressed, because much of the South did not and were not forced to adhere to the laws that were written. “Back

¹¹ Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal,” 92.

¹² Quoted in Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963): 53-54.

¹³ Michael J. Klarman, “How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): accessed online.

then,” recalled Rosa Parks, “we didn’t have any civil rights. It was just a matter of survival, of existing from one day to the next. I remember going to sleep as a girl and hearing the Klan ride at night and hearing a lynching and being afraid the house would burn down.”¹⁴ As a result, many lives were placed in harm’s way.

Emmett Till was fourteen-years-old in 1955. He lived with his mother in Chicago, Illinois, but decided to visit his great uncle, Moses Wright, who lived in Money, Mississippi. That summer, racial tensions still existed throughout the United States, but nowhere so much as in the Deep South. The United States Government had given the appearance of denouncing racism and segregation, but in practice, the two existed in most every state. Lynching was a common occurrence in the South, and little was done to discourage the act. A simple mistake or forgotten “Sir” at the end of a sentence could bear heavy consequences for African Americans in this region. Emmett Till was unaccustomed to this degree of persecution, and it cost him his life.

In August 1955, Emmett Till entered a general store in Money, Mississippi, to buy candy. The exact event that occurred next is debated, but Till either whistled at or spoke to the wife of the storeowner, Carol Bryant, offending her. Till and his friends were worried at first, but then did not think about the incident. A few days later, on August 28, 1955, Roy Bryant (the storeowner and Carol’s husband) and his brother-in-law, J.W. Milam, drove to the cabin owned by Till’s uncle at approximately 2:30 in the morning. “They awakened Moses Wright’s family and took his nephew, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, from the cabin at gunpoint. After driving across the Tallahatchie River, they savagely beat and shot him and secured a heavy cotton gin fan to his naked body

¹⁴ Quoted in American Academy of Achievement, “Rosa Parks: Pioneer of Civil Rights, Biography,” 2 December 2001, [<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0bio-1?rand=18391>], accessed online.

before dumping it into the river.”¹⁵ Till’s body was found three days later, “One eye was gouged out, and his crushed-in head had a bullet in it. The corpse was nearly unrecognizable; Moses Wright could only positively identify the body as Emmett’s because it was wearing an initialed ring.”¹⁶ This boy, in his youth, had been murdered because he was black, and because he was black, justice was not upheld.

Both Bryant and Milam confessed to kidnapping Emmett Till and were arrested. Across the nation, people were horrified at the murder, and no lawyer was willing to defend the kidnappers. Till’s mother, Mamie Bradley, asked that her son’s body be shipped back to Chicago for the funeral. After assuring herself that this disfigured corpse was her son, she insisted on an open-casket funeral so that everyone could see what had happened to Emmett. Thousands attended the funeral, and those who did not were shocked at the pictures of Till’s body that were distributed in magazines across the country. “Whites in Mississippi resented the Northern criticism of the ‘barbarity of segregation’ and the NAACP’s labeling of the murder as a lynching. Five prominent lawyers stepped forward to defend Milam and Bryant, and officials who had at first denounced the murder began supporting the accused murderers.”¹⁷

The two men were tried before an all-white jury in Sumner, Mississippi in September 1955. The prosecutors had trouble convincing blacks to testify against the two white men until Moses Wright, Emmet’s sixty-four-year-old uncle, when “Asked to identify the abductors to a hostile court, he stood, pointed first to J. W. Milam, and said

¹⁵ Ralph E. Luker, “Racial Matters: Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs,” *American Quarterly* 43 (March 1991): 167.

¹⁶ Lisa Cozzens, “The Murder of Emmett Till,” 1997, [<http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/early-civilrights/emmet.html>]: accessed online.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, accessed online.

firmly: ‘Thar he.’”¹⁸ Others were then willing to come forward to testify, but immediately afterwards, they had to be escorted out of the state for their protection. Their efforts were to little avail. Defense attorney John C. Whitten, in his closing statement, told jurors: “Your fathers will turn over in their graves if [Milam and Bryant are found guilty] and I’m sure that every last Anglo-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men in the face of that [outside] pressure.” After only one hour of deliberation, the jury acquitted the two men. The foreman later explained, “I feel the state failed to prove the identity of the body.”¹⁹ Whether this is true may never be known. The transcripts of the case have been destroyed – reportedly because the court was not required to keep them.

Emmett Till’s murder had implications for more than just the African American community. Mamie Bradley’s status as a good mother and as a “respectable, feminine woman” was important to portray Emmett as an innocent and respectable victim since he was accused of violating both racial and sexual boundaries. Bradley needed to confirm her role as a respectable mother, “but she needed to do so along multiple valences: to emerge as protective to Emmett, yet not emasculating; fashionable and well –groomed, yet not ostentatious and luxury laden; hardworking, yet not ambitious; and ‘universal’ enough to attract the sympathy of whites without distancing herself from the black community.”²⁰ Equally important was her level of patriotism. Bradley’s husband died fighting in World War II, and one magazine reported her “concern that the murder would

¹⁸ Quoted in Luker, “Racial Matters,” 168.

¹⁹ Quoted in Cozzens, “The Murder of Emmett Till,” accessed online.

²⁰ Ruth Feldstein, “‘I Wanted the Whole World to See’: Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till,” In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 270.

be used by the Communists for anti-American propaganda.”²¹ Even with the tragedy of her son’s death, communism was still a factor in her decision-making.

