

Harry S. Truman & Civil Rights

Political Pragmatism or Moral
Imperative?

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Introduction

“As Americans, we believe that every man should be free to live his life as he wishes. He should be limited only by his responsibility to his fellow countrymen. If this freedom is to be more than a dream, each man must be guaranteed equality of opportunity. The only limit to an American's achievement should be his ability, his industry and his character. The rewards for his effort should be determined only by these truly relevant qualities. Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers, which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion. Or race, or color.”¹ These words were spoken by Harry S. Truman during his speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in June 1947.

Many scholars over the years have focused on Harry Truman and the way he engaged in the civil rights struggle during his presidency. The Truman Library Institute in Independence, Missouri, organized a meeting in 1968 which attracted various scholars to discuss Truman's achievements during his presidency regarding the issue of civil rights. This specific conference had been held a couple of times in the past and the historians present always agreed on the notion that Truman made a great contribution to the civil rights issue, based upon his personal principles and moral convictions. But in the year 1968, for the first time, a revisionist approach could be heard. Some argued that perhaps Truman was not a morally influenced man who wanted to improve the lives of African Americans. Some put forward the idea that Truman perhaps was mostly guided by political motives and opportunities, which would make him seem like a president who put political pragmatism first. However, at that particular time, not much research had been done. The scholars who were present at this meeting did not seem to have much academic knowledge on the subject, simply because of the fact that certain sources were not available yet. This changed during the early 1970's. A collection of books and articles was published, based upon thorough research. During these years, a division became visible, namely: the differences between the liberal approach and the revisionist (radical) approach.

Revisionists often were appreciative, but also claim that Truman's efforts were meager and hesitantly undertaken. They emphasize the political motives and interpret the situation from a

¹ PBS Online, “President Truman's Address to the NAACP, June 28, 1947”, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/truman/psources/ps_naacp.html (accessed 7 June 2012).

late 1960's perspective. Revisionist scholar, William C. Berman claims in his book *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (1970), that Truman was both challenged and threatened by the issue of civil rights and that he responded in such a way as to obtain political benefit for him and his party. He also argues that issuing the Executive Order 9981 was not an exercise in good will, but rather the product of political pressure. Truman saw the necessity to hold the country together, but moved only because he had no choice: Black vote and the demands of the Cold War, not simple humanitarianism. Another liberal scholar is Barton J. Bernstein, who argues in his book *The Ambiguous Legacy: The Truman Administration and Civil Rights* that it was an ambiguous legacy, marked more by promise than substance.

Scholars who believe that Truman's actions were substantial and important can be defined as liberal scholars. They focus especially on his personal principles and analyze Truman from his own time perspective. One of those liberal scholars is Richard M. Dalfiume. He discusses the way Truman reacted to civil rights and the way he personally felt about this subject in his book *Desegregation of the US Armed Forces. Fighting on Two Fronts* (1969). Dalfiume claims that the implication that the Truman administration's civil rights program was entirely the result of political pressure is a distortion and argues that Truman was basically sympathetic to civil rights. Liberal scholars Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten agree. They credit Truman in their book *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (1973) for advancing the struggle for civil rights. Both believe that Truman "left something to be desired" and claim that Truman's efforts were substantial and that his interference was mostly based on moral principles. They claim that: "His endeavors, courage, and accomplishments far surpassed those of his predecessors, and at a time when it would not have been difficult to have treated the civil rights problem with soft soap alone."²

Later in time, both sides were influenced by new perspectives which arose because of the availability of Truman's personal writings and also because of certain events. People seemed to need a heroic figure in their lives after events like the Watergate scandals and the Vietnam War. The liberals started to depict Truman as a mythic individual. David McCullough's *Truman* (1992) depicts Truman as a man who did all he could to change the lives of the African Americans, a noble man who felt morally encouraged to change the world.

² Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 352.

The revisionists also were influenced by new perspectives. In the 1970's the revisionists emphasized the political reason for Truman's interference, but thirty years later, the focus shifted to geopolitical calculation. American foreign policy during the Cold War seemed to have influenced Truman's reaction to civil rights a lot. Mary Dudziak argues in her book *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000) that Truman downplayed the matter of civil rights depending on his audience. In the South Truman tended to neglect the issue, while he did address racial problems in Harlem. Dudziak also states that the importance of the Cold War, the inseparable propaganda, the influence of the National Security and the fact that violence had an impact on US foreign relations. She claims that one of the reasons why Truman decided to address domestic racism was the fact that other countries were paying attention to the problem. Concern about the effect of U.S. race discrimination on Cold War foreign relations led Truman, according to Dudziak, to adopt a pro-civil rights posture as part of its international agenda to promote democracy and at the same time contain communism.³

The last couple of years more research have been done. Some examples of recently published works are the articles of Michael R. Gardner *A President Who Regarded Civil Rights as a Moral Imperative* and Ken Hechler's *Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement*. These articles were published in 2007. Also Michael R. Gardner's book *Harry Truman and Civil Rights. Moral Courage and Political Risks* and William E. Leuchtenburg's *The White House Looks South* which were written in 2002 and 2005 examine Truman's intervention in civil rights. Many modern articles and books portray a rather positive view on Truman. Gardner, for instance, argues that Truman knew in his heart and soul that civil rights equality was a moral imperative that had to be pursued regardless of the political consequences. In his book *Harry Truman and Civil Rights. Moral Courage and Political Risks* (2002) Gardner states: "From janitor Bob Brown to legislator Julian Bond, from entrepreneur Percy Sutton to civil rights pioneers Dr. Dorothy Heights and Roy Wilkins, from White House butler Alonzo Fields to Judge William Hastie and White House reporter Alice Allison Dunnigan, black Americans knew with certainty that their full civil rights under the Constitution had been an absolute goal for the morally courageous and politically reckless Truman. It was indeed appropriate that African Americans honored him for his pioneering role in making their civil rights equality a reality in

³ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 26-27.

America- an America that even today is fighting to free itself of the racism that Harry Truman rejected in his own lifetime.”⁴

Hechler represents Truman as a heroic president as well. He believes that Truman did everything within constitutional power to ensure that it was public policy to guarantee civil and human rights to all Americans, without respect to race, religion or any other limitations. Hechler stresses that: “President Truman did everything within his constitutional powers to ensure that it was public policy to guarantee civil and human rights to all Americans, without respect to race, religion or any other limitations. He went as far as he could to carry forward his objectives through executive orders and the actions of his Department of Justice, including the submission of amicus briefs in important civil rights cases.” According to Hechler: “It was impossible to do more under the U.S. Constitution.”⁵

Leuchtenburg, on the other hand, shares a more critical opinion and argues that Truman’s enemies misperceived him, because Truman never wholly forsook the racist attitudes he had learned from his family and years later, he even opposed the civil rights movement. Still Leuchtenburg claims that Truman set the chain of events in motion which made the achievements of the civil rights movement possible, regardless of Truman’s own convictions.⁶

Before, during and after Truman’s presidency the African American community struggled to gain equal rights. They heavily tried to improve their living conditions. While the Second World War had begun, African American soldiers who fought in the American army started to realize that it was time for them to become first-class citizens because they fought for their country in order to maintain freedom. African American soldiers wanted to experience freedom in their own country as well and they hoped that their patriotism would grant this to them.⁷ The following words of an African American soldier to *The Pittsburgh Courier* written in April 1943 describes the feeling of

⁴ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 228.

⁵ Ken Hechler, “Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 63.

⁶ Raymond H. Geselbracht, *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman* (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 11-16.

⁷ Lawrence P. Scott, *Double V. The Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press), 2.

frustration very well: “Yes, that is all we ask- a change to prove to the whole world that we colored people are no one’s fools. Just give us a chance to show our color.”⁸

The fact that the Jim Crow laws followed the black soldiers all the way into the army and even to the other side of the Atlantic influenced the combativeness of the African Americans to a great extent. While white soldiers were able to fight and experienced the ability of being promoted, black soldiers were being kept away from combat. Segregation increased the problems of all commanders concerned and undermined the prestige of black soldiers. Segregation penalized the educated African American whose talents were likely to be wasted when he was assigned to service along with the unskilled. Segregation not only weakened the Army’s organization for global war, it also deepened the African American’s sense of inferiority. Therefore, deteriorating morale in black units and pressure from articulate black leaders caused the War Department to take the racial problems seriously.⁹

While looking at the American history, it becomes clear that few American presidents felt responsible for handling the situation of segregation practices and inequality. According to many, Harry Truman was the first president since Lincoln who engaged in the civil rights conflict. In 1946 he established the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and in 1948 he also tried to restrict segregation in the army during the first years of the Cold War.

This research will completely focus on the question to what extent Harry Truman’s civil rights policy was motivated by moral convictions or political expediency. I believe that this particular analysis could contribute to the scholarly debate to a great extent. Because of the complexity of this specific matter I think it is important to decompose the historical situation in order to expose all the factors and causes which are responsible for Truman’s decision making, which in the end will result in a clear synthesis. The main research question is also important against the background of Truman’s own past, namely growing up in the segregated environment of former slave-state Missouri.

The division between the revisionists and liberals still exists today although it seems like the liberals are more prevalent. Most of the contemporary works about Truman’s commitment to civil rights are rather positive and tend to portray Truman as a civil rights hero. Even though

⁸ Philip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army. Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 65.

⁹ Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965* (Washington: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 1981), 25, 34, 206.

critical works do still exist, they definitely are the minority. Several contemporary scholars believe that Truman paved the way for the civil rights movement to rise in the late 1950's and no longer pay much attention to Truman's personal beliefs, this in contrast with earlier works. I believe it is necessary to collect and analyze all the different factors which could have influenced Truman's decisions in order to understand his commitment and examine the situation as it was at that time, without taking the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties into account. The usage of both the liberal perspective and the revisionist perspective will be needed in order to provide a thorough and complete overview.

This research is divided into two sections; the first section, containing three chapters, will focus specifically on the personal and political context, while the four chapters of the second section, will intensively examine the Truman presidency. The first chapter will start by providing a clear description of the Truman family in the conservative slave south. Truman's ancestors were used to owning slaves. They were also very clear in their view of the union army; they felt a strong devotion to the Confederates and Truman's mother felt a deep hatred for Abraham Lincoln. Truman was also born in Missouri and because of the negative views on blacks his family expressed, it is not a surprise that Truman grew out to be a racist. At a very young age he already learned from his parents the South's view of "The war between the States". He attended segregated schools and did not socialize much with African Americans because of the segregated neighborhoods he grew up in. The works consulted help to understand Truman's background and the way he felt about Southern life and racial tensions. This first chapter will also focus on Truman's personal experiences in the First World War while serving as a soldier in the U.S. armed forces. Special attention will be paid to the influence the war had on Truman maturation process and in what way it may have contributed to his decision making when he became president. Also Christianity and the role it played in Truman's life will be discussed in this first chapter.

Chapter 2 mainly focuses on the geopolitical context and all the important international factors which could have influenced Truman during his decision making process. A couple of situations and events during these years are important to emphasize. After the Second World War, many African American soldiers were unsatisfied because of the failure of their 'Double V' campaign. They had hoped that serving the U.S. army would provide them the status of first-class citizens when the war was finally over, which unfortunately did not happen. Among other

reasons, this was one decisive factor for the gathering of African Americans in order to collectively fight for civil rights. Also the start of the Cold War influenced the presidency of Truman heavily. The Soviet Union was not oblivious to the racial tensions that were present in the United States and they used this information for their Soviet propaganda. Truman realized that the racial problems in his country endangered foreign relations. The third focus point of this second chapter is the issue of anti-colonialism. The focus on black America aiding and influencing Africa had obscured the profound transformations that African freedom struggles fostered in black America and particularly in black Americans' relations with Africa. These freedom struggles drove and shaped discourse about Africa in mid-twentieth century black America, which ultimately had a profound influence on the American government as well.¹⁰

The third chapter, also the final part of section one, examines the domestic issues in the United States during the Truman presidency. It is necessary to explore FDR's political heritage, because he surely had left behind a remarkable legacy due to his New Deal policies, a range of progressive programs aimed at providing greater security for the average man, which would be difficult to match by his successor. Therefore, when Truman became the new president of the United States, the nation and especially the African American community looked upon him with great suspicion.

The Second Great Migration forms the second focus point of this third chapter. During the Second World War, great numbers of African American people had fled poverty-stricken areas of the South to work in Northern and Western defense plants. The migration started rather slowly, but grew heavily when President Roosevelt established the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in 1941, and when the United States entered the war. However, the increasing war production not only offered economic opportunities for African Americans, it also caused unrest, which again caused Truman to consider solutions.¹¹ Another issue that needs to be discussed is the rise of lynching in America. After the Second World War had ended, race riots almost became a common event in the United States. African Americans veterans who returned home were not wanted by white civilians and were regularly subjected to violence. Thus while African Americans started to unite in order to gain civil rights, white Americans assembled to put

¹⁰ James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans. Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (North Carolina: North Carolina Press, 2002), 13.

¹¹ Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Radical Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 24.

the black American back in its place. Truman was forced to find a way to respond to the national disorder.

The second section of this research focuses mainly on Truman's political career. First, chapter 4 explores Truman's introduction to the political arena and the way he dealt with the many responsibilities when he became the new president of the United States. Several factors forced Truman to respond, racial issues in particular. When Truman succeeded Franklin Delano Roosevelt it was time for Truman to decide how to approach the African American community and their struggle for civil rights. Then chapter 5 continues by examining Truman's political decision making in a more detailed manner. In 1946 Truman established the President's Committee on Civil Rights, a decision which came as a surprise to many. The reason why Truman decided to establish such a committee will be the foremost focus point of this chapter. Political motives and moral convictions both will be discussed to a great extent and therefore the points of view of the several liberal and revisionist scholars will be incorporated in this chapter as well. Chapter 6 illustrates the matter of racism in the American army and the way Truman responded to this issue. On July 26, 1948 Truman signed the Executive Order 9981, which also authorized the creation of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces to study and resolve the problem of discrimination and segregation in the armed forces in accordance with the president's stated policy. Executive Order 9981 stated: "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."¹² Truman's signing of Executive Order 9981 again causes people to wonder what were the underlying motives for such a decision, especially when taking the upcoming elections of 1948 into account.

The last chapter of this research on Truman's motives for intervening in civil rights emphasizes Truman's Fair Deal and its origins and accomplishments. In January 1949, Truman proposed his economic and social reform agenda to the nation. The Fair Deal, however, had a previous incarnation, namely in September 1945. After the Japanese surrender and the ending of the Second World War, Truman wrote a message of sixteen thousand words to Congress,

¹² William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 118.

containing twenty-one points of possible legislation.¹³ The civil rights issue also was mentioned in Truman recommendations, therefore it could be argued that through his Fair Deal, Truman seemed to show his goodwill and dedication to the cause. The genuineness of the Fair Deal and the question if Truman can be defined as a “New Dealer” both are subjects which are heavily debated on by the liberals and revisionists and therefore will obviously be incorporated in this final chapter.

¹³ Our White House, “The Presidential Timeline: Nothing but the Facts. Harry S. Truman,” <http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/prespgs/hstruman.html> (accessed 11 April 2012).

Part I: Personal and Political Context

Chapter 1

Harry S. Truman's Background and Personal Life

In consideration of liberal arguments that Truman's civil rights legislation can be explained by his moral convictions, the first chapter of this study will begin by focusing on Truman's personal background. In what kind of family was Truman raised, and what were their values? How might Truman's family history have influenced his views concerning race relations? This chapter will then proceed to examine Harry Truman's childhood and upbringing, including his being raised in a segregated environment with strong views of white supremacy. Truman's experiences as a young man during World War I will also be explored, as these influenced the development of his moral convictions as a young man. Finally, the influence of religion on Truman's life and his way of thinking will be examined in this first chapter, as his religious ideas clarify the context in which he made decisions later in life as an adult.

1.1 Harry Truman's Ancestors

In order to understand Harry Truman's opinions regarding civil rights for African Americans, it is first necessary to examine his family history. Certain events, living conditions, and his family's political and moral preferences all influenced Truman's upbringing and personal development. Interestingly, a perusal of his family's history suggests that that Truman was an unlikely champion for civil rights.

First of all, Truman descended from slaveholders. His great-grandparents moved from Kentucky to Missouri in the 1840s. While traveling by steamboat on the Missouri River, they brought with them most of their possessions, including a number of slaves. Although Missouri was often portrayed as a relatively "mild" slaveholding state where slaves were treated better than in the Deep South, several sources indicate that bondage there was as brutal as it was in other parts of the South. The personal narratives of Missouri former slaves are especially telling. Sarah Frances Shaw Graves, interviewed by one of the members of the Federal Writers' Project, lived as a slave in Nodaway County, Missouri. At the time of the interview, in 1937, Sarah was

87 years old and still carries scars from lashes. She begins her story by telling that she was brought to Missouri when she was six years old, along with her mother who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw. She tells the interviewer: "There was most always something to do. Master never allowed nobody to be idle. Mama worked in the house and the fields too. I worked in the fields, and I worked hard too." Sarah speaks of the danger of allotments and the selling of family members and also the threat of whippings. When the interviewer asks her if she ever experienced violence, Sarah answered: "Yes'm. Some masters was good and some was bad. I've had many a whippin', some I deserved, and some I got for being blamed for doin' things the master's children did. My master whipped his slaves with a cat-o-nine tails. He'd said to me, 'You ain't had a curryin' down for some time. Come here!'"¹⁴ Her story resembles those of other slaves narratives, both from Missouri and from other states.

Historian Teron Delivia Sharp also claims that slaveholding in Missouri was certainly not as mild as generally has been assumed. She points out that Missourian slaveholders had started their own system of slavery in the Mid West. They owned less than half of the slaves owned by slaveholders in the Deep South. Even though they saw themselves as equals, Missourian slaveholders would often resort to violence to assert their power. Sharp also argues that Missourian whites felt threatened by the dual difficulties of being a slave state and bordered by three free states. Therefore, Sharp states, violence towards slaves was often used as a deterrent to maintain control, which led to the participation of slaveholders and non-slaveholders in mob action activities and other crimes against slaves.¹⁵

As was the case with many Missouri households during that time, slavery was firmly embedded in the Truman family's culture and way of life. As slaveholders, The Truman family identified strongly with the slave south; they depended greatly on the institution of slavery and felt without a doubt comfortable with it. Slaveholding was a distinctive feature of the family's way of living and it shaped their personal values concerning the issue of civil rights for African Americans both during and after the Civil War.¹⁶

¹⁴ Missouri Slave Database, "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," [http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=100/mesn100.db&recNum=130&itemLink=r?amme/m/mesnbib:@field\(DOCLD+@lit\(mesn/100/131126](http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=100/mesn100.db&recNum=130&itemLink=r?amme/m/mesnbib:@field(DOCLD+@lit(mesn/100/131126) (accessed 3 March 2012).

¹⁵ Teron Delivia Sharp, *The Social Apathies of Violence Toward Slaves in Missouri* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2006), 22.

¹⁶ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 147-148.

As slaveholders living in a border state, the Truman and Young families viewed the coming of the Civil War with anxiety and experienced the full impact of the war's destruction to their way of life. To all residents of Missouri, the Civil War was a confusing and stressful time. In 1819, long before the Civil War started, the Missouri Territory asked to be admitted to the Union as a state. Most of the people who settled the Missouri Territory came from Southern states. They were used to the institution of slavery and therefore wanted Missouri admitted as a slave state. In 1821, Congress agreed to accept Missouri as a slave state, and also decided that from then on no other Western territories north of a line that ran along the southern border of Missouri would be admitted as slave states. This agreement is also known as the Missouri Compromise. Nevertheless, the decision was withdrawn in 1854 and Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act; from then on the question of whether territories would be admitted to the Union as free states or as slave states would be left to a vote of the people living in the territories.

In early 1861, Missouri's governor Claiborne Fox Jackson wanted Missouri to join the Southern States, when those states were abandoning the Union. In March, a state convention was held and the majority of the attendees agreed that, despite Jackson's opposite opinion, Missouri should stay in the Union. Nevertheless, Jackson kept on trying to get Missouri to join the State Guard and force the Union Army out of the state. For the first several months of the Civil War in Missouri, the main fighting was between Missouri State Militia, who wanted to secure slavery and Union Army troops, who wanted to either abolish or restrict slavery.¹⁷ Some of the supporters of the South, comprising a sizable minority of Missourians' population, provided intelligence to the enemy, they stole and destroyed civilian and public property and ambushed Union forces. President Abraham Lincoln was aware of the struggle between Unionists and the Confederate sympathizers and stated: "It is very painful for me that you in Missouri cannot, or will not, settle your factional quarrel amongst yourself. I have been tormented beyond endurance for months by both sides."¹⁸ According to the anti-Union Missourians, the war was simply a raid of Abolitionists upon the South, with a view to steal and liberate slaves and argued that the National troops were a horde of monsters marching through the country burning houses, stealing

¹⁷ Robert L. Dyer. *Jesse James and the Civil War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 6-16.

