On January 7, 1948, speaking to Congress in person and to the nation by radio, President Truman delivered his State of the Union address. His message was a request for vital legislation as well as a reaffirmation of the progressive tradition in America. But it was more. "Our first goal," the president noted slowly and deliberately, "is to secure fully the essential human rights of our citizens," for "any denial of human rights is a denial of the basic beliefs of democracy and of our regard for the worth of each individual." After briefly indicting the various forms of discrimination in America, Truman referred to the report of his Committee on Civil Rights, which "points the way to corrective action by the federal government and by state and local governments." He would take the lead, he promised, and soon send a special message to Congress dealing with the problem of civil rights in America. In the following days and weeks, the president virtually deluged Congress with special messages, including his budget message of January 12, in which he requested a one-million-dollar appropriation for a National Commission Against Discrimination in Employment.\(^1\)

Civil-rights leaders and the Negro press were pleased. Referring to the president's request for a permanent FEPC, Elmer Henderson noted that "the president has pointed the way" and that Congress must "follow his lead." There were, of course, denunciations from those who viewed the State of the Union message as a plea for votes in November, which prompted the Chicago Defender to regret only "that more of the other aspirants to the presidency do not follow his example."\(^2\) Actually, only the politically innocent could suppose that politics was
not involved, for in fact Truman’s annual message of January 7 was the opening gun of his campaign for nomination and election in 1948.

There was nothing precipitant about the decision to launch the campaign with the State of the Union address. In September 1947, for example, a White House assistant spelled out the importance of the message in the campaign politics of 1948. The memorandum noted that its principles would “inevitably become the basis for the Democratic party platform in June 1948” and should set the party’s campaign course. Nor was there anything precipitant about other campaign strategy. Although Truman’s stock had risen considerably by the summer of 1947, according to public-opinion polls, Democratic campaign strategists were keeping their optimism subdued. As early as the summer of 1947, various members of the administration, the Democratic National Committee, and the White House staff had begun sifting and exchanging ideas for the politics of 1948. One memorandum, unsigned and undated but apparently written in August 1947, dealt with the problem of the president’s image, suggesting in particular that until the Democratic convention, the president speak “not as a candidate for election, but as the representative of the whole people.”

These materials apparently provided some of the background and ideas for a forty-three-page confidential memorandum of November 19, 1947, over Clark Clifford’s name, which outlined the campaign strategy for 1948. Predicting that the Republicans would nominate Thomas E. Dewey and that Henry A. Wallace would be the Progressive candidate, the memo pointed to six “major points of conflict” in 1948, including civil rights. It assured the president, however, that the South was safely Democratic and that civil rights could be pursued without fear of a Dixie rebellion. The political dividend was that Negro and Jewish voters in heavily populated northern states might provide the margin of victory in the fall of 1948.

How much influence the Clifford memorandum exercised on Truman and subsequent campaign strategy remains undocumentable at this point. What seems clear, however—given the rhetoric of the cold war, the president’s own personal commitment, the continuing militancy of black leaders, and the political circumstances of a campaign year—was that civil rights would be an important issue in 1948, with or without the Clifford memorandum. For years, Negro politicians and leaders had argued that the black vote provided the balance of power in heavily populated states of the North, particularly in close presidential elections; it was a fulcrum that could be used to pry performance as well as promises from the two major parties. Walter White
was to remind the president of this power in May 1948, when he sent him a copy of Henry Lee Moon's recently published *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote*, accompanied with the unsnubtle hint: "You will enjoy and profit from reading it." And there could be no assurance that the Negro vote would go Democratic in 1948 as it had in every presidential election since 1936. It was never clear how much of the Negro vote was for FDR personally instead of the Democratic party generally, and southern domination of the congressional wing of the party for the previous ten years had been both irritating and embarrassing to civil-rights advocates within the party.

Moreover, the defection of some Negroes from Democratic candidates in the elections of 1946 was cause for alarm, particularly in New York, the home state of the leading contender for the Republican nomination, Governor Dewey. His appointments of Negroes to important state positions, his endorsement of New York's FEPC legislation of 1945, and his statements in favor of justice for American minorities made him a force to fear. Indeed, to many black Republicans, he seemed the logical successor to Wendell Willkie. To a considerable extent, however, Truman had offset Dewey's appeal as a result of his speech to the NAACP in June 1947, his requests for civil-rights legislation, and his vocal endorsement of the report of his Committee on Civil Rights. And the reluctance of many congressional Republicans to vote for civil-rights legislation was not lost upon Negro leaders. In January 1948 the *Call* saw the Negro vote as "fluid" and observed that Truman had halted the trend toward the Republican party, in part because of the report of his civil-rights committee, which prompted Negro voters to "Stop, Look and Listen!"

The Democrats, however, had other fears. On December 29, 1947, Henry A. Wallace announced for the presidency as a third-party candidate sponsored by the Progressive Citizens of America, an announcement that carried with it a sense of political urgency. Since late November, Wallace's aides had sought to persuade him to announce his candidacy, so that he would "get the credit for forcing any progressive gestures which Mr. Truman makes." The former vice-president had appeal for a broad range of liberals who wanted more democracy at home and less belligerency abroad. Since his abrupt departure from the administration in 1946, he had been a consistent critic of Truman's foreign policy, arguing that the policy of containment was plunging the nation down the road to a third world war. Wallace's domestic program likewise had its attractions. In addition to his espousal of advanced social-welfare legislation, he had repeatedly condemned
prejudice in all of its forms. In May 1946, according to a poll of the *Negro Digest*, 91 percent of the black voters favored Wallace for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1948. Thus, it came as a great shock to many civil-rights leaders when he resigned under fire as commerce secretary in September 1946. Many Negroes expressed dismay, including Walter White, Henry Lee Moon, and Bishop W. J. Walls; and one columnist noted that, except for Tom Clark and Julius Krug, the administration was “bereft of heads of departments who have a fair and impartial attitude toward colored people.”

