DEFEAT IN CONGRESS

"Vote Republican, Nov. 7, and End Truman Double-Talk" went the punch line of a Republican campaign tract in October 1950. Prepared by Val Washington, Negro assistant to the chairman of the Republican National Committee, the pamphlet represented the party's major effort to capture Negro votes in the congressional elections of November 1950. Entitled Civil Rights Double-Talk—The Egg That Truman Laid, the leaflet made a few telling points as well as the usual campaign distortions in indicting the president and the Democratic Congress for inaction on racial discrimination in America.¹

Although Val Washington may have believed that he had scored significantly by recounting certain select senatorial votes, particularly those on cloture, Walter White was nearer the mark in his column in the Chicago Defender. White argued that the key vote on civil rights in the Eighty-first Congress concerned the Barkley ruling, which would have permitted the application of cloture to a motion as well as to the measure itself. Moreover, the defeat of the Barkley ruling led directly to the adoption of the Wherry-Hayden "compromise," which made cloture even more difficult. On these votes, the Republican record was shaky at best. Although White endorsed neither party, his resurrection of the Barkley vote was primarily a criticism of the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition that had stymied so much progressive legislation.²

In truth, the Republican party was hard pressed to find strong black support anywhere in the country. For the first time in memory, the Call endorsed Democratic candidates so as to provide President Truman with a working majority in both houses of Congress. The Chicago Defender indicted the "coalition of tory Republicans and Dixiecrats," who "succeeded in gagging and diverting every serious
attempt to match the promises with performances.” It seemed to the Defender that “President Truman has been unyielding in his demand for action on civil rights and we should elect a Congress that will support his program.” And the president gave indications that he would continue the fight. Although Truman followed the customary presidential practice of not campaigning for Democratic candidates in an off-year election, he did deliver one highly partisan speech in St. Louis in which he pledged his party to renewed efforts for better education and health “for all our citizens, without discrimination on account of race, creed, or color.” It was that kind of commitment that prompted many black Americans to remain with Truman throughout 1950.

On the eve of election day, an Associated Negro Press (ANP) poll predicted widespread black support for Democratic candidates. There were good reasons, both historical and contemporary, for such loyalty to the Democratic party. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy’s campaign against communism in the government may have persuaded some independent white voters to support Republican candidates; but Negroes were more concerned with “bread and butter” legislation, which the Democratic party had championed since 1933. Moreover, although Congress had not enacted any of the major presidential requests for civil-rights legislation, Truman himself had come through with several significant appointments and with two key executive orders, one of which at that moment was leading to integration of the military in Korea. His appointees in the Department of Justice had also filed amicus curiae briefs in several significant court cases between 1948 and 1950.

The congressional elections of 1950 fulfilled the ANP forecast, if not the hopes of civil-rights organizations for additional friends in Congress. An analysis of the black vote in ten northern cities revealed continued support for all Democratic candidates, except in Baltimore, where Senator Millard Tydings won only 23 percent of the Negro vote in contrast with Truman’s 54 percent in 1948. The combination of the Maryland senator’s poor record on civil rights and Senator McCarthy’s vicious campaign against him all but made Tydings’s reelection impossible.

To most black Americans, however, Senator Tydings’s defeat was one of the few happy results of the congressional elections. In a record turnout for an off-year election, the American voters increased GOP membership by twenty-seven in the House and by five in the Senate. Although the Democratic party still held a paper majority in both houses, the senatorial margin of two members was the smallest since
the period 1931–1933. In the House, the voters whittled Democratic strength to 235. Of equal importance, the elections also resulted in defeats for some who had usually supported civil rights. In the Senate, the Democrats lost both of their leaders when Congressman Everett Dirksen defeated Majority Leader Scott Lucas, and James H. Duff retired Majority Whip Francis Myers.6

The postmortems were painful. Although Lucas had never inspired the black community, the Afro-American feared that his defeat would result in the selection of Georgia’s Richard Russell as the new majority leader; the editor also growled about the increased strength of the conservative coalition. The Journal and Guide was even more depressed, noting that “Republicans, siding with southern Democrats, can keep civil rights legislation from leaving committee or defeating it unmercifully on the floor.” The Chicago Defender, however, professed to see light amidst the gloom of the election returns. “Some of the stalwarts of the Truman administration bit the dust but the Democrats still control both houses of the Congress,” the editor rationalized. He also took a close look at local elections around the country and noted happily that “there were more Negroes elected to public offices throughout the nation than at any time in our memory.”7

