Quest and Response
McCoy, Donald R., Ruetten, Richard T.

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Truman’s victory in November stirred hope throughout black America, for civil-rights advocates chose to interpret his election as an endorsement of his stand for equal rights. Walter White lost no time in cabling the president. “Your triumph, achieved over both the extreme Right and extreme Left,” he maintained, “is a mandate under which you and the new Congress can proceed to carry out the program you outlined so clearly and courageously to the people.” “The people have spoken!” exclaimed Mrs. Sadie Alexander to Francis Matthews, a fellow member of the president’s civil-rights committee. “They have approved President Truman’s appointment of a Committee on Civil Rights, the report of that committee and the president’s determination to make the recommendations of that report a reality.” Matthews agreed. Writing to the president on November 12, he rejoiced “in the vindication of your championship of our committee’s report and recommendations.” Truman’s response was more than pro forma; after the customary pleasantries of thanking Matthews for his “generous words of congratulations and commendation,” he penned at the bottom: “We shall win that civil rights battle just as we won the election, I am sure.”

Although some did not share Truman’s certainty about victory on the field of civil rights, few doubted his personal commitment, and the pages of the black press were replete with glowing tributes to the president. “The future for civil rights looks brighter than it has in the history of this country,” concluded a reporter for the Courier. “Democracy Reborn with Truman Victory,” went the headline of a front-page article in the Call, erstwhile supporter of Governor Dewey. “No candidate for the presidency ever faced a greater combination of hostile power,” editorialized the Chicago Defender. “In the face of such oppo-
sition Harry Truman never wavered once. He discussed every issue from civil rights to foreign policy and he took his stand without qualification or compromise."

But if there was little doubt in the black press about the president, there was considerable apprehension about the new Congress, for the election had also resulted in Democratic majorities in both houses. Here, black opinion was divided. The Chicago Defender was convinced that Democratic control of Congress would ensure enactment of the president’s program and that Truman possessed enough patronage power to keep southern politicians in line. At the very least, several newspapers expected the new Congress to legislate against lynching and the poll tax. But the Journal and Guide was deeply distressed. Pointing out that Sam Rayburn of Texas would serve as speaker of the House, that Vice-President Barkley of Kentucky would preside over the Senate, and that southerners would chair important committees, the paper concluded on the wry note that these facts “should give Negro leaders who had advocated Mr. Truman’s election very little to be happy about.”

Nevertheless, for the moment Truman had the advantage, which he was determined not to lose, either with black America or with the new Congress. On November 16, in his first news conference after the election, he promised a civil-rights statement in his State of the Union message. This prompted Jonathan Daniels to write in the Raleigh News and Observer: “There is nothing strange about that. Indeed, one certain thing is that Harry Truman means what he says.” In another news conference on December 2, Truman delighted black America with his response to a question concerning how Dixiecrat electors ought to cast their votes. “I don’t want the Dixiecrat vote,” the president retorted. “We won without New York and without the solid South, and I am proud of that.”

All this helped, of course, when Congressman Frank W. Boykin of Alabama declared in a postelection speech in Mobile that Truman, prior to the election, had confided: “Frank, I don’t believe in this civil-rights program any more than you do, but we’ve got to have it to win.” The Associated Negro Press picked up the story and also reported that Truman had “no comment” on the matter. The ANP predicted, “The statement will continue to plague and haunt him until he makes some definite statement on the congressman’s speech.” The alleged statement actually haunted no one. The White House subsequently denied it in private correspondence, and most Negro papers did not even
bother to report it. The Call refused to accept it at the outset, denouncing Boykin as a southern politician habituated to "skullduggery."

In his resolution not to waver on civil rights, Truman had solid support from several Democratic spokesmen and senators. When Senator Sparkman of Alabama sought to prevent a showdown in Congress by proposing the appointment of a congressional committee to investigate the problems of minorities in America, Senator Pepper of Florida rejected the idea, stating that the administration was determined to move quickly on civil rights. Vice-President-elect Barkley also chose to let people know where he stood. In a speech in New York in mid December, he made an exceptionally strong and vigorous statement in favor of civil-rights legislation, noting that "the controversial aspects of it cannot minimize our obligation to deal with it." And when Senator Sparkman promised a fight if the president refused to compromise, Senator McGrath reported that he saw "no change in the president's attitude. He is still determined to press for his program as he outlined it before the 80th Congress and during the campaign."

Truman also had the same message for Walter White when he called at the White House on November 29 to present the statistics of the black vote. White later emerged to announce the president's determination to pursue his civil-rights program. "I saw no sign of any compromise," he reported. The NAACP leader was unusually optimistic. Speaking to the tenth constitutional convention of the CIO, he proclaimed that "the outlook is infinitely brighter for the stopping of reaction, for the repeal of anti-labor legislation and the enactment into law of civil-rights and social welfare legislation than any time in recent history." Yet his critical faculties had not escaped him. In his column in the Chicago Defender, he noted that the old guard might die but would never surrender, which "makes it imperative that liberals, and especially Negroes, waste no time jubilating over the election of a somewhat more enlightened Congress . . . or the defeat of those who attempted to lynch Harry Truman because of his civil rights program."

Truman also conferred with other civil-rights advocates. On December 10 he met with four members of the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, who presented him with the published, and abbreviated, version of the committee's comprehensive investigation of discrimination in the District of Columbia. With financial support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the committee had been privately organized in the fall of 1946, at the same time that Truman had created his own Committee on Civil Rights. In fact, the two committees had worked closely together. Four members of the president's
committee—Sadie Alexander, James Carey, Dorothy Tilly, and Channing Tobias—had also served on the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, and the latter committee had supplied the president's committee with the source material for its brief indictment of discrimination in the District. Truman thus had good reason to accept the report in an "extremely warm and cordial" manner, as George N. Shuster, chairman of the committee on segregation in Washington, later revealed to the press.