In November 1947 Wallace toured the South under the sponsorship of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, defying southern tradition by speaking to integrated audiences and advocating equal justice. His appeal to many Negroes was obvious, and the presence of Paul Robeson and Canada Lee on some of his speaking tours added credibility to his rhetoric. To those Negroes who had come to believe that neither major party would do anything to bring about justice in American life, Wallace was especially appealing. “Voting for a Democrat or Republican is like voting for different ends of the same egg,” Charles H. Houston asserted in February 1948. “Wallace offers the American people something different.”

At the beginning of 1948, then, the Wallace threat seemed real; for he might drain away enough Democratic votes, including those of the Negro, to deny Truman his bid for election in his own right. The administration responded accordingly. The report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights offered a foundation for action, and his special message of February 2, 1948, would build on it. To the administration, the report and the message were part of the same package, and the one called for the other. But Wallace’s third-party candidacy strengthened the sense of urgency within the White House and probably contributed to the timing as well as the substance of Truman’s message on civil rights. The vagaries of politics thus meshed with the president’s personal commitment to justice and fair play; and in his message he sought to appropriate the civil-rights issue as his personal property in the campaign of 1948, much as Henry Wallace was attempting to do.

The February 2 message was historic, if only because it represented the first occasion upon which an American president had dispatched a civil-rights message to Congress. It was also eloquent and forceful. Pointing out that the founding fathers had contended that all men were created equal, the president indicted the “flagrant examples” of discrimination spelled out in the report of his civil-rights com-
mittee. Although there had been racial progress, *To Secure These Rights* also illuminated “a serious gap between our ideals and some of our practices,” which, he said, “must be closed.” The president then developed the particulars of his program, including ten recommendations for congressional action. Specifically, he requested abolition of the poll tax; establishment of a fair employment practices committee as well as a permanent commission on civil rights; federal protection against lynching; creation of a civil-rights division in the Department of Justice; home rule for the District of Columbia and suffrage for its residents in presidential elections; strengthening of existing civil-rights statutes; statehood for Hawaii and Alaska and a greater measure of self-government for the territories; prohibition of segregated facilities in interstate transportation; removal of the inequities in naturalization laws; and settlement of the evacuation claims of Japanese-Americans. All this, the president concluded, represented a “minimum program” for Congress.

Truman also promised executive action, particularly an executive order to prevent discrimination in federal employment, one with the necessary authority to ensure compliance. Moreover, he had already directed the secretary of defense to eliminate, as quickly as possible, “the remaining instances of discrimination in the armed services.” He carefully avoided the word “segregation”; that would come later. In conclusion, he placed his campaign for civil rights in the context of the cold war, contending that “the peoples of the world are faced with the choice of freedom or enslavement.” To set the proper example, “we must correct the remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy.”

The message was not a carbon copy of *To Secure These Rights*, primarily because of certain omissions. The president, for example, carefully refrained from attacking segregation directly, except in interstate transportation, where the Supreme Court had already pointed the way. Moreover, the executive branch itself was not doing its utmost to eliminate discrimination in civil-service employment, in the armed forces, or in the rendering of public services. On the other hand, the message clearly outlined and anticipated the course of the struggle for equal rights over the next two decades. Given the racist circumstances of 1948 and the muted but sometimes resentful disagreement within the administration over civil rights, the message represented a clear-cut victory for advocates of racial justice in America.

And with few exceptions, the northern press and civil-rights organizations accepted it as such. Some wondered, however, if Truman
had not requested too much. The New York Herald Tribune, for one, accused the president of throwing the book at Congress and suggested that he set aside “the more bitterly controverted items.” Others indicated that he was simply playing politics, particularly to offset Wallace. Negroes, however, were on the whole delighted. The Journal and Guide compared Truman with Roosevelt at the latter’s expense, though it did comment on the absence of any generous proposal in the presidential message to aid American Indians, “who are perhaps more oppressed, cheated, disfranchised, and sinned against than even the Negro, if that is possible.” The Negro weekly also observed that the president would not profit politically, if only because he had “alienated the vast majority of the white South” in doing “a great and selfless thing.” The Call, with considerable prescience, argued that the message had made the Negro a permanent political issue until justice was a reality. Even the Amsterdam News, already committed irrevocably to Governor Dewey for the presidency, found praise possible.

It was the white South that found the message unpalatable. Having studiously ignored the State of the Union address, southerners now released their pent-up anger and frustration. Letters poured into the White House; southern politicians denounced the program on the floor of Congress; and southern governors threatened secession from the party. In a classic understatement, Senator Tom Connally of Texas informed a constituent: “We are deeply distressed in the utterances of the president and the position in which he has placed our party.”

These opinions were neither isolated nor scattered. It was clear that significant numbers of southern leaders were mobilizing against Truman, as indicated by the attempt of a committee of the Conference of Southern Governors to force the administration to capitulate. On February 23, 1948, five southern governors, led by J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, conferred at some length with J. Howard McGrath, chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Actually, it was more of a grilling. Tight-lipped and with the pose of a prosecutor, Governor Thurmond fired question after question at Senator McGrath, who, though sorely tested, not only maintained his composure but staunchly resisted any compromise that would be meaningful to the South. Responding to Thurmond, McGrath indicated his support of Truman’s civil-rights message of February 2, opposed restoration of the two-thirds rule in the nomination of presidential candidates (by which the South could have denied Truman the nomination), agreed with the presidential request for the abolition of segregation in interstate transportation facilities, refused to exercise any influence to with-
draw civil-rights bills then under consideration in Congress, and endorsed the move to establish a civil-rights division in the Department of Justice. McGrath offered to compromise only when he suggested that the party’s plank on civil rights in 1944 might be adequate for 1948, but at this point the governors were clearly more interested in the president and his program than in the Democratic platform. The governors departed with the warning shot that “the South was no longer in the bag.”