The pessimism following the November elections was justified, for the Eighty-second Congress got off to a poor start on January 3, 1951, the opening day of the first session. In the House of Representatives, the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition succeeded in repealing the “twenty-one-day rule” and in restoring the power of the Rules Committee to control the flow of proposed legislation. By a final vote of 244 to 179, the coalition rebuffed the administration’s forces and demonstrated beyond doubt where power resided in the new House. Of the 244 votes in favor of the Rules Committee, 152 were by Republicans and 92 by Democrats, mostly from the South. The government could muster only 136 Democrats, 42 Republicans, and one Independent. Although the administration could still utilize the petition method or the “Calendar Wednesday” approach to by-pass the Rules Committee, the loss of the twenty-one-day rule was critical. Since its adoption in 1949, the rule was invoked eight times to circumvent the Rules Committee and get bills on the floor, most of which were “must” measures of the administration. The proposals for Hawaiian and Alaskan statehood and the bill to outlaw the poll tax, which passed the House during the Eighty-first Congress, were in this category. As the New York Times editorialized, it was “A Bad Beginning.”8

Matters were no better in the Senate on opening day, when Demo-
crats were scheduled to elect a majority leader and a whip to replace Lucas and Myers. Earlier, when asked if he had any preferences, Truman said no; that was the Senate’s decision. Truman’s refusal to become involved was the only realistic course open to him. Given the conservative coloration of the Senate, the choice of a majority leader was probably not vital. Nonetheless, it was a bitter moment when Senate Democrats named Ernest W. McFarland of Arizona and Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas as majority leader and whip, respectively. Both had consistently opposed civil-rights legislation, and both had bolted in 1949 and voted against the Barkley ruling.

Civil-rights advocates were never enamored with Lucas and Myers, but the combination of McFarland and Johnson was altogether distasteful. The NAACP reacted quickly and denounced both as foes of civil-rights legislation. The Afro-American saw them as part of the “unholy alliance” in control of both houses of Congress. The Chicago Defender had explained away the results of the congressional elections of 1950, but it could not ignore the action of the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition in the House in restoring the power of the Rules Committee and the action of Senate Democrats in the selection of McFarland and Johnson. These two developments, the editor now confessed, “may very well destroy the fair deal program of the administration and particularly the civil rights measures.” It was Congressman Powell, however, who expressed publicly what most muttered about privately. “There will be no civil rights in this session of Congress,” he announced flatly in an article in the Amsterdam News. “They will not even be considered. There will be no progressive nor liberal legislation enacted. As far as homefront democracy is concerned, the 82nd Congress is not even interested.”

The developments in both houses inevitably came up in the president’s news conference the following day. With reference to the restored power of the Rules Committee, Truman could say only that Congress made its own rules and that the administration would proceed in the normal manner with its legislative requests. In response to a question concerning his opinion of McFarland and Johnson, he replied that he was “very fond” of McFarland, to whom he had already sent a congratulatory letter, and that Johnson was also a friend. Even had he preferred other leadership, he had no choice but to sound pleased with the results.

Faced with a more conservative Congress, with a perilous situation in Korea, and with the need for war appropriations, Truman chose not to indulge in a mock battle over civil-rights legislation. In his State
of the Union message on January 8, 1951, he stressed the theme of unity and mentioned civil rights only in passing, without specifically urging the enactment of any legislation. In his news conference of January 11, a reporter observed, “Some people are assuming that civil rights has been put aside for a while?” Given the phraseology of the question and the expectations of civil-rights organizations, Truman had no alternative but to answer no, though, significantly, he did not elaborate on his answer.\(^{12}\)

He had more to say in his budget message on January 15. The Korean situation demanded wise utilization of all available manpower resources, he argued, and the nation could not afford to discriminate against minority groups. “Following the federal experience with a Committee on Fair Employment Practice in World War II,” he continued, “eight states and a number of cities have established successful regulatory commissions to deal with employment practices. I again recommend that the Congress enact legislation to establish a Federal Fair Employment Practice Commission to prevent discrimination in interstate industries.”\(^{13}\)