The committee's published report, entitled Segregation in Washington, had been prepared by Kenesaw M. Landis, who had ruthlessly cut the original manuscript to a brief, hard-hitting, and well-illustrated ninety-one pages, hoping thus to achieve the maximum impact. He succeeded. In casting a bright light on the dark side of racism, Segregation in Washington did for the District what To Secure These Rights had done for the nation. By word and picture, Segregation in Washington illustrated the plight of blacks living in the shadow of the Capitol, who were suffering the degrading effects of discrimination in employment, recreational facilities, education, restaurants, theaters, and housing. By inference, it revealed that on racial matters the nation's capital combined the worst features of discrimination, northern as well as southern. As a showplace of American democracy, the capital was a disgrace.

The discrimination in the District was apparent the moment a visitor deplaned at Washington's National Airport, located on the Virginia side of the Potomac, because of its rigidly segregated restaurant facilities. Discrimination at the airport had a long and complicated history. Almost from the moment it opened in June 1941, Negroes had lodged complaints. When Edgar G. Brown, then president of the United Government Employees, was denied service and referred to the basement to dine with the help, he staged a one-man sit-down strike; the Southernaires, a prominent black radio group, also protested. And everyone was confused by premature reports that discrimination would not be tolerated because the airport was supervised directly by the Civil Aeronautics Administration, which was located within the Department of Commerce.

In 1945 the situation was clarified, or so it seemed, with the settlement of a longstanding boundary dispute between the state of Virginia and the District of Columbia. The federal government was given exclusive jurisdiction over the National Airport, constructed on reclaimed land on the Virginia side of the Potomac; but the law contained a joker. It stipulated that certain sections of the federal criminal
code applied to the airport, including Section 289, which provided that when the federal government assumed control of state land, the criminal laws of the state would nonetheless remain in effect; and Virginia law required segregation in “public halls.” To complicate matters further, a private corporation, Air Services Terminal, Inc., was the concessionaire; and it opposed integration of its restaurant facilities.\textsuperscript{12}

On the surface, it seemed a hopeless situation for advocates of desegregation, although some obviously were unaware of the finer points of the law. In 1945 and 1946 criticism of the Civil Aeronautics Administration mounted, and Henry Wallace, then secretary of commerce, came in for much abuse. Apparently Wallace’s solicitor had informed him that he lacked authority to integrate the airport in view of the Virginia law, although a White House assistant later recalled that Wallace had never responded to White House referrals on the subject.\textsuperscript{13} The NAACP then protested to his successor, W. Averell Harriman, who received similar advice from departmental lawyers. But unlike Wallace, Harriman pursued the matter and personally urged Congress to adopt legislation requiring integration of facilities at the National Airport. As a result, the \textit{Chicago Defender} placed Harriman on its honor roll in 1947 “for his role in ending discrimination in the Washington airport restaurant.” The announcement was premature. Congress failed to respond to Harriman’s request and rejected Congressman Everett Dirksen’s bill to eliminate segregation at the airport.\textsuperscript{14}

There the matter stood while politics were being played, although the airport situation threatened to become an issue. It cropped up occasionally in criticisms of Henry Wallace, and a court case instigated by the NAACP posed a special problem for the administration. After several postponements, the case was scheduled to be heard by Judge Albert Bryan in federal district court on October 28, 1948; and the administration was thus faced with the possibility of embarrassment in the closing days of the campaign. The matter was referred to John R. Steelman, assistant to the president, who consulted with the Department of Commerce as well as with the president. Apparently, the solicitor for the Commerce Department concluded that the department lacked authority to issue a desegregation order.\textsuperscript{15}

The Department of Justice, however, had already decided otherwise. In an unsolicited opinion, Acting Attorney General Philip B. Perlman informed Commerce Secretary Charles Sawyer on October 27 that he had the necessary authority. Pointing out that the Justice Department had been in contact with Judge Bryan, which evidently led
to a further postponement of the case, Perlman requested action by the Commerce Department "at an early date." The Justice Department had thoroughly studied the problem, Perlman contended, and believed that the Civil Aeronautics Administrator could issue regulations for the airport. Presumably, the Department of Justice was insisting that a restaurant was not a "public hall," as stipulated in the Virginia segregation statute. Secretary Sawyer, however, chose not to issue an order at that time.16

With the matter apparently at a standstill, Truman decided to intervene. The immediate occasion for his action stemmed from a letter of November 10, written by Sadie Alexander. Upon deplaning at Washington National Airport on August 9, she informed the president, the soda fountain offered to serve her a glass of milk only if she would carry it "to the ladies room or drink it in the lobby." She refused to suffer the indignity and promised to take the case to court, which she did in October. Mrs. Alexander, however, preferred executive action. Therefore, she asked the president to request an opinion from the attorney general, who, she was convinced, must "advise you that the defendant cannot deny the same service . . . solely because of color." Francis P. Matthews also promised Mrs. Alexander that he, too, would urge presidential action. The White House responded. David Niles requested an opinion from the Department of Justice, which of course was favorable to executive action, and Clark Clifford participated in writing the order.17

On December 27, 1948, after seven years of agitation, black Americans had a small amount of satisfaction when D. W. Rentzel, CAA administrator, announced that the government, on the advice of the Justice Department, had ordered the end of racial segregation at Washington National Airport. Mrs. Alexander, writing to the president, saw the action as "further evidence of your conviction that democracy can and must be made a living force in America." She also dropped her court case immediately.18