¹⁸ Dennis K. Boman. *Lincoln and Citizens' Rights in Civil War Missouri: Balancing Freedom and Security* (Lafayette: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 2.

slaves, ravishing women and murdering innocent civilians.¹⁹ Thus even though Missouri was still a Union state and should have been sympathetic to the Union Army, a great amount of Missourians felt more comfortable on the Confederate side. Families were also very often sharply divided; The Young's and the Truman's were certainly no exceptions. Truman was also frequently told the story of his Uncle Harrison. Harrison was a boy of only thirteen years old, whose head was put in a noose by Union raiders in order to make him confess that his father was a Confederate soldier. Although they threatened to hang him, Uncle Harrison did not speak a word, something that was viewed and remembered by the Truman family as a very honorable thing to do. Indeed, Harry Truman was named after his Uncle Harrison. The Truman family held a firm belief in white supremacy and they were not shy to use racist language. Although most of the family was sympathetic to the Confederate Army, however, not all rejected the Union Army. In early 1860's, one of Truman's great-uncles wrote a letter to his brother, Truman's grandfather, in which he told his brother that he was advocating the Union now and that his wife could not be convinced to support the Confederates either. "You see I am a union man yet and expect to live and die one..." Despite the fact that this man supported the Union Army, did not necessarily mean that he felt sympathetic to Abraham Lincoln. This was obviously not the case: "My old woman is distant relation of old Abe Lincoln, but we are not Lincolnites".²⁰

Truman grew up in a household and an environment in which stories about these times, and the personal convictions attached to these stories, were told on a very frequent basis, socializing the young Truman to his state's and his family's racist and slaveholding past. One of Truman's forefathers, for example, lived in Platte County, where in 1855 a great number of abolitionists were brutally attacked. Truman's grandmother never hesitated to tell the story of Jim Lane, the head of a small Yankee army, who came to kill all the livestock, steal the family silver and ordered her to come along and cook for his men.²¹

But the most important people who shaped Harry Truman's way of thinking, especially concerning racial issues, were his parents. Truman's mother, Martha Ellen Truman, was a strong, sarcastic and articulate woman, who enjoyed music and books, but her frontier roots made her aware of the Victorian-era female trap of being placed too high on the pedestal. John Truman

¹⁹ Michael E. Banasik, *Missouri in 1861: The Civil War Letters of Franc B. Wilkie, Newspaper Correspondent* (Iowa: Press of the Camp Pope Bookshop, 2001), 215.

²⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 152-153.

²¹ Paul Kirkman. *The Battle of Westport: Missouri's Great Confederate Raid* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 132.

always had been a farmer, a very ambitious man who was precise in business affairs, partisan in politics and patriarchal towards women.²² The value of working hard, a black-and-white view of the world and the importance of honesty were all being passed along to their son Harry. His parents' experiences of the war also made a deep impression on him. Truman's mother, Martha, was 'evacuated' by the Union army when she was eleven years old together with her five siblings. The harsh treatment she had to endure, all the stories about the war she had heard and the fact that her parents owned slaves, all added up to a certain way of thinking. She hated President Abraham Lincoln and she expressed a deep anti-Union anger.²³ Not only her, but all the women in Truman's life distrusted New England and the Northeast because the racially liberal values of those regions stood at odds with the family's southern sympathies.

When the Civil War was over, the South had been conquered, humiliated and impoverished. Slavery had been abolished. A second war on both sides came into being; a second war of conquest: the conquest of the Southern mind, calculated to remake every Southern opinion and to impose a Northern way of life during the period of Reconstruction.²⁴ At the end of the war, many visitors from the North and other parts of the world traveled to the South and witnessed the widespread devastation suffered by the Confederacy. At first, the devastation did not break Southern spirits completely. The crushing defeat on the field of battle had reassured the Southern whites in their determination to preserve the integrity of their way of life and they were willing to fight.²⁵

Nevertheless, former slaveholders faced the loss of valuable property when slavery was abolished. Very soon they started to witness reluctance of the freed slaves and realized that they were not dedicated to their former masters' well being after all. Out of frustration and disappointment, they fought to hold their political power and struggled to secure a cheap labor force to work their farms and plantations in place of slaves. In order to maintain control over formerly enslaved African Americans, many white southerners used threats of force and violence, which endangered the lives of African Americans to a great extent. This violence was often justified by the 'honest white folk' against the perceived 'menace' of the unchained former slave

²² William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 4-5.

²³ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 4-5.

²⁴ Frank Lawrence Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," in *I'll Take My Stand: the South and the Agrarian Tradition. Twelve Southerners* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 63-65.

²⁵ John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2-4.

perception.²⁶ For its time, the Reconstruction settlement represented an unprecedented effort to guide the South through a transition from slave to free labor. But well into 1865, some Southern whites continued to deny true freedom to the former slaves. The Reconstruction program failed to work properly most of the time. Racism was a feature of the antebellum as well as of the postbellum South, but with emancipation it became far more virulent. Slavery had shielded its victims from the most extreme consequences of racism: with enslaved blacks apparently safely under control, masters commonly stressed their paternalistic duty to protect their dependent human property. Emancipation not only freed the slaves from direct slave-owner control; it also freed the masters from their protective role -and attitude.²⁷ Truman's mother was greatly influenced by these events. The fury her parents had felt when they had to give up their slave-owning practices had been transmitted over to her, which would eventually influence her son as well. During his life, Truman's mother always expressed her rage against abolitionists and Reconstruction, and she always emphasized the benevolence of slaveholders.²⁸

1.2 Harry Truman's Childhood

Truman's parents, John Anderson Truman and Martha Ellen Young married in the year 1881 and on 8 May 1884, less than twenty years after the emancipation of Missouri's slaves, their son Harry was born in Lamar. He would grow up in a state marred by racial tensions.

Harry grew up in Independence, Jackson County and during his childhood he lived in an environment where African Americans were segregated from the white community. To many African Americans, the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, were extremely difficult times. Due to industrial capitalism, many working-class Americans were able to find a job more easily, but to African Americans, the situation still was painful. Often they were victimized by their landlords or were trapped in peonage. Racism took away their political and civil rights and white supremacists took over more control, especially in the southern states. In the South, many white Americans demanded humility from their fellow black citizens and because the black population grew in the North, Northern racism increased as well. As a reaction

²⁶ David Deverick, "Formers Slaveholders and the Planter Class," in *Reconstruction: People and Perspective*, ed. Anna A. Moore (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2008), 113, 126.

²⁷ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 213-215-234.

²⁸ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 4-5.

to these events, some African Americans started to unite. They moved away from white Americans and began to establish all-black towns in order to achieve autonomy and economic security. Other African Americans still believed in the promise of a better existence in the North and therefore migrated to the Northern bigger cities. African American leaders like Booker T. Washington stepped up and tried to inspire and guide the struggling black community. Washington urged people not to travel to the North and insisted that African Americans “cast down your bucket where you are”. Another, though smaller, group of African Americans decided to leave the United States altogether. Some hoped for a better life in Mexico, others chose Canada, while a few hundred made their way to Africa. It is evident that around the turn of the century, African Americans found it difficult to keep their heads above the water and fought very hard to find solutions to improve their living conditions.²⁹

Although Harry sporadically played with the children of black servants, he always had attended segregated schools and played in neighborhoods where Jim Crow was still the rule, so he did not interact much with African American children. Because of this particular environment and the fact that Truman at a young age already learned from his family and neighborhood the South’s view of the ‘War Between the States’, he acquired a firm belief in white supremacy. As has been pointed out earlier, Truman was brought up by his parents with the idea that white people were superior to blacks, his uncle served in the Confederate army and his mother condemned Republicans as abolitionists. As a boy, Truman lived in Independence, a Southern border town, one of whose more prominent organizations was the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Partly because there were no Yankee soldiers lingering in the Missouri of Truman’s youth, racism that had been a core element of the Civil War remained.³⁰ Truman’s racial attitudes also stemmed from ‘his family’s Southern roots and prevailing views in turn-of-the-century Independence, still divided over the Civil War. As a struggling young Missouri farmer, he used the language of the times to speak derogatorily of blacks.³¹ Often, Truman made fun of immigrants and called black people ‘niggers’ or ‘coons’. He would also often use words like ‘darkies’ and ‘rastus’ without feeling any shame.³² These ideas of white supremacy stayed with Truman throughout his school years. When Harry was a bit older he wrote to his future wife

²⁹ Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age. Americans of the Progressive Era*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 125-134.

³⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 5.

³¹ Micheal Joseph Cohen. *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 7.

³² William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 151.

Bess: “I went nigger chasing on Monday. Right through central Africa: Vine St. There was no trace of that Nelson nigger.”³³ Michael R. Gardner argues that Truman was conditioned to be a racist because of his mother’s experiences with the Union army and because of the pervasive attitude of a master-slave way of life in Missouri, even after the Civil War was over.³⁴

Truman’s racial opinions as a young adult become clear in the following fragment from a letter Truman wrote when he was twenty-seven years old: “Uncle Will says that the Lord made the white man from dust, a nigger from mud, then He threw up what was left and it came down a China man. I am strongly of the opinion that Negroes ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia and white men in Europe and America.”³⁵ Michael Joseph Cohen argues that Truman’s racist comments were not simply an acquired habit, caught from his contemporaries. They were fueled by his own frustrations and an evident feeling that foreigners were making their fortune in the “promised land” at the expense of its natives, such as himself. In 1911 when planning a trip to South Dakota to look for farming land to buy Truman wrote to Bess: “I’ll bet there’ll be more bohunks and “Rooshans” up there than white men. I think it is a disgrace to the country for those fellows to be in it. If they had only stopped immigration about twenty or thirty years ago, the good Americans could all have had plenty of land and we’d had been an agricultural country forever.”³⁶ In consideration of Truman’s forefathers and their strong connection to slavery, the conviction of white supremacy of the Truman family and his own racial behavior, indicates that it would not be likely that Truman would ever fight for civil rights.

1.3 Harry Truman in the Army: World War I

By the time the war had started, Truman was thirty-three years old and as soon as he could he got himself enlisted. The causes for the war, which had originated in Europe, were not known to many Americans, including to Truman. He romanticized the battle and was very moved by the messages of Woodrow Wilson. Truman felt, he later mentioned in his memoirs, as if he were “Galahad after the Grail, and I’ll never forget how my love cried on my shoulders when I told her

³³ Harry S. Truman, *Dear Bess. The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910-1959*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 158.

³⁴ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 4.

³⁵ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 139,151, 152, 171.

³⁶ Micheal Joseph Cohen. *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8.

I was going. That was worth a lifetime on this earth.”³⁷ On 30 March 1918 Truman and his comrades sailed for Europe. In France he and the other men underwent an intensive training and a few months later Truman gained command of Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery of the 35th Division.³⁸ The men in Battery D were mostly Irish and German Catholics from Kansas City. Truman himself wasn’t a Catholic and worried if he would be accepted and also respected as the captain. “I’ve been very badly frightened several times in my life and the morning of July 11, 1918 when I took over that battery was one of those times”.³⁹

According to Alonzo Hamby, his experiences in the army made a great impact on Truman. He was an effective officer who made himself into a first-rate leader of men. Hamby argues that this particular experience was the first major, unqualified success of his life, which must have strengthened his self-confidence enormously. He also claims that this sense of self-improvement and opportunity for service as a citizen would be prime motivations behind Truman’s universal military training proposals as a president.⁴⁰

The First World War seemed to complete Harry Truman’s maturation process. Not only did he learn about responsibility, morality and power and did he experience what it was like to earn respect and at the same time to lose some of his naivety; serving in the army also caused Truman to consort with African Americans, which was not something that had happened very often before in his life. Truman’s association with black soldiers gave him the opportunity to develop an opinion on race of his own. In several ways, the war made a great impact on Truman.⁴¹

During the war years African Americans not only experienced the Jim Crow laws back home, but they also had to deal with restrictions in the army. Many politicians were fearful about arming black Americans and they were drafted into segregated units. Most of the black soldiers were not permitted to fight and were assigned to menial labor while they endured abuse and

³⁷ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 101.

³⁸ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 14.

³⁹ Harry S. Truman. *The Autobiography of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 46.

⁴⁰ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 27.

⁴¹ Michael James Lacey, *The Truman Presidency* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1990), 26-27.

miserable conditions.⁴² The African American community felt disappointed because they had hoped that they would have earned respect for their efforts and devotion. George H. Woodson, a Howard University Law graduate, served as a noncommissioned officer during the First World War and he expresses the way young African American boys gathered to fight their foreign enemy but the national one as well: “With less than thirty days notice the superb youth, the very best brain, vigor, and manhood of the race gave up comfort, position, future promise and outlook, in their various civil locations and from the North, South, East and West, started on their voluntary march to Fort Des Moines to answer the call. God grant their efforts and sacrifices may open a brighter and better day for all the downtrodden people of the earth and especially the oppressed colored people of these United States.”⁴³

According to Leuchtenburg, Truman simply liked people and later as a veteran of World War I, he appreciated the enormity of the sacrifice that each soldier and sailor was prepared to make to preserve the democratic way of life guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Leuchtenburg even stresses that the same Constitution became Truman’s solid anchor when he entered politics and that from this point forward –throughout Truman’s life, both private and public- it was his Constitution-grounded belief in the equality of opportunity and civil rights for all Americans that shaped Truman’s words and actions.⁴⁴ It surely could be argued that Truman’s personal experiences in the army modified his opinion on racial segregation to some extent. Later in time, when Truman already was the president of the United States, these experiences in the army also influenced his decision-making concerning integration and racial protection in the American Army, which will be discussed later in this research.⁴⁵

1.4 Influence of Religion

Uncovering the religious influence on Harry Truman’s political decision making, especially in regards to civil rights, is unfortunately a difficult and challenging task. This specific matter of interest has not been thoroughly researched and therefore it is difficult to provide an in-depth

⁴² Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during the World War II* (Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2010), 45.

⁴³ Robert V. Morris, *Black Faces of War: A legacy of Honor from the American Revolution to Today* (Michigan: Zenith Press, 2011), 41.

⁴⁴ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 6.

⁴⁵ Richard M. Yon and Tom Lansford, “Political Pragmatism and Civil Rights Policy. Truman and Integration of the Military,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 107.

analysis. Nevertheless, exploring the subject as far as possible is important because religion reveals important clues about Truman's personal values and ideals.

Christianity was very important to the Truman family. The Young's and the Truman's were Baptists who regularly attended church. Like other Baptists in their surroundings, they rejected liquor, worked very hard and tried to pay their debts on time. According to Hamby, they were practical Baptists of a type that was rather common in rural America. They did not like extravagant emotionalism and hypocrisy.⁴⁶ Truman's mother wanted her son to read the bible intensively, which he did. With the help from his mother, he learned how to read by repeatedly reading the large-print family bible. When he was just twelve years old, Truman had read the whole Bible twice.⁴⁷

As a teenager Truman attended the Benton Boulevard Baptist Church in Kansas City and was baptized in the Little Blue River. Baptists descend from the Puritans, who insisted that people should live their lives of obedience to the Lord, and from the Anabaptists, who claimed that faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.⁴⁸ Although Truman was baptized in the church of his ancestors, he did not care for the theological questions, nor did he like rituals. Once Truman argued: "Forms and ceremonies impress a lot of people, but I've never thought that the Almighty could be impressed by anything but the heart and soul for the individual. That's why I'm a Baptist, whose church authority starts from the bottom-not the top." In a letter to his future wife Bess, Truman wrote: "I think religion is something one should have on Wednesday and Thursday as well as Sunday. Therefore I don't believe that these protracted meetings do any real good. They are mostly excitement and when the excitement wears off people are as they always were."⁴⁹ But he did pray often, believing that God guided him and answered his prayers and also thought that the bible contained answers for all human miseries. The following prayer has been said by Truman from his high school days to his years as the American president: "Oh! Almighty and Everlasting God, Creator of Heaven, Earth and the Universe: Help me to be, to think, to act what is right, because it is right; make me truthful, honest and honorable in all

⁴⁶ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 20.

⁴⁷ Niels C. Nielsen, *God in the Obama Era: Presidents' Religion and Ethics from George Washington to Barack Obama* (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2009), 155.

⁴⁸ Glen Harold Stassen, "Harry Truman as Baptist President." *Baptist History and Heritage* 34, no.3 (1999): 1

⁴⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Dear Bess. The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910-1959*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 23.

things; make me intellectually honest for the sake of right and honor and without thought of reward to me. Give me the ability to be charitable, forgiving and patient with my fellow men-- help me to understand their motives and their shortcomings even as Thou understandest mine!"⁵⁰

However, he did not use the "born again" images of Christ having died to absolve human sins. He believed that many of the world's problems came from conflict over religious interpretations. "Fact is I never thought God picked any favorites. It is my studied opinion that any race, creed or color can be God's favorites if they act the part and very few of 'em do that. "Initially, this specific quote seems to indicate that Truman was open minded to racial differences and equality, at least in regards to religion. He seems to believe that, to God, every individual is equal despite the ethnicity of this person. Nevertheless, Truman's remark also contains a certain cynicism, when he states that although any race, creed or color is equal in God's eye, very few of them act the part. People fail due to their own actions, therefore causing the refusal of God. If Truman is talking about the failure of any race, creed or color is debatable, while he could be just talking in general.

His preference to moral codes attracted him to Freemasonry, which he joined in 1909.⁵¹ To the question if religion was necessary for sustaining morality and to check the possible tendencies towards immorality, Truman answered: "I don't think there's any doubt about it. The great leaders of the world have all been leaders of a moral approach to a way to live and that's what it amounts to".⁵² Still, Truman did not define himself strong as a Baptist. The Baptist church disapproves of dancing, attending shows and playing cards, while Truman loved to do all those things. He figured that it was more important to be real and hold on to the inner convictions than to remove earthly entertainment.⁵³ His world view shaped itself first around the 'religion of the deed' he imbibed at home. Honesty, duty, loyalty and the Victorian paradigm of moral behavior were what he believed in.⁵⁴

However he did not abandon the bible, he spend a lot of his time on the 20th chapter of Exodus; the Ten Commandments and the 5th, 6th and 7th chapters of Matthew's Gospel; the

⁵⁰ Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, "Harry S. Truman Speaks," <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/speaks.htm> (accessed 9 April 2012).

⁵¹ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989, 11.

⁵² Weber, Ralph Edward. *Talking with Harry*, p291

⁵³ Harry S. Truman, *Dear Bess. The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910-1959*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 25.

⁵⁴ Niels C. Nielsen. *God in the Obama Era: Presidents' Religion and Ethics from George Washington to Barack Obama* (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2009), 155.

Sermon on the Mount. Later in his life, when he had been appointed as the president of the United States, he referred to both of these passages during his presidency, both personally and publically. To Truman, they offered him a superior moral code, which perhaps motivated him to act benevolent to the racial issues. In the King James Version, the version he liked most, one specific section was very inspiring to him: “Blessed are the peacemakers for there they shall be called the children of God.” According to Richard S. Kirkendall; that’s what Truman probably most wanted to be, a peacemaker.⁵⁵

Initially, the influence of religion was not very apparent in Truman’s life. This changed during the Cold War when Truman grasped the value of religion and came to the conclusion that religion had a part to play in the unfolding standoff. Where the United States stood for freedom, Communists stood for totalitarianism. In the summer of 1947 he wanted to propose an alliance of moral and religious forces- a crusade by men of goodwill across the world against the evil encroachments of Communism and wrote a letter to the Vatican. “Your Holiness, this is a Christian nation. I believe that the greatest need of the world today is a renewal of faith. I believe with heartfelt conviction that those who do not recognize their possibility to Almighty God cannot meet their full duty toward their fellow men”. Truman believed that Christianity could unite and protect the nation against the anarchist Soviet Union. According to him: “The basic source of our strength is spiritual for we are a people with a faith. We believe in the dignity of man. We believe that he was created in the image of the Father of us all”.⁵⁶ While fighting communism, Truman also had to respond to the racial issue in his own country. The previous remarks of Truman could have perfectly fit into America’s internal struggle.

In an attempt to link Truman’s religious convictions to his civil rights involvement, it could be argued that Truman intended to follow biblical passages in order to justify his actions towards civil rights. In the following quote Truman himself attached the role of religion to the matter of civil rights: “The fundamental basis of this nation’s laws was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings we get from Exodus and Saint Matthew, from Isaiah and Saint Paul. If we don’t have a proper fundamental moral background, we will finally end up with a totalitarian government which does not believe

⁵⁵ Richard S. Kirkendall, “Harry Truman’s Quest for Peace,” in *Immigration and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Roger Daniels (Missouri: Truman State University Press: 2010), 5.

⁵⁶ Jonathan P. Herzog. *The Spiritual, Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76-78.

in rights for anybody except the State.”⁵⁷ Another example of Truman trying to connect religion to governmental actions regarding to civil rights becomes clear in the following quote: “When we are honest enough to recognize each other’s rights and are good enough to respect them, we will come to a more Christian settlement of our difficulties.”⁵⁸

1.5 Conclusion

In order to comprehend the motives responsible for Truman’s involvement in civil rights, this chapter has focused mainly on his moral convictions. Due to the facts that Truman was raised in a segregated environment in former slave-state Missouri, he was prone to use racial language, his great grandparents were slaveholders and that Truman was raised by parents who strongly believed in white supremacy, certainly does not make Truman a likely candidate for advocating civil rights to African Americans. His years of serving the army, caused Truman to interact with African American people on a more regular basis, which allowed him to make judgments on the racial matter based on his own personal experience and opinion. When assessing Truman’s moral convictions concerning civil rights it was necessary to examine the influence of religion. Based on Truman’s personal quotations on Christianity, it can be argued that Truman believed that every individual is equal in God’s eye despite skin color or ethnicity. Nevertheless, Truman claims that although any race is equal when it comes to religion, very few of them act their part, hereby uttering criticism in a very subtle way without offending certain ethnicities directly.

⁵⁷ Richard G. Lee. *The American Patriot’s Bible: The Word of God and the Shaping of America* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 180.

⁵⁸ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 292.

Chapter 2

The Geopolitical Context

This second chapter will focus on the international political context before and during Truman's presidency. When Truman became the new president, he needed to respond to several issues which ultimately were very closely connected civil rights. The Second World War, although in its final stage when he took office, influenced the African American community greatly and its impact did not come to a halt when the war finally ended. Black soldiers not only joined the army to protect the world from Nazi Germany, at the same time they hoped that fighting for the security of their country would gain them more civil rights. They also wanted to point out the similarities concerning racial atrocities that were going on in Germany and in the U.S. as well. This 'Double V' campaign will be intensively discussed. This chapter then will proceed by examining the influences and consequences of the Cold War on the racial issues. Soviet propaganda, aimed at emphasizing America's double standards on democracy, not only had a great impact on the attitude of African Americans, it also caused the American government to consider a solution to prevent any more damage to their reputation. The final focus point of this chapter will be the importance of America's involvement in the Third World. As will be further discussed, America tried to protect the world from communism and secure democracy, which eventually caused certain nations to believe freedom could be achieved. This newly gained confidence and belief in change, not only stayed within the boundaries of the Third World, it traveled all the way to the African American community in the United States and influenced them greatly while fighting for civil rights.

