During the winter and spring of 1948 Truman followed the high road of presidential politics and spoke as the representative of all the people rather than as a candidate for election. If he was tempted to descend into the political arena then, the rumbles of southern white revolt, the militancy of northern black leaders, the ponderous deliberations of Congress, the Democratic draft-Eisenhower movement, Wallace’s third-party candidacy, and the deterioration of the international situation persuaded him to remain above the clamor as much as possible. It was good politics to appear calm in the face of tribulations at home and provocation abroad. But the time arrived when Truman had to take the offensive in order to ensure his nomination at the Democratic convention and to bolster his sagging popularity. The vehicle for his first attack was a “nonpolitical” tour of the West from June 4 to June 18, 1948. The ostensible purpose of his transcontinental journey was to accept an honorary degree and to deliver the commencement address at the University of California at Berkeley.

There was nothing new, of course, about a presidential “nonpolitical” tour; but it did offer a convenient, if transparent, excuse to leave Washington before the adjournment of Congress and to sound out the sentiment of the country. Various people, including Truman himself, have taken credit for the idea. One of the first suggestions appeared in a memorandum from Gael Sullivan of the Democratic National Committee in August 1947. The memo urged the president, prior to the Democratic convention, to “show himself to the nation via the back platform of a cross-country train.” It also advocated a change in presidential style. Noting that the president’s “easy manner of speaking . . . informally” was often “lost in translation to the people via radio and
speaking tours,” it suggested that “the entire approach to the presi-
dent’s speeches be changed. It would be well to gain more natural
delivery, even if some rhetorical effects are lost.” Whether by acci-
dent or design, Sullivan’s recommendations became part of the cam-
paign strategy of 1948. Indeed, although Truman had spoken infor-
mally with notes on various occasions in the spring of 1948, the “Give
‘em hell, Harry” approach was born during the “nonpolitical” tour of
June.

Whistle-stopping across the country, the president repeatedly
labeled the Republican-controlled Congress as one of “special inter-
est” designed to frustrate the needs of the people. His was a well-
balanced attack. In large cities, he indicted Congress for its inade-
quate record of legislation on labor, social security, housing, and price
control. In agricultural areas, he pleaded for stronger legislation to
guarantee farm profit. And in various small towns, he emphasized
issues peculiar to them. His autumn appeal to workers, farmers, and
consumers was already taking shape. He was careful, however, to
restrict his indictment of Congress to domestic matters, for he de-
serately needed its cooperation in foreign and military affairs.

Nor did Truman completely neglect the issue of civil rights. In
his first major speech, in Chicago, the president stood firm on his com-
mitment. There, in addressing the Swedish Pioneer Centennial Asso-
ciation on June 4, he emphasized the courage of American pioneers,
the injustice of the displaced persons bill pending in Congress, and
the need to provide democracy at home in order to offset the appeal
of American Communists. In particular, he promised that the federal
government would be “a friendly, vigilant protector” of the ideals of
freedom and equality and contended that the “menace” of communism
within the United States “lies primarily in those areas of American life
where the promise of democracy remains unfulfilled.” When people
“are arbitrarily denied the right to vote or deprived of other basic
rights, and nothing is done about it,” he continued, “that is an invita-
tion to communism.”

The speech was not lost upon American minorities. Negroes were
especially appreciative. Traveling with the presidential special, Stan-
ley Roberts, a columnist for the Courier, was elated. “If apprehensive
Negroes feared, or southern revolt Democrats hoped, that the man
would backtrack from civil rights advocacy as an integral part of the
program,” he wrote, “the fears of the former were needless, and the
hopes of the latter have gone with the wind.” Republicans, however,
were outraged with the “nonpolitical” tour: it was as “nonpolitical as
the Pendergast machine," said Carroll Reece, chairman of the Republican National Committee. And Senator Robert A. Taft was incensed with Truman's "blackguarding Congress at every whistle station in the West." It was in that mood and with the expectation of nominating the next president that the Republicans opened their national convention in Philadelphia on June 21.

Black leaders, too, had high expectations concerning both the Republican platform and the candidate. Before the convention opened, various Negroes, including Walter White and Channing Tobias, testified in favor of a strong civil-rights plank before the resolutions committee. White frankly expressed his disappointment over the failure of the Eightieth Congress to enact legislation on the civil-rights provisions of the 1944 Republican platform. Tobias warned that both parties "face a long, strong line of Negro voters never before seen in the history of this country," which prompted a southern member of the committee to inquire if that was "a considered statement or a threat." Tobias straddled nicely, placing it in the category of a "considered statement," though "it may be interpreted as a threat."

As the platform emerged from committee, however, it was more liberal than the Eightieth Congress was on civil rights, although it represented no improvement over the 1944 version. The plank hedged in calling for the abolition of the poll tax without specifically endorsing federal legislation. More important to black leaders, the plank failed to mention the FEPC by name and was content to "favor the enactment and just enforcement of such federal legislation as may be necessary" to ensure the "right of equal opportunity to work and to advance in life."

In view of the fact that fair employment practices had become the foremost legislative demand of black Americans, this fuzzy endorsement was unacceptable to many. Louis Lautier pronounced it a "platitude" and viewed the civil-rights plank as "weak, to say the least. It is vague and indefinite and promises little." A. Philip Randolph's comments were predictably more colorful. "This is lousy," he concluded, contending that the Republican party had descended "to its lowest depths of opportunism and has become more 'Dixiecrat' than Mississippi and South Carolina." But the plank's equivocation on the FEPC was probably not designed to appeal primarily to the South. The initials had become inexorably associated with Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom Republicans longed to forget, and, more recently, with the charge that it was not only an infringement on the rights of employers but was also Communist-inspired. In view of the plank's statement of
opposition "to the idea of racial segregation in the Armed Services of the United States"—a position repugnant to the white South—it is probable that the absence of the famous initials stemmed from a desire to appeal to businessmen and to Democratic as well as Republican patriots rather than to southern whites in particular.7

Although disappointed with the plank, some Negro leaders were able to console themselves with the expectation that Thomas E. Dewey would be nominated. There was great concern, however, that Senator Taft might win. Although Taft had the support of old-guard Negro Republicans, the more militant blacks within the party were lining up with Governor Dewey. They feared Taft's conservatism on social-welfare legislation at a time when it appeared that the Republican nominee would also be the next president.8

Not all Negro leaders, however, were enamored with the New York governor. Some supported his nomination only because of the mediocrity of his competitors among Republicans. Others, like Walter White and the Chicago Defender, believed that the Democratic party was the most promising vehicle for civil-rights progress, if only because the party's presidential wing seemed more receptive to the pleas of black Americans. As early as July 1947, the Defender had launched a campaign against Dewey and his position on states' rights. In March 1948 Walter White devoted one of his newspaper columns to Dewey, "whose record is best described as spotty" and whose ambivalence justified the widespread wisecrack that he "would rather be president than right." In June, White argued in particular that the New York governor had refused to support fair employment legislation in his state in 1944 until after he had secured the presidential nomination. But others were edging toward an endorsement of Dewey for president in November even before his nomination in June. In May, for example, the Amsterdam News declared outright for Dewey. "In the White House," the editor wrote, "this great American and friend of the Negro and human decency would have greater influence to advance the cause of democracy throughout the nation."9