The problem of segregation at Washington National Airport revealed in microcosm all of the difficulties involved in razing the wall of segregation in America. In removing only a stone, the cause of justice had to combat legal technicalities, ignorance, bureaucratic inertia, departmental opposition, political calculations, and general indifference, both within the government and without. Nor was the case closed. Air Terminal Services, Inc., the concessionaire, refused to serve six Negroes within twenty-four hours after the CAA order, and it appealed to the federal district court for an injunction. On January 3,
1949, Judge Albert Bryan denied the injunction, holding that the Civil Aeronautics Administration had ample authority to erase the color line at the airport; and Virginia authorities indicated that they would not contest the order. It was only fitting that Edgar G. Brown, who had launched the first sit-in protest in 1941, was the first to be offered service on January 4, although during the three-hour wait while the waitress ignored him, he lost his appetite and “couldn’t even drink their water.” His black companions, however, dutifully consumed ham and eggs.19

There were to be other gratifying moments for black America. On January 3, the House of Representatives stripped the Rules Committee, which had a strong Dixiecrat-Republican flavor, of its almost absolute power to bottle up bills. Previously, it had required a petition signed by 218 members of the House to force a bill out of the Rules Committee; now, any committee chairman could request a vote of the House to place any bill on the calendar that had been in the committee over twenty-four days. It was a decisive victory for the administration and promised to facilitate consideration of various progressive measures, including civil-rights bills.20 Indeed, some members of the White House staff later saw the move as one of great significance, for in 1949 the threat of action by committee chairmen persuaded the Rules Committee to report bills dealing with housing and social security, which Congress subsequently passed. In addition to this reform, black Americans also took pride in the appointment of Congressman William Dawson as chairman of the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments—the first Negro “to head a major congressional committee in modern times.”21

Then there was Truman’s State of the Union address on January 5. In his news conference the week before, he had indicated that the message would “cover the waterfront.” It did. Speaking to a joint session of Congress, the president offered a bold program to provide every American with the opportunity “to obtain his fair share of our increasing abundance.” In requesting low-cost housing, an increase in the minimum wage, repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, extension of Social Security, federal aid to education, and various controls over the economy, Truman revealed clearly the contribution of the New Deal to his own Fair Deal. The address included more, however, for he also called for national medical insurance and enactment of civil-rights legislation. Speaking with deliberation, he referred to the requests in his special message of the previous February 2. “The civil rights proposals I made to the 80th Congress, I now repeat to the 81st Congress. They should be enacted in order that the federal government may
assume the leadership and discharge the obligations clearly placed
upon it by the Constitution." To dispel any doubt about his commit­
tment, he closed with the statement, "I stand squarely behind those
proposals," which he emphasized with voice inflection and hand ges­
ture. And in news conferences after the address, he reaffirmed the
commitment.22

Yet, in requesting civil-rights legislation from Congress, Truman
was determined not to go beyond his message of February 2, 1948,
which had aroused so much controversy. At that time, for example, he
had requested home rule for the District of Columbia and nothing
more, unless "local corrective action" failed in the "near future," in
which case he said that he would ask for a "model civil rights law for
the Nation's Capital." Thus, despite the recommendations of To Secure
These Rights and the stinging indictment of racism in Segregation in
Washington, the president, for reasons known only to himself and his
advisers, chose not to fight for such legislation in 1949. Perhaps he
feared that a congressional battle over liberalization of racial policies
in the District might jeopardize the passage of legislation, civil rights
and otherwise, that would benefit Negroes everywhere in the country,
although one correspondent pointed out that southerners could not
employ the argument of states' rights in debates over civil-rights legis­
lation for the District.23 Perhaps, too, the administration feared vigor­
ous opposition from white residents of the District. An editorial in
the Washington Post in December 1948, for example, had conspicu­
ously omitted any mention of corrective legislation for the District,
while calling for a cautious approach on civil-rights legislation gen­
erally.24 Whatever the reason, from 1949 on, the administration would
attack discrimination in the District obliquely and piecemeal through
the actions of various executive agencies, particularly the Interior and
Justice departments. The president would also make a telling point
about segregation in Washington during inaugural week.

The State of the Union message was anything but bland, and it set
off a discordant chorus. While liberal Democrats sang hosannas,
many Republicans decried his proposals for "state socialism" in concert
with the wails of southern politicians. Congressman E. E. Cox of
Georgia, for example, gloomily predicted that approval of the civil­
rights program would create "the greatest social disturbance the coun­
try has ever known," although Hugh Scott, chairman of the Republican
National Committee, maintained that Truman was "as bold in urging
socialized medicine as he is now timid in hastily skimming over the
explosive civil rights issue."25
Few black leaders agreed with Scott. Walter White, as usual, immediately wired the president, praising him for the “unequivocal reaffirmation” of his stand on civil rights as well as for his espousal of various social-welfare measures. “We are more hopeful today than at any time in recent history,” editorialized the Chicago Defender. “The president has strengthened the faith of all of us and struck another blow for freedom.” Black Americans were also pleased with the request in his budget message of January 10, 1949, for a hefty increase in the appropriation for Howard University. Moreover, two days later Truman met with a delegation representing the National Citizens Council on Civil Rights, whose spokesman declared afterwards that the president had promised action “right away” and that his staff was already in the process of drafting various civil-rights bills.

The highlight of the new year, however, was yet to come, for Harry S. Truman’s inauguration was destined to be an historic occasion for black America. Negroes had eagerly anticipated the ceremonies since December 25, when the Afro-American had headlined a second-page story: “TRUMAN’S TO BE FIRST INAUGURATION WITHOUT COLOR LINE.” The story noted that “for the first time since the administration of William Howard Taft . . . the foes of segregation have gained a foothold, and plan a completely integrated program on a city-wide basis.” To facilitate integration of the festivities, the inaugural committee named William L. Houston, a Negro lawyer, to serve as a committee chairman. One of the first public indications of this change in policy occurred at the Truman-Barkley Club Dinner on January 18, where the president made his first speech of inaugural week. In the audience were four blacks, guests of Welborn Mayock, general counsel of the Democratic National Committee and treasurer of the Truman-Barkley Clubs.