That was the extent of it, and Negroes were not overjoyed. The Journal and Guide, for example, called attention to the presidential statement giving priority to defense measures and to his omission of any demand for civil-rights legislation. But the paper understood some of the realities facing the president and the country. “More than any other president,” the editor maintained, Truman had “courageously” demanded action on equal-justice legislation, “but he is a good enough politician and ex-soldier to know when to ‘retire to previously prepared positions.’ That is exactly what has been done. He has retired from the conflict over citizenship equality.” The editor concluded that Truman might be an adroit politician, “but in the eyes of true believers in freedom, he has circumscribed his stature as a statesman by abandoning a program he once gave top priority to himself.”\(^{14}\)

Although everything in 1951 seemed to conspire against enactment of equal-justice legislation, civil-rights organizations went through the traditional motions of raising a ruckus. Once again, they gave top priority to revision of the Senate’s cloture rule and passage of an FEPC. As the Afro-American explained, the fear of economic lynching had replaced the old terror of physical lynching as the “real enemy” of black Americans. Indeed, the editor gave the FEPC priority over everything else, including the current contests in courts across the country to break segregation in education, primarily “because educa-
tion will serve of little purpose if all the doors of opportunity to use that training remain closed.\textsuperscript{15}

The legislative priorities of civil-rights organizations accurately reflected the emerging economic and social patterns of American Negroes. Physical lynching of blacks was primarily a rural, southern preoccupation and had dropped significantly in the postwar years. Moreover, as a result of black migration to northern and western cities, economic opportunity in industry was now the foremost need. By 1951 only a handful of northern Negro leaders believed that an FEPC was not the most pressing issue, although some argued that for political reasons it should be used primarily as a club to force other—less controversial—civil-rights measures through Congress. Congressman William Dawson was in the latter category, and this probably explained why the NAACP began looking to Adam Clayton Powell to lead the fight in the House.\textsuperscript{16}

Congress went through the motions of considering civil-rights legislation in 1951, but so desultorily as to irritate nearly everyone. Although the usual bills were dropped in the hopper, including two Senate and seven House bills for an FEPC, nothing reached the floor of Congress during the first session. In fact, Senator Humphrey and eight of his liberal colleagues did not introduce their FEPC proposal until June 25, which testified eloquently to their own lack of optimism. The leisurely pace of Congress and the priorities of the president prompted the \textit{Defender} to print a scorching editorial warning Democrats that the Negro vote was the captive of neither party. “The civil rights program of the administration has been hidden so well in Washington that Sherlock Holmes couldn’t find it,” the editorial continued. “The emergency has been used as a smokescreen to evade the issue.” After a few choice criticisms of Congress and the president, the editor concluded that “the record of the Democrats is not inspiring although we must confess that the current Republican leadership gives us the creeps.” Some papers did not bother to comment, concentrating instead on the need to increase integration of public and private facilities across the country.\textsuperscript{17}

Of course, passage of an FEPC required revision of the senatorial rule on cloture, and the Senate did take a half-step in this direction. During the first session, four proposals for revision were introduced, and the Senate Rules Committee agreed to hold hearings. Although Senator Wherry believed that the Wherry-Hayden compromise of 1949 was workable if Democrats would get out their votes, he was willing to consider revision to permit a working majority to invoke cloture.
But the leaders of both parties were unwilling to make an issue of it. In October the Senate Rules Committee heard the testimony of representatives of the usual organizations—including the NAACP, the ACLU, the CIO, ADA, the American Council on Human Rights, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and others—but the committee failed to report any of the proposals to the floor. Moreover, Senator McFarland flatly refused to hold the Senate in session until it had considered civil rights. The best Congress could do positively for black Americans in 1951 was to pass a bill in September authorizing the coinage of fifty-cent pieces “to commemorate the lives and perpetuate the ideals and teachings of Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver.” Given the pressing needs of black America, the bill was only an insult.