2.1 The Influence of the Second World War and the "Double V" Campaign

While assessing Truman's influence on civil rights, it becomes clear that there were many issues that needed special attention when he started as the new American president. Those issues forced Truman to think about certain matters in order to gain control. The Second World War is one of those matters. The war had a great influence on the African American community, which demanded Truman to consider solutions. Alongside other factors, the Second World War sparked an internal struggle within the war, known as the 'Double V' campaign. James Baldwin wrote during these years: "The treatment accorded the Negro during the Second World War

marks, for me, a turning point in the Negro's relation to America: to put it briefly, and somewhat too simple, a certain hope died, a certain respect for white Americans faded".⁵⁹

The Second World War changed the attitudes and expectations of African Americans. When the war began, African American leaders wanted to force the nation to confront the parallels between the racist doctrines of Nazi Germany and on the other side the presence of the Jim Crow laws in the United States. African Americans aimed for victory abroad and at home as well because they found the American Dream an illusion. The African American press and especially the *Pittsburgh Courier* endorsed and cultivated the concept of a double victory into a rally cry and logo "Double V". The *Courier* and other African American publications kept black America motivated for the struggle for victory abroad and home.⁶⁰

Rev. Dr. Thomas Harten, militant pastor of the Holy Trinity Baptist Church in Brooklyn told his congregation that there would be no peace until double victory was achieved.⁶¹ Many African American soldiers argued that their war was not against Hitler in Europe, but against the Hitlers in America.⁶² During and after the war, membership in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) dramatically increased. In 1940 the organization had 50.000 members, while in 1946, the number had risen to 450.000 members, which indicates the way African Americans were ready for change. Thus military service was a key issue for black Americans, because they understood the link between the duty to defend one's country and the rights of full citizenship.⁶³

One group of African American veterans had already fought a fascist enemy on the battlefield. Those were the U.S. veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a volunteer army who sailed to Europe to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War in 1936. African American soldier Tom Page, a native of New York City, describes his personal experiences while being in Europe: "Spain was the first place that I ever felt like a free man. If someone didn't like you, they told you to your face. It had nothing to do with the color of your skin." Southern-born Crawford

⁵⁹ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 105.

⁶⁰ Lawrence P. Scott, *Double V. The Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press), 2.

⁶¹ Richard Byron Skinner, *The Double "V": The Impact of World War II on Black America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 87.

⁶² Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 106.

⁶³ Beth Bailey, *A People and a Nation. The Second World War at Home and Abroad* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 762.

Morgan agrees and explains that in Spain: “people didn’t look at me with hatred in their eyes because I was black, and I wasn’t refused this or refused that because I was black. I was treated like all the rest of the people were treated and when you have been in the world for quite a long time and have been treated worse than people treat their dogs, it is quite a nice feeling to go some place and feel like a human being. This previously unfamiliar feeling of acceptance, experienced by black soldiers overseas, is one of the factors responsible for setting in motion the process of fighting segregation.

During war time, the members of the Lincoln Brigade had eventually managed to eliminate the racial animosities that limited democracy in the United States. The Lincolns, with their fully integrated military units, saw themselves as a self-conscious melting pot organization and a “people’s army”. The success-story of the Lincoln Brigade influenced future African American soldiers in a positive way and it also contributed to the pride of the African American veterans who offered their services to the U.S. Army after the outbreak of World War II. The morning after the Pearl Harbor attack, Vaughn Love volunteered for the army: “I didn’t ask anybody because I knew that that was where I belonged. I knew since the end of the war in Spain that we would have to face these bastards ourselves.” Once enlisted, these black veterans were initially treated as if they were white, therefore experiencing far more opportunities than other African American soldiers. However, due to the segregated units, such possibilities were drastically limited, which caused the Lincoln veterans to face the same political discrimination as the rest of the black soldiers.⁶⁴

The following poem written by African American soldier Roscoe Jamison perfectly illustrates the feeling of frustration among the black soldiers during the war: “These are the Brave. These men who cast aside old memories, to walk the blood-stained pave of sacrifice, joining the solemn ride. That moves away, to suffer and die for freedom, when their own is denied.”⁶⁵ During their battle within the battle, African Americans found it difficult to feel accepted within the army and often felt frustrated about the way they were being treated. Private Norman Brittingham wrote in a letter: “We are limited duty men, and all not able to hardly do any work. Our medical treatment is poor also. A lot of the officers are as bad as the whites that

⁶⁴ Peter N. Carroll. *The Good Fight Continues. World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 116-117.

⁶⁵ Lawrence P. Scott, *Double V. The Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press), 1.

curse us. In fact we are treated like dogs.” Segregation as they had experienced at home, had followed them into the army and all the way to the other side of the Atlantic. Most of the time black soldiers were discriminated, rejected, were not taken seriously and were never accepted as military equals to white soldiers. Often, African Americans were not given the opportunity to advance themselves or acquire a responsible job. They were relegated to segregated and distinct combat units, to separate training schools, and to segregated camp facilities.⁶⁶ Regularly, black soldiers were internally being transferred to keep them away from the more responsible jobs, which would cause feelings of frustration and uselessness. James Bernard Rucker, a soldier who was stationed in North Carolina, expressed his disappointment in a letter to his wife: “Just as I was on the height of preparation for playing at least a definite and positive part in this phase of the war, a special order from the Ft. Bragg Post Headquarters came down which transferred me to the Post Detachment, under the provisions of an order that requires me to be re-classified for “limited service”. I took personal pride in that I acted on the basis of my hatred against Hitlerism at all times, and I had personal hopes that I’d be given by my own country even a limited opportunity to express that hatred through some measure of participation in our armed forces. This has been effectually denied me by my transfer-from an already Jim Crowed “Separate” organization into non-combatant limited service on a Jim Crow basis.”⁶⁷

Half a million African American soldiers fought overseas during the war and most of them felt a sense of irony while being there. They were asked to fight fascism and racism abroad, while they themselves had to endure racism at home. The word ‘Jude’ painted on German Jewish storefronts caused many people over the world to feel outraged, while the word ‘colored’ generally caused no substantial negative comments.⁶⁸

The American government did not feel ready to improve the racial conditions in the army. Secretary of War Stimson wrote in 1940: “Leadership is not imbedded in the Negro race yet and to try to make commissioned officers to lead the men into battle, colored men, is only to work disaster to both. Colored troops do very well under white officers but every time we try to lift them a little bit beyond where they can go, disaster and confusion follows. Nevertheless they are going to have a try but I hope for Heaven’s sake they don’t mix the white and the colored groups

⁶⁶ Philip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army. Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 18-22.

⁶⁷ Peter N. Carroll. *The Good Fight Continues. World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 130.

⁶⁸ Alexander M. Bielakowsky, *African American Troops in World War II* (Oxford: Osprey, 2007), 3.

together in the same units for then we shall certainly have trouble”.⁶⁹ A. Philip Randolph threatened in 1941 to organize a march on Washington to protest segregation in the armed forces and military industries. This sounded not very appealing to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was trying to win support for the American involvement in the war. Problems within the military were the last thing he needed. He told the Negro leaders that he was opposed to the march but that he was considering the creation of a board to investigate complaints of discrimination in defense industry.⁷⁰ Eventually he decided to issue Executive Order 8802, requiring all employers, unions and government offices and agencies to “provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries without discrimination because of race, creed, color or national origin.” The march on Washington was canceled in response to the issued Executive Order. Even though the defense industries were slowly starting to integrate, the military was still divided by race. African Americans were very disappointed and felt that the Executive Order gave far less than had been demanded.⁷¹ On black man wrote a ‘Draftee’s Prayer’: Dear Lord, today, I go to war: To fight, to die. Tell me what for? Dear Lord, I’ll fight, I do not fear, Germans or Japs: My fears are here. America!”⁷²

2.2 The Influence of Soviet Propaganda

The end of World War II and the achievement of an Allied victory over the Axis powers did not mean that peaceful times were going to return any time soon. The international relations still were tense. The collapse of Germany and Japan had created power vacuums that resulted in a collision between two major powers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. Even though both countries had fought on the same side during the war, now they opposed each other’s actions and values. A new world had to be created and both countries desired to expand their influence in the world. The ideological chasm between Democratic America and Communist Soviet Union increased over the years and resulted in much distrust, intimidation and fear.⁷³ The years of the Cold War has had a profound influence on numerous situations, the civil rights issue

⁶⁹ Philip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army. Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 32.

⁷⁰ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 120.

⁷¹ Clarence Lusane, *Hitler’s Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 151.

⁷² James T. Patterson. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

⁷³ Richard Pells. *Not Like Us* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 46-47.

in particular. Therefore it is necessary to examine the importance of this second geopolitical factor and explore the extent of its influence in order to clarify the political context in which Truman had to do his job as the US president.

The United States undertook the task of containing the Soviet Union in the hope that it would moderate its commitment to an international Communist revolution and that it eventually would become more acceptable to the Americans. The Soviet Union had abolished private property, established a state-controlled economy and had created instability, according to Americans, by exporting revolution. Now in the postwar world, it clearly aimed for a closed sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Soviet Union challenged the American quest, but its actions were probably mostly motivated by a feeling of insecurity. Many factors were responsible for the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union, which will not be discussed in this research, but the Cold War in itself has had a huge influence upon Truman's policies concerning national security, foreign relations and civil rights.⁷⁴

The Soviet Union was not oblivious to race issues in the United States and its leaders tried heavily to benefit from it. Nearly half of Russian propaganda against America was centered on this particular issue. The American magazine, the *Observer* wrote in 1949: "The colour bar is the greatest propaganda gift any country could give the Kremlin in its persistent bid for the affections of the coloured races in the world".⁷⁵ Truman was aware of the Soviet Union's aim to exploit America's racial issues and argued: "How closely our democracy is under observation. We are learning what loud echoes both our successes and our failures have in every corner of the world. That is one of the pressing reasons why we cannot afford failures."⁷⁶ The United States defined itself the preeminent democratic power and labeled the Soviet Union a slave state. The fact that the US claimed to be the land of the free resulted in a critical observation in order to find flaws in the system. Mary Dudziak argues that racial discrimination became fuel for the Soviet propaganda machine and stung America's Achilles heel. The Soviets exploited America's

⁷⁴ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 71-74.

⁷⁵ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 18.

⁷⁶ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 139.

internal problems, claiming that America's professions of liberty and equality under democracy were a sham.⁷⁷

The Soviet Union started to spread stereotypical images of oppressed and impoverished black people around the world. Stories of lynching, of segregation in all avenues of life, and of economic exploitation were constantly publicized. Soviet propaganda effectively exploited the contradiction between America's espousal of freedom and the South's system of racial segregation. Russian interest in the murder of the black US veteran George Dorsey provides a case in point. George Dorsey and his three companions were found dead along the banks of the Appalachian River on July 25, 1946. Their bodies were riddled with at least sixty bullets. Dorsey had just returned to Georgia after five years of service in the American army. On that day, Dorsey, his wife, his friend Roger Malcom, who had been arrested earlier after stabbing a white man during a fight, and Malcom's wife, took a ride with J. Loy Harrison, who had said he wanted them to work his field. Suddenly another car drove up from behind and made their car to stop. The Dorseys and the Malcoms were lined up and shots were fired. Mary Dudziak argues that this crime was, in some ways, unremarkable and that its pattern was familiar: African American men were detained by the police, then were released, then killed with companions by a white mob. What made this crime different from the previous one, was the attention it received. Not only America seemed to be occupied with this murder, the Soviet Union was as well. The Monroe Lynching, named after Monroe, Georgia, where the attack had taken place, was the lead story in an article on the "Position of Negroes in the USA" in the Soviet publication *Trud*. The story was published in August 1946 and mentioned the incident as just one example of "the increasing frequency of terroristic acts against negroes" in the United States. The U.S. embassy in Moscow found this story to be "representative of the frequent Soviet press comment on the question of Negro discrimination in the United States."⁷⁸ The *Trud* story was one example of an increasing tendency of the Soviet Union to exploit American racial problems. According to the embassy, "The Soviet press hammers away unceasingly on such things as 'lynch law', segregation, racial discrimination, deprivation of political rights, etc., seeking to build up a picture of an America in

⁷⁷ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 38-45.

⁷⁸ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 18-20.

which the Negroes are brutally downtrodden with no hope of improving their status under the existing form of government”.⁷⁹

The increase of Soviet propaganda influenced America’s National Security policies to a great extent. The US government felt uneasy about these actions, and realized that this propaganda could ultimately damage the world’s view upon their country. An amicus curiae, a legal term for someone who does not belong to a party or case and volunteers information to the court, argued:”It is in the context of the present world struggle between freedom and tyranny that the problem of racial discrimination must be viewed, for discrimination against minority groups in the United States has an adverse effect upon our relations with other countries.”⁸⁰ Policy makers decided to counteract the propaganda practices. The State Department and the White House gathered to establish reform actions. They realized that some sort of action was required in order to contain Soviet propaganda and limit the damage. However, at the same time, civil rights advocates were being exploited and the categorization of civil rights as national security to create reforms was being promoted.⁸¹ Thus, in order to secure international support and allegiance, the United States needed to improve upon its own form of democracy and make progress in civil rights. By 1946 Americans realized that domestic inconsistencies in race relations were becoming further complicated and internationalized in the bipolar world that was developing.⁸²

2.3 The United States and the Third World: Anti-Colonialism

America’s role in world affairs after World War II had a profound impact on the struggle for civil rights, not only in the emerging Cold War but also in its position on colonialism in the Third World. When the Second World War had come to an end and the years of the Cold War began, the American government started to worry about the threat of communism in the world. Truman came to believe that a “get tough with Russia” policy was necessary in order to contain their communist influence. A world in flux seemingly offered numerous opportunities for communist intrigue and advance. To the United States, the main priority became shoring up the Western

⁷⁹ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 38.

⁸⁰ Arthur J. Sabin, *In Calmer Times: The Supreme Court and Red Monday* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 114-115.

⁸¹ John David Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2002) 30.

⁸² Christopher A. Swiggum, “W.E.B. Dubois, Harry S. Truman, Civil Rights and Communism: Conflicting Views on the Relation Between African American Rights and the Soviet Threat from 1946-1948” *A Journal of Undergraduate History* 4 (2002): 1.

allies in the face of the perceived communist threat. One aspect of America's involvement in Europe was the establishment of the Marshall Plan, a financial program to help the devastated economies in Europe. The Marshall Plan was organized in order to secure democracy in the world, to prevent European countries to become weak and turn people towards communism and it also caused European countries to behold their colonial empires. American aid was seen as a temporary solution, while Western European trade and investment expansion in the Third World would sustain long-term recovery. Faced with what they perceived as a choice between continued colonialism under the control of European allies or newly independent nations potentially ripe for communist influences, U.S. officials clearly preferred the first option. The Western sensibilities of U.S. officials predisposed them to believe that colonial peoples actually were better off under the guidance of Westerners. Self-government was certainly not a realistic option and would only be ripe for discussion until the threat of communism was contained.⁸³

America's involvement in the Third World during the Cold War had a great impact on the African American community and it certainly influenced their struggle for civil rights. Being oppressed in their own country, African Americans sympathized with colonials. They believed that they were all being deprived of freedom and democracy. African American historian and for many years editor of the NAACP magazine *Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois, made the link between America's support for European colonialism and its failure to defend the democratic rights of African Americans.⁸⁴ In 1945, Du Bois wrote in a letter to the American Delegation: "May I beg of you in the name of 13 million American's who are blood brothers of many millions of these colonists, first, to make a preliminary statement on the essential equality of all races. And that secondly, the United States delegation proposes this article for the Charter of the United Nations: 'The colonial system of government, however deeply rooted in history and custom, is today undemocratic, socially dangerous and a main cause of wars. The United Nations, recognizing democracy as the only just way of life for all peoples, make it a first statute of international law that at the earliest practical moment no nation or group shall be deprived of effective voice in its own government and enjoyment of the four freedoms'".⁸⁵ As the Cold War emerged, a broad

⁸³ James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans. Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (North Carolina: North Carolina Press, 2002), 69-73.

⁸⁴ William T. Martin Riches, *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 32.

⁸⁵ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois Volume III*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 11.

spectrum of black American leaders continued to view international politics through the prism of anti-colonialism. Escalating tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were read by black leaders and the black press as intransigence on the part of American and British imperialism. Journalists and activists consistently linked the foreign policies of Secretary of State James Byrnes of South Carolina with the Jim Crow of his home state, and the violence of imperialism with the lynching and brutality in the American South.⁸⁶ Black Americans thus faced a situation in which strong anticommunism and support for European allies topped the postwar foreign policy agenda. Several African American leaders chose to continue voicing strong anti-colonial rhetoric and forging ties with emerging liberation movements in Africa, as well in Asia. Not only individuals chose to do so, but also certain organizations adopted this way of thinking.

Founded in 1937, the Council on African Affairs (CAA), probably the first U.S. solidarity organization in support of Africa's fight against colonialism and apartheid, argued that the independence of new Asian and African nations would help black Americans in their quest for political, economic, and civil rights.⁸⁷ Initially, the CAA's aim was to educate the public about the history of Africa and its struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Their monthly bulletin, *New Africa*, and regular newsletter, *Spotlight on Africa*, featured in-depth stories on Africa by renowned scholars, like W.E.B. Du Bois. The council organized public campaigns and raised funds around specific issues such as the Campaign of Defiance Against Unjust Laws in South Africa, against the jailing of African leaders in Kenya and South Africa, in support of workers' struggles in south Africa, Nigeria and Ghana and for the end of South Africa's mandate over South West Africa; Namibia.⁸⁸ As early as 1942, the CIA labeled the CAA: "active in creating considerable in unrest among the negroes by stressing racial discrimination", and started tracking the activities of the organization. Nevertheless, before the Cold War, the CAA had operated without much opposition and its views were widely shared by many Americans. However, this changed during the first years of the Cold War, when the organization decided to oppose Truman's foreign policy. The emphasis on the growing American involvement in Africa and American uranium interests in the Belgian Congo and South Africa, and its support for African

⁸⁶ Penny Marie von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-Colonialism 1937-1957* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 96-97.

⁸⁷ Christian G. Appy, *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966* (Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 123.

⁸⁸ African Activist Archive, "Council on African Affairs," <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=Council+on+African+Affairs> (accessed 5 December, 2011).

liberation groups placed the CAA outside the mainstream opinion and increasingly at odds with the Truman administration.⁸⁹

While the CAA moved to a more radical and leftist anti-colonial critique and as the Cold War heightened, other civil rights organizations or activists and the mainstream press decided to adopt staunch anticommunism and support Truman's foreign policy agenda, especially the NAACP. During the Second World War, the NAACP at times worked with or donated money to CAA-sponsored drives. But as the Cold War gathered intensity, the two organizations drifted apart; although the CAA and the NAACP shared many similarities in their positions, they stood on different sides of an increasingly widening Cold War chasm. The head of the NAACP, Walter White, believed that by supporting Truman there would be domestic civil rights concessions from the federal government. W.E.B. Du Bois, once also a member of the NAACP before he made the transition to the CAA in 1949, wondered what the NAACP could possibly gain from supporting Truman's policies, which were only a continuation of Western imperialism and colonialism.⁹⁰ Even though the NAACP decided to support Truman, they did not simply abandon their anti-colonial efforts. Their broad anti-colonialism was affected, but was not ended; the left's role in speaking out against colonialism remained vibrant.⁹¹

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the geopolitical conditions shortly before and during the early Truman presidency. Several issues that were closely related to civil rights would eventually lead Truman to respond to the racial inequality in the United States. America's participation in the Second World War resulted in the highlighting of America's racial issues. African American soldiers not only fought to free the world from the Axis powers, they also strove to eliminate Jim Crow in the army and eventually bring democracy back to their own country; the United States. A shift in the attitude of African Americans, encouraged by the war, influenced their fight for civil rights greatly; they became more confident and collectively demanded reformations. The U.S. government had no choice but to respond to these pressures in order to keep control.

⁸⁹ Penny Marie von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-Colonialism 1937-1957* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 115.

⁹⁰ Herbert Aptheker, *Herbert Aptheker on Race and Democracy: A Reader*, ed. Eric Foner and Manning Marable (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 231.

⁹¹ James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans. Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (North Carolina: North Carolina Press, 2002), 73.

Another geopolitical issue which influenced civil rights to a great extent was the Soviet propaganda. Stories about black Americans being racially harassed and discriminated were regularly being published by the Soviet Union. By pointing out the inconsistencies between on the one side; the promise of democracy and freedom and on the other; racial behavior, the soviets wanted to undermine the influence of their enemy. These propaganda activities caused the American government to feel uneasy and forced them to act in order to counteract the soviet threat.

Another important element is America's involvement in the Third World and its influence on the African American community. To contain the rise of communism in the world, the United States felt it was necessary to interfere in the Third World. This decision to maintain colonialism caused a schism in the African American community. Most of the civil rights activists and organizations wanted to abolish colonialism, but not all of them believed that turning against the Truman administration and its foreign policy was the most constructive solution, which was the case with the NAACP. While others, like the CAA, decided to adopt a more leftists and radical point of view regarding anti colonialism.

Chapter 3

Domestic Issues

In order to understand the situation in which Truman formulated his policies concerning racial matters, the third chapter of this study will examine the national political context during Truman's presidency. The civil rights legacy left by Truman's predecessor Franklin Delano Roosevelt will be the first focus point that will be explored. Both Roosevelt's New Deal and certain wartime measures had improved the lives of millions of African Americans, policies which Truman felt pressured to continue after Roosevelt's unexpected death in 1945. Thereafter, this chapter will discuss the increasing race riots and violence aimed at returning black soldiers from the Second World War, a situation which spurred both the African-American population and the Truman administration into action.