The parade, too, was a revelation, although the army predictably stymied complete integration by separating the races by platoons. The crews of light tanks, however, were integrated, while the men of the Coast Guard were completely scrambled. Moreover, the Women’s Army Corps “showed a dark face in a sea of white ones.” Blacks also sat in the president’s reviewing stand and were delighted with the president’s apparent snub of Governor Thurmond as he passed before the president. Negroes attended the President’s Reception and danced at the President’s Ball. There were, of course, some incidents in the privately owned hotels and restaurants which maintained a fairly rigid color line; but the threats of several delegations to cancel reservations
unless Negro guests were accepted sometimes resulted in their admission.  

In describing inaugural week, the highly partisan Chicago Defender, for once, reflected the feelings of most Negro newspapers when it concluded: “For the first time in history Negro citizens were fully integrated in the inaugural celebration and it was obvious to everyone that the lily-white era of Washington’s official social life had come to an abrupt end. It was made clear that when President Truman talks about the American people, he is talking about all the people.” The reports of the inauguration in the Negro press also revealed a subtle, though significant, change in the vocabulary of black America. For years, Negroes, like whites, had generally used the words “desegregation” or “unsegregated” to describe the erasure or the absence of the color line; but the reports in the press of January 1949 indicated that black America, or at least part of its leadership, was well on the way to general usage of the word “integration,” which was not only a stronger and more positive expression of their desires but was also inflammatory to some whites who interpreted it to mean “social equality” and the “mixing” of the races. It was also an indication of greater determination and hope on the part of black America and a hint of the progress then taking place under the Truman administration.

There were, in addition, many tangible accomplishments in race relations across the country, in state and local governments as well as in the private sector. In many instances the exhortations and actions of the Truman administration, coupled with the pressure applied by various civil-rights organizations, resulted in dramatic breakthroughs on the color front. Some of these gains resulted from court decisions, both state and federal, and affected minorities other than black Americans. For example, To Secure These Rights had indicted the states of Arizona and New Mexico for their disenfranchisement of reservation Indians. In July 1948, encouraged by an amicus curiae brief filed by the Departments of Justice and Interior, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that those Indians who met the state’s educational requirements must be permitted the right to vote. The following month, a special federal court, after listening to another brief from the two departments, ruled similarly for New Mexico. Both cases were historic, if only because they “removed, once and for all,” wrote the Afro-American, “the remaining abridgements of suffrage which have plagued the nation’s Indians.” The federal court decision did not sit well with the New Mexico legislature, however, and in 1949 only the governor’s pocket
veto prevented enactment of a bill designed to contravene the court and to disenfranchise the Indians again.\textsuperscript{30}

The courts were also upholding the right of Negroes to vote in the South. Since 1944, when the Supreme Court case of \textit{Smith v. Allwright} had outlawed the white primary, various southern states had adopted ingenious devices to keep Negroes from the polls; but federal judges, particularly South Carolina's courageous J. Waties Waring (who was eventually hounded out of the South), repeatedly ruled them unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{31}

Mexican-Americans, too, were profiting from the postwar awareness of minority grievances. For years, their children had been segregated in various schools in the Southwest, often without legislative sanction. In California, for example, the state law called for segregation only with respect to Indians and certain Orientals; but Mexican-Americans were in fact also segregated, ostensibly because of a language problem. As a result, a few parents joined with LULAC—the League of United Latin American Citizens—to bring a successful court case against the segregation policies of four school districts in Orange County, California. A federal circuit court upheld the decision. In the so-called \textit{Delgado} case in Texas in 1948, a similar ruling was reached, except that separation might be permitted in the first grade if language problems existed.\textsuperscript{32}

Although there were few serious attempts, at least immediately, to implement the court decisions, the California case apparently had some connection with the legislature's decision to drop all mention of segregation from the educational code. Moreover, because of the organized activities of LULAC and the increased voting power of Mexican-Americans, some politicians were becoming sensitive to their grievances. In 1949, for example, when small-town authorities in Texas denied the right of chapel services and interment for the body of Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American killed in combat during the Second World War, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson intervened and arranged for burial in Arlington National Cemetery.\textsuperscript{33}

While Congress continued to frustrate creation of a federal FEPC in the postwar years, by 1949 nine states had followed the pioneering efforts of New York and established their own commissions; and in Kansas and Nebraska, state commissions were investigating employment discrimination. Although their laws varied widely in scope and in effectiveness, eighteen of the more populous states had enacted laws banning discrimination in amusement facilities and places of public accommodations, such as hotels, restaurants, libraries, parks, public...
conveyances, and educational institutions. Seven states had expressly abolished segregation in their National Guard units, while two others—New York and Pennsylvania—had paraphrased the Democratic platform in calling for equality of treatment. Only a few states, however, had taken steps to outlaw discrimination in public or semipublic housing. Oregon and Utah had both repealed their alien-land laws, by which they had traditionally prevented certain Oriental groups from owning real property. By the standards of the late 1940s, a time when the old verities and prejudices still imprisoned the minds of most whites, such state action represented advances in the attempt to establish equality in America, particularly because the most populous states were generally those involved in attempting to implement a new order.