Confronted with an unresponsive Congress, the civil-rights coalition began to crumble in 1951. In April, Walter White had issued a call to fifty national church, fraternal, labor, civic, and minority-group organizations to participate in a civil-rights conference in Washington on May 22 and 23. As a build-up to the conference, White issued several statements critical of the president and Congress, arguing that the president was stalling on administrative action and that Congress was engaged in “a wilful sit-down strike against civil-rights.”

Yet when the conference convened on May 22, only sixty-seven delegates representing thirty-one organizations were present. It was a far cry from the conference of January 1950. In his opening remarks, Walter White tried to make up in spirit for what the meeting lacked in numbers, and his criticisms of the president were the sharpest of his career. The conference concentrated primarily on the enactment of legislation, and its three “demands” included revision of the Senate’s cloture rule, passage of an FEPC, and legislation to protect servicemen from assault by civilians. Yet most politicians cast only a passing glance at the conference; no one seemed intimidated.

Part of the problem stemmed from past success. For example, as Japanese-Americans readjusted successfully to American society, aided by the government’s payments of wartime claims, they began to inch away from their earlier commitment to the coalition. As overt anti-Semitism decreased and as the problems of the new state of Israel increasingly attracted Jewish attention in America, the traditional Jewish organizations seemed less militant about civil-rights legislation. Moreover, the restoration of the power of the House Rules Committee in January 1951 had a discouraging influence on the American Jewish
Committee, whose report of legislative inaction in 1951 sounded almost like an epitaph.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, there was no mass militancy anywhere, and without it, intimidation was virtually impossible. In 1941 A. Philip Randolph could point to spontaneous, grass-roots uprisings in the black community everywhere outside the South as evidence that Negroes would no longer tolerate discrimination in defense industries. Although some feared that the masses had grown soft and complacent, others observed that the employment situation in 1951 represented a dramatic improvement over that of 1941, not only because of the Korean War but also because of the fair employment laws and ordinances in several states and cities and because of a more tolerant attitude generally. The fact that no Negro leader seriously considered a mass march or demonstration in 1951 was persuasive evidence that such strategy would probably have backfired. The only threat that seemed to carry any political weight was the Negro vote of 1952; but the growing evidence that Senator Taft, never a favorite of minority groups, would be the Republican nominee in 1952 allowed many Democratic politicians to ignore it. Thus, neither the president nor the Eighty-second Congress had much to worry about in the way of reprisals.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet any verdict on the first session would be incomplete without mentioning what it prevented, for the session consisted primarily of a holding action on civil rights. For example, as the military became increasingly integrated in Korea in 1950 and 1951, southerners in the House backed the Winstead amendment to permit draftees the choice of refusing to serve in integrated units. The House, however, rejected Winstead's contention that integration would lead to race riots and knocked his proposal out of the selective-service bill by a vote of 178 to 126.\textsuperscript{24}

Southerners also feared integration of Veterans Administration hospitals in the South, and Congressmen John D. Rankin of Mississippi sought to head it off when he sponsored legislation to construct an all-Negro hospital in honor of Booker T. Washington in Franklin County, Virginia. Opposed on the floor by Congressmen Dawson and Powell and by messages from the NAACP and the Veterans Administration, the bill lost by the comfortable margin of 223 to 117. The defeat was all the more noteworthy because of the fact that identical bills had passed the House during the Eightieth and Eighty-first Congresses, only to die in the Senate.\textsuperscript{25}

But Congress missed on one count. On November 2, 1951, Truman vetoed a bill that would have required the federal government to oper-
ate schools for military dependents in conformance with the laws of the state in which the facilities were located. The intent of the bill was clear, for it would have meant resegregation of four military schools in the South and no possibility of integrating such institutions in the future. "Step by step we are discarding old discriminations; we must not adopt new ones," the president explained in his veto message. Inexplicably, congressional liberals had raised no serious, concerted objections to the measure; and the Chicago Defender, for one, wanted to know the whereabouts of Humphrey, Lehman, Douglas, Aiken, Taft, Morse, and Ives when the bill went through the senatorial committee on which they served.

The bill itself was only of passing importance; but Truman's veto had a much larger meaning, which was evident in the unrestrained chorus of Negro approval. The demand for an executive FEPC and for equal-justice legislation had diminished appreciably in the fall of 1951; and the civil-rights coalition, then in the process of coming apart, was apparently about to concede defeat. Truman's veto revived hope everywhere and symbolized everything that had been sought and achieved over the past decade. The 1952 Negro Year Book put it in a capsule: "President Truman's veto message is unprecedented in this generation."