Certainly the Republican party came up with an attractive ticket when it nominated Governor Dewey on the third ballot and chose Governor Earl Warren of California as his running mate, even though earlier in the year the latter's record on civil rights had been a matter of some dispute. In April, in a biting editorial entitled "Warren? Are You Kidding?", the Afro-American had listed many grievances against the California governor. "Mention the name of . . . Warren as a potential compromise candidate for the Republican presidential nomi-
nation," contended the editor, "and colored voters in Los Angeles will laugh in your face." Three weeks later, the paper abruptly reversed itself, suggesting that there was nothing wrong with Warren’s heart, only with his tactics in failing to win civil-rights measures from the state legislature.10

Actually, as far as black Americans were concerned, the ticket of Dewey and Warren was the best they could expect from the Republicans. In fact, there was considerable jubilation, although Ralph Matthews, columnist for the Afro-American, reminded his readers that they were “still only the front men for a motley collection of mediocre performers whose actions in Congress have been something less than lousy,” which was an inelegant way of saying that Dewey had to run on Taft’s record. Even the Chicago Defender, which would endorse Truman in the general election, applauded this “notable victory” of the liberal wing of the Republican party. It also issued a warning: “Those Democrats who are determined to repudiate President Truman and his civil rights program are courting disaster for the Democratic party. Should they win control in Philadelphia, they will drive Negroes . . . into the Republican camp.”11

Black leaders were understandably nervous about the Democratic convention, set to open on July 12, and their concern embraced both the platform and the prospective candidates. The collapse of the Eisenhower boom shortly before the convention, however, ensured Truman’s nomination and permitted Negroes and northern liberals, led by members of the ADA, to concentrate attention on the party’s platform. Rumors about the civil-rights plank were disquieting. On June 22, 1948, Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi emerged from the White House to deliver a prepared statement in which he implied that the South would adhere to a plank along the lines of the generalized version in the 1944 platform, a plank unacceptable, as it turned out, in the heated politics of 1948.12

As usual, Walter White appeared before the platform committee to deliver an impassioned plea for a strong plank. “The day of reckoning has come,” the NAACP leader warned, “when the Democratic party must decide whether it is going to permit bigots to dictate its philosophy and policy or whether the party can rise to the heights of Americanism which alone can justify its continued existence.” During his testimony, as well as that of Channing Tobias, according to a report in the Afro-American, “a strange silence” greeted their sharply worded demands, and southern members of the committee “merely sat back
and smiled.” This prompted the paper to conclude that “it looks like a deal has already been made.”

The Afro-American’s suspicions were partially correct, although the situation was a good deal more complicated than the newspaper’s commentary implied. Having virtually bagged the nomination, Truman sought to prevent a massive southern walkout over the civil-rights plank by seeking the middle ground between the demands of white southerners and those of northern liberals, although, apparently, there was disagreement within the Truman ranks over what the middle ground should be. The evidence suggests that administration stalwarts in Congress, particularly Senators Francis J. Myers, Scott Lucas, and Howard McGrath, were willing to settle for a paraphrase of the 1944 plank, as McGrath had suggested in his meeting with southern governors in February and to reporters during a news conference on July 10. The White House staff, led by Clark Clifford, apparently wanted something stronger and more specific, while stopping short of a plank that would provoke widespread southern rebellion during and after the convention.

In the days prior to the convention the White House staff was in constant communication with William Batt, director of the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee, exchanging ideas as well as specific drafts of the platform. On July 9 Batt congratulated Clifford on the “superb stuff” in the fourth draft of the platform, particularly the “powerful Civil Rights plank.” The statement on civil rights, though written mostly in general terms, specifically endorsed legislation “recommended by President Truman,” which obviously would offend southern sensibilities. On July 11 Clifford discussed the administration’s platform proposals in Philadelphia with Senator Myers, chairman of the platform committee, devoting considerable time to civil rights. Clifford also indicated to Myers that the president “was convinced that he could not run on a weak civil-rights plank.”

Nonetheless, what emerged from a platform subcommittee over the weekend was only a thinly disguised rewrite of the weak 1944 statement, one that was unacceptable to the militants of the Americans for Democratic Action as well as to southern conservatives, who had found a similar plank distasteful but not unpalatable in 1944. Caught in the middle, the Truman forces united and eventually agreed upon a plank more specific than the subcommittee’s version and stronger than southerners wanted, although weaker than the White House draft. ADA leaders, led by Andrew Biemiller and Hubert Humphrey, were still dissatisfied; and in a final committee session marked by dis-
courtesy and rage on both sides, the northern rebels lost their fight to commit the party to the specific civil-rights proposals outlined by the president in his message of February 2. Senator Lucas epitomized the temper of the session when he asked about Humphrey, then mayor of Minneapolis and a candidate for the Senate: “Who is this pipsqueak who wants to redo Franklin D. Roosevelt’s work and deny the wishes of the present president of the United States?” Although the ADA forces were soundly defeated in the committee, Biemiller promised to carry the fight to the convention floor.

The administration’s forces could not take Biemiller’s threat lightly, not only because of the damage that a floor fight might inflict on the public image of a party already rent with dissension but also because the ADA’s strength was greater than the number of its delegates—120—might indicate. This pregnant fact emerged in a floor fight on July 13, when a Negro delegate challenged the credentials of the Mississippi delegation because of its pledge not to support the party if the convention nominated Truman and adopted a civil-rights program. Pandemonium broke loose; and when order was finally restored, the motion was defeated. It was clear, however, that many northern delegates were in an angry mood; and this encouraged the Biemiller forces to strive to amend the civil-rights plank on the floor of the convention. They were also encouraged when some of the northern big-city bosses, desperately hoping to win on the local level even if Truman went down nationally, promised support for the minority plank. One of them concluded, “This is the only way we can win the election, by stirring up the minorities and capturing the cities,” adding, “and besides, I’d also like to kick those southern bastards in the teeth for what they did to Al Smith in 1928.” And the ADA delegates were elated when Hubert Humphrey agreed to present the minority plank to the convention, although only after the addition of a statement commending the president for “his courageous stand on the issue of civil rights,” which permitted the young politician to maintain a bridge with the administration.

The floor fight erupted on July 14, when four amendments to the civil-rights plank were introduced before the convention. Three were southern proposals with a states’ rights flavor and the fourth was the ADA plank, which differed mainly from the majority version in its demand for congressional action on fair employment practices, mob violence, and equality in political participation and military service. In presenting their amendments, southern spokesmen were modest and restrained; and it was Humphrey, speaking last for the liberal plank,
who infused the lackluster session with enthusiasm. "There are those who say to you—we are rushing this issue of civil rights. I say we are a hundred and seventy-two years late," the young mayor exclaimed. Then he said, "There are those who say—this issue of civil rights is an infringement on states’ rights. The time has arrived for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states’ rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights." With that, northern delegates erupted into a ten-minute demonstration. The convention then moved to a vote, and the three southern amendments went down quickly at the hands of a coalition of northern liberals and administration forces. The alliance then split. Although most of the administration’s congressional leaders, in collaboration with the South, voted against the Humphrey-Biemiller amendment, the northern liberals carried the day by a close vote. Incredibly enough in the face of the South’s obstinance and the administration’s reluctance, a strong civil-rights plank had become part of the platform.¹⁸