That progress resulted not only from the Truman administration's leadership by word and deed but also from the irrepressible activities of civil-rights organizations and from the ever-increasing number of Negroes elected to state legislatures and city administrations—people who could speak with some authority concerning the needs of the black community. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that Negroes, or any underprivileged minority, for that matter, held the semblance of a balance of power in any state or local government unit, for the rate of progress was agonizingly slow. The fact that most state legislatures were gerrymandered in favor of rural America while most American minority groups were concentrated in large cities only indicated that proportionate representation was far in the future, even on the city level, where similar gerrymandering was a frequent practice. It was indeed a sad commentary on American democracy when Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles, the city's largest minority, went without representation on the city council from 1881 to 1949. Even New York, with its large Jewish population, did not send a Jew to the United States Senate until 1949, when former Governor Herbert H. Lehman replaced the ailing Robert F. Wagner; in fact, Lehman was the first Jew to be popularly elected to the Senate from any state.

Although American minorities generally lacked the muscle at the polls to elect their own people, they could and did unite with concerned white American Christians to elect sympathetic whites to various local offices. Furthermore, some major cities did respond with their own fair employment practices ordinances, notably Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia. Attempts to enact local housing ordinances, however, almost invariably failed, despite the combined efforts of various Jewish, Negro, and church
organizations. Yet, thirty-three cities had established commissions on human relations since 1943—when the first was created—to investigate, to give advice on, and to seek solutions to the problems of racial tension and discrimination.57

If only because there was so much room for improvement there, some of the most dramatic progress occurred in the South. And there were good reasons for the improvement. Concerned southern whites hoped that correction of the most blatant examples of racism might forestall action on the part of the federal government and the federal courts; sympathetic whites were encouraged and emboldened by the commitment of the Truman administration and by the report of the Committee on Civil Rights; and black Americans were registering to vote in record numbers. In 1948 alone—the year of the Dixiecrats—forty-seven meetings were held throughout the South to discuss civil rights, according to reports of the Southern Regional Council.58

Moreover, as a result of the abolition of the white primary in 1944 and the increasing determination of the federal courts to strike down the newly created barriers to Negro participation in the southern electoral process, the number of Negroes qualified to vote jumped in the postwar period. From an estimated 250,000 black voters in 1940, the number increased to 750,000 in 1948 and 1,008,614 in 1952. Although the 1952 figure represented only 20 percent of the potential black vote in the South, it was an impressive increase over the 5 percent of 1940 and compared well with the 28 percent of 1960. Further, by the end of the 1940s, only five southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia—retained the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting; and at this point its existence was as much an irritating symbol of discrimination as an effective deterrent to registration.59

This liberalization, coupled with the continuing migration of blacks from the country to urban areas, increased somewhat their political awareness and effectiveness in contests for local offices in the South. On the statewide level, however, rural control of the legislature completely negated their growing influence within southern cities. Nonetheless, there were encouraging signs on the local level. Negroes were elected to city councils in Richmond, Virginia, and in Winston-Salem, Fayetteville, and Greensboro, North Carolina. Others were appointed to positions as precinct officials. In 1949 Governor Kerr Scott of North Carolina named a black educator to serve on the state board of education; this represented progress, if only because such tokenism had been politically unnecessary a decade earlier.40

Moreover, as a result of the Supreme Court’s insistence, Negroes
began serving on southern juries with increasing frequency, even in areas where a black juror had not been visible since the turn of the century. Black policemen, too, were becoming more common, if not commonplace; and the annual report of the Southern Regional Council in 1948 revealed that only Mississippi and Louisiana contained all-white police departments. Between 1947 and 1952, the number of Negro police tripled, while the number of southern cities with such personnel doubled. In 1951, 443 black officers were on duty in eighty-two cities of thirteen southern states, although, predictably, their authority almost invariably extended only to black people in all-black areas and was usually enforced without benefit of sidearms.41

Although none of these advances immediately threatened the white southern way of life—in fact, some were designed to perpetuate that way of life—there had to be a beginning somewhere at some point; and the faint signs of increasing tolerance gave hope where none had existed before. The wall of segregation, however, remained virtually impassable for Negroes, except when traveling on interstate transportation facilities or when entering the hallowed halls of a few professional and graduate schools in the upper South. To be sure, there were sometimes diligent efforts to equalize health, educational, and recreational facilities, but only within a segregated pattern and usually for the purpose of undermining the rationale for federal action. The Supreme Court, in particular, was becoming a frightful specter to many white southerners in the late 1940s.

In some other parts of the country, however, there were concerted efforts to remove the barriers of segregation, particularly on the part of private and professional organizations and in the entertainment world. “Americans of every faith, race and ancestry,” noted the National Council of Civil Rights in its report near the end of the decade, “are proving their convictions that freedom is indivisible—and that the surest way to safeguard their own precious liberties is to protect the rights of their neighbors.” Although the statement was as much an expression of hope as of fact, it did focus attention on those activities that promised to reshape the nation’s racial practices. Moreover, in publicizing racial progress, civil-rights organizations had the ever-increasing support of numerous popular magazines—Collier’s, Woman’s Home Companion, Parent’s Magazine, Seventeen, Ladies’ Home Journal, Reader’s Digest, Newsweek, and Time—which published occasional pieces on the plight of America’s minorities.42

Religious periodicals, too, were involved in propagating the new faith. And although eleven o’clock Sunday morning continued to be
the most rigidly segregated hour of the week, various churches were at least making verbal commitments to equal rights and to an integrated society. Although individual churches had generally ignored the 1946 plea of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America to renounce “segregation in race relations,” the council reaffirmed its position in even stronger language in subsequent years and pledged a specific course of action. In 1949, for example, it promised full support to the equal-education cases in Texas and Oklahoma when they appeared before the Supreme Court.43

The United Council of Church Women, representing ten million members of eighty-four Protestant denominations, also adopted a series of resolutions in 1948 calling for a program of persuasion to accompany a package of legislation. That same year Archbishop Robert Cushing publicly pointed to the actions of a “staggering” number of religious and racial bigots, contending that “no true Christian could support or participate in any such activity.”44 The growing realization of many Catholic and Protestant leaders of an apparent contradiction between scriptural injunction and church practice, and the increasing cooperation between them and various Jewish organizations that had long been committed to the fight against intolerance, provided further evidence of a new and viable civil-rights coalition in the country.