On October 20, 1951, the last day of the first session, Truman did something that was unprecedented in American history when he announced the appointment of Gen. Mark W. Clark as the first United States ambassador to the Vatican. Roosevelt had taken the initial step in 1939 when he appointed Myron C. Taylor, without Senate approval, as his personal representative to the Pope. Despite protests from several Protestant churches and clergymen, Taylor had remained on until January 1950, when he submitted his resignation to Truman. The Vatican let it be known that it would be delighted with the appointment of an ambassador but would frown upon another personal representative. Most major Protestant organizations, however, were opposed to either course and deluged the White House with appeals not to replace Taylor. Even a Sunday-school class of the First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., which Truman attended, submitted a petition to the president. Pastor Edward H. Pruden was embarrassed about it, but Truman urged him not to worry, for "it is simply a part of the duty of the presidential office to listen to everybody's viewpoint."

But Pruden was also opposed to any representation at the Vatican, and he urged Truman to meet with a large Protestant delegation to hear their point of view. Noting the strong opposition from American
Protestants, black and white, liberal and conservative, Pruden declared that he knew "of no matter on which there has been such unanimity of feeling among Protestants of every shade and variety ... and ... a large section of the Jewish community has also expressed itself ... as being strongly opposed to Vatican representation."  

The prospect of an ambassadorial successor to Taylor thus brought to the surface the fears of many Protestants and Jews about the political nature of the Vatican and the principle of separation of church and state in America. It also provided bigots with another issue that they could use in berating the Truman administration, which had been subjected for some time to irrational accusations of selling out to the Pope.  

Truman waited until the storm subsided, then announced Clark's appointment as ambassador on October 20, 1951. Presumably to lessen opposition, Press Secretary Joseph Short released a statement explaining the appointment on the grounds of "diplomacy and humanitarianism." "It is well known that the Vatican is vigorously engaged in the struggle against communism," the statement expounded. "Direct diplomatic relations will assist in coordinating the effort to combat the Communist menace." If that was the president's purpose, he might well have heeded an idea of members of the White House staff, who had suggested a roving ambassador to represent the president at the seats of all major religions around the Soviet periphery. During his news conference on October 25, Truman testily noted that the proposed nomination in no way conflicted with the principle of separation of church and state. Although he stated that the appointment had not created as much "hullabaloo" as he had expected, protests poured into the White House and the State Department. Within ten days of the announcement, the former had received five thousand letters and telegrams and the latter around ten thousand, most of them opposed. No appointment during the Truman years aroused as much general opposition.  

The affair also threatened to damage his already deteriorating relations with Congress. Senator Tom Connally, who would handle the appointment as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, announced his personal opposition to Clark because of his strategy in the Italian campaign during the Second World War; the Texas senator was particularly distressed about the high rate of casualties suffered by a Texas division in that campaign, which to him revealed Clark's unfitness for high office. Connally promised to pigeonhole the nomination permanently, if and when the president submitted it to the Senate.
Truman did not offer Clark a recess appointment, because that would have required the general to retire from the army, so the appointment was held over for the second session in January. But the continued protests, including the threat of a Protestant march on Washington, prompted Clark to withdraw his name on January 13, 1952, and prompted Truman to back off during the remainder of his administration.32

Opposition to an ambassador to the Vatican was not the only backlash of 1951 and 1952. More serious as far as racial and religious tolerance were concerned, for the present as well as the future, was the fresh outbreak of white “Christian” violence against Negroes and Jews. In October 1951 the Anti-Defamation League reported the results of several polls that showed a significant decline in racial and religious bias. From a wartime peak of prejudice in 1945, the League reported a “dramatic” drop of 40 percent by 1950 and 1951. Moreover, despite the tense situation internationally, “scapegoating of the minority groups seems to have considerably lessened.”63 The report may have been valid for the country as a whole, but the steady pressure for integration in the postwar period and Truman’s insistence on equal justice for everyone was difficult for many whites to accept. In 1951 their inability to adjust to the alterations in traditional racial patterns emerged, sometimes in childish behavior, at other times in ugly manifestations of racism. Some luxuriated in the symbols of a bygone era, while others seized upon extralegal means to preserve the status quo.