3. 1 Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his Politics

Franklin Roosevelt, elected as the Democratic president of the United States in 1932, is often viewed as the twentieth-century president who was most beloved by America's "common people". After Roosevelt passed away, the country was in mourning. He had left behind a remarkable legacy, which would be difficult to match by his successor. Because of his New Deal policy, Roosevelt had managed to improve the lives of many Americans, including those of African Americans. When Truman became the new president of the United States, many looked upon him with suspicion. In order to provide the correct political context in which Harry Truman had to operate, especially regarding the improvements made for African Americans, it is necessary to explore FDR's political legacy.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt had urged that the government should play a much bigger role in social welfare and pledged "a new deal for the American people". The New Deal was a liberal reform program that developed within the parameters of America's capitalist and democratic system. It mostly expanded the role and power of the federal government. Roosevelt introduced a range of progressive programs aimed at providing greater security for the average man. His wife, Eleanor Roosevelt also played a decisive role in the Roosevelt administration. She worked very hard for social justice and human rights. She took public positions, especially on African

American civil rights, which made her responsible for cementing the allegiance of African Americans to the New Deal.

The African American population benefited from FDR's new policies, and although the changes did not completely erase the injustices African Americans had to deal with, they did create more breathing space and opportunities. Importantly, racism became more exposed during FDR's presidency, and the issue screamed for attention. The president often received desperate letters from black Americans throughout the country begging for him to help. Roosevelt indeed was concerned and acted in a way that pleased African Americans. For instance, by the end of the 1930s, almost one-third of African American households survived on the income from a WPA (Works Progress Administration) job.⁹² The National Youth Administration hired more black administrators than ever before. The Federal Music Project helped African American artists financially, as did the Federal Theatre and Writing Projects. Roosevelt's government was sometimes called the 'Black Cabinet' because he appointed more African Americans to responsible government positions than any of his predecessors.⁹³ The National Recovery Administration (NRA), established in 1933, was created by the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The NRA brought together business leaders to draft codes of "fair competition" for their industries. These codes set production limits, prescribed wages and working conditions, and forbade price cutting and unfair competitive practices. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) funded short-term projects for the jobless in wintertime. The Public Works Administration (PWA) competed to control federal relief policy: large-scale PWA projects such as bridges, dams and government buildings promoted economic recovery. The Unemployment Relief Act established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which provided jobs for young men in public works and conservation projects.⁹⁴

Although several programs were organized to improve the lives of the African American community, the New Deal still often fell short for people of color. First, white southerners resisted any attempt to challenge the racial system of Jim Crow, which becomes obvious in the following fragment taken from a letter written by a black man from Reidsville, North Carolina,

⁹² M.J. Heale, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The New Deal and War* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 69.

⁹³ Next New Deal. The Blog of the Roosevelt Institute, "African Americans and the New Deal: A Look Back in History," New Deal 2.0 A Project of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, <http://www.newdeal20.org/2010/02/05/8156-8156/> (accessed 6 March 2012).

⁹⁴ Paul S. Boyer, Clifford E. Clark, *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People, Volume 2* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 736-738.

which was sent to Roosevelt in the year 1935: “I am sorry to worrie you with this Mr. President but hard as it is to believe the releaf officials here are using up most every thing that you send for them self + their friends. they give out the releaf supplies here on Wednesday of this week and give us black folks, each one, nothing but a few cans of pickle meet and to white folks they give blankets, bolts of cloth and things like that. I dont want to take to mutch of your time Mr president but will give you just one example of how the releaf is work down here.”⁹⁵ Another example of the inadequacies of the relief programs is the fact that even though the NRA upgraded the pay of black workers, many firms replaced their African American work forces with white employees. Therefore, not surprisingly, African Americans started to call the NRA the “Negro Run Around”, “Negroes Ruined Again” and “Negro Rarely Allowed”.⁹⁶

Secondly, Roosevelt lacked a strong enough commitment to the cause of civil rights, even though he wanted all Americans to enjoy the benefits of democracy. Obviously, Roosevelt was aware of risking losing the Southern vote if he would be sympathetic to the civil rights issue. Southern whites particularly resented New Deal programs that treated blacks equally, or that markedly raised black incomes. A North Carolina landlord protested to an agency official: “I don’t like this welfare business. I can’t do a thing with my niggers. They aren’t beholden to me anymore.” Many Southern whites blamed both the president and the First Lady for the erosion of the caste system. In 1936 South Carolina racists circulated a postcard stating: “A vote for Roosevelt and Byrnes means the day is coming closer when dirty, evil smelling Negroes will be going to church with you, your sister, your wife, or your mother. Busses, trains, hotels, picture shows, bathing beaches will all see the Negroes rubbing shoulders with your loved ones. From this it will only be a step when Negroes will be allowed to propose wedlock to white girls. All under Roosevelt laws.”⁹⁷ The increasing criticism caused Roosevelt to act in a less persuasive way.

African Americans were disappointed because of the president’s decreasing devotion towards civil rights. In 1938, Anna (Pauli) Murray, an African American student from Maryland who would later join Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the early sixties, wrote a letter to

⁹⁵ Federal Emergency Relief Administration Central Files and New Subject Files, National Archives, as published in Robert S. McElvaine (ed.) *Down and Out in the Great Depression*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983): 83 (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/137/>)

⁹⁶ Joe William Trotter Jr., *From a Raw Deal to a New Deal? African Americans 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 37.

⁹⁷ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 122-123.

Roosevelt, wherein she expresses her frustration: “Have you raised your voice loud enough against the burning of our people? Why has our government refused to pass anti-lynching legislation? And why is it that the group of congressmen so opposed to the passing of this legislation is part and parcel of the Democratic Party of which you are leader?”⁹⁸

Roosevelt indeed felt uneasy about which direction he had to choose when it came to the civil rights issue. Although he did meet occasionally with prominent African Americans, and although he occasionally heeded his wife’s persistence that he do something about blatant discrimination, his heart was never really involved in issues of black justice, beyond his sincere desire to provide jobs for black Americans through the WPA and other New Deal programs. Obviously, this was as far as he needed to go in order to win the trust of black voters, and it was as far as he dared to go lest he lose white votes. When the black vote was secured through economic means, Roosevelt continued to ignore civil rights issues even more.⁹⁹ The following poem, written by Langston Hughes called: “Ballad of Roosevelt” (1937), clearly illustrates in what way the relationship between Roosevelt and the African American community was kind of paradoxical.

“The pot was empty, the cupboard was bare.
I said, Papa what is the matter here?
I’m waiting on Roosevelt, son, Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
waiting on Roosevelt, son.
The rent was due, and the lights was out.
I said, Tell me, mama, what’s it all about?
We’re waitin’ on Roosevelt, son, Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
just waiting on Roosevelt.
Sister got sick and the doctor wouldn’t come,
cause we couldn’t pay him the proper sum.
A-waitin’ on Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
Roosevelt, a-waitin’ on Roosevelt.

⁹⁸ Spartacus Educational, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USARooseveltF.htm> (accessed 5 February 2012).

⁹⁹ Fredrick B. Pike, *FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 117.

Then one day, they put us out o' the house,
Pa and Ma was meek as a mouse.
Still waitin' on Roosevelt, Roosevelt, Roosevelt,
damn tired on waitin' on Roosevelt.
I can't git a job and I can't git no grub.
Backbone and navel's doing the belly rub.
A-waiting on Roosevelt, Roosevelt, Roosevelt.
And a lot o' other folks, what's hungry and cold,
done stopped believin' what they been told.
By Roosevelt, Roosevelt, Roosevelt.
Cause the pot's still empty,
and the cupboard's still bare.
And you can't build a bungalow,
out o' air.
Mister Roosevelt, listen!
What's the matter here?"¹⁰⁰

Despite all the negativity, disappointment and difficulties, many African Americans continued to support Roosevelt and his New Deal. Obviously they still were suffering from racial policies, but to some extent the New Deal helped them to improve their lives. The following anecdote which originated in a classroom in Georgia shows to what extent Roosevelt was being praised by some: "Children, who paved the road in front of your house?" In response, the chorus, "Roosevelt!" "Who put electricity into your house for you?" "Roosevelt!" "Who gave your uncle a job in the WPA?" "Roosevelt!" "Who got your granddaddy an old age pension?" "Roosevelt!" "All right children. Who made you?" A little boy in the back of the room answered: "God". Whereupon another boy yelled: "Throw that sorry Republican out of here!"¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Howard Zinn, Anthony Arnone, *Voices of a People's History of the United States* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 327.

¹⁰¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 42-43.

3.2 Second Great Migration: Postwar Racial Tensions

During the war, masses of African Americans had fled poverty-stricken areas of the South to work in Northern and Western defense plants. The migration started slowly, but after President Roosevelt established the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in 1941, and when the United States entered the war, the migration grew heavily. Unfortunately, the increasing war production not only offered economic opportunities for African Americans, it also caused unrest. White Americans felt uneasy about changes in their status. The growing resentment of African Americans over the hypocrisy of the war rhetoric of the Atlantic Charter's 'Four Freedoms' and the reality of their own condition did not improve the condition either. Between 1941 and 1945, racial violence occurred in Los Angeles, Detroit, Newark and New York City. One of the main issues was the housing problem. While many African Americans migrated to the North to work, the centers of war production lacked adequate housing for the increasing number of workers. The condition worsened when white workers did not want to live near African American employees which would often result in racial conflicts. For instance; whites at the Willow Run project near Detroit, in Baltimore, in Rockford, Illinois, and elsewhere blocked construction of temporary housing project for African American workers. In 1942, Roosevelt created the National Housing Agency (NHA) to oversee government wartime housing policy and named John B. Blandford its director. The NHA would manage the Federal Home Loan Bank Administration (FHA) and the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA). Still, policies on racial issues remained unclear under the new housing legislation. Although Blandford once declared: "in determining the need for war housing, no discrimination shall be made on account on race, creed, color, or national origin", still federal administrators could not live up to this promise. Resistance from local white interests, federal officials and other parts of the federal bureaucracy caused to prevent any improvement for the housing conditions of African Americans.¹⁰²

Not only African Americans who had migrated to the North to work in the war production faced difficulties concerning the housing situation. Returning soldiers from war were anxious to get on with their lives and start families. But these black veterans also experienced a hard time when they started to look for a house of their own. Financial mechanisms, such as government funded mortgage insurance, a secondary mortgage market and tax benefits, were established to

¹⁰² Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Radical Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 64-67.

help veterans to purchase houses. Nevertheless, these programs only benefitted middle and upper-class whites and provided little for African Americans.¹⁰³

3.3 Black Soldiers Returning From War: Lynching in the United States

Unfortunately, black soldiers and veterans who returned home were not wanted by white civilians and were regularly subjected to violence. This happened more often in the South than in the rest of the country. Being treated as outsiders again, the communal disappointment about a nation that refused to change, and the lack of protection by the U.S. army, resulted in the assembly of black Americans who wanted to work together in order to gain more civil rights and recognition. This was the time wherein Harry Truman became president of the United States. On May 8, 1945, Truman delivered a speech to the American people from the radio room at the White House announcing the surrender of Germany. During this speech, Truman said: “For the triumph of spirit and of arms which we have won, and for its promise to the peoples everywhere who join us in the love of freedom, it is fitting that we, as a nation, give thanks to Almighty God, who has strengthened us and given us the victory.”¹⁰⁴ To some disappointed African Americans this promise must have sounded empty, but to others these words may have created hope for the future.

Unfortunately, race riots almost became a common event in America after the Second World War had ended. While African Americans started to unite in order to gain civil rights, white Americans assembled to put the black American back in its place. Again Truman had to find a way to respond to the national disorder. Many white Americans, especially those in the South, certainly did not agree with the wish of African Americans to become first class citizens after they had been willing to fight for their country. Black Americans became bolder in openly questioning the sacredness of segregation.¹⁰⁵ Another reason for the increase of violence against African Americans was the fear of race mixing, something that obviously occurred during war times. Carol Anderson argues in her article “Clutching at Civil Rights Straws” that it was as if the usual suspects--Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee--rounded up

¹⁰³ Edward Allen Ross, *Differentiating Levels of Poverty: A Case Study of Jefferson County/Metropolitan Louisville, KY* (New York: Binghamton University, 2008), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Broadcast Truman surrender of Germany (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/viewpapers.php?pid=34>)

¹⁰⁵ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 114.

their “usual suspects” and proceeded to try to push defiant, “uppity” African Americans back into their so-called proper, subordinate place in American society.”¹⁰⁶ The wave of lynching had begun, merely because of the revival of the Ku Klux Klan.

Isaac Woodard, a black veteran of the Pacific campaign, for example, had just been discharged from the army when he took a bus ride to North Carolina to see his family. According to the NAACP Woodard was threatened by the bus driver for taking a long rest stop. Later, the bus driver contacted a South Carolina policeman and falsely accused Woodard of drinking and disorderly behavior. When Woodard objected to the charges, he was brutally beaten and after he was put to jail without medical attention and sadly became blinded for life. In another incident, a group of forty draftees on their way to Fort Benning, Georgia were beaten with clubs and blackjacks and finally jailed by Columbus, Georgia policemen. Their crime was that they had been playing cards and laughing loudly on the train.¹⁰⁷

When Leon McTatie was accused of stealing a saddle, six white Mississippians, as if they were reliving the glory days of the Old South, grappled the accused man and whipped him to death. In Louisiana, a black veteran who defiantly refused to give a white man a war memento was partially dismembered, castrated and blowtorched until his eyes popped out of his head.¹⁰⁸

The violence that occurred during these years signaled a shift from simple mob violence against blacks to increasing confrontations between blacks and the police and courts as well. In a press release the NAACP warned African Americans living in the South: “Acquittal of the five alleged lynchers of a Negro war veteran serves as a declaration to every negro in the South and particular those who fought for their country in the last war that they are now entirely at the mercy of white supremacist lynchers.”¹⁰⁹

The Methodist and Episcopal ministers of Atlanta issued a statement condemning the killings: “We have just recently sent millions of the flower of our young manhood to Europe and to Asia to stamp out Nazism, whose habits has been to take the law into its own hands and

¹⁰⁶ Carol Anderson, “Clutching at Civil Rights Straws. A Reappraisal of the Truman Years and the Struggle for African American Citizenship,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence P. Scott, *Double V. The Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press), 271-272.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Allen Ross, *Differentiating Levels of Poverty: A Case Study of Jefferson County/Metropolitan Louisville, KY* (New York: Binghamton University, 2008), 42.

¹⁰⁹ Gary A. Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 105.

murder helpless people. Now in Georgia, something closely akin to Nazism in Europe and Asia had arisen, and in every sense it is just as brutal.”

Many marches and protests were organized in New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco where demonstrators carried around large signs which read ‘We veterans are still being killed by racists’. A journalist for a Greek newspaper mentioned that after she had visited the South she understood the little black boys answer to the question what punishment he would impose upon Adolph Hitler: “I would paint his face black and send him to America immediately.”¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, the men who had fought the war abroad returned to their home country with a broader mental horizon, increased confidence and more self-esteem. Because they had fought the Nazis, defended their country, risked their lives and in the mean time were discriminated by their colleagues, once they finally arrived back home they were in no mood to passively accept the segregation practices in the South and felt that something definitely had to change.¹¹¹ On 27 May, 1946, *Life Magazine* published an article called: “The Ku Klux Klan Tries a Comeback”, which described a meeting of the Klan on a wide plateau on Stone Mountain, outside Atlanta. During this assemble, new members were selected and ceremoniously ‘knighted’ into the organization. According to the author of this article it was the first big public initiation into the Klan since the end of World War II and argued that it was put on at a carefully calculated time. “The anti-Negro, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-foreign, antiunion, antidemocratic Ku Klux Klan was coming out of wartime hiding just at the same time when the C.I.O. (Congress of Industrial Organizations) and the A.F. of L. (American Federation of Labor) were starting simultaneous campaigns to organize the South and just at the time when Southern politicians were starting their campaigns for state and national offices”. Despite this revival of the Klan, the article claims that the organization probably will not be as strong as it was in 1919, because although black Americans once were afraid of the white robed-members, this was certainly not the case anymore in 1946. According to *Life Magazine*, the Klan’s impotence was its lack of effect on African Americans and states that: “more than 24.000 Negroes have already registered for next July’s primaries in the Atlanta vicinity alone, where the Stone Mountain ritual was held.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching. Black Men, White Women and the Mob* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 168-170.

¹¹¹ Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1987), 15.

¹¹² “The Ku Klux Klan Tries a Comeback,” *Life Magazine*, 27 May 1946, 42.

3.4 Conclusion

The legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the disappointment of African American veterans and the increase of racial violence changed the internal political dynamics. Many African Americans were shocked by the death of their president. Even though their lives had not changed dramatically due to the New Deal programs and Roosevelt seemed to distance himself from the civil rights issues along the ride, a great number of black Americans had never lost their confidence in the goodwill of their president. Once appointed as the new president of the United States, his successor, Harry Truman, had to deal with a grieving African American community and obviously had to determine which approach would ensure his credibility and reliability.

Inspired by the change in attitudes of returning black soldiers, a willingness to fight for civil rights became noticeable among the African Americans. Being passive about the inadequacies in their day to day lives were no longer an option. Many decided that this was the time for change and that fighting for all the shortcomings they had suffered for many years was necessary.

Unfortunately, white Americans, especially those living in the South, responded in a negative way to the alteration in attitudes of their fellow black citizens. They wanted to prevent any improvements concerning civil rights and regularly turned to violence in order to make their statements clear. Sadly, many African Americans became victim of lynching practices.

Part II The Truman Presidency

Chapter 4

From County Judge to President

The previous two chapters focused on both the national and international political context preceding and during Harry Truman's presidency; this chapter will examine the way Truman was introduced to the political arena and the way he responded to the numerous political situations concerning civil rights with which he was confronted. Many factors pushed Truman to react to the racial problems in the United States. As mentioned earlier, African Americans demanded more attention during the postwar years; white Americans also forced attention because of the violent actions they imposed on their black nationals; and the Soviet Union also caused concerns because of their propaganda which emphasized the racial problems in the country of their enemy. Over the years, many scholars have been fascinated by Truman's involvement in civil rights, his moral convictions or political motivations. The points of view of on the one hand revisionist scholars and, on the other hand, liberal historians, will be incorporated in this chapter in order to develop a realistic overview of this particular period.

4.1 Truman's Introduction to Politics

When Truman succeeded Roosevelt as president in 1945, he had reached the pinnacle of a long and tumultuous career that had begun in the early 1920s. During his career he had gained plenty of insight in the relationship between politics and intolerance. In the summer of 1922, for example, he campaigned for the position of county judge in Jackson County, but the Ku Klux Klan opposed him fiercely because of the endorsement of 'Tom and Joe': two Roman Catholic Political Bosses who dominated and controlled political affairs and Government of Kansas City and Jackson County. The Klan not only harassed Catholics, but they intimidated the black community as well. This was Truman's first experience of harsh, political racism.¹¹³ Truman did everything he could to win the election. Some believe that Truman even decided to join the KKK,

¹¹³ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 8.

because they were politically very influential in Jackson County. The story goes that Truman thus became a member of the Klan, but refused to be a part of it any longer when they demanded him to pledge not to hire any Catholics when he would be elected as the county judge.¹¹⁴ Years later, in the 1940s, Truman claimed that all the stories about him being a Klan-member were incorrect and exclaimed: “Of course I’m not a member of the Klan. I never was. That lie was nailed back in 1922 when I was elected judge of the county court.” As a reaction to the assumptions, he wrote to a friend: “I have long since become immune to mudslinging and find the best tactics are to ignore it.”¹¹⁵ David G. McCullough, a historian who has attempted to demonstrate a Truman who was just as appealing as his admirers believed, explains why Truman initially would become a member of the Klan and claims that it had been a grievous mistake ever to have said he would join in the first place. He states that in his defense later it would be said that the Klan in 1922 seemed still a fairly harmless organization to which a good God-fearing patriot might naturally be attracted, that it offered a way for those who felt at odds with the changes sweeping the country to make known their views.¹¹⁶ Whatever the truth may be; circulating speculations on Truman’s supposedly membership did not contribute to Truman’s credibility regarding civil rights action.

Truman narrowly won the primary race and gained easy victory in the general election. In 1926 Truman was elected as presiding judge and his achievements won him wide support and easy reelection in 1930. A couple years later, in 1934, Truman took the opportunity to work directly with the democratic administration in Washington and he won the primary by a plurality of forty thousand votes, easily defeating his conservative Republican opponent in the general election. Although Truman sometimes felt like President Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not respect him and even occasionally humiliated him, Truman regarded his Senate years as the happiest ten years of his life.¹¹⁷

When examining Truman’s speeches on civil rights as a senator, his view on racial conflicts is debatable. Richard Dalfiume, one of the liberal historians who has examined Truman’s presidency in relation to civil rights to a great extent, argues that it is obvious that Truman felt highly responsible for solving the racial problems that plagued the country. In 1940 during an election speech Truman expressed his belief “in the brotherhood of man; not merely the

¹¹⁴ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 28.

¹¹⁵ David M. Jordan, *FDR, Dewey and the Election of 1944* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 303.

¹¹⁶ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 165.

¹¹⁷ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 28-30.

brotherhood of white men, but the brotherhood of all men before the law". He continued by saying that "in giving to the negroes the rights that are theirs, we are only acting in accord with our ideals of a true democracy". Dalfiume argues that Truman always was willing to fight for the improvement of living conditions for the African Americans and believes that Truman reflected on his own transition when he stated: "I was raised amidst some violently prejudiced Southerners myself; the vast majority of good southerners understand that the blind prejudices of past generations cannot continue in a free republic". Dalfiume admits that Truman initially did oppose social equality and wanted to keep the social lives of African Americans secluded from whites, but argues nevertheless that Truman, unlike racists, strongly believed in the *equal* part of the phrase 'separate but equal'. However, according to Dalfiume, a couple years later, Truman changed his mind and came to the conclusion that separate but equal was a contradiction and that as long there existed segregation, there would be discrimination.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, while focusing on the same speech, historian William C. Berman, from a revisionist point of view, argues that Truman, by emphasizing only the matter of equality, skirted any programmatic commitment. During other speeches on civil rights, Berman claims, Truman refused to offer any concrete solutions. The reason for this lack of devotion could have been the fear of losing his white, racial followers, while at the same time he wanted to spawn African American voters.¹¹⁹ His own political and personal ambivalence on the matter was revealed in a remark Truman made to a southern senator about the 1938 anti-lynching bill: "You know I am against this bill, but if it comes to a vote, I'll have to vote for it. All my sympathies are with you but the Negro vote in Kansas City and St. Louis is too important."¹²⁰ As a response to this point of view, liberal scholars Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten claim that even though Truman's statements may have seemed meager now, they were bold in much of America at that time. Both authors find Truman's approach very realistic, because they agree with Truman that segregation was still the norm and that progress had to be worked for from within that framework.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 136.