The murder of Emmett Till sent a shock wave across the nation and the world. The “not guilty” verdict sent a wave of anger and disbelief across the members of the population campaigning for civil rights. Mamie Bradley lamented, “Have you ever sent a loved son on vacation and had him returned to you in a pine box, so horribly battered and water-logged that someone needs to tell you this sickening sight is your son – lynched?”²² There was widespread condemnation of the verdict in the Till case. According to the American embassy, the French press was quoted as giving “wide coverage to the Till case, vociferously condemning the verdict. This was true not only of *l’Humanite* and *Liberation*, but of the entire press, right wing and left wing alike.”²³ It seems that foreign nations attributed more outrage to the injustice than did our own government. The government would have probably shown more concern had communist nations used the incident as means of propaganda, as Bradley had feared.

It is obvious that not much credence was given to the murder of this innocent teenager. On the day the story appeared in *The New York Times*, the headlines concerned G.O.P. Chairmen attending a conference with the President, Buenos Aires, the Chrysler Accord, and the wreck of an Egyptian plane. Emmet Till’s story appears on page 37, next to a story describing Liberty ships being modified to allow them to hold more grain. The short story describes nothing more than the bare facts of the tragedy, stating that the Governor of Mississippi was calling for a “complete investigation of the kidnap-killing of

²¹ Ibid, 272.

²² Quoted in Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987), 44.

²³ Quoted in Cary Fraser, “Crossing the Color Line in Little Rock: The Eisenhower Administration and the Dilemma of Race for U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 24 (Spring 2000): 236.

a Negro youth who allegedly had whistled at a white woman.”²⁴ It is written as if the governor is making a special effort with the case because the person murdered is black. One could only assume that in cases where the victim is African-American, the court is not obligated to fully investigate the crime or see that justice is performed. This notion pervaded American society, and the government did nothing to alleviate this conception because it was not of vital importance at this time. Other articles appearing in the paper that described the progression of events did not take front page. They normally appeared after the important news had been related. The articles described when the two white men were indicted for the crime (even though they claimed to have released him unharmed), Till’s burial, and the progression of the trial. Only when the two men were acquitted was any importance given to the story. It appeared on page one of the September 24, 1955 issue of *The New York Times*.

Although the government seemed almost oblivious to the importance of Emmett Till’s murder, it awakened the consciousness of a generation. People could no longer pretend that as long as it did not happen to them or their family, it did not affect them. Moses Wright, “By accusing a white man in court...broke a deep South racial taboo nearly as full of risk as the one Emmett Till apparently broke.”²⁵ His courage, however, induced other African Americans to stand up against the Jim Crow laws that had controlled their existence up to that point. African Americans, and whites too, learned that a child could be abducted and murdered, and because he was black, the court system established by our government would set the white murderers free. It was a firm admission by the South that blacks were not and would not be treated as equals. “It was

²⁴ “Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy’s Slaying,” *The New York Times*, 2 September 1955, p. 37.

²⁵ Luker, “Racial Matters,” 168.

the epitome of the ugliness and hatred of racism. It made people uncomfortable, but it made people act. If you want to move a people, kill their children...I believe that Emmett Till was the straw that broke the camel's back, that his death sparked the flame."²⁶ This flame would soon develop into a fire that reached across the nation, and history records it as beginning with one woman.

Segregation of public facilities was an accepted fact, especially in the South. Buses, restaurants, hotels, and public restrooms all had separate areas (and sometimes entrances) for whites and blacks. So was the case in Montgomery, Alabama. "Back in Montgomery during my growing up there, it was completely legally enforced racial segregation, and of course, I struggled against it for a long time."²⁷ Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old seamstress, knew this and had accepted it. "Mrs. Parks was a medium-sized, cultured mulatto woman; a civic and religious worker; quiet, unassuming, and pleasant in manner and appearance; dignified and reserved; of high morals and a strong character."²⁸ On December 1, 1955, however, she was unusually tired after leaving her department-store job. Parks was in the middle section of the bus, and as more white and black passengers boarded the bus, the bus driver asked Parks to give up her seat for a white man. "She responded with a single word: 'No.'"²⁹

Perhaps Mrs. Parks had heard of the murder of a teenage boy just a few months before, or perhaps she was finally tired of being subjected to inhuman treatment simply

²⁶ Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29 (November 1998): accessed online.

²⁷ Rosa Parks, "Rosa Parks: Pioneer of Civil Rights," Interview by American Academy of Achievement (2 June 1995), [<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0int-1>] (2002), accessed online.

²⁸ Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, Edited, with a Foreword, by David J. Garrow (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 43.

²⁹ Linda Kulman and David Enrich, "9 Rosa Parks," *U.S. News & World Report* 131 (20 August 2001): accessed online.

because she was black. According to Parks, “I was not sitting in the front of the bus, as many people have said, and neither was my feet hurting, as many people have said. But I made up my mind that I would not give in any longer to legally-imposed racial segregation...”³⁰ She did not feel that she, a woman, should have to stand so that a man could sit. Rosa Parks knew, “There was no way...I would ever stop being mistreated if I allowed myself to be mistreated.”³¹ The driver of the bus, J.F. Blake, did not know Mrs. Parks. “But it was apparent to him that his quietly adamant passenger was not drunk, was not deranged, and certainly was not ordinary...Court Square, in the heart of town, was exceedingly busy that evening...Traffic was hectic and thickening. Blake’s decision to summon the police appeared to offer the most expedient solution to this extraordinary dilemma.”³² The police arrived, and Rosa Parks was arrested and taken to jail for refusing to relinquish her seat on a public bus.

This was not the first time an incident like this had occurred. At least two other incidents had occurred in which black women were arrested for refusing to give their seats to a white passenger, one only a few months before, in October 1955. But these two women were not of reputable character – one was an unwed mother and the other was the daughter of an alcoholic. “Parks, a high-school graduate and a valued community member, was the first who could become an appropriate symbol.”³³ Parks contacted Mr. E.D. Nixon, an important figure in the local NAACP, who, with the aid of an attorney secured Parks’ release on bond. “The news of Mrs. Parks’ arrest spread rapidly by

³⁰ Parks, “Rosa Parks,” accessed online.