Through it all, the president preserved a discreet silence. The final plank was probably stronger than he would have liked as a presidential candidate confronted with the possibility of losing most of the South in November, despite his later statement that the plank was his own.¹⁹ But all he had to do was accept it. After all, the final civil-rights plank still fell short of some of the recommendations in his message of February 2. It did not include, for example, any mention of home rule for the District of Columbia, though it did endorse suffrage for its residents. Nor did it identify the FEPC by name; instead, much like the Republican platform, it called for "the right to equal opportunity of employment." Moreover, although generally stronger than its Republican counterpart, the plank promised only "the right of equal treatment in the service and defense of our nation," while the Republicans had specifically declared their opposition to segregation itself. The platform also embraced other civil-rights recommendations of the president, thus appealing to minorities other than black Americans. It urged immediate statehood for Hawaii and Alaska and increased self-government for the Virgin Islands, Guam, Samoa, and Puerto Rico, and condemned the "inadequate and bigoted" displaced persons bill passed by the Eightieth Congress.²⁰

Southern reaction to the platform and to Truman’s nomination was predictable. Some delegates walked out shortly after the adoption of the minority civil-rights plank, while others remained to cast their presidential ballots for Senator Richard Russell. Truman, however, won on the first ballot, though he was denied the traditional unanimity;
and Senator Barkley, a southern moderate on the race issue, was se­lected as his running mate. The president’s acceptance address de­lighted the delegates. Reflecting his new oratorical approach, Truman spoke from an outline in terse, biting phrases. He promised victory in November—which his audience found difficult to believe in, despite the euphoria of the moment—boasted of the many Democratic achieve­ments, and displayed contempt for the Eightieth Congress of “special privilege.” He also dealt skillfully with the civil-rights issue. Referring to his recommendations to Congress on civil rights, he noted that “some of the members of my own party disagree with me violently on this matter. But they stand up and do it openly! People can tell where they stand.” He continued by saying that the Republicans “all professed to be for these measures. But Congress failed to act.” In concluding, he surprised the delegates and angered Republicans when he revealed his intention of calling Congress into special session, on July 26, so that the conservative Republican Congress would have the opportunity to translate their party’s liberal platform into law.\(^2\)

Never before had black Americans been so jubilant, and their en­thusiasm often embraced the candidates and platforms of both parties. Columnist Louis Lautier spoke for many when he noted: “Colored voters find themselves fortunately situated. Both President Truman and Governor Dewey are excellent candidates . . . both parties are committed to a civil-rights program.” Walter White declared that the strong civil-rights plank in the Democratic platform marked “the greatest turning point for the South and for America since the Civil War”; and he argued that both parties were now committed to the recommendations of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights.\(^2\)

Meanwhile southern dissidents were busy transforming talk into action. Faithful to their pledge of May 10 at Jackson, Mississippi, to hold a rump convention if the Democrats nominated Truman and adopted a civil-rights plank, various southern Democrats assembled in Birmingham, Alabama, on July 17 to launch the States’ Rights party. It was clear from the beginning that only a part of the South would secede from the party of Harry S. Truman. But what the convention lacked in wide southern support, it more than made up for in enthusiasm. Waving Confederate flags, while rebel yells pierced the convention hall, the delegates unanimously nominated South Carolina’s Governor J. Strom Thurmond for president and Mississippi’s Governor Fielding Wright for vice-president on a platform denouncing “totalitarian government” and advocating “segregation of the races.” Al-
though the so-called Dixiecrats could not realistically expect victory in November, they could vengefully hope to deprive Truman of victory.\textsuperscript{23}

Those backing Henry Wallace’s third-party candidacy were equally displeased with the results of the Democratic convention, particularly the adoption of the strong civil-rights statement. They feared, with good reason, that Truman and the platform would limit their inroads into the minority vote. Indeed, shortly after the Democratic convention, some Negro commentators called for Wallace to withdraw as a candidate. C. B. Baldwin, Wallace’s campaign manager, tried to head off such suggestions when he noted sarcastically that the Democrats had nominated “the man nobody wanted and adopted a program nobody meant.” There was further cause for alarm in the fact that Wallace’s popularity had not increased. From January to July 1948 Wallace had been running downhill, as both foreign and domestic events seemed to conspire against him. He had also compounded his problems with a number of political blunders, the most monumental of which was his refusal to disavow Communist support at a time when genuine fear of the Soviet Union was on the rise.\textsuperscript{24}

None of this seemed to faze the delegates of the “new party” as they trooped enthusiastically into Philadelphia for the opening of their convention on July 23. Consistent with the party’s bid for minority votes, blacks played conspicuous roles throughout the convention. Charles P. Howard, a black lawyer and a former Republican, delivered the keynote address after W. E. B. DuBois, although he was in attendance, had declined; Shirley Graham, the biographer of Frederick Douglass, spoke about the tyranny of America; Larkin Marshall, the first black senatorial candidate from Georgia since Reconstruction, nominated Senator Glen Taylor of Idaho for the vice-presidency; Paul Robeson spoke and sang; and Dean Joseph Johnson of Howard University’s medical school occasionally presided over the platform committee and served on the drafting committee with Mrs. Paul Robeson.\textsuperscript{25}

The delegates of the “new party” opted for the name Progressive party and nominated Wallace and Taylor on a platform that condemned Truman’s foreign and domestic policies. The civil-rights plank, as might be expected, not only indicted the record of the old parties but specifically condemned “segregation and discrimination in all of its forms and in all places.”\textsuperscript{26} The whole was an attractive package to minorities; but Communist influence on the deliberations of the convention, although it has been exaggerated, largely offset the platform’s appeal at this stage of the campaign.

The actions of the Truman administration in the weeks following
the Democratic convention also contributed to the increasing isolation of the Progressive party. After his nomination had been secured and Congress had approved the Marshall Plan, selective service, and military appropriations, Truman could respond to his own promises and to the increasing pressures of the civil-rights movement. He also had the advantage that an incumbent president has of being able to campaign while appearing to be engaged in his official duties. On July 20, for example, he paid public tribute in a special White House ceremony to Brigadier General B. O. Davis, Sr., upon the Negro soldier’s retirement from the army after a half-century of service.  

On July 26 Truman delivered his surprise packages, Executive Orders 9980 and 9981. Fulfilling a long-delayed promise made in his special message of February 2, Executive Order 9980 proclaimed the policy of “fair employment throughout the federal establishment, without discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin,” and directed each department of the executive branch to appoint a fair employment officer to supervise operating procedures, to receive complaints, and to take “necessary corrective or disciplinary action” in consultation with his department head. The order also established a Fair Employment Board in the Civil Service Commission to review cases and to report to the president when necessary to maintain the fair employment program. Obviously, the program would take time to implement; and there would be variances in departmental operating procedures, although at least eighteen agencies had established such procedures by the end of the year. There were also outright refusals to obey the presidential order. On September 17, for example, Mortimer Jordan, Collector of Internal Revenue in Alabama, informed Secretary of the Treasury John Snyder that he had no intention of following the directive. Jordan was subsequently removed.  

The other order, 9981, was more significant, not only for its political import at the moment but also in terms of its impact. The order paraphrased the Democratic platform in calling for “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin,” and it promised implementation “as rapidly as possible.” To assist or prod the military toward achieving this goal, the president created the Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.  