Many professional organizations, too, decided to pay at least lip service to democracy and to the cause of equal rights. In 1949, for the first time in its history, the American Medical Association accepted a Negro physician into its House of Delegates; and there were even more impressive signs of change in the actions of its constituent societies. For example, in 1948 the Baltimore County Medical Society unanimously approved admission of Negro physicians; in 1949 the Missouri State Medical Association dropped the word “white” from its constitution, and, later in the year, the St. Louis chapter began accepting black membership applications; and in 1950 the Florida State Medical Association altered its bylaws to remove the white label. Moreover, in June 1950, during its annual convention, the AMA passed a resolution that urged local societies with racial restrictions to review them in light of present developments. Apparently, those developments included not only a growing conviction in favor of integration in American society but also increasing public support for Truman’s national health-insurance program, which the AMA vigorously denounced as “socialized” medicine. Many Negro physicians suspected that the recent, and belated, “democracy” of the AMA was a crude overture for the support
of the black National Medical Association, which had endorsed such legislation as early as 1946.\textsuperscript{46}

The American Nurses Association, with no ideological or self-interest issue to champion, proved more progressive than the AMA. In 1948 the association not only provided for direct memberships in the national organization to nullify the racial restrictions of district chapters, but also elected a Negro to its board of directors. By the end of 1949, only chapters in Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., continued to refuse the applications of black nurses.\textsuperscript{46}

The American Bar Association lagged behind both the AMA and the ANA. Although its constitution nowhere mentioned race as a qualification for membership, the association had long practiced a lily-white policy. The National Lawyers Guild, however, had accepted both blacks and whites since its organization in 1936; but its effectiveness was limited because of its small membership and the growing number of accusations by superpatriots of its alleged subversiveness. By the late 1940s, the Federal Bar Association, which was composed primarily of the federal bench and bar, contained at least four black members, while the ABA had relented enough to extend membership to some half-dozen Negro lawyers, perhaps because it was under considerable pressure from various state associations. In 1949, for example, the New Jersey State Bar Association recommended that application blanks eliminate references to race, creed, and color.\textsuperscript{47}

Other organizations were more in tune with the times. In 1949 the American Association of University Women amended its bylaws so that local chapters could not discriminate against otherwise qualified applicants. The Red Cross finally began distributing blood without indicating the race of the donor. Records were kept, however, should a physician request such information. And the National Interfraternity Conference recommended that college and university fraternities drop their restrictive membership provisions, although the real battle on the campuses was more than a decade away. The Congress of Racial Equality also reported some progress in integrating public accommodations across the country.\textsuperscript{48}

The most dramatic and visible penetrations of the color barrier came in the entertainment world, particularly in athletics and motion pictures. Until 1947 major-league baseball was a white man's sport, although usually with a speckled audience. But the rhetoric of the times and the appeal of the box office combined to produce the first modern major-league contract for a black player, Jackie Robinson, who
became the storybook hero of the decade. His phenomenal success with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 persuaded other teams to follow suit. By 1951 eighteen Negroes were playing on six teams, and the number would accelerate rapidly in the 1950s. Integration quickly became a fact, and complete acceptance was not far behind.

In football, the story was much the same. Although it was national news when the Yale University team selected Levi Jackson as its captain for the 1949 football season, professional football—particularly the maverick and short-lived American Conference—was already exploiting the talents of black players. The National Football League had originally excluded Negroes, but in the late 1940s, it, too, met the spirit of the times. By 1951 eighteen Negroes were playing on six of the league’s twelve teams, and each year thereafter saw a substantial increase. On both the college and professional levels, however, integrated basketball lagged behind. Occasionally various college teams paraded a Negro or two, but the solid evidence of black talent emerged most clearly in the colorful and skillful performances of the Harlem Globetrotters, who delighted audiences and intrigued coaches across the country. In 1950 the New York Knickerbockers of the National Basketball Association had seen enough and signed Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton of the Globetrotters. The precedent was set, and within two decades black players would dominate the sport at the professional level.

The story was different, however, in those sports that had limited box-office appeal and those that required leisure time and a degree of affluence. In tennis, some of the private courts maintained a color line, though the United States Lawn Tennis Association did not. The first Negro to play at Forest Hills, for example, was Althea Gibson, in 1950, who went on to become one of the greatest women players in the history of the game. But black men were conspicuously absent from most courts until the 1960s. Golf was even more difficult for blacks to penetrate, largely because it required financial resources beyond the means of most of them. Nearly all private clubs, and some public courses as well, drew a color line when it came to playing the game. Moreover, only Joe Louis’s threat of a law suit persuaded the Professional Golfers Association to drop its ban on “non-whites.” The story was similar in professional bowling and wrestling. By the end of the decade, however, black and white alike—outside of the South—were beginning to accept integration as the new way of life in the nation’s athletics.

Equally significant for the present and the future was Hollywood’s changing of the images of American minorities, a process that began
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during the Second World War and accelerated in the postwar period. In 1945, however, it was not at all clear that Hollywood would continue the trend, and there were repeated criticisms of the industry for its perpetuation of stereotyped casting and token representation. There were also fears that the new psychic mysteries would include the eye-rolling, knee-quaking, “skaird-of-haints” Negro in the tradition of Stepin Fetchit. Decades of futile protest had prepared blacks to expect the worst and to recognize that progress was neither linear nor permanent.52

The fear was genuine but misplaced, for a number of postwar factors and events persuaded Hollywood to make the greatest effort in the industry’s history to remove stereotypes, to expand opportunities for black performers, and to propagate better understanding of all minority groups. The grotesque revelations of the Nazi concentration camps, the increasingly shrill rhetoric of the cold war, the preachments of the Truman administration, the pressures from various civil-rights organizations, the threats of blacks to boycott the box office, the competition of television, and the occasional compassion of white actors, directors, and producers combined to produce a new epoch in the history of Hollywood and to persuade the industry to exchange some of its white southern audience for an equally large northern audience. Hollywood’s commitment, of course, was neither unanimous nor complete; and movies sometimes worked at cross-purposes, while they almost always stopped short of advocating equality between black and white.