³¹ Quoted in Albin Krebs and Robert Thomas Jr., “Rosa Parks Recalls a 1955 Bus Ride in Montgomery,” *The New York Times* 130 (3 December 1980): B10.

³² David Levering Lewis, *King: A Biography*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 47.

³³ Kulman, “9 Rosa Parks,” accessed online.

telephone to the leaders of the black community.”³⁴ Parks stated, “I don’t remember feeling that anger, but I did feel determined to take this as an opportunity to let it be known that I did not want to be treated in that manner and that people have endured it far too long. However, I did not have at the moment of my arrest any idea of how the people would react.”³⁵

The president of the Women’s Political Council (founded after refusal of the League of Women Voters’ to admit blacks), Jo Ann Robinson, was informed of the event and saw the chance her organization had been waiting for. Not only was Rosa Parks black, she was a black woman, resulting in discrimination due to both factors. Robinson drafted leaflets and spread them throughout the city of Montgomery. Rosa Parks was scheduled to stand trial on December 5, and on that day, “The women of Montgomery will call for a boycott to take place” of all public buses. “We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don’t ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk.”³⁶ The African American population of Montgomery was unifying, for the first time, in reaction to this abuse of their civil rights.

The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was founded by supporters of the boycott to promote this and other civil rights activities. This association needed a leader, a spokesman to place its concerns and demands before the white people and government of Alabama and the United States. Its president needed to be someone with

³⁴ Lewis, *King: A Biography*, 48.

³⁵ Parks, “Rosa Parks,” accessed online.

³⁶ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, 45, 46.

courage and the ability to speak to the public. A young, twenty-four year old pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery seemed the ideal candidate. At the first meeting, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was nominated and elected to fulfill this duty. His first speech, after accepting leadership of MIA, epitomized the boycott:

“But there comes a time when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired – tired of being segregated and humiliated, tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression. We have no alternative but to protest. For many years, we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.”³⁷

This boycott, originally intended to last only the day of the trial, continued for the next 381 days. African Americans did not ride the bus to school, work, or town – a full boycott of the public transportation system in Montgomery. “The only thing that bothered me was that we waited so long to make this protest and to let it be known wherever we go that all of us should be free and equal and have all opportunities that others should have,” recalled Parks.³⁸ Dr. King “solidified his position as leader of his people...when his home was bombed at 9:30 in the evening. A crowd of blacks equipped with guns, bottles, and sticks gathered at the King home. It was at this moment that King proved himself worthy of being designated leader of the Civil Rights Movement and thus began his nonviolent campaign.” He calmed the crowd with his voice and assured the people that violence would not solve any problem. The movement would go on with or without him, because God was behind the movement.³⁹

³⁷ Quoted in Lewis, *King: A Biography*, 58.

³⁸ Parks, “Rosa Parks,” accessed online.

³⁹ Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, “Martin Luther King Jr.: Minister, Civil Rights Activist, and Public Opinion Leader,” *Public Relations Review* 18 (Fall 1992): accessed online.

This event did catch the attention of the nation, but it was given little importance. The description of the bus boycott appeared on page 31 of *The New York Times*, describing the “emotional crowd of Negroes” that approved the action of the boycott. The headlines for that same day included the portrait of George Washington that was painted, hospital crowding, and guards at the Manhattan City Prison.⁴⁰ It is obvious what was considered more important to the nation at the time. Any further notice of the boycott for the rest of 1955 appears in small columns, hidden between other issues. The boycott of city buses “because of alleged discrimination” was not important.⁴¹ It wasn’t even accepted that discrimination did occur in Ms. Parks’ case. It was only supposed.

Even during this time, more than 30 years after women were given the right to vote, women’s issues were still not deemed as important as the traditional role they had played in society. In 1955, on the 35th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote, the *New York Times* published an article marking this moment in history. It appeared on page 63 of the August 21st, 1955 issue. Women were not encouraged to take advantage of this Amendment and exercise their civil liberties. In fact, they were often discouraged from it. An article published in October 1955 reported that the number of stomach ulcers increased more than 30 percent “among women who aspire to ‘wear the pants in the family,’” according to a physician in Memphis, Tennessee.⁴² The exact cause was unknown, but it was largely attributed to the mental and emotional stress associated with entering the workforce. Women could enter the

⁴⁰ “Buses Boycotted Over Race Issue,” *The New York Times* (6 December 1955): 1,31.

⁴¹ “Bus Boycott continues: Alabama Line Rejects Negro Demands on Seating,” *The New York Times* (10 December 1955): 13.

⁴² “Career Women Warned of Occupational Ulcers,” *The New York Times*, 25 October 1955: 22.

workforce as men had been doing for centuries, but they would have to face the consequences of securing these basic freedoms.