Although the administration had apparently decided late in June to issue such an executive order, the statements of both major party platforms concerning discrimination in the military and the pressure of civil-rights advocates made it imperative to release the order directly
after the conventions. A. Philip Randolph, for example, had repeatedly threatened that Negro youths would fail to register for the new draft, scheduled to begin on August 16, unless the president issued an executive order abolishing segregation. Behind this threat he had a new organization entitled the League for Non-Violent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation. On July 15 he and Grant Reynolds had written to the president, contending that the statements of both platforms had presented him with a “bipartisan mandate to end military segregation forthwith by the issuance of an executive order.” They also pointed out that “the date for registration under the draft is only a month away and it is the hope of all Negro youth that there will be an alternative beyond submission to a discriminatory law and imprisonment for following the dictates of self-respect.” The ADA’s Leon Henderson had also reminded Truman of the platform promises of both parties and had urged an executive order abolishing segregation “so that the armed forces of the world’s greatest democracy may become in truth the world’s most democratic armed forces.”

Public reaction to the president’s order on military discrimination was divided. Henry Wallace denounced it as an “empty gesture,” and southerners came up with the usual strictures. Surprisingly, Negroes were far from unanimous. The Chicago Defender, already committed to Truman, contended that the executive orders were “unprecedented since the time of Lincoln” and argued that American citizens would not “permit Mr. Truman to be crucified on a cross of racial bigotry.” Others, however, observed that the word “segregation” did not appear in the presidential order and wondered if black Americans were about to be given another example of white obfuscation. The situation was complicated further when the press picked up Chief of Staff Omar Bradley’s statement that the army was not a social laboratory and would change its racial policies when the nation as a whole had changed. Although General Bradley’s statement carried the connotation of insubordination, he had not read the president’s order, was unaware that reporters were in the audience, and had inadvertently mixed up his words.

As it turned out, Bradley’s bobble worked to the advantage of black Americans and, ultimately, to the administration itself. The matter inevitably came up in the president’s news conference of July 29. Truman denied that Bradley had favored “segregation in the lower echelons of the army,” but more important was his response to a reporter who wondered if his order envisioned “eventually the end of segregation.” “Yes,” replied the president flatly; and that was that.
For the first time, Harry Truman had publicly committed himself to the end of segregation in the armed forces, although he had implied earlier that segregation was discriminatory, particularly in his special message of February 2.

The rest was anticlimactic. When A. Philip Randolph wondered if Truman would fulfill his public commitment, Senator McGrath met with his group on August 2 and assured them that the president's committee would follow the directives of the president. On August 18 Randolph announced the end of his civil-disobedience campaign on the basis of “assurance that segregation in the armed services is unequivocally banned under the executive order of July 26,” an expression more of hope than of fact. But the executive orders deflated the pressure from black leaders for the remainder of the election campaign. Although the NAACP did not endorse a presidential candidate, because of its nonpartisan status, most of its members were happy with Truman. “His new orders,” editorialized the Crisis, “represent a spirit and a courage on these issues as refreshing as they are rare. A standard has been set for government administrators of the present and the future.”

Truman had been making political capital elsewhere. His announcement of a special session had allowed him a momentary political advantage, of which the opposition was clearly aware. The New York Times observed that the president’s purpose was to “attempt to put the Republicans on the spot for their failure to enact legislation—principally in the matter of low-cost housing and price-control.” Truman admitted this later in his Memoirs. “Of course,” he recalled, “I knew that the special session would produce no results in the way of legislation. But I felt justified in calling the Congress back to Washington to prove to the people whether the Republican platform really meant anything or not.”

To dramatize the special session, Truman appeared in person before a joint session of Congress on July 27, where he presented his legislative requests. Speaking in careful, restrained language, in striking contrast with the strident tone of his acceptance address, the president identified two critical areas—housing and inflation—for congressional action. He also hoped for “other important legislative measures on which delay would injure us at home and impair our world relations.” Among other things, he urged the enactment of those measures that he had “recommended last February to protect and extend basic civil rights of citizenship and human liberty.” Noting that Congress had enacted legislation only with respect to Japanese-Americans, he
pleaded for those other measures "necessary to carry out our American ideals of liberty and justice for all."\textsuperscript{36}

Truman apparently hoped for congressional action on housing and inflation, despite the confession in his Memoirs that he was playing politics. No one seriously expected Congress to pass a civil-rights bill, least of all the president, and he carefully played down the issue. But it was hoped that some action would be taken on other matters, and careful planning on the part of the administration preceded delivery of the message to Congress. In particular, the White House consulted with members of the cabinet and with Democratic leaders in Congress. Democratic strategists also sought to mobilize outside forces in support of the president’s requests and at least to create the illusion of administrative efforts for civil rights. Consulting with representatives of the NAACP, the ACLU, and other civil-rights organizations, members of the Democratic National Committee’s Research Division urged them to press for continuation of the session until the president’s civil-rights program had been enacted, but warned, “Under no circumstances must it be a political football and used to becloud the pressing problems of inflation, housing, education.”\textsuperscript{37} This is to a large extent what happened. Few liberal Democrats, in the White House or in Congress, were willing to put civil rights first, which lessened their credibility among racial minorities and weakened the civil-rights movement of the time.

Faced with the prospect of easy victory in November and having a presidential candidate who was reluctant to become entangled in the politics of the special session, Republicans planned less carefully. Herbert Brownell, Dewey’s campaign manager, sought to offset any criticism of congressional inaction by arguing that before the Republicans could enact their platform, it was first necessary to elect a Republican president to lead a Republican Congress. The Afro-American, however, rejected this logic, contending that “the opportunity is certainly theirs. What they do with it will be a fair test of the party’s leadership.”\textsuperscript{38}

But Republicans were not bereft of inspiration. If the president could play politics, so could they, and Senate Republicans came up with the tactic of placing an anti-poll-tax bill first on the agenda. Such a bill had passed the House in 1947 and now awaited consideration in the Senate. To prevent a vote on it, Republicans reasoned, southern Democrats would launch a filibuster, thereby embarrassing the president. Thus, on July 29, Senator Kenneth S. Wherry moved to consider the anti-poll-tax bill, and the inevitable occurred when southern Demo-
crats objected strenuously on the grounds of unconstitutionality. On August 2 Wherry sought to invoke cloture on the measure, but the chair ruled that under existing rules cloture could not be applied, and the debate continued. Seeking to offset southern arguments concerning constitutionality, Senator Morse reminded his colleagues that Congress had legislated specifically against the poll tax in the soldier vote bill of 1942. He also recalled that Truman and Barkley had voted then against the anti-poll-tax amendment to that bill, though both had supported the final soldier vote bill which included this provision.89 The subsequent debate and maneuvers on the 1948 anti-poll-tax bill consumed half of the two-week special session. Finally, on August 4, the Senate voted sixty-nine to sixteen in favor of a motion by Wherry that automatically removed the anti-poll-tax bill from the agenda. That action effectively terminated consideration of civil-rights legislation in the special session.