Perhaps predictably, Hollywood launched its first postwar attack against religious bigotry, thus continuing a trend developed during the war and at the same time attacking a subject that was less inflammatory than white mistreatment of blacks. Indeed, as a result of Going My Way (1944) and The Bells of St. Mary’s (1945), Bing Crosby, Barry Fitzgerald, and Ingrid Bergman made Catholicism a respectable and entertaining theme, while simultaneously humanizing the clergy. Treatment of anti-Semitism, however, was a more delicate matter. During the war, a number of pictures had excoriated Nazism for its anti-Semitism; but its existence at home was ignored, except in Pride of the Marines and in several other movies that made oblique references to it. But the appearance of Edward Dmytryk’s Till the End of Time in 1946 signaled the beginning of a direct assault on American anti-Semitism, although Walt Disney’s Abie’s Irish Rose, denounced by the Negro press and the National Conference of Christians and Jews,
provoked momentary bewilderment concerning the direction in which Hollywood was heading.\footnote{53}

Two pictures in 1947, however, dissipated nearly all doubt. Dmytryk's *Crossfire* centered directly on anti-Semitism in America, and the picture's financial success sparked hope in the black community. "If the producers continue to make intelligent films and make money on these films," Walter White noted, in praising *Crossfire*, "perhaps in time Hollywood will have the courage to attack anti-Negroism." And when *Gentleman's Agreement* appeared later in the year, *Ebony*—the black counterpart of *Life* magazine—labeled it "undoubtedly the most daring picture ever made in Hollywood."\footnote{54 The trend was evident, and Negroes hoped to profit from it.}

But the impact of such films was less evident than the purpose, and some commentators feared that audiences might react adversely to the message. In particular, some contended that these movies worked at cross-purposes, that their visual messages differed from their verbal ones. One critic, for example, observed that the persecuted Jew in *Crossfire* had all the characteristics of the stereotype—"soft-handed, flashily dressed, suave, artistic"—which might "reinforce rather than abate" the emotions that feed anti-Semitism. Although studies were taken of audience reaction to *Crossfire*, which indicated a decrease of racial prejudice among those who saw it, others were quick to note that Hollywood generally produced pictures with only a vague idea of audience reception and without any systematic research into their effects. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, experts continued to plead for such studies, including an examination of the unconscious impact versus the "message" in the antibias film.\footnote{55}

The box-office appeal of the pictures of 1946 and 1947 exploring anti-Semitism did not persuade directors and producers to plunge immediately into a similar examination of racial prejudice. In fact, Walt Disney's *Song of the South* in 1946 set off a chorus of criticism. Although recognizing the film's artistic merit, the NAACP regretted its glorification of slavery. *Ebony* could find no merit anywhere. Denouncing James Baskett, who played Uncle Remus, as an "Uncle Tom—Aunt Jemima caricature complete with all the fawning standard equipment thereof—the toothy smile, battered hat, grey beard, and a profusion of 'dis' and 'dat' talk," the critic lamented the appearance of another one "of those Mammy-minded, plantation-prejudiced movies that ... has done more to ... set back Negro progress than a fistful of Bilbo speeches in Congress."\footnote{56}

The years 1947 and 1948 were more promising. *Body and Soul*
co-starred Canada Lee as a black boxer on a first-name basis with his white friend, John Garfield; and The Burning Cross cast a bright light on the white-sheeted bigots of the Ku Klux Klan. There were also little things, such as the absence of the “yas, sah, boss” convention in The Long Night, the unobtrusive presence of black people in crowd sequences of The Best Years of Our Lives, and the use of the title “Mrs.” to address a black maid in Cass Timberlane. In 1948 The Boy with Green Hair circuitously attacked color prejudice; pro-football-star Kenny Washington lobbed hand grenades at the Vietnamese as a member of the French Foreign Legion in Rouges’ Regiment (a touching irony which escaped the critics); and Jackie Robinson played himself in The Jackie Robinson Story. Many of the stereotypes continued, of course, and Ebony magazine complained about “perennial Hattie McDaniel donning an apron for the 83rd time since she first went before the cameras in 1931.”

The big breakthrough came in 1949, when a few directors decided to deal with themes that were traditionally verboten. Lost Boundaries, for example, dealt with the subject of “passing.” So did Pinky, which also raised the explosive issue of intermarriage but, predictably, without its consummation and with Jeanne Crain posing as a Negro in order to “pass” as white. (The candid, though strained and somewhat unimaginative, approach of Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner was still far in the future.) Intruder in the Dust starred Juano Hernandez in a powerful indictment of lynching, and Home of the Brave and Battleground recaptured some of the courage and bigotry of the Second World War.

For the first time in its history, Hollywood was systematically exploring the roots of racism in America, although the message almost invariably fell short of black expectations. Critics, for example, denounced the selection of Jeanne Crain for the lead role in Pinky. Nevertheless, there was rejoicing throughout the black community. “Hollywood Comes of Age,” editorialized the Courier; “The handkerchief was snatched off,” concluded a film critic; “Hollywood can never go back to its old portrayal of colored people as witless menials or idiotic buffoons,” exulted Walter White.