¹¹⁹ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 12-13.

¹²⁰ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 10.

¹²¹ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 15.

In July 1940 Truman made a speech to the National Colored Democratic Association in Chicago, saying: “I am not appealing for social equality of the Negro. The Negro himself knows better than that, Negroes want justice, not social relations”. Revisionist scholar, Barton Bernstein, argues that Truman as a grown man never seemed deeply troubled by the plight of African Americans and did not oppose racial segregation. He believed that African Americans did not want to eliminate segregation, but only inequality. Therefore he thought that equality for the law could be achieved within the framework of ‘separate but equal’.¹²² During the same speech, Truman said: “Legal equality is the negro’s right, because he is a human being and a natural born American”¹²³ Berman states that Truman opposed social equality but at the same time was a political realist who acknowledged the fact that the interests of his African American constituents needed protection.¹²⁴

In 1940 he won the election, while the United States moved in a more internationalist direction to help the Allies fight Nazi Germany. A new committee was established in order to investigate all aspects of war production, namely the Truman Committee. Even though the committee was criticized much, it still won the trust of the key people in the war effort. Truman was even chosen by newsmen in 1944 as one of the top ten most valuable men in Washington.¹²⁵

When a vice president had to be appointed and the elections began, Truman was convinced that he would not be in the race for vice-president. “I have no desire to be Vice President, as I told you when I was in Florida, but I will try my best to keep a straight face until that hurdle is passed.” So Truman himself did not necessarily want to become Vice President and he also thought president Roosevelt did not want him to either. But everyone around him assumed that he would and Truman constantly had to repeat that he would not be a nominee. But at the last minute, the situation changed. President Roosevelt ordered him to be a candidate and after hearing that Truman hesitated, Roosevelt said: “Well you tell him if he wants to break up the Democratic Party in the middle of a war that’s his responsibility”. When hearing this

¹²² Barton J. Bernstein, *The Ambiguous Legacy: The Truman Administration and Civil Rights* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 272.

¹²³ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 292.

¹²⁴ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 238.

¹²⁵ William E. Pemberton, *Harry S. Truman. Fair Dealer & Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 33.

statement, Truman felt like he had no choice and started to look for someone who would nominate him.¹²⁶ Eventually, Truman was only vice-president for eighty-two days.

On April 12 1945 at 4:45 in the afternoon, President Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage, which made Harry S. Truman the new President of the United States. On the outside, Truman seemed to look calm, but internally, he was very worried. "I was very much shocked. I am not easily shocked but was certainly shocked when I was told of the President's death and the weight of the Government had fallen on my shoulders." He did not know how the nation would react to the death of their president and also the fact that Truman was not a specialist in foreign affairs and that he also wasn't entirely informed about Roosevelt's wartime conferences, made him unsecure. Still, he had to deal with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin.

Truman felt intimidated by the lingering memory of the previous president who had led the nation through depression and war crises which he had done with dramatic and personal leadership, but after a while, Truman felt like things were starting to fall in its place and he started to embrace the presidency and everything that was attached to this.¹²⁷ He stated: "I have received a great heritage from my lamented predecessor. I shall strive to attain the ideals for which he fought and am strengthened by the assurance of your support in that effort."¹²⁸ Often he would say that he would try to do what Roosevelt would have liked and this became the theme of all of Truman's first term. Eleanor Roosevelt became his consultant during his first months as a president. He called her regularly and asked her 'what he would have done' about this or that situation. Truman continued to call her 'First Lady'.¹²⁹

The American people were used to the previous president and his reform policies. Although not completely beatific, these reforms did change the lives of the African Americans, and by this time they wanted to improve their living conditions even more. The death of the president shook the African American community and a feeling of insecurity about the new president increased. A representative of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association asked during Truman's first presidential press conference about the president's civil rights position:

¹²⁶ Harry S. Truman, *The Autobiography of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 89-91.

¹²⁷ Harry S. Truman, *Off the record*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 16.

¹²⁸ Barton J. Bernstein, *The Ambiguous Legacy: The Truman Administration and Civil Rights* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 269.

¹²⁹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR. From Harry Truman to Barack Obama* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 8-10.

“Mr. President, probably as much as any group, the passing of President Roosevelt is very keenly felt by the Negroes in America, as they looked upon them as sort of a symbol of justice and equal opportunity”.¹³⁰ A black woman wrote to FDR’s former press secretary: “You know what Mr. Roosevelt ment to Negroes. The thing I am riting you for, is will you try to make clear to Mr. Trueman what the Negroes want. And that is first class citicinship. We know Mr. Rosevelt would have given us that.” On the other hand, Truman had lived most of his live in the South and southerners assumed that Truman would be sensitive to southern-style race relations, a thought that had also crossed the minds of some African Americans.¹³¹ For instance, *The Afro-American*, a newspaper in Baltimore which showed its concern for the Southern influences of Truman’s homeland.¹³² The democratic senator from South Carolina Burnet Maybank assured a southern friend, “Everything’s going to be all right- the new President knows how to handle the niggers”.¹³³ This was the point when Truman had to decide, to what extent he would be involved in the civil rights debate and which side he was on.

4.2 The Democratic Party

Attention and worries regarding racial matters increased during the thirties and forties. American political life became more distracted with the schism between black and white. In the year 1936 a majority of the African American vote was going to the Democratic Party for the first time. The reasons for the shift from Republican to the Democratic Party was first of all that black Americans felt abandoned by the Republican Party and secondly, black Americans felt supported by Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal. Therefore, a majority of black voters supported the reelection of Roosevelt in 1940.¹³⁴ Republicans witnessed this transition and tried to turn the changes around by promising the African Americans to pay more attention to the existing racial problems. Black democratic sympathies were also endangered by disturbing stories about the occurrence of discrimination in relief agencies. Therefore the Democratic party also had to find a

¹³⁰ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 23.

¹³¹ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 24.

¹³² Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 13.

¹³³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 162.

¹³⁴ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 32.

way to hold onto the black vote and was more or less forced by the African American community to investigate one of the most important issues, namely segregation in the army.¹³⁵ Although the Democratic party had been successful in attracting groups diverse in their cultures and at times irreconcilable in their political interests, by the end of the thirties it begun a process of disintegration that brought Roosevelt's New Deal to an end and initiated an era of political stalemate. North versus South, urban constituencies versus rural ones, minority groups versus WASP's, liberal versus conservatives—all were responsible for conflicts within the Democratic party.¹³⁶

Truman faced many responsibilities when he started as the new president. First, he had to maintain economic stability and prosperity. Second, he had to protect the rudimentary welfare state the New Deal had established, and perhaps even push through a modest enlargement of it. And finally, he had to make progress toward equal justice and equal opportunity for an awakening black minority.¹³⁷ He was determined to continue Roosevelt's New Deal and established his own reform agenda, known as the Fair Deal, which included national health-care legislation, federal aid to education and civil rights. Unlike New Deal liberalism, the Fair Deal focused on continual economic growth.¹³⁸ After the war was over, Truman needed to guard the country from falling into another economic depression and, secondly, he felt the need to get more involved into social issues. In September 1945, the President sent out twenty-one points of possible legislation. Put briefly, they asked for an increase in the minimum wage, full employment, more security for farmers, tax reduction, decent housing and medical care.¹³⁹ With regards to civil rights, Truman wanted to expand Roosevelt's limited steps toward racial moderation and reconciliation.

According to Alonzo Hamby, an historian who has researched the life of Truman to a great extent, it is obvious that Truman was well aware of the importance of the black vote; he needed black support in order to maintain the Democratic party majority status. Nevertheless, Hamby states that although Truman's commitment to civil rights was to some extent motivated

¹³⁵ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 38.

¹³⁶ Alonzo Hamby, *Liberalism and its Challengers: From FDR to Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 67.

¹³⁷ Alonzo Hamby, *Liberalism and its Challengers: From FDR to Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 60.

¹³⁸ Paul S. Boyer, Clifford E. Clark. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People, Volume 2* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 810.

¹³⁹ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Missouri: University of Missouri, 1994), 287.

by political benefits, his self-interest was also morally enlightened and was consistent with his previous political actions.¹⁴⁰ Hamby also claims that Truman took his job as the president of the United States very seriously, and even though he may not personally have felt sympathetic to certain groups, he did believe that the business of the representative government was to see that everyone had a fair deal. He saw the purpose of American politics as the creation of opportunity for the common man, whom he envisioned in various ways: a blue-collar worker who wanted a job without having to buy a union card or pay off a labor leader in advance, a small businessman threatened by monopolistic practices, a member of a white ethnic minority and even a black struggling against discrimination.¹⁴¹

Many contemporary scholars believe that Truman was sympathetic to the African American civil rights issue right from the beginning of his presidency. One of those scholars is Carol Anderson, who argues that not only African Americans made the connection between American racism and German Nazism, but that Truman was one of the first who recognized this. According to her, Truman and his administrative team acknowledged that there was a problem and she refers to the following quote made by Truman: “We have only recently completed a long and bitter war against intolerance and hatred. Yet in this country today there exists disturbing evidence of intolerance and prejudice similar in kind, though perhaps not in degree, to that against which we fought the war.”¹⁴²

When he was a U.S. senator he once wrote: “Just killed a cockroach. He walked right out on the armrest, as impudently as a sassy nigger.” But Leuchtenburg claims that Truman grew into the job of being president and, with respect to race, was expanding his horizons, even to the point of embracing integrations as public policy.¹⁴³

Harvard Sitkoff, a revisionist scholar, believes that at the beginning of his presidency, Truman was mostly occupied with the fear of losing his Southern white voters. Every now and then he made promises to his black voters but when it came to it, he backed out. Sitkoff states that the breaking point occurred when the race riots in the South began which made Truman realize that something had to be done and finally took a stand. On December 5, 1946, Truman

¹⁴⁰ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Liberalism and its Challengers: From FDR to Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 67.

¹⁴¹ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 36.

¹⁴² Edward Allen Ross, *Differentiating Levels of Poverty: A Case Study of Jefferson County/Metropolitan Louisville, KY* (New York: Binghamton University, 2008), 33.

¹⁴³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 170.

issued Executive Order 9809, which established a multiracial Civil Rights Committee of fifteen distinguished U.S. citizens. The Committee would investigate law enforcement procedures and recommend measures to safeguard the civil rights of minorities.¹⁴⁴

4.3 Conclusion

Already in the early 1940's the debate on Truman's genuine devotion to the African American struggle for civil rights began. As well as the fact that Truman's background and his upbringing certainly did not contribute to his credibility regarding civil rights in a positive way, despite Truman's efforts to deny the allegations, the rumor that he once was a member of the Ku Klux Klan also had a negative influence upon the African American's faith in his sincere goodwill. Truman's official statements on the matter of social equality and freedom for all could not convince everyone of his genuineness, therefore causing even more doubt. Truman had to decide how to approach the African American community. He was aware of Roosevelt's legacy and the fact that many African Americans were still grieving his loss. Truman also knew that the Democratic Party needed the black vote. It could also be argued that Truman knew in his heart that fighting for civil rights was the right thing to do. However, the insecurity among the black community was already sensible during the first days of Truman's presidency, which would probably never completely disappear during the years to come.

¹⁴⁴ Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics" *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 4 (1971): 599.

Chapter 5

The President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1946

On December 5, 1946, Truman informed the nation that a Committee on Civil Rights was to be organized in order to examine the situation concerning civil rights in the United States. To provide a realistic view on racial issues, this committee would start an intensive investigation on the presence of inadequacies in the lives of minority groups, especially those of African Americans. Subsequently, the committee would offer a report including all the information gathered and also a list of recommendations would be incorporated.

For a long time now, many scholars have discussed Truman's motivations for establishing a civil rights committee. As has been mentioned earlier, Truman did not seem to be a likely candidate for advocating civil rights. Few had expected a move like this, especially when Truman's personal background is taken into account. Therefore, a thorough examination of the various reasons responsible for Truman's decision and the position of several historians on the subject will be provided in this chapter.

The statement concerning the establishment of a civil rights committee made by Truman and the eventual report, caused many people to react. Many newspapers and magazines regularly devoted much printing space to Truman and his civil rights project. But it was not only the press who paid much attention to the subject; many individuals felt the need to voice their opinion and decided to write down their critiques or praises, to send it all the way to the White House.

5.1 The Decision

"Southern gentle lady, do not swoon. They've just hanged a black man, in the dark of the moon. They've just hanged a black man, to a roadside tree. In the dark of the moon, for the world to see, how Dixie protects its white womanhood. Southern gentle lady, be good, be good!"¹⁴⁵

When Truman heard about the race riots that were erupting in the South, he was shocked and exclaimed in a Midwestern accent: "My God! I had no idea that it was as terrible as that. We've got to do something!"¹⁴⁶ He continued by exclaiming: "I can't approve of such things going on

¹⁴⁵Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching. Black Men, White Women and the Mob* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 165.

¹⁴⁶Gary A. Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 106.

and I shall never approve of it, as long as I am here. I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause.”¹⁴⁷ He was especially outraged by reports of black troops being discriminated against at Fort Leavenworth and said: “I have been very much alarmed at the increased racial feeling all over the country, and I am wondering if it wouldn’t be well to appoint a commission to analyze the situation and have a remedy to present to the next Congress.”¹⁴⁸

On December 5, 1946, Truman made the following statement: “Freedom from fear is more fully realized in our country than in any other on the face of the earth. Yet all parts of our population are not equally free from fear. And from time to time, and in more places, this freedom has been gravely threatened. After the last war, when organized groups fanned hatred and intolerance, until at times, mob action struck fear into the hearts of men and women because of their racial origin or religious beliefs.(...) I have, therefore, issued today an Executive Order creating the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and I am asking this committee to prepare for me a written report.”¹⁴⁹

The establishment of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights was rather controversial, Truman already had lost many of his followers and according to polls, 47 percent of the American public already disapproved of his leadership. According to Michael R. Gardner, another historian who has been examining the life and presidency of Truman, Truman did not believe that polls and public opinion should interfere with his decisions and his fear that the revived Ku Klux Klan would become too influential became a stimulating force for Truman to interfere. In September Truman wrote to Attorney General Tom Clark; “I know you have been looking into the Tennessee and Georgia lynchings, and also been investigating the one in Louisiana, but I think it is going to take something more than the handling of each individual case after it happens, it is going to require the inauguration of some sort of policy to prevent such happenings”.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 24.

¹⁴⁸ Ken Hechler, “Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 53.

¹⁴⁹ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0939-1273

¹⁵⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 166.

The nation responded to the announcement in different ways. Many people had not expected Truman to come up with such a plan and a great number of people responded in an appreciative way. Someone wrote: “We wish to thank you for the appointment of a committee on Civil Rights. It took courage because there are so many who do not want civil rights for anyone outside the majority group. (...) We will always be grateful for your effort to help this section of your citizens.”¹⁵¹ Eugene Kinckle Jones, member of the National Urban League For Social Service Among Negroes in New York, also voices his enthusiastic opinion on the establishment of the Civil Rights Committee: “This is to express to you my deep appreciation and gratitude at your decision to appoint a Civil Rights Committee of fifteen persons to make recommendations that will make more effective legislative procedures for protecting personal rights of American citizens. I doubt whether since Reconstruction Days a more important commission has been appointed by any President advance the civil rights of the people.”¹⁵²

Some African American organizations were pleased with the establishment of The Committee on Civil Rights. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, for instance, remarked; “The action of President Truman in naming a committee on civil rights is salutary and potentially of great value to the welfare of millions of Americans. Its very creation by the executive head of the nation’s government is alone a constructive step.”¹⁵³ Nevertheless, others weren’t very hopeful about Truman’s efforts. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for instance did not have great expectations that a president who was born and raised in a former slave state would do very much for African Americans, but still decided to invite Truman to speak to the closing session of the thirty-eight annual conference of the NAACP, to be held at the Lincoln Memorial. Realizing that the President’s Committee on Civil Rights would issue its report in a few months, Truman decided to accept the invitation. He would become the first president of the United States to address the NAACP since its founding in 1909 and more importantly, he would become the first modern president to make an open and public commitment to civil rights. During his speech Truman told the audience that he was convinced that America had reached a turning point in the long history of the country’s efforts to guarantee

¹⁵¹ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel III, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0291

¹⁵² Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel IV, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0431

¹⁵³ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 57.

a freedom and equality to all citizens. He also stated that: “We must keep moving forward, with new concepts of civil rights to safeguard our heritage. The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people against the Government, but protection of the people by the Government.”

The Tucson Star expressed a more or less reserved point of view on Truman’s message. They argued in an article, published one day after Truman’s speech at the Lincoln Memorial, that Truman’s initial basic theme was sound, but claim that, as the President continued his speech, he left out some important elements. “But as the President continued, he outlined certain “rights” which he said should be enjoyed by every individual. It is in this portion of his speech that we feel the President left out one important element regarding some of those rights.” While mentioning the absence of a certain part, the author of the article was referring to the right of free speech. According to the author, little improvements can be accomplished without improving this particular element first. Judging from the content of this article, it is probably correct to state that the author questions Truman sincere commitment to the civil rights issue and wonders if Truman realizes which underlying errors have to be eliminated before national democracy can be reached.¹⁵⁴

The Plain Dealer, a newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio, argued that Truman’s speech came close to a great one, but that it fell down at the end. The reason for this is, according to the author of the article, the fact that Truman did not have anything concrete to offer. The author expressed his concern by mentioning that Truman only: “appointed an advisory committee on civil rights last December.” Then the author asks: “Does this problem need any surveying by citizens, distinguished or not? Hasn’t the world from Cleveland through the state of Ohio, the federal government and the United Nations had enough of the surveys of problems which are known in detail to any layman that can read and write?” Obviously, the author wonders if Truman during his speech, was just trying to convince the public that the civil rights issue was being taken care of, while at the same time, trying to postpone any further concrete action.¹⁵⁵

Others critiqued Truman for several reasons. The United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America questioned Truman’s sincerity and accused him indirectly of being

¹⁵⁴ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0038

¹⁵⁵ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0040

thoughtlessness. They refer, in a letter, to an appointment made by Truman, which they felt was an insult to the African American community. “We approve of the idea of setting up a civil rights committee, but we feel strongly that the appointment of Mr. Wilson as Chairman makes a mockery of the principles for which such a committee is supposedly established. (...) His record will show that Mr. C. E. Wilson has been one of the leaders in the fight to suppress civil rights and, in our opinion, is not fit to serve as chairman of a committee who’s avowed purpose is to protect and extend civil rights.”¹⁵⁶ Mr. E. J. Fulgham, member of the Christian League, communicated in a letter to Truman that, according to him, it seemed like the president was acting in a confident and resistant way in order to protect the black people in America, but that he should keep in mind that many Americans were not of the same line of thought and that some had pretty strong feelings about the role the government should play. David K. Niles, working as Administrative Assistant to the President, responded in perhaps a defensive way: “As you say in your letter, the President’s position is to stand firm on the Constitution. It was with this idea that he created the Committee on Civil Rights.” Nevertheless, he did also encourage Fulgham, that if he wished to communicate with the Committee about his organization, he was certainly free to do so.¹⁵⁷

After the announcement that a report on civil rights was going to be created and the existing defaults associated with racial issues was to be investigated; the process of examination and evaluation by the appointed committee began, just as Truman had ordered the committee to do. In order to demonstrate to what extent the research can be defined as reliable and whether the president had an influence on its content; a short overview of the committee’s methods will be provided in this section. The appointed members of the committee used several sources in order to establish a realistic and convincing report. First of all, the committee consulted several reference works. Many books related to American racial issues were borrowed from various agencies. The manuscript of the ‘Negro Fact Sheet’, the book ‘Nurenberg Diary’ by Gustave Gilbert, a copy of ‘Roget’s Thesaurus’, 1946 edition, Lyman Bryson’s ‘Approaches to National Unity’, ‘Life and Times of Frederick Douglass’, ‘Jim Crow America’ written by Earl Conrad,

¹⁵⁶ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel III, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0286

¹⁵⁷ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel I, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0349

Charles H. Wilson's 'Education of Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910' and 'No Peace for Asia' by Harold Isaacs, are a selection of works consulted by the civil rights committee.¹⁵⁸

The members of the committee also contacted various organizations in order to collect important background information and to gather relevant statistics. A memorandum about the inadequacies of the facilities for African American patients and the lack of opportunities for black medical students and physicians in the district of Columbia, for instance, was sent by the Physicians Forum.¹⁵⁹ The Department for Commerce provided the committee data on the number of African American employees in the Departmental service. The War Department sent a memorandum on African Americans in the American army. Self-evidently, civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, were being addressed by the civil rights committee.¹⁶⁰

Not only organizations, but certain individuals specialized in racial issues, were being asked for their personal input as well. Assuming that he would make some helpful suggestions, the committee approached Langston Hughes, who at the time, worked as a visiting Professor of Creative Writing at the Atlanta University. Unfortunately, for the committee, Hughes responded by answering: "I am so sorry to say I do not have any very specific suggestions to offer your committee since I am sure that you are all familiar with the various problems relating to Negroes and civil rights in this country". However, he did express his uneasiness about the matter of civil rights in relation to travel in those states of the country where Jim Crow laws were still the rule.¹⁶¹

5.2 Truman's Motives for Establishing the Civil Rights Committee

While the Cold War was enhancing, the spread of Soviet propaganda increased heavily, which sought to expose weaknesses in the American system. In this atmosphere, the NAACP attempted to internationalize the issue of civil rights through the form of a petition to the United Nations. The petition claimed that the lack of democracy in the American South was a far greater threat to the American way of life than the actions of the Soviets and that the failure of democracy for African Americans was detrimental to all democracies of the world. According to Christopher A.