Civil-rights organizations had been painfully reminded of the power of southern Democrats to prevent action on civil-rights measures. But they were also keenly aware of the fact that Senate Republicans had voted unanimously for Wherry’s motion, while liberal Democrats and the Democratic leadership had supplied all sixteen votes in opposition. Even before the end of the session, Walter White unleashed a torrent of invective at the Republican leadership and southern Democrats, identifying the latter as those “morons of the Senate who fear with a mortal terror that any interference with the Dixie sport of lynching, disfranchisement or second class citizenship for Negroes would instantaneously mean that their wives and daughters would flee in ecstasy to the Harlems of the South.” Republicans were delighted with the Dixiecrat filibuster, he maintained, and “sat back and chortled, believing that the voters are so dumb that they could not see through the transparent dishonesty of the opera bouffe which was being staged.”40

Republicans were scarcely more responsive to other presidential requests. Although Congress did provide for bank and consumer credit controls as well as for additional public housing, these provisions fell short of Truman’s recommendations. The administration’s political ploy therefore had been a success. On August 12, shortly after the adjournment of the special session, the White House released a scorecard contrasting the president’s requests with Congress’s inadequate action. This also prompted comparisons between the performance of the Republican Congress with the promises of the Republican platform. Moreover, during his news conference on the same day, Truman
was asked if he would label it a “do-nothing” session. Quickly exploit­
ing the situation, he replied that indeed the term “do-nothing” applied to the deliberations of the entire Eightieth Congress.41

The administration had taken the offensive, and the customary August lull during a campaign year was not allowed to destroy the advantage. Throughout the month, while other candidates prepared for the fall campaign, the president skillfully exploited the advantages of his office, issuing various statements denouncing the “feeble” efforts of the Eightieth Congress. At the urging of David Niles, he also met with Negro leaders of Harlem, including the “unofficial” mayor, who pledged their support.42 And behind the scenes, Democratic strategists prepared for the greatest effort in the history of the party to attract the black vote.

Organized Negro pressure on the administration had evaporated, but no one assumed that the black voter was a captive of the Demo­cratic party, particularly because of the threat of Wallace’s candidacy. The Research Division of the Democratic National Committee, created earlier in the year, contributed many tactical suggestions as well as detailed data, including a twenty-three-page “fact sheet” outlining the administration’s accomplishments in the area of civil rights. It was a comprehensive brief, which, aside from the obvious, included such things as the Justice Department’s amicus curiae briefs in the restrictive covenant cases of Shelley v. Kraemer and Hurd v. Hodge, a report of the administration’s intervention in court cases in New Mexico and Arizona to permit Indians in those states to vote, and the Justice Department’s argument in the Supreme Court case of Takahashi v. Fish and Game Commission of California, which contended successfully that the state law prohibiting Japanese-Americans from commercial fishing violated the Constitution.48

In August, William Batt of the Research Division also forwarded to Clark Clifford a six-page memorandum outlining strategy for the president’s campaign, which Clifford in turn, after slight revision, sent to the president. The document stressed three main objectives—to win the majority of political independents by identifying Dewey with the “failures” of the Eightieth Congress; to solidify the Democratic appeal to workers, veterans, and Negroes without overlooking farmers and small businessmen; and to cut into normal Republican areas by highlight­ing the president’s program for “peace.” The president should “speak out fully” on his civil-rights contributions. “His record proves that he acts as well as talks Civil Rights,” the memo argued; “the Negro votes in the crucial states will more than cancel out any votes the presi-
dent may lose in the South.” Geographically, the president should tour the Midwest and Far West and then finish in the East, where he should emphasize the housing shortage, inflation, labor, and civil rights. And in New York he “should appear for a major speech at a mass meeting in Harlem, a center of Negro population. His appearance there would have a powerful effect on Negro voters throughout the United States.” Finally, the memorandum implied that the South should be ignored, except for a brief trip where the president could remind southerners of the economic benefits of the New Deal.

It was a well-reasoned document and, with some variations, accurately described the campaign that Truman would wage. On his transcontinental tour, beginning on September 17, he launched a well-balanced attack, indicting the “do-nothing” Congress everywhere, while exploiting issues of local concern. As he swept across the country, he ignored civil rights, an issue that had never electrified the farmers and small-town people of the West. California, where Wallace was considered strong and where Warren had much home-state appeal, was another matter. In a major address in Los Angeles, Truman opened fire on Wallace, contending that Communists controlled his party, that a vote for him was wasted, and that the Democratic party was truly liberal in seeking, among other things, to “extend civil rights.”

On his return journey through Texas and Oklahoma, he studiously avoided any mention of civil rights, or of Strom Thurmond, for that matter, which prompted some newspaper comment. In Dallas, Truman reportedly spoke to a desegregated audience in Rebel Stadium; and it did him no harm, with black or white voters, when he said in response to Tom Clark’s introduction of him as the man who stopped Joe Louis: “It wasn’t Joe Louis I stopped—it was John. I haven’t quite that much muscle.” Moving north into Oklahoma and then to southern Illinois, the “Little Egypt” area of agriculture and coal mining, Truman evoked the memory of William Jennings Bryan, as he warned his audiences that “big-business Republicans have begun to nail the American consumer to the wall with spikes of greed.” In southern Illinois he also informed his audiences that his administration had “continued the fight to expand our civil liberties by new measures against discrimination.” He did not go beyond that for the time being. On October 2 the president was back in Washington, satisfied with his performance and with his reception.

The administration’s strategy was clear. By avoiding a confrontation over civil rights and by refusing to admit Thurmond’s existence, Truman hoped to restrict Dixiecrat strength to the deep South. In-
deed, for the remainder of the campaign, he ignored the South, except for speaking in Miami to the American Legion Convention, where he stressed the issues of peace and war, and in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he spoke at the dedication of a monument to Presidents Jackson, Polk, and Johnson. Truman’s Raleigh speech was a thoughtful and skillful performance, designed to appeal to southern moderate opinion and yet to reaffirm his commitment to fulfill his constitutional duty. Identifying himself with the three presidents, each of whom had fought “the forces of pressure and persuasion which sought to make him act as a representative of a part of the nation only,” Truman formulated a single message from this lesson of the past: “Do your duty, and history will do you justice.”

From the moment that Thurmond had opened his campaign at a watermelon festival in Cherryville, North Carolina, he had tried desperately to provoke Truman into a debate, or at least to force him to respond to his accusations. And Thurmond was a clever performer. He concentrated on equating the civil-rights program with communism, an association that was becoming increasingly popular in right-wing circles. On August 21, for example, he alleged that the administration was “honeycombed” with Communists who were dictating policy, particularly on civil rights. His running mate, Governor Wright, declared that the FEPC was “hatched in the brains of Communists.”

On September 25 Thurmond wired Truman in El Paso, noting “the amazing parallel between the ideology and administrative provisions of the proposed FEPC bill, which you support, and Communistic Russian all races law promulgated by Stalin.” He hoped that Truman would “not duck any of these issues while in the South.” There were also naked appeals to the racist vote. A form postcard sent to southern workingmen urged labor unions to fight Truman, the man seeking to “force you to work with Negroes and other undesirables.” Through it all, Truman remained imperturbable, and the strategy paid political dividends. By mid October, it was clear that the States’ Rights party was becoming increasingly isolated. Prestigious southern newspapers shunned the party; politicians feared the loss of patronage or remembered past favors; and nearly everyone realized the hopelessness of the cause.