In mid March the Southern Governors Conference received the report of its committee that had met with McGrath. With all but four southern states represented, the Conference recommended that delegates to the Democratic National Convention oppose Truman’s nomination and that presidential electors refuse to vote for any candidate in the general election who favored civil rights. At a news conference early in April, Governor Fielding Wright of Mississippi declared that the people of his state meant business and that the South would hold its own convention should Truman win the Democratic nomination. A meeting in May of “volunteer citizens” in Jackson, Mississippi, summarized the thinking of militant southern segregationists: they would oppose Truman’s nomination and the adoption of a plank on civil rights at the Democratic convention in July; if unsuccessful, they promised to meet in Birmingham, Alabama, on July 17 to take action appropriate under the circumstances.

Yet it was plain from the outset that the South was not solid in its hostility to Truman or in the strategy that it should follow. Politicians, for instance, feared the effect that secession from the party might inflict on their careers. Moreover, there were voices of moderation and instances of courage, even in the deep South, where secession from the party seemed most likely to occur. One such example took place in Atlanta, where white and black advocates of civil rights, representing eleven southern states, gathered to draft resolutions in favor of equal justice and federal civil-rights legislation. Others were also taking a strong and positive stand. Monsignor T. James McNamara, pastor of a Catholic church in Savannah, speaking to a local business organization, defended the president’s civil-rights program and labeled the South’s reaction an “ostrich-like attitude.” The clamor of white supremacists, unfortunately, not only muffled these voices of reason but also intimidated others into remaining silent.

The militancy of the white South surprised the administration. Truman had anticipated a cold congressional reception, similar to that given to his State of the Union message, not a fiery southern response.
In retrospect, it is difficult to understand the administration's miscalculation. It is true that southerners had repeatedly threatened secession from the party of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, but it is equally clear that Roosevelt had taken some of this talk seriously, studiously skirting those racial issues that might offend the South and sometimes regretting his wife's civil-rights activities. It is also true that white racists, perhaps for political purposes, deliberately misrepresented the president's position and the contents of his special message, particularly when they contended that he favored "mongrelization" of the white race. Yet Congressman Oren Harris of Arkansas spoke for many white southerners when he informed the president in a letter of February 9 that compromise was impossible. "We cannot agree to relinquish our violent opposition to proposals for Anti-lynch, Anti-poll tax laws and the establishment of FEPC," he wrote, and any "concession" from the administration would only be considered as adding "insult to injury." One cannot avoid the conclusion that many white southerners clearly understood the long-range implications of the president's civil-rights programs. Although the message did not directly attack the citadel of segregation, its rhetoric and its opposition to segregation in interstate transportation facilities and in the nation's capital clearly foreshadowed an assault on segregation everywhere in America. Moreover, Truman had implied that discrimination and segregation were one and the same thing—as Negroes had argued for years and as the administration would soon contend vigorously in various amicus curiae briefs before the Supreme Court.

The extent and volume of the southern reaction persuaded the administration to shift to low gear in its drive for civil rights, particularly in matters that would command public scrutiny. Truman had yet to win the nomination of his own party, hopefully with some southern support and without making his position on the issues untenable in the fall campaign against Wallace and the Republican presidential nominee. It was a delicate political situation, and the administration consequently held certain matters in abeyance until after the Democratic convention. This included the White House staff's omnibus civil-rights bills, which had been drafted concurrently with the president's special message and which incorporated several of its legislative suggestions.

Shortly after the president's message of February 2, the White House had sent the bill to Senate Minority Leader Alben Barkley, with the request that he submit it to Congress. The vehemence of the southern protest, however, coupled with the fear that a southern fili-
buster on the bill might jeopardize the passage of other vital legislation, apparently prompted the administration and Barkley to put the bill under wraps. The president’s comment during his news conference on March 11 made it abundantly clear that a civil-rights bill would not be forthcoming from the administration during the current congressional session.

The administration also stalled on the presidential promise to issue an executive order to ensure equal employment opportunities in federal civil service. In his news conference of May 13, when pointedly asked about it, Truman stated that the administration was not preparing the order “at the present time.” In rebuttal, the Afro-American contend that drafts of such an order already existed but that administrative disagreement over its political effects had delayed issuance. Actually the Civil Service Commission had submitted a draft, but members of the White House staff found it too weak, one that “would incur as much wrath as a stronger order and yet would not gain any favor.” In a letter in April to the president, Walter White sought to minimize the importance of the southern rebellion, while “eagerly awaiting the issuance of your promised executive order.” The president, however, decided that the order could wait until after the Democratic convention.

If the administration procrastinated on some of its promises, it had also made it clear to the white South that the civil-rights message itself was not negotiable. And if the president had initially misjudged the reaction of many southerners to the message, they too had misjudged the president. It was out of character for Truman to cave in to pressure of any kind. He might temporize, but capitulation was out of the question; and the suggestion of Congressman Frank W. Boykin of Alabama, shortly after the special message, that the president reassure the South by announcing his firm belief in states’ rights and his opposition to federal civil-rights legislation could stem only from a gross misreading of Truman’s nature as well as of the political climate of 1948.