This heightened awareness, however, of the discrimination that still existed towards women planted the seeds of what came to be the modern feminism movement. Women were still being paid less in the workforce, were being denied access to birth control, and were still struggling to attain the basic rights granted to all white males. “This state of affairs – significant numbers of women working in comparatively low-level, low-paying jobs – gave rise in the 1960s to a reemergence of an organized women’s movement after a lull during the country’s preoccupation with World War II and its aftermath.”⁴³ These women, combined with the women working in the civil rights movement, led to a new and revived women’s movement aimed solely at promoting and passing women’s rights legislation. Women “led national struggles to close the wage gap between men and women, and they sought legislative and contract provisions that would protect the employment rights of women. They also lobbied for family support policies such as day care, maternity leave, and limitations on mandatory overtime.”⁴⁴

At the same time, groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress on Racial Equality, and Students for a Democratic Society emerged to aid in the fight for equality. These groups often worked in conjunction with one another on issues with a common goal. Women joined these groups that were forming and often played a major part in their organizations. Their part, however, was often the more menial tasks of secretary or office worker. As women of the previous

⁴³ Simon and Danziger, *Women’s Movements in America*, 55.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Sue Cobble, “Recapturing Working-Class Feminism: Union Women in the Postwar Era,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 61.

decade, or children of these women, they began to notice the sexism that permeated these groups fighting for the equality of the black man but not the woman. During this time, women found the support that had slackened immediately after the Second World War, “and these movements also gave white women the opportunity to develop skills and to break out of confining, traditional roles.”⁴⁵ In the early stages of the movement, however, their role remained secondary to the goal of ending segregation and discrimination for the black man.

Women and African Americans had allowed time for the government to take action to alleviate the problems that developed after World War II. They allowed rights and liberties they had earned and deserved during the war slowly erode away after the end of this Second World War. The government, however, had a different focus, in Vietnam, and did not attribute the resources necessary to domestic issues. During the period of late 1954-1955, the government was forced to turn to domestic issues as a result of the cease-fire in Vietnam and the major events occurring at home. Their response was substandard, and as elections were to take place in Vietnam to reunite the country, the focus turned back to Indochina.

⁴⁵ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 26.

CHAPTER 5

RETURN TO FOREIGN SOIL: 1956-1960 – REFUSING TO BE IGNORED ANY LONGER

The elections to reunite Vietnam were scheduled to take place in 1956. “He [Diem] and the Eisenhower administration recognized that the popularity of the Diem regime could not stand up to the popularity of the Viet Minh and their leader Ho Chi Minh.” It was also known that Ho Chi Minh possessed the capacity to conduct both traditional and guerrilla warfare over large areas for extended periods of time. Therefore, supported by the American government, Diem resisted the elections. “The Americans and Diem carried the day. There were no country-wide elections. Vietnam remained divided, and Washington welcomed Diem as a hero.”¹ After this, Diem’s problems began to grow. Insurgents within South Vietnam began to rise, and although Diem welcomed American dollars, he often resisted the advice that came with them. “Denied the election promised at Geneva, and nearly destroyed by Diem and Nhu’s police, the Communist leadership and its southern supporters decided to go back to war. It would be, they said, a war of national liberation – against Diem and against the American presence in Vietnam.”² Once again, the U.S. made a decision – the decision not to support elections in Vietnam – and the consequence led to uprisings among the nationalists in the country.

Knowing that Diem would not maintain enough support to win the elections, it should have been obvious that he would not have enough support to continue his reign in the southern region of the country. Yet still, it seemed of vital importance that we

¹ Smitha, “Chapter 37: The United States and War in Vietnam,” accessed online.

² “VIETNAM: A Television History,” accessed online.

maintain our presence in this area. In 1956, Senator John F. Kennedy stated that “fundamental tenets” of our foreign policy depended “in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnam nation.” It represented “the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike” and if the “red tide of communism” poured into it, much of Asia would be threatened.³ We could not abandon our post in Indochina, therefore we accepted commitments in the global realm with the assumption that “our resources, soldiers, and national will – were abundant if not limitless.”⁴ Our commitment for the last half of the 1950s was decided and we continued to focus our attention on this region of the world.

In 1956, the government finally responded to the petition of the people of Montgomery. The United States District Court ruled that racial segregation of Alabama city bus lines was unconstitutional.⁵ The boycotters had won, and Dr. King and Rosa Parks boarded a city bus together, taking seats that had once been reserved for whites only. The actions of one woman sparked a movement that brought national attention to Montgomery, Alabama. In doing so, a leader emerged that would soon carry this movement well into the 1960s, advocating non-violent resistance and love for the oppressors. The United States government, after extreme pressure to refocus on domestic issues, had ruled that segregation of public schools and public transportation was indeed unconstitutional. The civil rights movement found roots to grow and a man to lead them. Dr. King would go on to take a prominent role in the Civil Rights Movement, but not without struggles. In allowing Rosa Parks to be arrested, the government of Alabama

³ Quoted in Herring, *America's Longest War*, 43.

⁴ Buzzanco, “Prologue to Tragedy,” 203.

⁵ Frank E. Smitha, “Chapter 39: Social Change in the U.S. from the 1950s to 1980,” *The 20th Century: Conflict, Attitude, and Changing Religions*, 1998 [<http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch28.htm>]: accessed online.

helped Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerge as a leader whom millions would follow. This was not to be the last time a government's action or inaction brought about events it would later try to suppress.

As stated earlier, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case resulted in a mandate to desegregate public education facilities. It did not stipulate a deadline to do so, nor did it provide guidelines as to how this should be done. Another factor that hurt the desegregation of schools was the opposing viewpoints on segregation itself. When discussing segregation and discrimination, W.E.B. DuBois stated, "But the two things do not necessarily go together, and there should never be an opposition to segregation pure and simple unless that segregation does involve discrimination."⁶ In school segregation in the South, however, the two terms were practically synonymous. Utilizing the conflicting positions, many took the ambiguity of the government to mean that they had as much time to integrate school systems as they deemed necessary. Such was the case in Little Rock, Arkansas. Governor Orval Faubus can be called nothing short of a racist. His actions spoke more loudly than words as to his disposition towards blacks and their attempt to obtain civil rights. In 1957, he had undoubtedly heard about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott. Although there is no evidence to disclose his views about the matter and the movement that was taking shape, one can assume that he condemned the effort. One may also assume that he had seen the lack of or tardiness of the American government to respond to African American concerns and issues, and this could have played an integral part in the decisions he made.

⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, "Self-Segregation Might Benefit African Americans," In *African Americas: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. William Dudley (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1997), 217.

In 1957, nine African American teenagers attempted to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. They were the first students to integrate the school, even though the *Brown* decision had been issued three years earlier. The night before classes were to begin, Gov. Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to mobilize on school grounds so that only white students would be admitted, despite a federal judge's order to allow the integration. Article 6 of the United States Constitution concerns the Supremacy Clause, stating that in conflicts of government, the federal law is supreme. Therefore, Gov. Faubus risked direct defiance of the judge's order and the Constitution. At this point, President Eisenhower could have immediately nationalized the state national guard, but he chose not to. Eight of the children, along with their parents, tried to enter the high school but were turned away. The remaining student, a girl, missed the group and had to go alone. She too was met by a mob and denied admittance to the school.

Gov. Faubus took his stand on school integration, and by not forcing his hand, the government also indicated its lack of commitment to enforcing the ruling. The matter was not an issue of civil rights or ensuring that desegregation took place, but a matter of whether or not Faubus was defying the law as established by the federal government. In communicating with Faubus, President Eisenhower assured him that "the Federal Constitution will be upheld by me by every legal means at my command."⁷ President Eisenhower requested a private meeting with Gov. Faubus, with no press or even secretaries to record minutes of the meeting. At the close of this meeting, Eisenhower was positive that school integration would be completed and the matter was settled. The

⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Press Release: Telegram to Orval E. Faubus, the Governor of Arkansas, 5 September 1957, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/PressReleaseofDDEtelegramtoFaubus90557.pdf>]: accessed online.

press releases issued after the meeting gave this same impression. President Eisenhower stated that he was pleased with the progress and that he recognized “the inescapable responsibility resting upon the Governor to preserve law and order in his state.” In turn, Governor Faubus stated that he assured the President of his intent to cooperate, and that he had “never expressed any personal opinion regarding the Supreme Court decision of 1954 which ordered integration. That is not relevant. That decision is the law of the land and must be obeyed.”⁸ No personal opinion on the matter of integration? The actions of Governor Faubus told of his opinion more than his words ever could.

In his diary, Eisenhower was sure that this matter was settled and he could move to other concerns. He had suggested to Faubus that he “not necessarily withdraw his National Guard troops, but just change their orders to say that” he had “been assured that there was no attempt to do anything except to obey the Courts and that the Federal government was not trying to do anything that had not been already agreed to by the School Board and directed by the Courts.” Eisenhower wrote that it would not be wise to have a test of strength between the President and the Governor “because in any area where the federal government had assumed jurisdiction and this was upheld by the Supreme Court, there could be only one outcome – that is, the State would lose, and I did not want to see any Governor humiliated.”⁹ It was not an issue of ensuring that all Americans, including African Americans received the same treatment and civil rights that others had, it was solely a matter of appearance and the authority of the federal

⁸ Press Release: Statement by the President and Statement by the Governor of Arkansas, 14 September 1957, [<http://www.Eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/StatementsbyPresidentandFaubus91457pg1.pdf>] (and also pg2): accessed online.

⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Diary entry, 8 October 1957, [<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/DiarynotesDDEremtgwithFaubus100857.pdf>]: accessed online.

government. Faubus was expected to comply because if he did not, he would be embarrassed when the government overruled his authority.

Upon returning to Little Rock, however, Faubus still refused to allow the black students to attend Central High School. He dismissed the National Guard (to remove the risk of their being nationalized) and called the city police to prevent integration. The crowd began to riot and decided to hang a student. At this extreme point, Eisenhower finally decided to intervene. He sent the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and nationalized the Arkansas National Guard. Each student had an individual soldier to escort him or her to classes for protection.¹⁰ In a later statement, Eisenhower once again made the matter an issue of civil obedience rather than civil rights. He was proud that the parents and students had conducted themselves with dignity and restraint and was “confident that the citizens of the City of Little Rock and the State of Arkansas will welcome this opportunity to demonstrate that in their city and in their state proper orders of a United States Court will be executed promptly and without disorder.”¹¹ By laying the responsibility on the citizens to enforce the decision of the court, Eisenhower was removing the necessity of the government remaining involved in the issue in Arkansas. It was therefore free to concentrate its attention to other world matters.

In his reaction to the controversy in Little Rock, Eisenhower also had other intentions. He was well aware of the South’s feelings toward integration and knew that the Southern constituency was vital in the previous elections. It was a difficult decision to utilize troops, fearing “that sending military forces into the South, as the Republicans

¹⁰ *Eyes on the Prize Episode 2: Fighting Back (1957-62)*, prod. Henry Hampton, 60 min., Blackside, Inc., 1986, videocassette.

¹¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Statement by the President, 21 September 1957, [<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/StatementbyPresident92157.pdf>]: accessed online.

had done during Reconstruction, would cost him his party dearly in the 1960 election.”¹² It was also known that the “riots” in Little Rock were detrimental to foreign relations. Henry Cabot Lodge stated that “More than two-thirds of the world is non-white and the reactions of the representatives of these people is easy to see. I suspect we lost several votes on the Chinese communist item because of Little Rock.”¹³ Issues with African Americans were only important if they affected our concern in fighting the spread of communism abroad.

The first real challenge to school desegregation had arisen, and the response was less than admirable. Gov. Faubus defied a national order to allow African Americans to attend the same schools that had previously been designated for white children only. Rather than confront him in the beginning, the American government instead tried to persuade him to obey the law. It was only after repeated refusals that Eisenhower took direct action to force integration. The next school year (1958-59), however, Gov. Faubus closed all public high schools to prevent integration, once again in disobedience of a Supreme Court decision. Disciplinary action was not taken against Gov. Faubus. Arkansas schools were eventually integrated, but the damage had already been done. Faubus had shown the nation that he could defy the law with little repercussion. The outrage of the African American community at this injustice intensified, and they demanded change.