The most widely used symbol of protest by 1951 was the Confederate flag. An owner of a flag company in Virginia reported that there were more Confederate flags in that state in 1951 than during the Civil War. In September the largest flag company in the world, located in New York City, revealed that it was unable to meet the demand for Confederate flags, which exceeded that for Old Glory. From the nation’s capital came a similar report. In Fordyce, Arkansas, high-school students donned Confederate hats, flew rebel flags, and marched to “Dixie,” while using Confederate money as legal tender at the school store. The New Yorker magazine carried one advertisement that urged its readers to purchase the Stars and Bars to “show where you stand.” The annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars became acrimonious when southern delegates insisted upon placing the Confederate emblem over the American flag.34

Although initially disposed to attribute such behavior to retarded adolescents, Negro leadership began to take it seriously, especially when the rebel flag cropped up consistently on military vehicles. In
September the *Courier* reported that in one army convoy that was returning from "Exercise Southern Pine" over half of the vehicles were flying the flag. Again, according to "reliable sources," the paper revealed that Negro paratroopers stationed in North Carolina refused to jump from a plane with a rebel flag painted on its nose. Apparently, the stories contained more than a grain of truth, for in October the *Defender* commented on an air-force warning to all commands that display of the Confederate flag was a violation of military regulations. Walter White, too, pointed out that there was widespread display of the flag in military units in Germany, Japan, and Korea.

Although the flag fetish was physically innocuous, it had serious psychological and political implications, which the Negro press sought to comprehend. The *Defender* saw the flag fad generally as "rebel nonsense," but the paper feared that it might lead to racial violence. The *Courier* asked: "Is the revival of the Confederate flag a harmless 'mystical fad,' a reaffirmation of the dogma of the old and defeated South, or is it symbolic of a growing resentment of Trumanism? That's a top question today." Undoubtedly, various factors were involved, and "Trumanism" was clearly one of them. In the late summer and fall of 1951 a flood of newspaper articles commented on the political storm brewing in the South. Truman was the issue, partly because of his stand on civil rights and partly because of the supposed socialistic trend of his administration; and southerners were threatening to secede from the Democratic party unless the president stepped down in 1952.

The flag fad was at least a peaceful protest, but other manifestations of a white backlash were not. The thrust of the Truman administration since the *Shelley* case of 1948 toward further integration in public and private housing brought to the surface all of the economic fears and social prejudices of lower-class whites. In July 1951, as a Negro couple prepared to occupy an apartment in all-white Cicero, Illinois, a mob of four thousand to six thousand whites broke through a National Guard barricade and set the building afire. Called out by Governor Adlai Stevenson in anticipation of trouble, the guardsmen eventually restored order, but not before twenty-three soldiers, policemen, and rioting whites had been injured. No Negroes were involved, and not until the 1960s would they respond in kind.

The riot in Cicero received worldwide attention. Visiting in Singapore, Governor Dewey was irritated to discover that "an incident of racial prejudice involving a few hundred people . . . is front page news in Singapore and elsewhere, and is considered worthy of a four-column photograph on the front page." But Cicero was more than an isolated
incident or a passing phenomenon. After the riot, the Associated Negro Press noted that the population of Cicero was generally first- and second-generation Bohemian, of whom about 80 percent were Catholic. The ANP also observed that some of the recent violence in and about Chicago had occurred in Catholic areas, much to the distress of the local Catholic clergy and leading Catholic laymen. Cicero thus became the prototype of an increasingly familiar story of a minority group whose time had arrived pitted against another whose time was yet to come. The oppressed of the past had become the oppressor of the present.

A Cook County grand jury subsequently indicted those who had aided the black couple in renting the apartment, accusing them, among other things, of “conspiracy to injure property . . . by causing a depreciation in the real estate market by renting to Negroes.” The day after the indictment, the Department of Justice intervened and impaneled a federal grand jury, which eventually indicted and convicted three policemen, including Cicero’s chief of police, for violating the civil rights of the couple. The chief had threatened the couple when they attempted to occupy the apartment, and then had denied them police protection when whites had threatened to riot. Truman later publicly praised his officials for preventing “a gross miscarriage of justice.”