¹⁵⁸ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel I, The President's Committee on Civil Rights. 0098, 0521-0524

¹⁵⁹ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel I, The President's Committee on Civil Rights. 0245

¹⁶⁰ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President's Committee on Civil Rights. 0397, 0404

¹⁶¹ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President's Committee on Civil Rights. 0514

Swiggum, Truman was aware of both threats, but was not really alarmed that America's race problems would be internationalized, he knew that the Cold War would force civil rights into the international sphere. Nevertheless Truman did seek to control the method and timing. Swiggum claims that Truman thought that if his administration could deal with civil rights on its own terms, it would be able to convey a sense of control and willingness to make improvements. Swiggum seems to suggest that Truman was not alarmed by the Soviet threat or the fact that the civil rights issues would get out in the open as long as he could maintain control.¹⁶² The accuracy of Swiggum's statement can be questioned since Truman himself did admit his concern for America's leading position being at stake during a speech in 1947 before a joint session of Congress:" The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this Nation."¹⁶³

The assumption that Truman did realize there was a connection between civil rights and the Cold war also seems evident when examining his speech at Jefferson's home which he made on the 4th of July, 1947, seven months after Truman announced the organization of the civil rights committee. During this speech he emphasized the importance of securing human rights. He claimed that when the basic rights of men are not known and aren't secured, it will result in fear. He was not only talking about world affairs, but also referred to the human rights issues in his own country. Truman continued by addressing the problem of suspicion between countries and argued that when nations want to live in ignorance, no world peace will be achieved. Therefore, free and full exchange of information and ideas must be provided. To Truman, communication was the key for securing human rights all over the world and promised that the United States would have the leading role in this effort. He warned the public of the propaganda of *certain* countries and the danger it caused. As long as there are lies and suspicion, no peaceful world can be created, Truman argued. To end the suspicion, propaganda must be eliminated.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Christopher A. Swiggum, "W.E.B. Dubois, Harry S. Truman, Civil Rights and Communism: Conflicting Views on the Relation Between African American Rights and the Soviet Threat from 1946-1948" *A Journal of Undergraduate History* 4 (2002): 2.

¹⁶³ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 27.

¹⁶⁴ Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, "Independence Day Address Delivered at the Home of Thomas Jefferson," <http://trumanlibrary.org/audio/audio.htm> (accessed 23 March 20012).

Historian Mary Dudziak can be described as a ‘new’ revisionist. While the old revisionists emphasized political calculation, its new successor emphasizes geopolitical calculation. Dudziak believes that the main motivation for Truman’s dedication to civil rights, was the increasing threat of Soviet propaganda. She states that concern about the effect of U.S. race discrimination on Cold War foreign relations led the Truman administration to adopt a pro-civil rights posture as part of its international agenda to promote democracy and contain communism.

Her statement, that the main reason for establishing the Civil Rights Committee probably would have been Truman’s concern for soviet propaganda and the increasing international critique, is probably a partly correct conviction. The perception that the civil rights committee and their constructed report are inextricably linked to soviet threat, dates from the period it originated. Truman’s fear of losing America’s credibility against the world, was a very realistic point of view at the time and therefore it is obvious that he felt that action was needed. In fact, the threat and consequences of Soviet propaganda are supported by the motivations for immediate action offered by the civil rights committee, hereby confirming Truman’s initial concern. Since the report was solely constructed by the appointed members of the committee and was delivered to the president when the report was already finished; it would be correct to assume that the report could not have been subjected to Truman’s personal secret agenda; Truman himself had no influence in the outcome of the report. Based on the committee’s recommendations and based on logical reasoning, therefore it could be argued, that Truman’s decision for establishing a civil rights committee was probably a reasonable choice. The civil rights issues were becoming an obstacle to the international relations. Dudziak also argues that Truman’s sensibilities on race were rather mixed. In his own private sphere, away from the public, Truman continually tended to use racial terms when referring to African Americans. But at the same time, in a personal letter to an old friend he criticized his friend’s “antebellum proslavery outlook”.¹⁶⁵ She claims that it wasn’t necessarily Truman’s compassion for the African American struggle, he most of all wanted to secure America’s status of a democratic and peaceful country in order to contain communism. Harvard Sitkoff agrees with Dudziak and argues that only after a succession of horrible racial murders in the South had aroused the national conscience and provided much grist

¹⁶⁵ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 24.

for the Communist propaganda mill, did Truman condemn racist violence.¹⁶⁶ This statement is perhaps rather bluntly put. The negative overtone, concerning the presence of Truman's moral convictions, which are incorporated in these statements, are at least debatable. The fact that international reasons caused the government to respond does not necessarily mean that there were no moral motivations involved and is thus completely independent of Truman's personal feelings regarding the hardship of African Americans.

Voicing his perspective on the matter, Gardner states that Truman's foremost reason for establishing the Committee on Civil Rights was indeed the killing and intimidation of African American veterans and believes that Truman's own experiences in the army could be responsible for his reaction, which obviously does not relate to Dudziak's point of view. Gardner emphasizes that Truman himself also returned home as a U.S. army veteran after the First World War, receiving a warm and grateful welcome and felt troubled about the reverse situation African American veterans had to go through. Hereby Gardner thus argues that Truman's own personal feelings and experiences were responsible for his efforts in the civil rights debate.¹⁶⁷ This certainly could be a plausible assumption. As mentioned earlier; the years in the army caused Truman to develop an opinion on its own; they were based upon his own personal experiences instead of just adopting the generally accepted views of Southern America. Socializing more with African American people and witnessing the successes achieved by the African American troops let him to think about racial issues in a more progressive way. Being welcomed home as a young war hero by the nation and at the same time being aware of the opposite reaction towards African American soldiers, surely could have influenced the way Truman as president of the United States reacted to atrocities against World War II African American soldiers. Gardner also argues that Truman was appalled by these atrocities because it endangered the democracy he knew and loved and therefore realized that the situation really got out of hand and that something had to be done about it. African Americans had hoped for more civil rights, freedom and respect after they had returned to their own country, but instead they had to deal with far more discrimination and especially violence than they had before.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics" *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 4 (1971):4.

¹⁶⁷ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 17-21.

¹⁶⁸ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 14.

Liberal scholars McCoy and Ruetten, also both believe in the sincere goodwill of Truman and claim that the president's outspoken interest in civil rights certainly is convincing. The previous president Roosevelt had established the Fair Employment Practices Committee under extreme pressure and continued to say nothing and do little, while Truman in comparison was confronted with less pressure and often spoke out not only to favor tolerance and equal rights, but also to condemn those who opposed him.¹⁶⁹

Revisionist William Berman, on the other side of the divide, is not completely convinced when it comes to Truman's supposedly morally motivated actions. He states that Truman's efforts surely had its limits. Even though Truman's liberal rhetoric served to distinguish him from his immediate predecessor, because he never hesitated to pronounce his loyalty to the ideas of equality and that he undoubtedly wanted to see 'fair treatment' extended to all citizens, Berman argues that it was unlikely however that Truman wished to upset his working relations with the South, therefore causing him to be very cautious and not being totally devoted to the cause.¹⁷⁰ He also explains that as most of Truman's fellow white Missourians, Truman opposed social equality; but was also a political realist who acknowledged the fact that the interests of his Negro constituents needed protection. Both challenged and threatened by this issue, Truman responded to it in such a way as to obtain maximum political benefit for him and his party. Berman argues that personal wariness and political canniness characterized his *modus operandi* in handling an issue which could have resulted in a decisive division within the Democratic Party.¹⁷¹

5.3 Reaction to the Report and Critique on the President

Ten months after the establishment of the Civil Rights committee and consulting various manuscripts, organizations and individuals, the 178-page report was made public by the president, titled 'To Secure These Rights' as 'a declaration of our renewed faith in the American goal- the integrity of the individual human being, sustained by the moral consensus of the whole

¹⁶⁹ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 53-54.

¹⁷⁰ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 34,57.

¹⁷¹ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 237-239.

Nation, protected by a government based on equal freedom under just laws.’¹⁷² In the report, the committee argued that there were several reasons why they believed the federal government had to play a leading role in the efforts of the nation to improve civil rights records.

The first reason, according to the committee, was the fact that many of the most serious wrongs against individual rights are not being penalized properly. Too many individuals take the law into their own hands and the states are unable to eliminate them. Thus, federal safeguards are needed in order to guarantee freedom for all.

Second, the committee claimed that it was true that the conscience of the nation is colored by the moral sense of its local communities and that still, the American people have traditionally shown high national regard for civil rights, even though the record in many communities has been far from good. The committee urged local communities to be encouraged to set its own house in order and also argued that strong leadership was needed and that leadership was available in the national government. They also warned that it could not be afforded to delay action until the most backward community had learned to prize civil liberty and had taken adequate steps to safeguard the rights of every individual.

Third, the committee argued that their civil rights record has growing international implications and stressed that these cannot safely be disregarded by the government at the national level which is responsible for relations with the world. “The subject of human rights itself,” the committee pointed out, “has been made a major concern of the United Nations. It would therefore be ironical if in our own country the argument should prevail that safeguarding the rights of the individual is exclusive, or even the primary concern of local government. The world looks to the American national government for an explanation.”

Fourth, they argued that the steadily growing tendency of the American people to look to the national government for the protection of their civil rights was highly significant. But the committee also recognized the fact that the American people are loyal to the institutions of local self-government, and often distrust highly centralized power. Nevertheless, the committee pointed out that they have never hesitated to entrust power and responsibility to the national government when need for such a course of action has been demonstrated and the people themselves are convinced of that need.

¹⁷² Clarke D. Forsythe, “George W. Truman.” *Human Life Review* 30, no. 2 (2004): 3.

Finally, the committee stressed that the national government should assume leadership in the civil rights program because there is much in the field of civil rights that it is squarely responsible for its own direct dealings with millions of persons. According to the committee; the freedom of opinion and expression enjoyed by these people is in many ways dependent upon the attitudes and practices of the government.

The committee also tried to convince the nation of immediate action by providing another set of motivations. First they introduced the moral reason and explained that the pervasive gap between the aims and what is actually done, is creating a kind of moral dry rot which was eating away at the emotional and rational bases of democratic beliefs, hereby pointing out the difference between acting and believing. The second motivation the committee offered was the economic reason. The committee claimed that the loss of a huge, potential market for goods was a direct result of the economic discrimination which was practiced against many minority groups. They claimed that a sort of vicious circle was created; discrimination depressed the wages and income of minority groups, which curtailed their purchasing power and reduction of the market. While explaining the international reason, the committee argued that the position of America in the world was so vital to the future, that the smallest actions would have far-reaching effects. They claimed that America's foreign policy was designed to make the country an enormous, positive influence for peace and progress throughout the world. With this in mind, the committee urged, the domestic civil rights shortcomings were becoming a serious obstacle.¹⁷³

The report was divided into four main parts. The first part reviewed the American heritage, asserting that it was based on the premise that "all men are created equal as well as free". The committee also stated that there were four basic rights for Americans, namely "safety and security of the person", citizenship and its privileges", freedom of conscience and expression", and "equality of opportunity". The second section of the report dealt with the state of basic rights in America. It included a summary of the disparities between the promises of freedom and equality and their achievement while especially focusing on African Americans. The third part examined the federal government's responsibilities in securing people's rights. The committee argued that for the constitutional powers of the national government to be effective, they required specific legislative and executive action. The last part of the report, the committee's

¹⁷³ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel I, The President's Committee on Civil Rights. 0001-0045

thirty-five recommendations, constituted the most awaited section.¹⁷⁴ The committee urged, among other things, the creation of a full-fledged civil rights division in the Department of Justice, the establishment of a permanent commission on civil rights in the Executive Office of the President, enactment of a federal anti-lynching law, the ending of poll taxes as a voting prerequisite, elimination of segregation based on race, color, creed or national origin, the enactment of federal fair employment practices act and the outlawing of restrictive covenants.¹⁷⁵

In the report, the Civil Rights Committee stressed that: “people need more than protection of our rights against government; we need protection of our rights against private persons or groups, seeking to undermine them.” To emphasize this statement, the committee included the following statement expressed by Truman: “We cannot be content with just a civil liberties program which emphasizes only the need of protection against the possibility of tyranny by the government. We must keep moving forward, with new concepts of civil rights to safeguard our heritage. The extension of civil rights today means not protection of the people against the government, but protection of the people by the government.”¹⁷⁶

Proudly Truman had announced the committee’s report to the public and seemed to be satisfied with all the work the civil rights committee had done. Commissioned by Truman, Administrative Assistant to the President, David K. Niles wrote the following letter to all the members of the committee who had contributed to the creation of the report on civil rights: “The President has asked me to say to you that the report of the Presidents’ Civil Rights Committee meets all the hopes he had for it. He regards it as an important document and is confident that it will take its place among the documents on Freedom. He wants me to express to you his personal appreciation for your service with the committee and for your share in the preparation of its report.”¹⁷⁷

As expected, a harsh public reaction resulted from this report. Many, especially southerners, decided to write President Truman in order to express their concern, among those was a letter from Mrs. M. R. Baker who had seen a picture of the president’s multiracial

¹⁷⁴ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 86-87.

¹⁷⁵ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 60-61.

¹⁷⁶ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel I, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0001-0045

¹⁷⁷ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel IX, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 0290

committee: "Do you expect the South to vote for you after seeing this picture and reading what is under it? If you do away with segregation, allow negro children in white schools, churches etc. you might as well drop a few bombs on us and not prolong the agony".¹⁷⁸ Many correspondents warned the president of the political consequence. The Democratic chairman in Danville, Virginia stated: "I really believe that you have ruined the Democratic Party in the South".¹⁷⁹ Southern disapproval worsened after Truman implemented some changes which had been issued by the committee. Truman asked Congress to abolish poll taxes, make lynching a federal crime, curtail discrimination in employment and prohibit segregation in interstate commerce. The president also established a full civil rights division in the Justice Department and a Joint Congressional Committee on Civil Rights to report regularly to the president.

The changes that were made caused Southern segregationists to react in a violent way. To Truman, the situation became insecure because of the future elections and he wanted to be sure of his re-nomination. Although Truman had responded positively to the committee's report and had followed many of the committee's recommendations, now he felt rather anxious about the direction which he was heading. Sitkoff argues that Truman in an attempt to behold the Southern vote, he attempted to defuse the civil rights issue by remaining silent. He refused all attempts to get him to comment publicly on the race question. Sitkoff emphasizes Truman's silence by mentioning the fact that Truman voiced the civil rights matter just once during his seventy-three speeches while he was on his tour of eighteen states.¹⁸⁰

Some African Americans were pleased with the establishment of The Committee on Civil Rights. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* remarked: "The action of President Truman in naming a committee on civil rights is salutary and potentially of great value to the welfare of millions of Americans. Its very creation by the executive head of the nation's government is alone a constructive step."¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, others weren't very hopeful about Truman's efforts. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for instance did not have great expectations that a president who was born and raised in a former slave state would do very much

¹⁷⁸ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 62.

¹⁷⁹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 177.

¹⁸⁰ Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics" *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 4 (1971): 5-15.

¹⁸¹ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 57.

for African Americans, but still decided to invite Truman to speak to the closing session of the thirty-eight annual conference of the NAACP, to be held at the Lincoln Memorial. Realizing that the President's Committee on Civil Rights would issue its report in a few months, Truman decided to accept the invitation. He would become the first president of the United States to address the NAACP since its founding in 1909 and more importantly, he would become the first modern president to make an open and public commitment to civil rights. During his speech Truman told the audience that he was convinced that America had reached a turning point in the long history of the country's efforts to guarantee a freedom and equality to all citizens. He also stated that: "We must keep moving forward, with new concepts of civil rights to safeguard our heritage. The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people against the Government, but protection of the people by the Government."

5.4 Conclusion

As has been pointed out in this chapter, no consensus has been reached on why Truman decided to intervene in the American racial issues. Several factors and circumstances have been mentioned which all could have had an influence on Truman's decision making. Thus, perhaps it is best to argue that not just one factor, but rather a combination of all these factors led Truman to intervene on behalf of African Americans. The recurring reports of African American citizens, in particular black veterans, being lynched, could have aroused a feeling of injustice in the president's mind. Wanting to please the African American community in order to retain the black vote, could also have been a plausible reason. The necessity of safeguarding America against the soviet propaganda practices, aimed at exploiting America's racial problems and irregularities and protecting America's leading position in the world, also could have had a great influence on Truman's willingness to protect civil rights. Perhaps it would be correct to state that all these previously mentioned motives and causes are all equally responsible and important. It would not be all that illogical to believe, that a fusion of all conditions present at the time, would cause Truman to respond in the way that he did.

Chapter 6

Integration of the Armed Forces, 1948

Truman's subsequent decision to desegregate the U.S. army has been examined by many scholars. After the creation of the President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1946 and its final report *To Secure These Rights* in 1947, Truman's decision of 1948 perhaps was not all that unsuspected. However, many people at the time wondered whether his motives were sincere or if his actions were just being influenced by the upcoming elections. Even today scholars wonder if Truman's civil rights agenda, and the reintegrating of the armed forces in particular, was part of his political pragmatism or that he just felt he was doing 'the right thing'. This chapter's aim is to provide first of all a clear view of the racial issues that were present in the American army before Truman signed executive order 9981. After that, this chapter will focus on the nation's reaction towards Truman's decision. Finally, much attention will be paid to the opinions of contemporary scholars.

6.1 Racism in the American Army, Before the Decision

Henry L. Stimson, after being Secretary of State during Herbert Hoover's presidency and being appointed as Secretary of War by Franklin Roosevelt, continued his proceedings in office and started working under Truman. Although Roosevelt had shown sympathy for the African American struggle for civil rights and Truman as well, Stimson had strong negative feelings regarding minority groups. Therefore not surprisingly, he heavily opposed reintegration of the armed forces, claiming that African Americans were incapable of mastering modern weapons or that black soldiers were "too dumb to fight". In 1944, the NAACP and the *Pittsburgh Courier* started to call for Stimson's resignation.¹⁸² In July 1945, Stimson opposed a bill to desegregate the armed services because it was a matter "not susceptible to treatment by legislation" and one that would require radical changes in the army's basic organization. He also argued: "Whether

¹⁸² Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during the World War II* (Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2010), 41.

such a change would operate in the interest of producing an efficient military establishment is questionable at this time”.¹⁸³

However, in October 1945, the new Secretary of War, Robert P. Patterson, decided to establish a three-member board under Lieutenant Alvin C. Gillem, Jr., in order to analyze the operations of War Department policies over the period of the two world wars, to make recommendations for changes and construct a intensive policy on black manpower in the postwar period. In March the next year, the report, named the Gillem Report, was issued by the board for Utilization of Negro Manpower. According to this board, black manpower was poorly utilized in the Second World War and they recommended an advancement in black education, skills, crafts, and economic attainment; that remedial steps be taken to eliminate deficiencies of black soldiers in future wars; that more African American officers and enlisted personnel be added to the Army to provide cadres and leaders for future national emergencies and that female components also be added.¹⁸⁴

Several Executive Orders created before 1945, prohibited any form of discrimination in the army. In 1940 a civil service rule was amended to assert that: “No discrimination shall be exercised, threatened or promised by any person in the Executive Civil Service against or in favor of any applicant eligible or employee in the classified service because of race or his political or religious opinion or affiliation, except as may be authorized by law.” Executive Order 8802 of June 25, 1941 states: “...I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or Government, because of race, creed, color or national origin.” Executive Orders 9346, signed on May 27, 1943 and Executive Order 9664, signed on December 20, 1945, both authorized the continuation of the original policy and the work of the Fair Employment Practices Committee.

However, the reality seemed to be completely different in practice, which was something Truman apparently realized because he wrote a letter to his agency heads in December 1945: “It has come to my attention that a considerable number of loyal and qualified employees have been refused transfer and reemployment by employing agencies solely because of race and creed. This

¹⁸³ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 36.

¹⁸⁴ Philip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army. Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 244.

condition is a violation of civil service rules which have been issued by the President and in violation of existing law.”¹⁸⁵

The presence of racism in the U.S. army was something that had also been recognized by Truman’s committee on civil rights long before Truman made the decision definite in 1948. In a confidential memorandum from June 10, 1947, the committee emphasized the importance of solving the issue or at least improving the current conditions in the U.S army. “The armed forces are one of our major status symbols; the fact that members of minority groups successfully bear arms in defense of our country, alongside other citizens, serves as a major basis for their claim to equality elsewhere. For the minority groups themselves discrimination in the armed forces seems more immoral and painful as elsewhere. The notion that not even in the defense of their country can they fight, be wounded, or even killed on an equal basis with others, is infuriating.”¹⁸⁶

Prominent leaders of civil rights organizations, not surprisingly, also made their discontent concerning segregation in the army known. A Philip Randolph for instance argued: “Negro youth will have no alternative but to resist a law, the inevitable consequences of which would be to expose them to un-American brutality so familiar during the last war. So long as the American government attempts to sponsor any program of Jim Crow, its aspiration to moral leadership in the world will be seriously impaired.”

Many ordinary citizens shared the same point of view. Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Dagen wrote a letter to Truman, urging him to “use all the power you have to abolish undemocratic segregation of ANY kind” in the armed services. “We feel that one of the most effective, firm, and noticeable ways in which we can show the rest of the world we believe in democracy is to practice such a virtue at home.”¹⁸⁷

Interestingly, the official statements on recruitment and enlistment as received from the War, Navy and Treasury (Coast Guard) Departments, gathered by the civil rights committee’s research, show that the issue of racism is not always fully recognized. The Navy Department, for instance, noted: “No distinction is made between individuals wearing a naval uniform because of race or color. The Navy accepts no theory of racial differences in inborn ability but expects that

¹⁸⁵ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 208-220

¹⁸⁶ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 98-102

¹⁸⁷ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights. Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2000), 85.

every man wearing his uniform be trained and used in accordance with his maximum individual capacity determined on the basis of individual performances.” Obviously, the Navy claimed that it did not permit any racist behavior or that it circulated theories which emphasized racial differences. Furthermore, the statements made by the Navy also seem to indicate that certain improvements have been made. They claim that the Second World War caused several modifications of directives originally issued in the early stages of the war. “A directive regarding the assignment of black soldiers issued in the summer of 1943 stated that wherever possible, activities having large numbers of Negroes would become all- Negro. This type of segregation has since been repudiated by the Navy and a blanket non-segregation policy is now in effect.”¹⁸⁸

The following statement is worth mentioning as well: “It will be helpful to point out that past experience has proven the desirability of thoroughly indoctrinating white personnel prior to the arrival of Negroes. It has been the experience that when this is done and the white personnel thoroughly understand the Commanding Officer’s policy and what is expected of them, the chances of racial friction are materially lessened.”¹⁸⁹

The War Department also responded to the Committee’s call for information. According to the memorandum: “War Department policy has been and continues to be to train all individuals and units to such a degree of efficiency that they can effectively perform their mission, in war and in peace. Training policies do not differentiate between the races of troops; opportunities, requirements, and standards are the same for all.” The report also mentioned the fact that during the second world war, African American soldiers were assigned for service in each major branch of the army, combat as well as non-combat and that in 1940, black soldiers were given aviation mechanic and flight training for assignment to ‘Negro Aviation Units’. Whilst the presence of segregated units is acknowledged in the report, the so-called equal opportunities for African American soldiers are heavily being emphasized. Overall, the subject of racism in the U.S. army was ignored in the memorandum.