Nor was the trend only momentary. As a result of box-office success, between 1950 and 1953 several films continued to exploit black-white relationships. In 1950 No Way Out featured Sidney Poitier in a sensitive role as a black intern in a white hospital, which Ebony, usually hard to please, saw as “the most outspoken, hardest-hitting picture ever filmed on racial hatred.” In 1951 other themes were de-
veloped in *Bright Victory, The Breaking Point, The Well*, and *Steel Helmet* (which reflected the recent integration of troops in Korea).  

*The Red Ball Express*, starring Jeff Chandler, Alex Nicol, and Sidney Poitier, was the big story in 1952. The picture dramatized the actions of truck drivers, black and white alike, in a completely integrated unit, who rushed supplies to the rapidly advancing forces of General George Patton during the Second World War. A black private performed the most heroic act when he voluntarily drove his truck through a minefield (and was killed in the process), and the film presented a “first” when Poitier slugged a white soldier. But if the film was good propaganda, it was poor history, for the real Red Ball Express was a segregated outfit. In fact, the ironies of the film were intriguing. While the picture was being produced, black actors and actual black soldiers lived under semisegregated conditions at Fort Eustus while filming the story of an integrated company that was actually segregated.  

By 1953 the Negro trend was subsiding. Some themes were exhausted at the box office; others were considered too explosive for white sensibilities; blacks who customarily performed stereotyped roles were at loggerheads with the NAACP; and the pall of McCarthyism hung over every production. But there was no turning back. Although stereotypes continued, such as those in *Uncle Tom’s Cabana*, the degrading Stepin Fetchit role was a thing of the past, which the actor himself discovered when he came out of retirement in 1951. The revolution in the industry between 1943 and 1953 had also broadened the traditional roles for black actors and paved the way for the candid productions of the 1960s, particularly after 1953, when Hollywood revised its production code and struck miscegenation from the list of forbidden topics.  

Nor were Catholics, Negroes, and Jews the only minorities to profit from Hollywood’s concern. The American Indian, too, was stereotyped but in a manner quite different from the Negro. Although he generally lost the war, the Indian often won a battle or two in which he displayed savage ferocity. His bravery, his essential manhood, was seldom questioned, while the Negro generally appeared as a docile, dumb, sometimes demented creature, who evoked laughter, derision, and occasional pity. In the postwar period the Indian demanded justice, not manhood, from the hands of Hollywood. As three Oklahoma Indians, all members of the state legislature, noted in a resolution: “It’s a battle if the white man wins, a massacre if the Indian is victorious.” In 1950 *Broken Arrow* sought to correct matters. James
Stewart married the leading Indian lady; and Jeff Chandler played a creditable Chief Cochise, although the substitution of a sun-tanned white for a natural red was somewhat irritating to the few Indian actors in Hollywood. In congratulating Twentieth Century-Fox, Walter White praised the studio for “smashing all of the old cliches about Indian treachery and barbarity.” In 1951 Burt Lancaster starred in *Jim Thorpe—All American*, and in 1953 an Indian played a visible, though minor, part in *Take the High Ground.*

In shattering a stereotype, there was always the danger of creating or perpetuating another. In *The Oxbow Incident*, for instance, Leigh Whipper’s sympathetic role as a black preacher was offset by the portrayal of a greasy villain with a Mexican accent, a continuation of a usually unfavorable Mexican-American stereotype. Yet during the postwar period the portrayal of the Mexican was ambivalent, as in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. In 1950, however, Paramount decided to depart momentarily from the Bing Crosby–Bob Hope tradition and produced *The Lawless*, a gripping drama about discrimination against, and hatred of, Mexicans in the American Southwest. In the same year, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released *Right Cross*, featuring Ricardo Montalban as Johnny Monterez, a Mexican-American boxing champion who feared that Anglos would treat him as a social leper once he lost the crown. The plot was strained, but *Right Cross* did give off “sparks of social conscience.”

There was also concern for Orientals. Though Chinese-Americans were often portrayed as grinning, menial laborers, they could take some consolation in the exploits of Charlie Chan, who invariably solved crimes after white detectives had failed. And Japanese-Americans won belated recognition in 1951 in *Go for Broke*, which not only exposed the bigotry of white officers but also extolled the courage of the Nisei 442d Regimental Combat team during the Second World War. The film, however, was small compensation for the bucktoothed, inhuman villains of Hollywood’s wartime productions.

Although the competition of television spurred Hollywood to new heights of tolerance, television itself threatened to compromise this progress. For years, the radio show of “Amos and Andy” had burlesqued and stereotyped black America, perhaps unintentionally, and repeated protests about it had no effect. Television premiered the program in 1951, despite vigorous objections. The “Beulah” show—“the ridiculous and nauseating Beulah”—was also offensive. Moreover, the industry generally continued to boycott black performers on other programs. Nor was that all. In 1952 the Japanese-American Citizens
League lodged a protest against the old Hollywood productions then appearing on television, some of which depicted Japan as monstrous and Japanese-Americans as spies and saboteurs. Negroes, too, remonstrated against the release of pictures with prejudiced themes, those that portrayed blacks "as goofs, simpletons, dumbbells and half-savage buffoons"; but television would remain generally unresponsive until the 1960s.  

The gains nearly everywhere, however, were appreciable. Some of the progress smacked of condescension, of tokenism, of lip service. Occasionally, one form of discrimination replaced another. Yet progress was unmistakable at all levels of government and within the private sector of the nation. America was still a long way from President Truman's hope to fulfill the promises of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. As he expressed it in his special message on civil rights in February 1948, "We know the way. We need only the will." At the end of the decade, the will was present as never before, and the question was not simply if the country would continue to move ahead on racial matters but more if it would be able to maintain the same rate of progress.