Although a few black critics carped at the president for his reluctance to speak out boldly on civil rights during the first part of his campaign, most of the major Negro newspapers maintained a discreet silence—and for a somewhat embarrassing reason. Many were now in the process of endorsing Governor Dewey, who was actually saying
no more about civil rights than the president and a good deal less about social-welfare legislation. Indeed, both Dewey and Warren, who had initially won political reputations as relentless prosecutors, were resting their case on a mountain of platitudes, content with the expectation of a landslide victory in November. Such an approach was a serious miscalculation as far as the Negro vote was concerned. Although Dewey’s record on race relations was impressive, it was also unknown to the average black voter outside the state of New York. Truman, however, had reaped the benefits of vast publicity since the report of his Committee on Civil Rights. The Republican National Committee did seek to publicize Dewey’s record through the activities of its Negro Division and lavish advertisements in the Negro press.  

The New York governor, however, made no serious effort to entice black voters; and Negroes in his audiences responded accordingly. Negro columnists traveling with the “Dewey Victory Special” as it clicked across the country commented on the lack of enthusiasm for the governor and on the small number of Negroes in his average-sized crowds. And in Oakland, California, where one-third of the audience was black, he said nothing about civil rights, although in Santa Fe he did refer to the existence of an FEPC in New York state. Black citizens were also distressed when Dewey advocated that the African colonies be returned to Italy; this prompted the National Council of Negro Women, meeting in its thirteenth annual convention, to criticize the governor.

Although Dewey took a firm stand on civil rights in New Castle, Pennsylvania, his speech in New York City on October 21 best illustrated his low-keyed campaign approach to the issue of equal justice. Then Dewey declared:

Government . . . must guide its way by one single standard of equal justice and equal treatment for all.

By a faithful adherence to this standard we can meet even our most difficult problems of discrimination against minority groups, of prejudice, of bigotry, of denial of certain human rights.

From my own experience in this state with the largest minority groups in the nation, I have found it possible to find peaceful, honest solutions to problems which fester when they are ignored or explode if they are mishandled.

By a simple re-discovery of our devotion to human rights and the protection of others from the abuse of those rights, we
can draw a line through every conflict and draw it straight and true. It can be drawn so that both civil liberty and social responsibility complement and fortify each other.

We should deal with the problem of social injustice wherever it is to be found in America and solve that problem in American terms.54

Nor were the Republican leaders that were speaking for Dewey going overboard in their enthusiasm for civil rights. In Charlotte, North Carolina, Harold Stassen promised southern voters that Dewey, if elected, would find “an intelligent compromise between states’ rights and human rights which would satisfy Dixie.” Although Senator Taft contended to a northern audience that a Republican Congress would enact something in the way of civil-rights legislation, he dropped the subject in the South, where he took a states’ rights approach and indicted the “planned economy and totalitarian regulation of the Truman New Deal.” Plainly, neither major party was inclined to discuss the issue in the South, although both were interested in the region’s votes.55

Henry Wallace was not as reluctant, and during the fall he invaded the South, where several untoward incidents occurred. His campaign again took him to all parts of the country, but the enthusiasm shown earlier in the year was no longer apparent, except in New York City. The Progressive convention may have inspired some of the faithful, but the allegations of Communist influence on its proceedings and within the party increasingly isolated Wallace from the mainstream of America, particularly as the cold war promised to warm up. And the leadership of the Americans for Democratic Action, now in the Truman camp, was not about to allow anyone to forget the charges. In October the ADA released a forty-two-page indictment of Wallace, the burden of which was to pin the Communist tag on the Progressive party.56

Although Negroes generally had been reluctant to indulge in such accusations, perhaps because they, too, had been the object of suspicion, an increasing number of blacks began to perceive a reddish hue to the party. Columnist Earl Brown, who had attended the Progressive convention, reported that he “saw Communists and their allies and stooges running the Third Party convention as ruthlessly as any dictator ever ran a political show.” Although appreciative of Wallace’s courage, the Chicago Defender noted that “in order to love him, you must also love his motley crew of Communist stooges, for he has refused to repudiate the Commies.” A. Philip Randolph, too, joined the chorus of condem-
The Wallace candidacy also ignited long-smoldering differences within the NAACP, particularly between Walter White and W. E. B. DuBois, its research director. An avid supporter of Henry Wallace, DuBois found White's thinly disguised admiration for Truman unbearable, particularly when White excoriated Wallace in his syndicated column for his notoriously "bad" performance on racial matters while secretary of agriculture and of commerce. In subsequent columns, White evaluated Dewey's record on human and civil rights as "that of a man who coolly appraises political advantage and acts accordingly," while "it must be recognized that no president in American history has made as frontal an attack on racial and religious discrimination as Truman." The bitter disagreement between the two NAACP executives led to DuBois's ouster as research director.

The affair had portentous consequences for the NAACP. White's public expressions in favor of Truman challenged the credibility of the organization's claim to nonpartisanship, and White found himself the subject of increasing criticism in the Negro press, particularly from those newspapers championing Dewey. In his own inimitable way, George Schuyler undoubtedly spoke for many when he concluded: "While I do not usually agree with Darkwater (W. E. B. DuBois), the Leftwing octogenarian who has long and futilely aspired to the leadership of U.S. Senegambians for the benefit of Stalin, I must admit that he 'has something' when he charges that Blondie (Walter White) is riding the Truman New (?) Deal bandwagon. Of course, Walter replies that the NAACP is non-partisan, but the people who believe that should have their heads examined."

Democratic strategists did not permit White's virtual endorsement of Truman to delude them into assuming that he, or any Negro for that matter, could deliver the black vote in November. Although Wallace's overall appeal had fallen from its crest, it appeared that he still retained impressive support from black citizens, at least judging by the crowds of them in his audiences and by the number of Negroes running on the Progressive ticket for local offices. As a consequence, the Democratic National Committee was engaged in its greatest effort to woo black Americans. The 1948 Democratic campaign was far more than a one-man affair. Early in August, National Chairman McGrath publicly announced that the committee's Negro Division had been disbanded and its black members distributed throughout the staff; segre-
gation and discrimination, he announced, were inconsistent with the president's policy with regard to federal employment and the armed forces.61

Under the supervision of John P. Davis, a Negro who was Assistant Director of Publicity, the committee also published a four-page newspaper entitled the Truman Record, which contained articles by William L. Dawson, Channing Tobias, and others, emphasizing Truman's contributions to civil rights. A million copies were distributed, with special concentration on the key states of New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. In addition to other pamphlets and brochures, the committee published three million copies of a pictorial history of The Story of Harry S. Truman, which the opposition labeled a comic book. The booklet pictured the president repeating phrases from his State of the Union address of January 7, 1948, including his statement that "our first goal is to secure fully the essential human rights of our citizens," while someone in the background observed that "the right to vote must be shared by all!" The Political Action Committee of the CIO also issued a leaflet entitled "A Look at Truman's Record on Civil Rights."62

But the most significant tactic was the summoning of Governor William Hastie of the Virgin Islands, whose activities were designed almost entirely to undermine Wallace. On October 13, speaking at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, Hastie promised to visit nineteen cities on behalf of the president. He focused his criticisms on the Progressive party, "a political puppet securely tied to the Communist party line." A memorandum of White House Assistant Stephen Spingarn summarized Hastie's approach and contribution: "Throughout the campaign Hastie was the Democratic party's primary weapon against the Wallace move to suck in the uninformed Negro vote."63