Nonetheless, throughout the winter and spring of 1948, rumors circulated that Truman would modify his civil-rights requests of Congress, rumors that the White House repeatedly denied. Within days of the special message, a “highly placed Senate source” suggested Truman’s willingness to accommodate the South, which Press Secretary Charles G. Ross quickly scotched during one of his regular morning press conferences. “There will be absolutely no retreat on any point,” said Ross, raising the matter himself; “the whole story is without foun-
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dation and fact.” On March 8, when Senator McGrath announced to
the press that Truman would accept the presidential nomination, he
brought up the issue of civil rights, asserting, “The president’s position
remains unchanged since he delivered that message.” On March 12
Truman attended a luncheon with members of the cabinet and the
Democratic National Committee at which he informed everyone, in­
cluding southern committee members, that he retracted nothing: “I
stand on what I said; I have no changes to make.”

It was the same in April and May. Although some civil-rights ad­
vocates grumbled when Truman delivered an address in May at Phila­
delphia’s Girard College, which denied admission to Negroes, the
president could point to his speech in April at the College of William
and Mary, where he referred twice to civil liberties and the Bill of
Rights in the presence of Virginia’s segregationist governor, William
Tuck. A few days after this speech, Senator Allen J. Ellender of
Louisiana conferred amicably with the president on various matters,
including civil rights. “The president said he considers it a good pro­
gram,” Ellender announced afterwards, “and that he wouldn’t change
it.” Through it all, Truman refused to comment on reported southern
defections, except to jest during a news conference in April, when
asked if he had heard anything about a back-to-Truman movement on
the part of southern Democrats, that “there were a great many who
never left Truman.”

Even if Truman had been personally disposed to grant various
concessions to the white South, the militancy of the black North would
have made it politically difficult, if not impossible, particularly in view
of the Wallace candidacy. The president was walking a tightrope.
Negroes, of course, had applauded his special message of February 2
and had taken special delight in the consternation of the white South.
Actually, the South’s reaction paid an extra dividend with northern
black leaders. One Negro columnist noted that although Truman was
“a better New Dealer to Negroes” than Roosevelt, “he so far has not
been able to convince Negroes that he is not a backwoods Missourian
at heart. But the present abuse of Mr. Truman by certain southern
gentlemen is lifting the president to a new level in the estimation of
Negroes and other liberals.”

The administration sought to perpetuate this advantage even in
little things, such as inviting Mrs. Thomasina W. Johnson, the Labor
Department’s adviser on minorities, to the White House for tea. There
were also more substantial activities. When the president toured the
Caribbean late in February, he invited three representatives of the
black press, the first time that Negroes had received press accreditation on a presidential tour. In the Virgin Islands, he publicly paid tribute to the abilities of his “friend” Governor William H. Hastie. His short address, studded with references to freedom, celebrated the centennial of the emancipation of slaves in the Virgin Islands. Numerous pictures showed the president in the receiving line with the black governor and his wife, which of course did nothing to soothe southern anxieties. When critics dismissed it all as politics, the Afro-American countered with praise for Truman’s ability to win the hearts of oppressed peoples and expressed its appreciation for politicians who “in paying attention to the farm vote, the labor vote and the big business vote also pay attention to our vote.”

But this activity was not enough to assuage the feelings of some Negro leaders who wanted tangible accomplishments. Black militancy was on the rise in 1948, not only because it was an election year, but also because of the international situation. The cold war had begun in earnest in 1947, and the Communists throughout the world delighted in exposing the hypocrisies of an America that preached democracy and practiced discrimination. Negroes at home became increasingly determined to use the rhetoric of the cold war to their advantage; and that rhetoric became even more pronounced in 1948, particularly when President Truman addressed a joint session of Congress on March 17. In a speech replete with references to freedom, democracy, and justice, the president indicted the “ruthless” policies of the Soviet Union. To combat them, he pleaded for speedy congressional approval of the Marshall Plan for western Europe, universal military training, and temporary enactment of selective service. The Berlin blockade beginning in June 1948, and the American airlift response, added yet another dimension to the cold war and another problem for the Truman administration.

The situation late in 1947 and early in 1948 seemed ready-made for A. Philip Randolph, who was shrewdly attempting to exploit a deteriorating international condition as he had in the spring of 1941 when Roosevelt finally succumbed and created a fair employment practices committee. In the fall of 1947 Randolph and Grant Reynolds organized the Committee against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training and quickly launched a campaign of propaganda and pressure. The time seemed propitious, and not only because of the cold war. After all, there had been the report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, which condemned “the injustice of calling men to fight for freedom while subjecting them to humiliating discrimina-
tion," and Truman’s announcement in his message of February 2 that he had directed the secretary of defense to eliminate discrimination in the military. Both indicated a commitment on the part of the president to democratize the military.

On February 5, 1948, Randolph met with officials of the Democratic party in order to ask National Chairman McGrath, who was absent, to issue a strong statement denouncing segregation in the military and to attempt to influence Congress in its action on the bill for universal military training. Upon advice from William Dawson, Chicago’s black congressman, the party spokesman responded with caution and without promises, while quoting portions of Truman’s message on civil rights. Then on March 22, five days after Truman’s address to the joint session of Congress, Randolph and Reynolds conferred with the president. Once again they pleaded their case, requesting in particular that the president issue an executive order to abolish segregation in the military and to inform state governors that the federal government would no longer dictate racial policy in the National Guard. Moreover, Negroes were of the “mind and temper,” Randolph warned, “of not wanting to shoulder a gun to fight for the protection of democracy abroad until they have democracy at home.” Visibly disturbed, Truman replied that he was doing his best under difficult circumstances; he also apparently considered the statement a threat, although Randolph insisted that he was simply reporting a “deep emotional feeling” throughout black America.