The American government felt that it was taking the steps necessary to desegregate the nation. “In the Department of Justice, our efforts to enforce the Brown case were two-pronged: First, we responded affirmatively to calls for assistance from the

¹² Fraser, “Crossing the Color Line in Little Rock,” 245.

¹³ Quoted in Fraser, “Crossing the Color Line in Little Rock,” 251.

Federal Courts. Little Rock was the prime example of this policy, as hereafter described. Second, we drafted and succeeded in getting passed, the Civil Rights Act of 1957.”¹⁴ This Civil Rights Bill of 1957 was the first civil rights legislation to appear before Congress in 82 years – since the end of Reconstruction. The goal of the bill was to ensure that blacks were able to exercise their right to vote and to establish a department within the government to monitor cases of civil rights abuse. Some criticized the bill because the final act was a diluted version of the original document.

The weakness of the final act can be attributed to a lack of support in Congress from the Democrats. Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Senate leader, realized that passage of the original bill could divide the Democratic Party due to strong opposition from Southern senators as opposed to support from liberal West Coast senators. A judiciary committee examined the bill to ensure that no portions were deemed unconstitutional. One senator opposed the bill because he believed the new department it would create infringed on states rights to self-govern. The fact that Johnson was eyeing the Democratic party’s future nomination for President added to his concern in passing the bill. If he secured passage of the legislation, he would gain the support of East and West Coast senators. If he kept party unity and killed the bill, he would surely win the support of the South.¹⁵

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 did pass Congress. It “established the Commission on Civil Rights, which was mandated to study race relations in the United States. The act also created the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. The Attorney General was given the power to sue on behalf of blacks who suffered voting discrimination

¹⁴ Brownell, “Eisenhower’s Civil Rights Program,” 239.

¹⁵ “The 1957 Civil Rights Act,” no date given, [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/1957_civil_rights_act.htm]: accessed online.

federal elections.”¹⁶ While the spirit of the bill was kept, those found guilty of violating voting rights were not subject to severe consequences – trial by an all-white jury in a white courtroom. The African American community was divided on the success of the Act. Public support for and confidence in the act declined when President Eisenhower admitted that he did not understand parts of the act. Some criticized it as a sham and declared that no act was better than the one passed. It was, however, the first civil rights legislation that had been passed in the United States in 82 years, and that in itself was symbolic. It was a beginning point for acts to follow and build upon.¹⁷

How did our involvement in Indochina affect life in the United States? It was a time of fear, a time of war, and a time of trying to be normal again. Sally Belfrage described her life during the 1950s in her book, *Un-American Activities*. She dedicates one chapter to “Catching Commies,” an obsession that ravaged the U.S. and contributed to her father being sent to jail. In the Korean language, the words “United States” and “imperialists” are often linked in a single phrase.¹⁸ The “world of the 1950s was one in which, as Jimmy Porter put it, ‘nobody thinks, nobody cares’...different eras are liberal about different things.”¹⁹ The 1950s in America were not liberal about Communism.

A number of significant progresses in the women’s rights’ movement helped to give it the strength that it picked up later in the 1960s. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, “calling for drastic changes in societal roles for women.” In addition, the development of the birth control pill allowed women greater freedom and

¹⁶ NC State University, “Civil Rights Acts,” no date given
[<http://www.hcl.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/dye/docs/civrit.htm>]: accessed online.

¹⁷ “The 1957 Civil Rights Act,” accessed online.

¹⁸ Sheryl WuDunn, “For North Korea Still, the Americans Started It,” *The New York Times* (12 August 1989): 4.

¹⁹ “Lest We Forget: 1950s were Awful,” *New Statesman* 129 (19 June 2000): accessed online.

control over their bodies and choices. “In 1966, Betty Friedan and twenty-eight delegates to the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women formed the National Organization for Women when they became frustrated by the conference’s failure to ratify a resolution urging the EEOC to treat sex discrimination with the same seriousness as race discrimination.” NOW became the symbol for feminism (the new descriptive term adopted for the women’s rights movement) and the struggle for national legislation to promote equality. While many other groups, some more radical than others, developed, it was at this point that the women’s rights movement once again gained the momentum that it had lost in its fight to end gender discrimination.

The 1950s were also filled with acts of frustration against Jim Crow laws discriminating against blacks that were not as publicized or written about as others. African Americans in Wichita, Kansas organized a lunch-counter sit-in in July 1958. The protestors were without support from the local NAACP (the secretary stating that the sit-in was not a NAACP tactic) and would not receive legal assistance in the event of lawsuits. They faced physical hostilities from whites in the area, and a sit-in designed to last two days a week turned into several days a week for a month. The owner of the store finally conceded and the establishment began serving both blacks and whites without incident. A more hostile sit-in, led by 16-year-old Barbara Posey Jones, in Oklahoma City lasted from September 1958 until the end of 1959. Other demonstrations took place in St. Louis, Missouri, the University of Chicago, the University of Indiana, and Ohio State University.²⁰

²⁰ Ronald Walters, “Standing Up in America’s Heartland,” *American Visions* 8 (February – March 1993): accessed online.

Each new incidence of resistance to established white custom intensified the struggle for African American civil rights. Over time, small steps had been made in achieving equality in the United States. Life in the South was most difficult, for residents of this area seemed to resist change more violently than did others. Every act of defiance by a black person meant putting his life in danger because of the possible reactions of whites. Lynching was an accepted practice, and local authorities often looked the other way at these violations of the law. The time had come, though, when enough was finally too much. African Americans had tried passively to accept their situation and learn to live according to the established law. Now, however, African Americans decided to fight for what was legally, ethically, and fairly theirs.