Moreover, the Truman forces had the untiring efforts of Congressman William L. Dawson, who headed the all-black National Citizens Committee for the Reelection of President Truman. The committee pledged itself to raise $500,000; and it issued various pieces of propaganda, including a four-page statement on the "Truman Policy on Negro Health." The occasion for the statement was the publication of Federal Security Administrator Oscar R. Ewing's The Nation's Health: A Report to the President, a 186-page report in support of the president's national health-insurance program. Among other things, the document promised medical services to everyone "without regard to his race or religion, the color of his skin, his place of national origin or
the place he lives in our land,” and urged the abolition of discrimination in the training and employment of medical personnel.64

The Ewing report received considerable coverage. Dawson stressed its significance in his article in the Truman Record, and Walter White gave it a paragraph in his statement praising the president. Although the timing of the book coincided nicely with the needs of the campaign, it was not primarily a tract for the moment, for it would become the basis for the administration’s proposed health program. Moreover, Ewing took his work seriously and was primarily responsible for the agreement earlier in the year to permit Negro medical personnel to practice in Gallinger Hospital in Washington, D.C. Ewing was also an active campaigner for the president. Speaking in Richmond, Virginia, to three hundred delegates of the National Urban League on September 9, he lauded Truman for his controversial and courageous stand on civil rights, insisting that every Negro who “loves his race” should support him.65

Finally, there remained the president, who had played down civil rights for over a month, apparently ignoring the advice of Clifford and Batt in August to speak out boldly on the subject. True, early in October he had toured Philadelphia’s South Street—a black ghetto—and the Defender happily highlighted the fact that he was the first president to do so. But in speeches elsewhere throughout most of the month, he had avoided the issue of civil rights, except where it might be raised obliquely in connection with displaced persons legislation. Although there were indications that he already had impressive support from the black rank and file, he decided to take no chances. In the last week of the campaign, he launched an overt, almost blatant, appeal for the votes of American minorities, particularly those of Negroes, Catholics, and Jews. In arriving at the decision to do this, Truman was taking a calculated risk. Although he apparently considered most of the South safely Democratic, he also had to take into account the existence of antiminority prejudice elsewhere, for a Roper poll in September indicated the possibility of a white Protestant backlash.66

The new offensive was quite apparent in his speech in Chicago on October 25, where his campaign invective degenerated into demagoguery. Speaking from a prepared text, Truman ignored the “contemptible Communist minority” in order to concentrate on the “crackpot forces of the extreme right wing”—all located in the Republican party. Indeed, he more than implied that the forces behind Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo paralleled those in influential positions in the Republican
party—those who were “stirring up racial and religious prejudice against some of our fellow Americans.” Nor was it simply a solitary reference. He returned to the subject, asserting that “dangerous men, who are trying to win followers for their war on democracy, are attacking Catholics, and Jews, and Negroes, and other minority races and religions”; and he particularly indicted the voices of religious prejudice for passage of the displaced persons bill. Although more subdued in Cleveland the following evening, he pointed out that the special session had not responded to his plea to enact legislation “to protect the basic rights of citizenship and human liberty.”

In the remaining days of the campaign, he devoted speeches to each of America's three most prominent minorities. Speaking in Boston on October 27, he concentrated on the Catholic vote, though he did note almost parenthetically that Massachusetts had abolished slavery during the Revolutionary War because “the people held that liberty was not for any one race or creed.” In the course of his address, he denounced religious bigotry, particularly in the “shameful” campaign of 1928 in which “the Republican appeal was based on religious prejudice because of Al Smith’s Catholic faith.”

Truman then moved on to New York, where he delivered a major address in Madison Square Garden. There, he appealed to Jewish members of the audience by discussing the administration's policy toward Israel, which at that moment was involved in fighting with Arab nations. The president warned his audience that he would not allow domestic politics to influence that policy, which must have provoked little applause. He then declared, however, “I have never changed my position on Palestine or Israel,” which would have been news to the Zionists in the crowd, because of his earlier equivocation on the recognition of Israel.

Despite the importance of the Jewish vote, particularly in New York, it should be emphasized that Truman had sought religiously to keep the Palestine issue out of the campaign. Until late October he had restricted his appeal for Jewish votes to an indictment of the Displaced Persons Act. On October 22, however, Dewey released a statement reaffirming his support of a Jewish homeland. Only then did Truman mention his own attitudes and actions in this regard, first in a public statement on October 24, then in his speech on October 28 in Madison Square Garden.

His speech in Harlem the next day, however, was the highlight of the New York tour. It was a significant occasion, not only because he was the first president to speak in Harlem but also because he was to
receive the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Brotherhood Medal. It was, moreover, the first anniversary of the report of his Committee on Civil Rights. Consequently, Philleo Nash of the White House staff prepared carefully, and it required at least six drafts to get a message that would strike the proper tone, one without invective and virtually devoid of partisanship. Speaking thoughtfully and carefully from his prepared text before an audience estimated at sixty-five thousand, the president emphasized the contribution of his Committee on Civil Rights in preparing the way for the achievement of equality and justice in America. He pointed out that over one million copies of the committee’s report had been printed, and he stressed its educational value to all Americans. Governmental agencies, both state and federal, could and would act, he reminded his audience, but private action was also necessary, “for in the last analysis, freedom resides in the actions of each individual.” After briefly mentioning his executive orders of July and the Department of Justice’s contributions before the Supreme Court, he closed with the promise to work for the attainment of equal rights “with every ounce of strength and determination that I have.” The speech was an impressive performance, but at that late date in the campaign it probably influenced few votes. In fact, some Negro papers that had endorsed Dewey failed to report it. Some southerners were aware of it, however, and at least one white editor accused the president of having advocated the abolition of southern segregation in his address.

A few speeches remained, then Truman returned to Independence to vote and to await the election results. The polls showed Dewey in front, though Truman had narrowed the gap in the final weeks of the campaign. Still no one, except Truman apparently, really expected his stunning upset victory. In popular votes, Truman received 24,179,345 to Dewey’s 21,991,291, Thurmond’s 1,176,125, and Wallace’s 1,157,326. In electoral votes, Truman won 303, with Dewey and Thurmond receiving 189 and 39, respectively. Careful strategy had paid off. Thurmond’s electoral votes were confined to Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, except for one from a Tennessee elector. The administration had been able to isolate the States’ Rights party and to cut into the Wallace vote in the North at the same time. Truman also received approximately 69 percent of the black vote, and in many areas—Harlem, for example—he ran well ahead of Roosevelt’s margin in 1944.

Although Truman had a sizable plurality, the electoral count of 303 to 189 was misleading, for he had carried California, Illinois, and
Ohio by a total of only 58,584 votes. Had the voters shifted slightly in all three states, Dewey would have won the electoral vote and the White House. Here, the black vote played its role, for the concentration of that vote in the cities of heavily populated states contributed mightily to Truman’s margin of victory in the electoral college. For example, Truman won California by 17,865, yet Negro voters in Los Angeles gave him a 25,028 margin over Dewey. Truman carried Illinois by 33,612, while Chicago’s Negroes alone gave him a 128,541 plurality. In Ohio, Truman squeezed through by a mere 7,107 votes, but Negroes in Cleveland provided him with a margin of 14,713. And so it went.\(^7\)

The substantial black vote for Truman was no mystery. Aside from the obvious propaganda value of his Committee on Civil Rights, his special message of February 2, the civil-rights plank in the Democratic platform, and the issuance of executive orders 9980 and 9981, Truman had other things working for him, including the memory of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Wallace was fatally handicapped. The increasing tension of the cold war and the accusations concerning Communist influence within his party, which Hastie effectively exploited, alienated Wallace from a growing number of black Americans. And over it all hung the indisputable fact that Wallace simply could not win. Although Dewey had a respectable record on civil rights as governor of New York, that record was largely unknown to many black voters, and Dewey chose not to enlighten them in his campaign speeches in 1948. Moreover, when white southerners rebelled out of fear that the president really “meant it,” some Negroes were finally persuaded to take the Missourian at his word.