At the end of March, Randolph came up with his most dramatic ploy. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, then holding hearings on universal military training, he stated flatly that he would counsel American youth, black and white alike, to boycott the military, to refuse to register and to serve unless segregation was abolished. When Randolph argued that he would urge civil disobedience even in time of war, Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon cautioned him about the possibility of treason; but Randolph reminded the senator of the existence of a higher law. Truman K. Gibson, black member of the President’s Advisory Commission on Universal Training, sought to offset Randolph in his testimony, labeling the threat “shocking”; and White House aides believed that he had succeeded to some extent.

The reactions of the Negro community to Randolph’s threat represented a fairly accurate barometer of black opinion in 1948. No one disputed his goals, but some questioned the method of civil disobedience. The Journal and Guide more or less summed up press reaction in its editorial caption: “Protest, Yes; Treason, No!” Few, however,
were disposed to accuse Randolph of treason; and one, the *Afro-American*, annointed him “the John the Baptist of a new emancipation.”

On the other hand, an NAACP poll of Negroes eligible for the draft reported that 71 percent were sympathetic with the position of civil disobedience. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell endorsed civil disobedience and excoriated Truman Gibson as “the rubber stamp Uncle Tom who was used during the war by the War Department to cast aspersions on Negro troops in Italy, while these same Negroes were shedding their blood and dying.” George S. Schuyler, the acidulous columnist of the *Courier*, gloated about the administration’s embarrassment over the threat of civil disobedience “at a time when our government is beaming to all countries, especially Russia, loud self-serving praise of the freedom and justice enjoyed under the Stars and Stripes.” Although Schuyler seemed to endorse Randolph’s position, he later became less enamored of the idea, perhaps because he was then traveling the road to reaction.

A similar ambivalence prevailed throughout civil-rights organizations. The reaction of the NAACP was typical, as well as revealing of the political questions involved. Shortly after Randolph had testified, Walter White wired Senator Morse of the Armed Services Committee that “our association is not advising Negroes to refuse to defend their country if it is in danger”; but he pointedly did not repudiate the tactic. Morse, however, was unhappy with the association’s equivocation. Faced with the prospect of incurring the wrath of a strong civil-rights advocate in the Senate, White wrote a conciliatory letter to Morse in which he clearly disavowed civil disobedience. Randolph himself was not as easily dissuaded and continued his protest, which included picketing the White House in May against the “Jim Crow Army.”

In the meantime, other Negro leaders were applying pressure elsewhere, particularly on Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, in an attempt to persuade him to implement the president’s instruction to eliminate discrimination in the military. Forrestal’s position in the winter and spring of 1948 was not enviable. He was then attempting to win congressional approval of military appropriations and of selective service, while struggling to establish his primacy over the secretaries of the army, the navy, and the air force; at the same time, he sought to follow the president by liberalizing the racial policies of the three services, particularly those of the army. In short, Forrestal was caught in a squeeze between the White House, Congress, the service secretaries, and professional military men. Although sympathetic with the goal of racial integration, Forrestal preferred a gradual approach.
to the problem, much like the one that the navy had pursued during and after the Second World War. On March 18, 1948, he met with eleven Negro editors and publishers, seven of whom were scheduled to begin a two-week inspection of army installations in Europe. Their report upon their return surprised no one, including Forrestal, and consisted largely of a ringing indictment of the debilitating and costly effects of segregation.35

The meeting of March 18 was but a prelude to a much larger and more significant gathering on April 26, a “National Defense Conference on Negro Affairs” sponsored by Forrestal and Lester Granger, who served as chairman. Fifteen of America’s most prominent Negroes, representing a virtual who’s who of black America, were in attendance; but Randolph was pointedly not invited. Representing the military were Forrestal, the service secretaries or their representatives, and military and civilian aides. The meeting was not a happy one. Although encouraged with the progress of the navy, the black conferees found much room for improvement. They were less sanguine about the air force, which admittedly still followed the general guidelines of the Gillem report even though it was now a separate service. And they were altogether unhappy about the army, particularly the attitude, both personal and official, of Secretary Kenneth Royall, who contended vigorously that segregation could exist without discrimination. As a result, the Negro conferees pledged not to serve in any advisory capacity to the Department of Defense as long as such attitudes were tolerated, which indicated a significant turning point in the tactics of “moderate” blacks.36

Another result was that Royall and the army were severely criticized in the Negro press. The Crisis, the official organ of the NAACP, summed up its attitude in the editorial title “Stonewall against America.” The Chicago Defender declared that it was time “to build an American Army and not a Confederate Army.” Royall, for his part, was also displeased. On April 30, in a memorandum to Forrestal, he contended that neither the air force nor the navy had been completely candid during the conference and that the absence of the other two secretaries had resulted in his being placed in the spotlight.37

Actually, the limelight was on the White House, and its occupants were beginning to feel the heat. On May 12 Clark Clifford and other staff members met with Forrestal to devise what could be done immediately without incurring the wrath of everyone concerned. At that point, the White House was considering the appointment of a committee within the Department of Defense to deal with the accusations
of discrimination. The situation was extremely sensitive, for it was feared that any action concerning segregation in the military beyond the president's directive of February 2 would endanger passage of the selective-service bill. The proposed committee was thus held in abeyance, although by late June the White House had apparently decided to issue an executive order to establish a presidential committee on July 26—after the Democratic convention and after Congress had adjourned.38