Jackie Robinson once again made a plea for civil liberties, this time directly to the President himself. In a letter to President Eisenhower, he referenced a speech made by Eisenhower at the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders, in which Eisenhower (according to Robinson) told the Negro population to have patience. Robinson questioned how they could have self-respect and remain patient after the treatment they had received. He stated they wanted to enjoy the freedoms they were entitled to as American citizens, and that Eisenhower would “unwittingly crush the spirit of freedom in Negroes by constantly urging forbearance and give hope to those pro-segregation leaders like Governor Faubus who would take from us even those freedoms we now enjoy.”²¹ Robinson wrote that direct action by Eisenhower in all situations such as these would send a clear message to the American people that African American civil rights are a priority.

²¹ Jackie Robinson, Letter to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 13 May 1958, [<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/RobinsontoDDEMay1358.pdf>]: accessed online.

Eisenhower disputed Robinson's impression of his speech in a reply to Robinson. He wrote that he believed that every citizen deserved to enjoy equal civil rights and that "we have much reason to be proud of the progress our people are making in mutual understanding – the chief buttress of human and civil rights."²² Eisenhower was sure that they were steadily approaching their goal and that the progress would continue. Eisenhower's reply was dated three weeks after Robinson's letter, and his signature was stamped. One could easily wonder if Eisenhower ever even saw the letter or if it was a generated response from his staff. How could one believe that the issue was of utmost importance to Eisenhower, as it was to Robinson and others in the African American community? They felt that their dissatisfaction must be expressed in other ways that had not been tried.

The crux of the involvement of the United States in Indochina is that our actions, be they direct or indirect, set the stage for what would later occur in Vietnam. After World War II, Truman decided to reverse the policy towards the area and support France in the colonial effort. In the mid to late 1940s, we aided France in the struggle to dominate the government of Vietnam. Although we were not direct participants in the fighting, we provided monetary aid and advice. We saw that France was losing its stronghold, and rather than slowly withdraw from the war-torn country, we increased our support. This made it nearly impossible to withdraw from a country we were so heavily invested in, even after the defeat of France. The intense fear of communism as a threat to our security and democracy affected foreign policy decisions in the United States, causing the U.S. to become involved in nations that did not want our aid.

²² Dwight D. Eisenhower, Letter to Jackie Robinson, 4 June 1958, [<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/DI/LittleRock/DDEtoRobinsonjune458.pdf>]: accessed online.

As 1960 approached, the United States sank deeper into the conflict in Indochina, with the situation growing more volatile by the year. Senator Homer Capehart was a member of a Senate Subcommittee designated to investigate charges that the “program of economic aid to the Republic of Vietnam is full of scandalous waste and corruption.” When asked by the interviewer whether he thought the pacts the United States entered into under the SEATO agreement could result in another Korea, Capehart replied, “Well, it could I guess. I would be the last to say that it couldn’t. I hope it will not. I don’t think it will. But if – the answer to your question, only one frank answer and that is, that it might.”²³

One of the other countries in the Indochina region that benefited from the Americans’ support was Laos. The Prime Minister of Laos, Phoui Sananikone, stated, “The military aid has been received by my country in a great amount. The need of Laos is in both ways, I mean to say, the military one and the economic one. We need all of them.” The purpose of this aid was to help reestablish the country economically and to defend against Lao rebels, fueled by the Vietminh. Sananikone stated, “I have found no evidence that any Russians have interfered in the Laotian affairs. I have only evidence that the North Vietnamese and the Chinese have interfered in our country.”²⁴ The United States was almost obligated to continue involvement in Vietnam to prevent the spread of Communism through China and the Vietminh forces to the rest of Indochina.

By 1960, the United States’ involvement in Indochina had lasted for more than a decade. The communist forces were still growing strong and threatening the ideals held

²³ Homer E. Capehart, “Face the Nation,” Interview by George Herman (2 August 1959), *Face the Nation – 1959: The Collected Transcripts from the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts*, vol. 5 (1972), 238, 240.

²⁴ Phoui Sananikone, “Face the Nation,” Interview by Stuart Novins (25 October 1959), *Face the Nation – 1959: The Collected Transcripts from the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts*, vol. 5 (1972), 340-341.

by many Americans. The soundness of decisions made during this time, however, is often questioned. “Parts of history are frequently flawed because no one who did not bear the responsibility can thoroughly understand the decisions and no one who made the decisions can accurately explain them later, even to himself.” One journalist tries to explain our actions by writing, “For the admission that our Government did not know enough about Indochina is of deadly importance. The French kept saying that, but we thought they were just jealous of the chance that we might succeed where they had failed.”²⁵ It was a mixture of pride and ego that kept the United States in Indochina, and this combination would result in “conflict” that erupted in the late 1960s.

As 1960 approached, African Americans and women realized that their struggle for equality had only begun, and securing the attention of the government away from communism would be a large factor in their success. Thurgood Marshall pointed out that “many officials of both state and federal governments are reluctant to protect the rights of Negroes. It is often difficult to enforce our rights when they are perfectly clear.” Regardless of this attitude, it was vital to continue a program for additional legislation to secure rights, and “at the same time we must continue with ever-increasing vigor to enforce those few statutes, both federal and state, which are now on the statute books. We must not be delayed by people who say ‘the time is not ripe,’ nor should we proceed with caution for fear of destroying the ‘status quo.’”²⁶ Women realized that in fighting for civil rights for African Americans, they were opening a doorway that would allow

²⁵ Charles A. Cerami, “The ‘Healing Powers’ of McNamara and Rusk,” *America* 172 (3 June 1995), accessed online.