There were other reasons, economic as well as racial. The depression of the 1930s was still a vivid and painful memory to those black Americans who had lived through it. The widespread fear of a post-war depression had not materialized, and Truman reaped the benefit. Moreover, black Americans, like other low-income groups, favored social-welfare legislation, and Truman’s espousal of such measures and his hard-hitting indictment of the “do-nothing” Eightieth Congress was effective in convincing many Negro workers that he was a fitting representative of the New Deal tradition. In voting for Truman, these people were motivated as much by class as by race.

Nor did Truman’s veto of the Taft-Hartley Act and his exploitation of the fact during the campaign do him any harm with most black voters. Indeed, the act had been a divisive, though minor, issue within the black community since its passage in 1947. Although blacks were
still blocked from entering into many unions, particularly the skilled crafts unions of the AFL, many now belonged to the CIO as a result of recruiting drives during the 1930s and of the labor shortage and the actions of Roosevelt's FEPC during the Second World War. Furthermore, leaders of the CIO, black and white alike, did their homework in educating workers to the political realities of the time.\textsuperscript{75}

Negro workers were thus part of the CIO's bitter campaign against revision of the Wagner Act. When the Republican Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, prominent black leaders chose sides. Those who opposed substantial revision of the Wagner Act and supported Truman's veto included Walter White and the NAACP, A. Philip Randolph and other labor leaders, several columnists, and the \textit{Chicago Defender} and several minor Negro newspapers.\textsuperscript{76} Most of the major Negro papers, however, lined up in favor of Taft-Hartley, in part because of its abolition of the closed shop (which appealed to them as employers) and because it contained a clause aimed at discrimination in labor unions.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, when the Taft-Hartley Act became a significant issue in the campaign of 1948, blacks were involved. While several Negro newspapers urged the election of Dewey in part because of the Republican-enacted Taft-Hartley Act, black as well as white CIO workers prepared to troop to the polls to vote for Truman, which in the last analysis probably hurt Wallace more than Dewey.\textsuperscript{78}

If black workers could vote along class as well as racial lines, so, too, could black employers—which offers some explanation for the fact that all of the major Negro papers, except the \textit{Chicago Defender}, endorsed Dewey for the presidency. Historically Republican until the New Deal, some Negro publishers were eager to return to the Republican fold, and the nominations of Willkie in 1940 and Dewey in 1944, rather than someone like Robert Taft, persuaded them to drop Roosevelt after 1936. The \textit{Call}, in fact, had never endorsed Roosevelt, so that its support of Dewey in 1948 was completely consistent with its past editorial policy. In 1948 Dewey's strong record on civil rights persuaded some black publishers to see a standoff on that issue, and this permitted them to endorse the governor for economic reasons. Thus some favored Taft-Hartley; others wanted lower taxes; one endorsed "free enterprise"; still others were not convinced of the sincerity of the man from Missouri. The Dixiecrat rebellion persuaded some that the Democratic party was a hopeless vehicle for progress on civil rights if the rebels should return. And several reasoned that at that moment in history civil-rights legislation stood a better chance of enactment with a Republican president and a Republican Congress. With a Republi-
can in the White House, Republicans in Congress would be under pressure to support his program, while most northern Democrats would go along because of their personal commitment and their black constituents.¹⁹

Truman, of course, was not without support from the black press. In addition to the Chicago Defender, several smaller papers across the country, including some in the South, endorsed his candidacy. Moreover, he had the support of many black columnists, who endorsed him at the same time that their editors were eulogizing Dewey. Finally, the majority of black political reporters supported the president. On the eve of the election, they polled themselves: there were fourteen in favor of Truman, three for Dewey, two for Wallace, and, unbelievably enough, one for Thurmond.³⁰ Thus, in some ways, black journalism in 1948 paralleled its white counterpart.

Truman’s upset victory of 1948 has become part of American folklore, but the entire campaign was much more than that. For years, black Americans had anticipated the day when their votes would become numerous enough to affect presidential elections. As early as 1924 Professor Kelly Miller of Howard University had argued that as a result of the migration of southern Negroes to northern cities during the First World War, “the solid Negro vote constitutes the balance of power in the closely contested states of the North and West which usually determine the issue between the two parties.”³¹ The announcement was premature, but the election of 1948 made the wish a reality. It demonstrated that in a close contest the weight of America’s most numerous racial minority could determine the electoral votes of large states and hence the election, assuming, of course, that the black vote was fluid enough to shift according to the interests of the moment rather than to the dictates of memory.

Moreover, throughout the year, civil rights had occupied a position of importance, evidenced by the strong statements in both party platforms and the unprecedented activities of both national committees; the president’s message of February and his executive orders of July 26; the Dixiecrat defection and Wallace’s courageous campaigning. This position represented the fruition of a movement that had begun at least ten years before to increase public awareness of civil rights problems. No longer could the issue of civil rights be ignored, and in the future both parties would vie for the black vote. “From that time on,” Roy Wilkins has written, “the civil-rights issue has been squarely in the national political picture of both major parties (not around the fringes as in the old days), and the non-southern Negro
voting power is now balanced (in the Democratic party) against the Deep South white vote."

There were other significant results. In voting for Truman in 1948, Negroes demonstrated a loyalty to the party as well as to the president. During the 1930s black Americans had abandoned their historic allegiance to the Republican party, and from 1936 on, they had voted for Roosevelt, primarily for economic and emotional reasons. The New Deal convinced most blacks that the Democratic party was preferable on "bread and butter" issues, although many still looked to the party of Lincoln for progress on civil rights. Truman's contribution was not only to confirm the Democratic party's commitment to social-welfare legislation and to invoke the memory of the economic appeal of the New Deal but, of equal importance, to champion civil rights as no Democratic president had ever done, thus neutralizing the traditional appeal of Republicans on this issue. This was quite an achievement, particularly in view of the presence and power of southern Democrats in the party, and it made it increasingly difficult for Republicans to cut into the black vote.

The election of 1948 contained other hints of the future, particularly with regard to alterations in customary voting habits and the increasing complexity of campaign strategy. In 1948, while Truman was solidifying the allegiance of Negroes to the Democratic party, he was also persuading some racist white voters to look elsewhere: the States' Rights party was the first significant manifestation of white backlash in the twentieth century—a fact that both major parties had to keep in mind when bidding for black votes in subsequent elections. In 1948 the issue of civil rights provoked conflicts only between the North and the South and within the Democratic party, although beneath the surface in northern ghettos of various white ethnic minorities lay unmasked questions and unresolved answers concerning Truman's egalitarian policies. In the future, the white backlash would emerge and be present, in varying degrees, in every part of the country. Moreover, the revolt of the white South also encouraged the party of Lincoln to look South for votes in the future. But for the moment, the events of 1948 brought hope to minorities that progress would continue.