Amidst the furor of the winter and spring of 1948, there was some progress in one area of military segregation—that involving the National Guard units of various northern states. The struggle epitomized in microcosm the complex problems facing the administration—including pressure from northern governors and Negro leaders, opposition from southerners, and the recalcitrance of the army—all in the context of campaign-year politics, growing apprehension over Communist successes abroad, and frustration with Congress's painfully slow deliberations. The concern in 1947 with democratization of northern National Guard units developed into a squabble early in 1948 as a result of the request of Governor Alfred E. Driscoll of New Jersey to permit integration of the state's National Guard in conformance with a provision in the new state constitution. Other governors, with the vocal support of civil-rights advocates but without Driscoll's constitutional mandate, made similar requests. Army Secretary Royall was not disposed to grant concessions. Prodding from Forrestal, however, persuaded him to inform Driscoll on February 7 that, "for the present, Army militia units of New Jersey, if otherwise qualified, will not be denied Federal recognition on the ground of nonsegregation." Royall indicated, however, that he acceded to the request only because the people of New Jersey, "by direct majority vote," had lodged desegregation in the state constitution. He would recognize nothing other than a constitutional proviso.39

Presidential Assistant Philleo Nash, however, had other ideas. Responding to pleas that Royall's position contradicted both the report of the president's civil-rights committee and the president's special message of February 2, Nash suggested in April that the president press the army to permit the individual states to determine the racial policies of National Guard units not on active federal duty. The army should recognize any state action in this regard, be it a constitutional provision, legislative enactment, or gubernatorial order. In endorsing Marcus Ray's position of 1947, Nash considered a states' rights approach as the most progressive and only immediate, although partial,
solution. But for the moment, David Niles had the upper hand and persuaded the White House staff to do nothing and let Forrestal worry about it.\textsuperscript{40}

Clark Clifford, however, was becoming increasingly sensitive to the political consequences of inaction. Working closely with Forrestal and his special assistant, Marx Leva, Clifford forced a concession from Secretary Royall. Although Royall still refused to recognize a gubernatorial order, at least until he received a report from the army’s Committee on National Guard and Reserve Policy, which was then considering the problem, he indicated in May that he “would be inclined” to accept state legislative action as well as a constitutional provision. This represented a partial victory for the White House over Royall. Clifford reluctantly and temporarily approved Royall’s position, perhaps in deference to the political and international situation of the moment. Moreover, it was also clear that Royall’s position was more progressive than that of parts of the professional military. The Committee on National Guard and Reserve Policy, for example, subsequently reported against integration of any Guard unit by any means.\textsuperscript{41}

Royall probably conceived of his policy as a compromise between the White House and the National Guard committee. His timing in implementing it, however, was politically inexpedient to say the least. On July 8, only hours before the Democratic convention opened, he drafted letters to Governors James C. Shannon of Connecticut and Luther W. Youngdahl of Minnesota, denying requests for integration of Guard units by gubernatorial order. The White House, understandably enough, held up the letters and delayed any decision until after the convention and after the creation of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services on July 26. Royall was then informed that the new committee would consider the problem, and the secretary dutifully informed the governors to that effect.\textsuperscript{42}

The concessions of 1948 permitted progress. In 1949 several states abolished segregation in Guard units by legislative action. And after the Minnesota legislature memorialized Congress to abolish segregation in the Guard, the army accepted Governor Youngdahl’s executive order as a legitimate expression of the will of the state’s people. From there, it was but a short step to acceptance of a gubernatorial order without any legislative mandate whatever. In 1950 the General Staff made the recommendation that the army recognize the authority of the governors, which the army eventually accepted. There the matter stood, to continue as standard policy through the Eisenhower and
Kennedy administrations, with several states, not all of them southern, still clinging to segregation in the National Guard.43

Despite the militancy of black leaders in the early months of 1948 and despite the administration's limited response to their demands, Henry Wallace had difficulty in attracting black leaders to the Progressive standard. After barnstorming across the country for several months, he could count only a handful of prominent Negroes behind his candidacy, although the backing of such people as Paul Robeson, Canada Lee, William E. B. DuBois, Benjamin J. Davis, and Bishop Walls gave the illusion of considerable support, perhaps in part because of the vigor with which they denounced the major parties. Davis, for example, contended in the pages of the Daily Worker that Truman "speaks Negro rights, but he acts white supremacy."44

It was soon apparent, however, that the black press, most leaders of civil-rights organizations, and Negro politicians and labor leaders would not support Wallace. For this there were many reasons, both ideological and practical. Even before Wallace announced his candidacy, Lester Granger of the Urban League attacked his record of accomplishment as a member of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Wallace's glittering promises in 1947 and 1948 far exceeded his plodding performances on racial matters as secretary of agriculture and as secretary of commerce. As early as 1940, when he ran as the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, a Negro columnist had pointed to the "prejudice-ridden branches" in the Agriculture Department, with "the worst record" in the federal government. When Will Alexander left the Department of Agriculture in 1940, the last thing that Wallace allegedly said to him was: "Will, don't you think the New Deal is undertaking to do too much for Negroes?" Wallace himself almost admitted as much in 1948, when he conceded in an interview that he had not become concerned about segregation until 1944.45 Wallace's past record, however, probably had little effect in determining the attitudes of 1948. Negro leaders were hard-boiled traders, willing to overlook the indiscretions of the past in favor of the promise of the present; and the politics of the present worked to Wallace's disadvantage.