²⁶ Thurgood Marshall, “The Legal Attack to Secure Civil Rights,” In *The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings and Interpretations*, Raymond D’Angelo. (Guilford: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001), 189, 194.

them to campaign for their own freedoms. By participating in their protests and movement, they could accomplish a dual purpose. Before this could be done, however, the United States had to recognize that issues at home were equally important as foreign policy issues and their stance on communism.

When all indications that outside influence from democratic nations would not succeed in Vietnam were apparent, the United States could have made the choice to withdraw from the area. Instead, the U.S. remained and fueled the hostilities. Diem was a leader educated in the U.S. and supported by our government. He was not popular, yet we continued to provide money and support. Insurgencies rose up in the area against our involvement, and we did not heed the warning. The more time passed, the further we sunk in the mire that we called a struggle to defeat Communism and save Democracy.

Kennedy: In the final analysis, it's their war. They're the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it – the people of Vietnam against the Communists. We're prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and in my opinion, in the last two months the government has gotten out of touch with the people.

Chronkite: Do you think that this government still has time to regain the support of the people?

Kennedy: Yes, I do. With changes in policy and, perhaps, with, in personnel, I think it can. If it doesn't make those changes, I would think that the chances of winning it would not be very good.

- JFK interview with Walter Chronkite
September 2, 1963²⁷

Two months later, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Shortly before, the same fate had befallen Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam. Kennedy's words were a premonition of the outcome of hostilities in the area. The people were not behind the American intervention, and America refused to listen. The blowback from the decisions made since the end of World War II had only begun. Our continued presence in Vietnam

²⁷ Quoted in Deane, "VIETNAM: A Television History," accessed online.

exploded during the late 1960s, and this led the United States to a bloody war from which many have yet to recover. The repercussions from ignoring the issues facing African Americans and women on the domestic front during this period would also have severe consequences.

At this point, whether the U.S. was justified in interfering in Vietnam is moot. “The liberal argument that the war could not have been won is as unprovable as the conservative argument that with a different strategy the United States could have prevailed. Both sides answer dogmatically and categorically the sort of ‘what if’ questions that can never be answered with any degree of certainty.”²⁸ Hostilities began in Vietnam in 1946 when the country tried to free itself of French colonial rule. Rather than see it as an internal struggle, the United States chose to see it as the result of world communism. In doing so, the United States misjudged the origin and nature of the fight. “By intervening in what was essentially a local struggle, we placed ourselves at the mercy of local forces, a weak client in South Vietnam, and a determined adversary in North Vietnam. What might have remained a local conflict with primarily local implications was elevated into a major international conflict with tragic consequences for Americans and Vietnamese.”²⁹

²⁸ George C. Herring, “Vietnam, American Foreign Policy, and the Uses of History,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 66 (Winter 1990): 3.

²⁹ Herring, “Vietnam, American Foreign Policy, and the Uses of History,” 8-9.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: HOW ANTICOMMUNISM AFFECTED THE SOCIAL REALM IN THE U.S.

The United States' focus on communism during 1945-1960 affected both its domestic and foreign policies. The United States directed much of its energies and resources to ensuring that this "disease" did not spread to America and also to prevent it from infecting vulnerable countries outside the United States. This focus led the United States to remain involved in Vietnam after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. As the 1960s progressed, so too did the social and political turmoil at home. As Vietnam took much more of the attention of the United States in the 1960s, African Americans and women fought harder for the rights and liberties they deserved.

Many mark the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s with Rosa Parks' act of defiance on a Montgomery bus. She has often been called the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. Her act was extremely important, not just due to its symbolism, but also because it allowed one of the greatest leaders of the movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to emerge. African Americans had fought for equality since the abolition of slavery at the conclusion of the Civil War. During World War II, they made great strides in military and civilian life. They saw what racism led to in Germany, and they vowed that they could not let that happen in America. They brought this lesson home with them and renewed their struggle for civil freedoms. What they faced when they returned, however, was a Jim Crow nation that was concerned more with the communist forces abroad than the civil liberties of blacks at home.

Many of the same issues that affected African Americans in our country also affected women. They experienced many of the same freedoms as African Americans during World War II and desired to maintain this status after the war. The government, however, believed that the best place for women at this time was in the home and therefore did not promote civil liberties for them. In adhering to the ideal, the woman would provide a comfort zone for men away from the hardships of life and therefore lessen the chances that communism could take root in this country. Discrimination was rampant in almost every sector, forcing women to accept that fighting communism would take precedence over their concerns. Writing as both a woman and as an African American, Mary McLeod Bethune, in her Last Will and Testament, stated, “Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring to greatness...Nor must they forget that the masses of our people are still underprivileged, ill-housed, impoverished and victimized by discrimination...”¹

At each and every point that African Americans and women requested equality, the United States Government had a choice to make. In most instances, the choice was in favor of supporting civil rights legislation. The only problem is that it often had to take second place to the fight against communism. Legislation was delayed, and once passed, it was often not enforced. As a result, African Americans and women took it upon themselves to ensure that they would receive equal rights under the Constitution. Leaders, such as Dr. King and Betty Friedan, emerged and took charge to voice the concerns and demands of a population. Demonstrations and protests swept the country to change the oppressive conditions that had existed too long. Much of the white population

¹ Quoted in John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 482.

was shocked by this show of unity and force. As the 1950s progressed, the movements picked up momentum and became the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. The government feared what it could not control and tried to intervene in order to take command. By then, however, the stage was set. By not taking the lead in the beginning, the United States Government renounced its influence in the development of events.

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