The War Department mentioned the indoctrination of white soldiers as well. Films as “The Negro Soldier”, “Teamwork” and “How Do We Look to Others” were shown in order to produce more tolerance within the army. Also the distribution of certain pamphlets in an effort to

¹⁸⁸ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 99

¹⁸⁹ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 98-102

provide information furthering unity and cooperation is mentioned. Pamphlets, such as “The Negro in America” and “Divided We Fall”, were also useful in order to get a discussion started, as the memorandum states: “they are designed to develop a better understanding through discussion of the Negro soldier”. “The Army Talks” series, is based on recommendations made by the Gillem Board. It deals with black manpower in the armed forces, African American platoons in composite rifle companies and the problems of minorities in the army.¹⁹⁰

These initiatives all seem like indications of goodwill of the army officials, however, it could also be argued, especially based upon the titles given to the indoctrination movies and pamphlets, that it perhaps only would lead to more misunderstanding among the white soldiers, since it in fact emphasizes the distinctions between races even more.

Despite his initial reticence towards integrating the U.S. army, Henry Stimson urged passage of the bill for unification of the armed services in a letter to Senator Gurney, written in May 1947. He expressed his approval by arguing that: “It is my considered opinion that the new Secretary of National Defense will have it in his power to integrate our armed forces as they have never been integrated before. In World War II we accomplished great things by cooperation between the two separate departments, but from that experience we learned that cooperation is not enough. This new bill provides the framework for the increased unity we need.”¹⁹¹ While approving the bill in his statement, Stimson avoided the racial element of the issue all together and only commented on the economical benefits of the maximum usage of all available manpower.

The President’s Committee on Civil Rights argued that the various statements indicated developments which African Americans found both encouraging and disappointing. They also stated that: “there seems to be a reasonable doubt, in any case, as to whether commanders of certain Southern army camps are putting into effect the latest policies set down by the War Department. Prewar practice and policy left decisions on segregation and other discriminatory patterns to the discretion of the local Commanding officer. Even though this policy has changed, a strong re-affirmation by the Commander-in-Chief and more aggressive implementation by the

¹⁹⁰ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 399-405

¹⁹¹ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 959-963

War Department itself might have a more positive effect.”¹⁹² The committee finally concluded in the report that the main problems confronting African Americans in the armed forces during the war were first of all severe limitations on their recruitment and promotion. Second, backlog of prejudice against them among white officers and men. Third, the official policy of segregating them during their service and finally, tension between African American soldiers and white civilians, particularly in Southern communities and in others where public transportation and recreation facilities were inadequate.¹⁹³

6.2 Reaction to Executive Order 9981

On July 26, 1948 Truman signed the Executive Order 9981, which also authorized the creation of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces to study and resolve the problem of discrimination and segregation in the armed forces in accordance with the president’s stated policy. Executive Order 9981 stated: “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.”¹⁹⁴ The next day, Truman addressed a special session of Congress, referring to civil rights as well: “Finally, I wish to urge upon the Congress the measures I recommended last February to protect and extend the basic civil rights of citizenship and human liberty. I believe they are necessary to carry out our American ideals of liberty and justice for all.”¹⁹⁵

Truman’s decision to desegregate the American Army resulted in much criticism throughout the country. Revisionist scholar William Berman emphasizes the fact that the suggestion that Truman only acted out of political pragmatism circulated to a great extent. Berman mentions that *The Baltimore Sun*, for instance, claimed that “the timing of President Truman’s executive orders against racial discrimination in civilian government employment and

¹⁹² Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 196-220

¹⁹³ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Reel II, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights. 227-236

¹⁹⁴ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 118.

¹⁹⁵ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 120-121.

in the armed forces strongly suggest that they were politically inspired.” The *Montgomery Advertiser* argued that “Truman’s army program is of more raw and repugnant character than that urged for the civilian provinces”. The *Shreveport Times* accused Truman of “grandstanding to try to get back some of the Roosevelt Negro vote which seems to be swinging to the Wallace-Communist Progressive banner in some areas.”¹⁹⁶

Liberal scholar Richard Dalfiume, not surprisingly, first focuses mainly on the positive comments and describes the impact of Truman’s message through the words of David K. Niles, advisor on minority matters: “Strong favorable language was the rule in the editorials. The President was described as the new champion of human freedom. The program as a whole was hailed as the strongest civil rights program ever put forth by any President. The message was referred to as the greatest freedom document since the Emancipation Proclamation. The language of the message was describes as Lincolnesque.” Dalfiume admits that negatives voices also were heard. He refers to the negative criticism by stating that: “This enthusiasm was only part of the story, because incensed Southerners immediately began to talk of revolt.” He also expresses the way some opponents responded to Truman’s initiatives to desegregate the army. For instance, he mentions the reaction of Senator Burnett R. Maybank of South Carolina who claimed that: “the wars of this country have been won by white soldiers and I defy any member to challenge this statement”. Another comment is made by Senator Allen Ellender of Louisiana who proclaimed that the “Negro” was inherently inferior, and this was the reason he had proven to be a poor soldier in combat. Senator Russell of Georgia repeated these ideas, and said there was no doubt in his mind that the President was determined to end segregation in the armed forces. Secretary Royall and Army Chief of Staff Bradley made it clear that the controversy over the new draft law had not changed their minds. Segregation would continue to be Army policy.¹⁹⁷ Dalfiume continues by stating that the black press’ immediate reaction to the order was critical. Many African American newspapers supposedly felt that the language of the executive order was not strong enough.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 118-119.

¹⁹⁷ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 158-167.

¹⁹⁸ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 173.

Not only newspapers spread these critical messages, even certain individuals felt it necessary to inform the president. For instance, Norman Thomas, an American Presbyterian minister, wrote Truman on 29 July 1948, arguing that: “neither your executive order nor the plank in your party platform specifically mentions segregation” and he urges Truman to take a stand.¹⁹⁹

Dalfiume however claims that the African American criticism and skepticism about the motives behind Truman’s actions melted away when with the Dixiecrat revolt from the Democratic Party. Many African Americans, as Dalfiume argues, came to believe that their grievances against Truman were minor and that he merited their support. *The Crisis*, for example, published: “The formation of the Dixiecrat Party and its bitter attacks upon the President indicate that Truman’s pronouncements on civil rights are regarded as something more than barn-storming slogans”.²⁰⁰

Liberal scholars Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten both mention the division of the public reaction to the president’s order on military discrimination. According to them, African Americans were certainly not unanimous. They also mention the fact that many had observed that the word “segregation” did not appear in the presidential order. However, McCoy and Ruetten claim that the final substantial black support for Truman was no mystery and that aside from the obvious propaganda value of his Committee on Civil Rights, Truman’s special message to Congress of February 2, the civil rights plank in the Democratic platform and the issuance of executive order 9981, Truman had other things working for him as well. For instance, Truman benefited from the memory of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. According to McCoy and Ruetten, Truman opponent Henry Wallace had become alienated from a growing number of African Americans and while white southerners rebelled out of fear that the president really “meant it,” African Americans were finally persuaded to take the Missourian at his word.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Official File. 530

²⁰⁰ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 174.

²⁰¹ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 130, 131, 144, 146.

6.3 Truman & Executive Order 9981, 1948

Over the years, many historians have wondered which motives are responsible for Truman's decision to intervene in the racial issues in the American army. Some scholars emphasize external factors, for example pressure from certain important figures, while others argue that timing was the foremost reason, namely Truman's attempt to placate the African American community in order to win the black vote during the upcoming elections.

Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten, who both can be placed on the liberal side of the divide, argue that Truman became the prime educator for the need to secure the rights and dignity of all citizens and that he strove to make opportunity and treatment more nearly equal for minorities in the civil service and the armed forces. They emphasize the moral reason behind Truman's decision making process by claiming that Truman was a man intent upon further securing constitutional guarantees to all Americans, that he was a man who wanted to do, as he often said himself, "the right thing".²⁰²

According to liberal scholar Richard Dalfiume, Truman began to realize that the separate but equal framework was a contradiction and that this change in attitude by Truman and by the government is made more remarkable because the majority of whites opposed any alteration in the racial *status quo*. Dalfiume argues that the Truman administration marked a rapid change away from the federal government's policy of supporting or condoning segregation. Furthermore, he states that Truman's personal experiences in the U.S. Armed forces during the First World War are, to some degree, also responsible for wanting to desegregate the army. As mentioned earlier, young Harry had not interacted much with African Americans during his childhood. This changed during the war, while he served alongside the African American 92nd Division. Although this division performed poorly in combat, the 93rd Division did very well. Truman came to believe that bad performances were not resulting from a lack of ability but were the consequences of the absence of good leadership. Therefore, Dalfiume believes that Truman's involvement in civil rights was truly sincere and important. He emphasizes that Truman always had been sympathetic to racial conflicts and argues that Truman was really surprised, in a positive way, when he heard about the success of the 93rd Division.²⁰³

²⁰² Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 349.

²⁰³ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 136.

Some believe on the other hand, that Truman's foremost reason for eliminating segregation in the army was his aim to please African Americans. According to these revisionist scholars; moral considerations were completely absent, Truman's main goal was to win the black vote in order to win from Henry Wallace during the 1948 election. One of those scholars is William Berman, who claims that Truman in early September was solidifying his support among black voters and that Truman was reaping the benefits that accrued from the release of his executive orders. Berman also mentions the fact that Truman chose to ignore the issue of civil rights during his campaign swing through Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri, supposedly because the democratic leaders in those states felt that the subject was "too hot". Berman continues by explaining that during the last few weeks of the campaign, Truman visited the industrial states in the North and East, again muted the civil rights issue.

However, he toured the black slums of Philadelphia as well and exclaimed: "Dangerous men, who are trying to win followers for their war on democracy, are attacking Catholics, Jews and Negroes and other minority races and religions. We must do everything we can to protect our democratic principles against those who foment racial and religious prejudice." According to Berman, Truman's drive to win the black vote brought him to Harlem. While standing in front of 65,000 people, Truman first appraised his civil rights committee for all the work they had done and then he continued to outline his administration's record on civil rights.²⁰⁴

Based on Berman's clear description, it could be argued that Truman was well aware of the fact that discussing the civil rights issue in the Southern States would not cause him to receive more votes and that he should tell the southern public what they needed to hear while avoiding the civil rights issue. But in order to win the black vote, Truman knew that it was necessary to travel to places where former presidents of the United States had not been before in order to proclaim future changes and improvements regarding civil rights to the African American public.

Despite the fact that scholar Richard Dalfiume can be defined as a liberal historian, thus emphasizing Truman's moral considerations, he also stresses Truman's political pragmatism. Based on a memorandum from Donald S. Dawson to Truman, Dalfiume concludes that "President Truman's executive order on equality of treatment and opportunity in the military,

²⁰⁴ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 120-127.

together with the rest of his civil rights program, was instrumental in keeping the Negro vote a part of the Democratic Coalition”.²⁰⁵

Donald McCoy and Richard Ruetten also mention the political motives for intervening in civil rights. According to them: “The administration’s stand on civil rights also strengthened it in vying for liberal and minority-group backing in Truman’s bid for nomination and election in 1948”. However, they also stress the fact, that even though Truman was a president who increasingly turned to advisers who were sympathetic to the quest for equal rights and opportunities, other advisers, who were keenly aware of political advantages, had a great influence on Truman as well.²⁰⁶ It almost seems as if both scholars are convinced that moral beliefs are still the main reason for Truman to intervene in civil rights and that some of his advisers are to blame for any political considerations or bad influences.

That Truman indeed was interested in the statistics of the black vote and that his civil rights agenda had a positive effect on the black vote, becomes clear in the following memorandum created by Philleo Nash, special assistant for minority affairs. On November 6, 1948, Nash wrote to Truman: “I am listing some figures on the Negro Vote in case you should want some light reading on your vacation.” He continued by informing the president that: “Over the country as a whole, your majority in the Negro districts is the highest ever. The average will be above 80%.” According to Nash, in Philadelphia nine out of ten voters voted for Truman, in Illinois the average of all black districts in the state was 78,8% for Truman and in Harlem Truman received 65% of the combined vote and elsewhere in New York up to 80%. Nash also included in the memorandum the actual Harlem figures which showed that Truman indeed had received 65% with a president’s ratio of 1,5 to 1, while Dewey got 19% with a ratio of 3,5 to 1 and finally Wallace, who received 16% with a ratio of 4 to 1.²⁰⁷

Louis Lautier, White House correspondent for the National Negro Publishers Association also provided Truman late 1948 with information regarding the black vote. According to Lautier’s summary, in the Second, Third and Fifteenth Congressional Districts in Detroit, the principal African American Districts, Democratic candidates were decisively successful over their opposition. Lautier mentions the election of four African Americans to the Missouri

²⁰⁵ Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 174.

²⁰⁶ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 349.

²⁰⁷ Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Official File. 493.

Legislature in Kansas City and Saint Louis and he also points out that the African American vote in New York City was decisively pro-Democratic and anti-Dewey.²⁰⁸

A more recent statement, made by Colin Powell, suggests a combination of the two factors. Powell's opinion perhaps provides the most moderate and maybe even the most realistic interpretation. His conviction that a combination of all factors are responsible for Truman's decision to desegregate the U.S. Armed forces, seems as a correct approach, because it does not compels anyone to chose one specific direction and allows to retain an open mind. Powell first of all believes that Truman was deeply moved in a very human and personal way by some of the things that happened after the war. Powell argues that despite Truman's Southern background, he did believe to the depth of his heart that all citizens were entitled to their constitutional rights, hereby referring to the 1948 civil rights message to Congress. Truman then said: "We cannot be satisfied until all our people have equal opportunities for jobs, for homes, for education, for health, and for political expression, and until all our people have equal protection under the law. There is a serious gap between our ideals and some of our practices. This gap must be closed." Then Powell emphasizes that Truman saw the political pragmatism of moving forward on a strong civil rights agenda. His opponent Henry Wallace was drawing away liberal supporters because his Republican Party was promoting a strong civil rights platform. Truman needed that as well and he also needed the African American vote; African American political power was making a difference in America. Powell thus stresses that: "Principle, pressure, pragmatism, politics, all came to bear and all caused Truman to sign Executive Order 9981 on 26 July 1948".²⁰⁹

6.4 Conclusion

Again it can be said that Truman's intervention in civil rights raises certain questions. The fact that Truman signed Executive Order 9981 right before the presidential elections certainly contributed to people's skepticism greatly. Pleasing the African American community by proposing an extensive civil rights agenda and in this specific case; signing Executive Order 9981, would obviously result in an increase of black votes during the elections.

²⁰⁸ Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, Papers of Harry Truman. Official File. 496-498

²⁰⁹ Colin Powell, "Truman, Desegregation of the Armed Forces, and a Kid from the South Bronx," in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 118-119.

While of course it could be argued that these actions should be defined solely as political pragmatism, it could also be claimed that although Truman wanted to gain as many votes as he could get in the end, he at the same time truly believed in his civil rights agenda because he was convinced that everybody deserved the same opportunities and treatment, a conviction which perhaps is motivated by his own personal experiences as a soldier during World War I.

Chapter 7

The Fair Deal

“Every segment of our population, and every individual, has a right to expect from his government a fair deal”. With these words, Truman proposed his economic and social reform agenda to the nation after the elections early January, 1949.²¹⁰ The Fair Deal, however, had a previous incarnation, namely in September 1945. After the Japanese surrender and the ending of the Second World War, Truman wrote a message of sixteen thousand words to Congress, containing twenty-one points of possible legislation.²¹¹

While African Americans were not convinced about Truman genuineness to the cause of civil rights when he was first appointed president, they were however positively surprised to hear about certain decisions Truman had made. Many started to wonder if Truman could perhaps be a trustful ally to the African American community and if he would continue Franklin Delano’s Roosevelt’s civil rights agenda, which would make him the right successor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt after all.

Some scholars do believe that Truman, most of all, wanted to extent Roosevelt’s New Deal. There are those who believe that Truman was a New Dealer from the start; motivated by his own moral convictions. Others emphasize the influence and decisiveness of Truman’s own personal experiences. On the other hand, some scholars are doubtful about Truman’s dedication towards the Fair Deal and its civil rights agenda. They critique the president for only uttering words, while no concrete action was noticeable. This chapter will intensively examine Truman’s Fair Deal and its civil rights agenda, its origins and the criticism that resulted from it, then and now.

²¹⁰ Our White House, “The Presidential Timeline: Nothing but the Facts. Harry S. Truman,” <http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/prespgs/hstruman.html> (accessed, 11 April 2012).

²¹¹ Our White House, “The Presidential Timeline: Nothing but the Facts. Harry S. Truman,” <http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/prespgs/hstruman.html> (accessed, 11 April 2012).

7.1 Its Origins

In September 1945, Truman advocated in his twenty-one points message, Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights. To meet the fear of depression, he called for extension and enlargement of unemployment benefits; continuance of the federally operated U.S. Employment Service to facilitate the placement of war workers in new jobs; continued price and rent controls to avoid the boom-and-bust cycle which had occurred after World War I; "an immediate and substantial upward revision" of the minimum wage to help maintain purchasing power; passage of full employment legislation; and a vast program of public development similar to that outlined during the war by Hansen and Wallace, namely: highways, airports, hospitals, regional development authorities. He also urged "broad and comprehensive housing legislation," government aid for small business, the continuation of agricultural price supports, and a stronger system of crop insurance. Truman also promised plans for a national health program and expansion of the social security system.²¹²

Unfortunately, most of the proposals were being neglected for years. Looking back on Truman's initial program, many scholars agree that the list of points was simply too long.²¹³ A GOP Congressman from Tennessee denounced the president's message as a "fly-specked dish of New Deal hash," while the minority leader in the House, Joseph Martin, expostulated: "Now, nobody should have any more doubt. Not even President Roosevelt ever asked so much at one sitting. It is just a case of out-New Dealing the New Deal."²¹⁴

In his *Memoirs* Truman stated that he was a New Dealer from the start and continued by arguing: "In fact, I had been a New Dealer back in Jackson County". Historian Alonzo Hamby is doubtful about Truman being a New Dealer in any meaningful sense and claims that although Truman was a "progressive" county judge; his progressivism does not appear to have gone beyond honesty, efficiency, interest in road building and a general belief in coordinated urban growth. He voted for the party, not for an ideology.²¹⁵

²¹² Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 61-62

²¹³ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Missouri: University of Missouri, 1994), 287-288.

²¹⁴ William E. Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR. From Harry Truman to Barack Obama* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 9.

²¹⁵ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 42.

On the other hand, historian Michael Dukakis argues that Truman's own personal experiences are responsible for the proposed health plan. According to Dukakis, the first factor which influenced Truman in his decision making is the First World War. Truman was proud of his service in World War I, but at the same time he was not proud of the fact that many who volunteered for his unit could not pass their physical. Also he supposedly was not proud of the fact that thirty percent of the men called up for duty in the armed forces were unfit for service. The second factor Dukakis mentions, is Truman's experience in county government in the 1920s and 1930s when he was working as a county commissioner in Jackson County, Missouri. On May 1948, Truman gave a speech to the National Health Assembly: "It was my duty...to pass, with the other two judges, on the sanity of the people who would come before the judges and court, who would be tried for mental cases. Those cases ran over an eight year period while I was in the court. A most horrifying situation. It was our duty to send those people to the State hospitals for care. That did not include the people who were in private institutions. I became aware of what that situation means in a community and what it means to future generations." Truman continued by saying: "I found out with that experience that the people at the indigent bottom of the scale and the people at the top of the scale were the only ones who can afford adequate hospital care and medical care." According to Dudakis, it was the people in the middle that Truman cared about.²¹⁶

Historian Jaap Kooijman states that Truman remained ambiguous about several issues, for instance, the national health insurance, just as president Roosevelt had done before him. Kooijman, nevertheless, concludes by arguing that Truman supported the national health insurance during the campaigns for the presidential and congressional elections, but decided to keep a low profile on the issue once a national health insurance bill was being considered in Congress. One of Truman's advisors, John R. Steelman, later recalled that Truman knew that his national health insurance plan would not pass, but that "he wanted to scare these doctors and make them do something. So he scared the living light out of them by coming out more strongly than he ever hoped to get."²¹⁷

Many believe that Truman was not capable of motivating the masses. Hamby, for instance, argues that Truman did not provide the liberals any inspiration, excitement, identity or

²¹⁶ Michael Dukakis, "Truman's Conception of Economic Rights as Civil Rights," in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 129-130.