To a considerable extent, Truman's strong position on civil rights, coupled with the prospect of Governor Dewey as the Republican nominee, neutralized Wallace's appeal.46 But a major handicap facing Wallace in 1948 was the persuasive charge that he could not win, a fear echoed repeatedly in the Negro press and in the speeches of various black leaders. Though conceding the need for a new party, "because both of the major parties are afflicted with dry rot," Walter White
nonetheless contended that a third party in 1948 was “dangerously perhaps even tragically ill-advised.” His reasoning was not difficult to comprehend. “If the Negro vote swings in a bloc of decisive proportions to Wallace,” argued the *Journal and Guide,* “neither of the major parties will have any sense of obligation to fight for a better deal for us.” Congressman Adam Clayton Powell saw Wallace’s candidacy as “extremely unwise at this time,” for it might persuade Republicans to nominate a more conservative candidate rather than “a great American like Eisenhower whom I am ready to support 100 percent.” Other black leaders, including A. Philip Randolph, disavowed “the extreme Left” in order not to jeopardize civil-rights legislation in Congress. Long accustomed to the nuances of politics, Negro leaders were not about to jettison their greatest opportunity in an election year for a ride with rhetoric, which was all Wallace could produce.47

There were also ideological considerations. By 1948 few black leaders viewed the Soviet Union as a haven for oppressed minorities, and few shared Wallace’s views about the cold war. Indeed, although some still hesitated, most Negro leaders were then shifting from a non-Communist to an anti-Soviet position, a process accelerated by Truman’s message to Congress on March 17, 1948, outlining the international situation. Although more excited than most, the *Afro-American* struck a responsive chord when it editorialized, “If Russia really believed it could whip the U.S. today, it would declare war before sunset.”48

Although black leaders did not give Wallace the endorsements he sought from them, the administration did not assume that the Negro voter was reacting similarly, for it was not clear that the voter would play follow-the-leader in 1948. It was disturbing, for example, when Leo Isacson, a congressional candidate of the pro-Wallace American Labor party, trounced all other candidates in a by-election in a New York district composed mainly of Jews and Negroes on February 17. Some polls reported that Wallace would receive from 20 to 30 percent of the black vote. William L. Batt, Jr., head of the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee, was shocked when political leaders in Harlem and Brooklyn predicted that Wallace would receive 75 percent of the black vote in their wards. Having already established a “very informal advisory group . . . on the Negro situation,” the committee now made plans to organize a formal, functioning operation. It would also help, Batt noted in April, if the administration would issue its executive orders on fair employment in civil service and discrimination in the military; and he wondered if the administration had accu-
rately gauged southern sentiment. Unlike the White House, Batt apparently had yet to realize the full import of the southern rebellion, particularly its possible effect on the president’s nomination in July.\footnote{49}

Unfortunately for Democratic strategists, Wallace was not the only candidate suffering from the “no-win” syndrome. The president was also afflicted. As his popularity plummeted early in 1948, various elements of the Democratic party sought nervously, then frantically, to dump Truman in favor of General Eisenhower, whose only apparent qualification for the presidency was his unrivaled popularity. No one knew either his party preference or his political position on the divisive issues of the day, although he had made one thing clear when he had repeatedly disavowed any political ambitions. Nonetheless, in the most unusual development of a bizarre campaign year, an unabashed alliance of big city bosses, labor leaders, New Deal ideologues, liberals of the Americans for Democratic Action, and southern white supremacists strove to impose the ultimate indignity on the man in the White House. The absurdity of the campaign was nowhere better exemplified than in the joining together of Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina to make common cause against Truman and for Eisenhower.\footnote{50}

What made the alliance of opposition Democrats particularly unholy was the issue of civil rights, which the ADA had consistently championed and which the South had steadfastly resisted. Eisenhower may have been a political enigma, which permitted diverse groups to coalesce around his candidacy, but there was at least one crack in the facade as a result of his appearance early in April before the Senate Armed Services Committee. At that time he had testified generally in favor of the policies of the Gillem report, advocating the continuation of segregation in the military, at least for the present. To northern liberals, however, election victory was apparently more important than principle; so they continued to champion his candidacy, while preparing simultaneously, and incongruously, for a civil-rights confrontation at the Democratic convention. Negro leaders, however, would have none of it. After Eisenhower had testified, Walter White apologized to readers of his weekly column for his previous praise of the general. Though some Negro papers withheld comment, there was considerable disenchantment; the \textit{Chicago Defender}, for example, saw the general as “just another brass hat with a glib tongue and a ready smile.”\footnote{51}

Through it all, the president preserved a stony silence; he really had little choice. Moreover, he could take only cold comfort from the
fact that no convention in the twentieth century—Democratic or Republican—had denied the nomination to its incumbent president, for his predicament was without parallel. Yet if Truman was ever threatened by the draft-Eisenhower movement, the general came to his rescue, only days prior to the convention, when he emphatically disavowed any interest in the presidency. It was then too late for the opposition to close ranks behind any other possibly successful candidate.  

The final challenge to the president came from the Republican-controlled Eightieth Congress. From January to July 1948, Truman was confronted not only with the politician's task of winning his party's nomination but also with the presidential duty of persuading a reluctant Congress to pass legislation in the national interest. Shortly after his address on March 17, Congress responded to his request for approval of the Marshall Plan, but his bid for selective-service legislation ran into several snags. Randolph was not the only one playing politics with the issue. Southern Democrats threatened its passage when they backed an amendment, introduced by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, to permit a draftee the choice of serving in a unit of his race, a thinly disguised attempt to offset the president's directive to end discrimination in the armed services. Both Forrestal and Royall paraded to the Hill to testify against the amendment. The Senate Armed Services Committee subsequently rejected it, and the Senate later concurred by voice vote. The other threat came from Senator William L. Langer of North Dakota, who, opposed to the draft altogether, sought to defeat it by proposing several civil-rights amendments, including an outright ban on segregation in the military.  

The Senate, however, overwhelmingly defeated all of the Langer amendments, except one exempting soldiers from payment of a poll tax in federal elections. The final bill also incorporated an innocuous provision prohibiting discrimination "in the selection of persons for training and service." But at least the administration had its bill. Although Senate Democrats had united with Republicans to defeat the Langer proposals, Republicans received much of the criticism in the Negro press. Columnist Louis Lautier, although distressed with Senate Democrats, was furious with Republicans; while the Afro-American saw Langer's "greatest service" in "laying bare, for all to see, the hypocrisy of the Republican party's 1944 platform which called for specific civil rights legislation."  

Negroes were also angry over the fate of other civil-rights legislation. It was bad enough when Republicans refused to bring anti-
lynching, anti-poll-tax, and FEPC legislation to a vote; but the party's determination of priorities made matters even worse. Since the war, FEPC had replaced antilynching legislation as the foremost demand of black Americans; and A. Philip Randolph, also serving as cochairman of the National Council for a Permanent FEPC, reminded Republicans of this fact in a speech early in 1948. He suspected that the Republican leadership would push an antilynching bill instead of legislation for an FEPC, "which is opposed by the N.A.M., the Chamber of Commerce, and other forces." The black leader had exposed a raw nerve, for many businessmen with influence within the Republican party viewed an FEPC as an infringement on their rights, both personal and property. Some also considered it Communist-inspired, and Randolph was quite conscious of the need to deal with the "red bogey."55

Randolph's suspicions were confirmed in April when Senate Republicans voted top priority to antilynching legislation, with the explanation from Senator Taft that "it's the easiest to get through." Randolph, however, considered it "shocking" for the Republican majority to give preference "to the least needed of the three major civil-rights bills." But that was only part of the priority. According to a report in May, the Republican Policy Committee had devised two priority lists, with antilynching legislation at the bottom of the second list and with no other civil-rights measures scheduled for consideration. Roy Wilkins wondered about the party "of bad faith and broken promises."56

Both parties in Congress, however, were guilty of ignoring many of the requests made by the President in his civil-rights message of February 2. A bill providing home rule for the District of Columbia reached the floor of the House, but the rush for adjournment allegedly prevented a vote on it. Statehood for Alaska was never considered; and the Senate refused to approve a House bill, passed during the first session, providing statehood for Hawaii. Moreover, at least two measures not included in the president's message came up for consideration. One was an attempt to incorporate antisegregation and antidiscrimination amendments into the Taft-Ellender-Wagner housing bill; it was beaten down. When the housing bill finally passed during the special session, Negroes were displeased not only because it lacked any antidiscrimination provisions but also because of the limited nature of the bill itself.57

The other measure involved an attempt by a House subcommittee to deny federal grants-in-aid to states practicing school discrimination, which had been recommended by the Committee on Civil Rights but
not by the president. The provision, of course, had no chance of pas­sage, which the NAACP recognized when it endorsed the education bill without the denial clause. Black leaders were aware that if Congress denied federal funds to southern states on the grounds of discrimination, Negro school children would suffer even more. But even without the restriction, the bill failed. The defeat of another bill concerned with segregation in southern schools, however, represented a victory of sorts for the foes of discrimination. In February 1948 the Conference of Southern Governors had proposed that fourteen states form a regional educational compact to pool resources and, ostensibly, to provide better facilities in higher education. Though race was not mentioned, the compact was actually a device to circumvent the Supreme Court’s ruling for equal educational opportunities. Formulated in a bill, the proposal passed the House, but by a close vote the Senate sent it back to committee, where the bill died.58

Negroes were understandably unhappy with the Eightieth Con­gress, but they were not the only minority group with a grievance. Jews were furious over the final provisions of the displaced persons bill, which, although providing for the admission of over two hundred thousand displaced persons in Europe for the next two years, discrimi­nated against Jews. Leaders of various Jewish organizations inundated the president with appeals for a veto. American Catholics, on the other hand, were generally pleased with the provisions affecting members of their faith. “Since I cannot discern or admit alleged anti-Catholic aspects of displaced persons bill passed by Congress,” Francis Cardinal Spellman wired the president, “I respectfully urge you in the name of charity and national honor to sign it.” Caught between religious minorities but convinced that something had to be done, the president “with very great reluctance” signed the bill on June 25. He denounced it, however, as a bill that mocked the “American tradition of fair play” in its “callous” discrimination against Jews and “many displaced persons of the Catholic faith who deserve admission.” The issue had ominous political overtones; for the Jewish vote, like that of Negroes, could well be a decisive factor in determining the electoral votes of large states in November. Yet Truman’s recognition of Israel on May 14, after weeks of vacillation and contradiction, considerably offset any lingering anger over his acceptance, however reluctant, of the dis­placed persons bill.59

There was yet another bill that might have precipitated a clash between American minorities. Early in the year Congressman Walter H. Judd of Minnesota introduced a bill, drafted by the State Depart-
ment and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which provided for a token increase in Oriental immigration. Of more importance, it repealed the prohibition against naturalization of Orientals—one of the president’s recommendations in his civil-rights message. The bill, however, was not only discriminatory because of the token number of immigrants that it would have admitted but also because it favored Japanese over Chinese immigrants. But the bill had no chance of passage, and a possible confrontation between Chinese- and Japanese-Americans was thus avoided. Japanese-Americans, however, were mollified with the passage of the Japanese Evacuations Claims Act, which the president had also recommended and which constituted a belated but only partial apology for the property losses they had suffered during the Second World War.

The Japanese Evacuation Claims Act was the only civil-rights recommendation of the president to survive the Congress; and as adjournment neared late in June, the impatience and irritation of black leaders mounted. The party of Lincoln had not produced; the Crisis summed it up in the editorial title “From the GOP Congress: Nothing.” It was that record of “nothing” that Truman chose to exploit, beginning with his “nonpolitical” tour of the West in June 1948. Yet, up to this point in the year, Truman and the Democrats generally had also produced little in the way of concrete results; for the early months of 1948 had been primarily a record of promises made and delayed as the parties prepared for the fall campaign and as the presidential candidates jockeyed for position in the conventions and on the issues.