²¹⁷ Jaap Kooijman. *And the Pursuit of National Health: The Incremental Strategy Toward National Health Insurance in the United States of America* (Amsterdam, 1999), 104.

unity, something that Roosevelt certainly had done, even during the years of domestic deadlock. According to Hamby, Truman stumbled from one problem to another.²¹⁸ Gary A. Donaldson agrees and claims that Truman lacked FDR's ability as a political leader to keep people in line and failed in his attempt to ride the fence between southern conservatives and northern liberals.²¹⁹

7.2 Fair Deal and Civil Rights

It seems as if, to Truman, his Fair Deal was inextricably linked to civil rights. Not only did Truman call for better education and housing via his sixteen-thousand-word message to Congress, he also spelled out his strong and continued support for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). On June 25, 1941, Roosevelt had established Executive Order 8802, creating the FEPC, in response to an intense lobbying campaign led by A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Randolph had threatened to organize a march down Pennsylvania Avenue if the Roosevelt administration decided not to take a stand against discrimination practices in the defense program. Therefore, the FEPC was established in order to end discrimination in industries vital to war production.²²⁰

Less than a month after becoming the new president, Truman had a meeting with the NAACP executive director, Walter White, about the violence being suffered by African Americans. This meeting was symbolically important to African Americans who had felt a kinship with President Roosevelt.²²¹

After just two months in office, Truman surprised many when he wrote a public letter to the Illinois congressman Adolph J. Sabbath asking him, as chairman of the House Rules Committee, to restore funds to the FEPC and again when Truman in his twenty-one-point "bombshell" message to Congress of September 6, 1945, incorporated a recommendation for enactment of a permanent FEPC. He also followed up his earlier appointment of a prominent

²¹⁸ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 53-54.

²¹⁹ Gary A. Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 114.

²²⁰ Andrew Edmund Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-46* (Green Bay: University of Wisconsin, 2000), 1.

²²¹ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 12.

black man, Ralph Bunche, to the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission by naming William Hastie governor of the Virgin Islands, the first of his race to hold that post.²²²

Truman's recommendations concerning a permanent FEPC unfortunately were not received in a positive way. Again, in 1946, Truman emphasized its necessity. In a letter to A. Philip Randolph, Truman reaffirmed his commitment: "I want you to know, that I regard the FEPC legislation as an integral part of my re-conversion program and shall contribute my efforts to give the Congress a change to vote on it."²²³

According to historians Ruetten and McCoy, the year 1946 was a turning point in the civil rights process, if only because of a conjunction of pressure from several civil rights organizations with rising White House determination to prevent a reoccurrence of the racial violence and intolerance that had plagued the post-World War I period. Both historians also emphasize the importance of the willingness of public opinion for some action on civil rights. All of these factors eventually led Truman to create the President's Committee on Civil Rights by Executive Order, on 5 December 1946.²²⁴

A couple of months after this establishment, Truman agreed to speak to the NAACP and its supporters, they had gathered in huge numbers in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. In a letter to his sister, Truman wrote: "I've got to make a speech to the Society for the Advancement of Colored People tomorrow, and I wish I didn't have to make it. Mamma won't like what I say because I wind up by quoting Old Abe. But I believe what I say and I'm hopeful we may implement it."

Truman's message to his sister perhaps reads as a contradiction. The first part of the letter seems to indicate that Truman feels as if he almost is forced to do something. The way he prepares his sister for the things he is about to say the next day and the fact that he acknowledges, that he probably will "wind up by quoting 'Old Abe'", sounds rather reluctant and perhaps even a bit cynical. However, the second part of the letter sounds more like it had been written by a man who is convinced that he will do the right thing, someone who is committed to a certain cause.

In a way, the letter seems to indicate that Truman never overcame the prejudices of his Missouri upbringing, but on the other hand it shows that Truman understood that as president of

²²²William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 163-164.

²²³William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 32.

²²⁴Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 345.

the United States he had to speak for the nation. According to Raymond Frey, Truman wrote the letter partly to reassure himself that he was doing right, and that as president he had to say what he would say to the NAACP the next day.²²⁵

Whatever the truth may be, during his speech the next day, Truman did make some groundbreaking statements. “It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point... in our country’s efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens. We can longer afford the luxury of a leisurely attack upon prejudice and discrimination. We cannot, any longer, await the growth of a will to action in the slowest State or the most backward community. Our National Government must show the way.”²²⁶

On 26 July 1948, Truman issued Executive Order 9980, ordering that “all personnel actions taken by Federal appointing officers shall be based solely on merit and fitness; and such officers are authorized and directed to take appropriate steps to insure that in all such actions there shall be no discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin.” Executive Order 9981 stated, “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” Hechler emphasizes Truman’s sincerity and perseverance by referring to the following statement made by Truman in his State of the Union Address of 5 January 1949: “The civil rights proposals I made to the 80th Congress, I now repeat to the 81st Congress.”²²⁷

According to Ruetten and McCoy, Truman became, during his presidency and his Fair Deal agenda, the prime educator for the need to secure the rights and dignity of all citizens and they provide an overview of Truman’s efforts to improve the lives of African Americans. First of all, Truman worked for enactment of a cohesive civil rights program and to block legislation that would jeopardize minority interest. As has been mentioned earlier, he made occasional appointments of minority-group members to public offices and sought to heighten self-government in America’s territories. Because of Truman, the Justice Department came to accept the argument that segregation was a pattern that fostered and perpetuated discrimination. The

²²⁵ Raymond Frey, “Truman’s Speech to the NAACP, 29 June 1947,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 93-95.

²²⁶ Michael R. Gardner, “Civil Rights as a Moral Imperative,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 21.

²²⁷ Ken Hechler, “Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 58-59.

Supreme Court responded in a series of cases that withdrew the legal bases for restrictive covenants, unequal school facilities, and segregated railway dining cars. Both historians claim that these developments, together with advances in social-security benefits, minimum-wage levels, and health programs, constituted a substantial step forward.²²⁸

7.3 Fair Deal and its Criticism

Although the FEPC did in fact little to aid African Americans, many southern political leaders wanted it abolished as soon as the war ended. Therefore they were not too thrilled when Truman stated bluntly: “To abandon at this time the fundamental principle upon which the Fair Employment Practice Committee was established is unthinkable. Discrimination in the matter of employment against properly qualified persons because of their race, creed, or color is not only un-American in nature, but will lead eventually to industrial strife and unrest.”²²⁹ As historian Ken Hechler explains: by calling attention to the committee’s wartime effectiveness in helping to remove or prevent “many of the injustices based upon considerations of race, religion, and color,” he requested the Congress to take action “to continue this American ideal.”²³⁰ Much criticism resulted from Truman’s proposal to establish a permanent FEPC. The southern press even insisted that the proposal be rejected at the cost of defeating all the rest of his program. According to Harold LeClaire Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, Truman was losing patience with his southern critics. In November, 1945, Ickes wrote in his diary that Truman had said that: “he wished that there might be organized a liberal party in this country so that the Southern Democrats could go where they belonged into the conservative Republican Party.”²³¹

Black voters applauded Truman for his public commitment to a permanent FEPC and they also appreciated it when Truman decided, in October 1945, to nominate a black American attorney from Chicago to the United States Customs Court. Such an appointment was unprecedented in 1945.²³²

²²⁸ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 347, 348.

²²⁹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 163.

²³⁰ Ken Hechler, “Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 52.

²³¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Lafayette: Louisiana University Press, 2005), 164.

²³² Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 12.

Although Hamby argues that he is not convinced whether Truman was a New Dealer from the start or not, he is however convinced that Truman was sincere in his actions when it comes to the civil rights aspect of the Fair Deal program. According to Hamby, Truman sincerely cared about minority rights. When he heard about the instances of violence and discrimination against Japanese Americans, Truman supposedly replied with what appears to have been genuine indignation: “This disgraceful conduct almost makes you believe that a lot of our Americans have a streak of Nazi in them.” A reaction which resembles the one when Truman was told about the atrocities committed against African American veterans. Nevertheless, Hamby also admits that Truman, in the early days of his presidency, could have paid more attention to the minority problems when it was necessary to respond, but he also realizes that Truman was not the only one who believed that economic reconversion was the most important issue at the time, most liberals presumably felt that way.²³³

In reaction to the criticism towards Truman and his dedication to civil rights, Hechler obviously feels the need to defend Truman. As Hechler points out, some critics have charged that Truman failed to enforce the broad goals regarding jobs, housing, education, health care and that he defined “equal opportunity” too narrowly as only the right to vote. But Hechler responds by arguing that to Truman, the broad goals of good jobs, good housing, good education, and good health care were also civil rights goals and that according to Truman, they were the essence and core of what he labeled the Fair Deal. He continues by urging that the constitutional structure of American government and the political reality of the seniority system, which insured that long-serving segregationist members of the House and Senate chaired almost all the congressional committees, should be taken into consideration. Hereby, Hechler emphasizes to what extent the power of a president is limited, due to the importance of Congress approval.

He also points out that there were no race riots or sit-ins during the early Truman years, therefore he argues that Truman did not act because of political pressure.²³⁴ The conviction, voiced by Hechler, that Truman did not react due to political pressures certainly is debatable. Organized activism, such as marches and boycotts, which occurred in the 1960’s, obviously was absent during the first years of the Truman presidency, however this does not mean that there

²³³ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 65.

²³⁴ Ken Hechler, “Truman Laid the Foundation for the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2007), 56-57.

existed no other political influences whatsoever which could have caused a president to react. As has been mentioned earlier, the mindset of African Americans had changed during and after the war, racism and violence increased heavily during these years. It would not sound as a surprise when these factors caused Truman to incorporate a civil rights legislation into his Fair Deal agenda.

Historian Michael R. Gardner states that Truman indeed was aware that civil rights reform was in fact a non-issue at the moment. However, he emphasizes to what extent Truman felt devoted to the cause and compares him to Roosevelt: “He knew, even without the violent race riots of the 1960’s that would haunt his successors in the White House, that the federal government had to act promptly and aggressively to address the country’s rampant racism. In this regard, Truman was different from his predecessor, Roosevelt, and from later presidents- Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson; Truman did not need political pressure to do what he felt was morally right and constitutionally mandated for black Americans.”²³⁵ Gardner, thus, also emphasizes Truman’s moral convictions instead of politically inspired motivations. But even though he points out this lack of political pressure, he does, in contrast with Hechler, acknowledge the shift in attitude of the African American community and the rise of lynching practices in the early and mid 1940’s. Therefore it is perhaps correct to state that Gardner’s choice of words is misleading, while he in fact is talking of political pressure, he just is not referring to the political pressure which originated in the sixties.

Revisionist scholar William C. Berman offers a rather critical examination of Truman’s commitment to the continuation of the FEPC. While Truman received much liberal applause, Berman wonders if Truman actually deserved it and offers the following hypothesis made by Louis Ruchames, a historian of FEPC: “In passing, it may be mentioned that although the President’s letter was acclaimed as an important contribution to the struggle for an FEPC appropriation and for the creation of a permanent FEPC, the hosannas which greeted it were not entirely merited. Although it did urge passage of permanent FEPC legislation, it made no request for an appropriation for the existing FEPC which was then fighting for its life. One wonders whether it was the President’s intention to speak out on behalf of a bill which had little chance of passing and at the same time do nothing to secure the funds for the existing FEPC, which would

²³⁵ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press: 2002), 12.

have been materially aided by his efforts. Was it perhaps an attempt to curry favor with liberal groups in and out of Congress while at the same time not antagonizing those who opposed FEPC?" Berman subsequently states that this hypothesis points up Truman's dilemma vis-à-vis FEPC in the last half of 1945. According to him, Truman was hoping to avoid conflict and preferred the politics of stalemate, hereby choosing to dodge all firm commitments that might have taken him off dead center. Truman supposedly would do nothing to upset the precarious political equilibrium which had helped to elevate him to the White House. In short, Berman is convinced that Truman was reluctant to embrace a political cause that might damage him, but when it was politically expedient to act, he did so.²³⁶

Liberal historians Richard T. Ruetten and Donald R McCoy voice a completely different opinion on Truman's civil rights efforts. They speak of him in an almost laudatory way: "It is too pat to say that he was cadging votes, or that he was influenced by his rural stars-and-bars background, urban bossism, or New Deal idealism. Truman was a complex of ideas and impulses, prejudices and principles. Most important was that he was an honest man who was proud of his record and intended to do the best he could constitutionally by all men. He was loyal to those who helped him, although he did not shut out those who criticized him, and he abhorred having anyone get kicked around. He was no snob: he talked to anyone regardless of background, unless they were insulting. Truman was the kind of man who might accommodate the rising tide of black strength and aspirations."²³⁷

Not surprisingly, both historians are convinced that the failure of the continuous efforts to maintain the FEPC and its eventual collapse is not to blame on Truman. They emphasize Truman's devotion to the issue heavily and while doing so, they underscore the unwillingness of Congress: "Regardless of presidential messages and mass meetings, the House and Senate bills for a statutory FEPC were dead." They continue by stating, that: "If anything, by putting himself publicly on record for a permanent FEPC and for funds for the existing agency, the new president had gone well beyond his predecessor. As would be frequently the case on controversial issues during Truman's administration, the White House had neither enough public or congressional support nor other weapons at hand to win. It is doubtful whether Roosevelt, with his charm and

²³⁶ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 26-27.

²³⁷ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 16.

cunning, could have advanced further against the strong tide of congressional opposition than did Truman by relying on forthrightness.”²³⁸

7.4 Conclusion

Although the Fair Deal was in the end not as successful as Truman probably had hoped beforehand, it was responsible for certain changes, or at least it showed many signs of goodwill. During the first months of being the new president, Truman made several attempts to please the African American community, for instance his effort to maintain an open communication with prominent African American leaders or the fact that he kept on requesting a continuation of the FEPC. Of course, the establishment of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and his attempt to reintegrate the U.S. armed forces are good examples of Truman’s Fair Deal and its civil rights agenda. However, the Fair Deal was subjected to much criticism. Many assumed that the Fair Deal was a continuation of the New Deal, or perhaps even a renewed and improved version of the New Deal, which ultimately caused people to compare Truman with Roosevelt even more; an equation that Truman generally could not win.

Not only during the 1940’s, opinions on Truman’s civil rights agenda were heavily divided. Even today, no consensus has been reached. As has been mentioned in this chapter, some believe Truman to be a dedicated and convincing civil rights champion; somebody who believed what was right and knew what action was needed without the pressure of sit-ins or marches. Others describe Truman as a man who in a calculative way tried to please everyone in order to win as many votes as he could get. Therefore promising change to African Americans without being personally attached to the cause.

²³⁸ Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response. Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 22-24.

Conclusion

As illustrated in this research, no consensus has been reached on why Truman decided to intervene in civil rights. Liberals claim that Truman actions are sincere and were motivated by moral convictions. They focus especially on his personal principles and analyze Truman from his own time perspective. Revisionists, however, emphasize the political motives and interpret the situation from a late 1960's perspective. A couple years later both sides were influenced by new perspectives which arose because of the availability of Truman's personal writings and also because of certain events. Liberals started to depict Truman as a mythic individual, while revisionists started to emphasize geopolitical calculation.

Nevertheless, Truman made several attempts to please the African American community, for instance his effort to maintain an open communication with prominent African American leaders or the fact that he kept on requesting a continuation of the FEPC. Two other initiatives, namely, the establishment of the President's Committee on Civil Rights and his attempt to reintegrate the U.S. armed forces are good examples of Truman's Fair Deal and its civil rights agenda. On December 5, 1946, Truman informed the nation that a Committee on Civil Rights was to be organized in order to examine the situation concerning civil rights in the United States. To provide a realistic view on racial issues, this committee would start an intensive investigation on the presence of inadequacies in the lives of minority groups, especially those of African Americans.

Ten months after the establishment of the Civil Rights committee and consulting various manuscripts, organizations and individuals, the 178-page report was made public by the president, titled 'To Secure These Rights'. In the report, the committee claimed that there were several reasons why they were convinced that the federal government should play a leading role in the efforts of the nation to improve civil rights records. Then, on July 26, 1948 Truman signed the Executive Order 9981, which also authorized the creation of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces to study and resolve the problem of discrimination and segregation in the armed forces in accordance with the president's stated policy.

Truman's interference in civil rights during his presidency still raises questions among historians. What were the underlying motives for establishing the President's Committee on Civil

Rights or the signing of Executive Order 9981? Obviously, a man who grew up in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, and who lived in an environment where African Americans were segregated from the white community, does not seem to be a likely champion for civil rights. Truman's family, due to their own personal experiences during the civil war, also made sure that he would realize that white people were supposed to be superior to black people, which ultimately resulted in Truman becoming more or less a racist. Already at a very young age he did not hesitate to use racist language, something he continued to do his whole life, which certainly affects Truman's credibility. However, during World War I, for the first time in his life, Truman started to consort with African Americans. These years had a profound impact on Truman, not only because he learned how to be responsible or how to control his division, but for the first time in his life he was able to form his own opinion on racial issues which were based upon his own experiences.

Once appointed as the new president of the United States, Truman, had to deal with a grieving African American community and obviously had to determine which approach would ensure his credibility and reliability. Many African Americans were shocked about the death of their president. Even though their lives had not changed dramatically due to the New Deal programs and Roosevelt seemed to distance himself from the civil rights issues along the ride, a great number of black Americans had never lost their confidence in the goodwill of their president. Of course Truman was aware of Roosevelt's legacy and the fact that many African Americans were still grieving his loss. He also knew that the Democratic Party needed the black vote. But at the same time he did not want to alienate his white southern voters. Maybe Truman knew in his heart that fighting for civil rights was the right thing to do.

Several geopolitical factors also had a profound influence upon the American government during the time of World War II and the years of the Cold War, which caused Truman to consider action. First of all, the "Double V" campaign demanded much attention. The Second World War changed the attitudes and expectations of African Americans. When the war began, African American leaders wanted to force the nation to confront the parallels between the racist doctrines of Nazi Germany and on the other side the presence of the Jim Crow laws in the United States. African Americans aimed for victory abroad and at home as well because they found the American Dream an illusion. They strove for more recognition and most importantly; civil rights. Not only was Truman forced to come up with solutions, it could also be argued that Truman

honestly felt sympathetic to the civil rights cause and the “Double V” campaign in particular, because of his own experiences in the army. The notion of the successes of the African American 93rd Division really had surprised Truman and probably made him realize that black soldiers were not necessarily incompetent, a conviction which would influence Truman’s actions in the future.

Another influential issue was the Soviet propaganda. Reports about African Americans being racially attacked and discriminated were regularly being published by the Soviet Union. By pointing out the inconsistencies between on the one side; the promise of democracy and freedom and on the other; racial behavior, the soviets wanted to undermine the influence of their enemy. These propaganda activities caused the American government to feel uneasy and forced them to act in order to counteract the soviet threat.

Scholars have debated this topic to a great extent as well. Some believe that Truman did not feel alarmed by the soviet propaganda, which does not sound as a plausible conception, while the new revisionists do emphasize its influence. According to them, propaganda practices were the main reason for Truman’s proposed civil rights agenda, which is perhaps too bluntly put. Obviously, as the president of the United States, Truman had to react to the threats which were aimed to expose America’s racial weaknesses in order to undermine its power. However, this does not necessarily mean that Truman’s personal beliefs did not have anything to do with his intervention in civil rights. Various statements made by Truman in personal writings, during speeches and private conversations indicate that Truman certainly was not immune to the hardship of African Americans. It seems a plausible assumption that Truman felt sympathetic to the civil rights issue and was willing to act in order to improve the situation of the African American community. Despite this rather positive assumption, it could also be claimed that during the Cold War years, the categorization of civil rights as national security was being promoted to such an extent, that civil rights advocates felt they were being exploited.

America’s involvement in the Third World had a great influence on the African American community as well. To contain the rise of communism in the world, the United States felt it was necessary to interfere in the Third World. The decision to maintain colonialism caused a schism in the African American community. Most civil rights activists and organizations wanted to abolish colonialism, but not all of them believed that turning against the Truman administration and its foreign policy was the most constructive solution.

The legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the disappointment of African American veterans and the increase of racial violence changed the national political dynamics heavily. After the Second World War had come to an end, inspired by the change in attitudes of returning black soldiers, a willingness to fight for civil rights became noticeable among the African Americans. Being passive about the inadequacies in their day to day lives were no longer an option. Many decided that this was the time for change and that fighting for all the shortcomings they had suffered for many years was necessary. However, white, mostly southern, Americans wanted to prevent any improvements concerning civil rights and regularly turned to violence in order to make their statements clear. Lynching almost became a common event. The grim atmosphere that was noticeable nationally left Truman no option but to intervene.

According to several liberal scholars, the rise of lynching in the United States, in particular the Monroe lynching, caused Truman to create the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Some liberals believe that Truman's own experiences in the army caused him to feel sympathetic to the cause of the African American veterans. Obviously, Truman knew what it was like to receive a warm welcome when he returned home, therefore this probably could have had a certain influence upon Truman's decision making process. The fact that Truman felt that it was his responsibility to protect democracy could also have been responsible for him wanting to create the President's Committee on Civil Rights.

Still, several revisionists believe that Truman merely was led by his desire to receive as many black votes as possible and therefore they claim that Truman was mainly concerned with pleasing the African American community. Next to the organization of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, another example would be Truman's signing of Executive Order 9981. The timing of this decision arouses certain questions, which is not all that surprising considering the 1948 election. While of course it could be argued that his actions should be defined solely as political pragmatism, it could also be claimed that although Truman wanted to gain as many votes as he could get in the end, he at the same time truly believed in his civil rights agenda because he was convinced that everybody deserved the same opportunities and treatment, a conviction which perhaps is again motivated by his own personal experiences as a soldier during World War I.

Maybe it is best to argue that not just one factor, but rather a combination of all these factors led Truman to intervene on behalf of African Americans. The recurring reports of African

American citizens, in particular black veterans, being lynched, could have aroused a feeling of injustice in the president's mind, especially concerning his strong preference for democracy. Wanting to please the African American community in order to retain the black vote, could also have been a plausible reason for intervening in civil rights. The necessity of safeguarding America against the soviet propaganda practices, aimed at exploiting America's racial problems and irregularities and protecting America's leading position in the world, also could have had a great influence on Truman's willingness to protect civil rights.

Perhaps it would be correct to state that all these previously mentioned motives and causes are all equally responsible and important. It would not be all that illogical to believe, that a fusion of all conditions present at the time, would cause Truman to respond in the way that he did. By avoiding choosing one particular side and providing a synthesis instead, this research distinguishes itself from the current works written on the subject, which is precisely the strength of this particular analysis.

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