Although undoubtedly the most flagrant illustration of white violence in 1951, Cicero was also a harbinger of other extralegal action, particularly the use of bombs to intimidate various minorities. In Dallas, a series of bombings of Negro homes prompted the president of the city’s Council of Negro Organizations to announce that the city faced its most crucial moment. In Miami, minorities suffered a “reign of terror” as bigots bombed Jewish synagogues and a Negro housing project. In California, simultaneous time bombs destroyed the three homes of a Negro, a Jew, and a Mexican-American.

Tragedy had to happen. On Christmas Day 1951 the bombing of a Negro home in Mims, Florida, took the lives of Harry T. Moore and his wife. A school principal in Brevard County, Moore had long been on the firing line of civil rights, which made him a “marked man,” as the NAACP later put it. In the postwar years Tuskegee Institute had sighed with relief as the annual lynching rate continued to drop, but the single lynching reported in 1951 failed to tell the story of racial violence. Lynching “has gone out of style,” Tuskegee noted, to be replaced by other forms of intimidation. Walter White put it more tersely: “The bomb has replaced the lynchers’ rope.”

The death of the Moores became the rallying point in 1951 and
1952, as had the blinding of Isaac Woodard in 1946. Walter White quickly wired Attorney General McGrath, requesting an appointment to discuss cooperative efforts to curb terrorism in Florida and to solve the Moore murders. On January 8, 1952, representatives of eighteen organizations met with McGrath to urge a full-fledged federal investigation. The Department of Justice was active, examining the series of racial crimes in Florida and eventually winning a federal grand jury indictment of those allegedly involved in the bombings of a Negro housing development in Miami. But those who murdered the Moores were never apprehended.43

The white backlash thus added another dimension to the problems facing Truman in 1951. The best he could do—given the war, the need for unity, the composition of Congress, and the backlash—was to maintain a holding action and to keep the issue of civil rights before the American public. Thus, as on previous occasions, he attempted to exploit the educational possibilities of the presidency through a series of low-keyed public addresses and formal messages. For example, on March 1, 1951, he sent a message to the fourth annual Conference on Civil Liberties, in which he expressed the hope that the Eighty-second Congress would not adjourn without enacting his civil-rights program. He also pointed with pride to the “tremendous gains” in civil rights since the report of his committee in 1947, particularly in education, housing, employment, and use of public accommodations.44

In dedicating the Carter Barron Amphitheater in Washington, in May, Truman discussed the faith of the country’s founders, a faith expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. “We must believe in the faith of our fathers,” he said. “We must believe in human rights and civil rights for every man, be he yellow, red, black, or white.” On July 4, in a radio broadcast commemorating the 175th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, he opened by stressing that the United States was based on a new idea, the idea that all men were created equal. He noted, “We have made great strides in broadening freedom here at home. We have made real progress in eliminating oppression and injustice and in creating security and opportunities for all.” In conclusion, he urged greater effort to achieve liberty for everyone.45

But Truman did more than orate; he took action that symbolized what he expected of America. In August 1951 the Sioux City, Iowa, Memorial Park Cemetery denied burial to Sfc. John R. Rice, a Winnebago Indian killed in Korea. Mrs. Rice, a non-Indian, had purchased the lot, unaware of a restrictive clause limiting burial to Caucasians.
Officials of the cemetery therefore halted the ceremony after the conclusion of military rites, and the casket remained in front of the open grave. The story was front-page news the next morning, and Harry H. Vaughan, the president’s military aide, called it to Truman’s attention. Truman’s reaction was decisive and irate. In an angry telegram to the mayor of Sioux City, the president pointed out that “national appreciation of patriotic service should not be limited by race, color or creed.” A similar telegram went to officials of the cemetery, who quickly apologized and offered a free lot for Rice’s burial. Through Harry Vaughan, however, the president had already arranged for burial in Arlington National Cemetery, and Mrs. Rice accepted the “greater honor.” Rice thus became the second serviceman of a minority group to be buried under similar circumstances in Arlington National Cemetery, following Felix Longoria, the Mexican-American from Texas, who had won such burial honors as a result of Lyndon Johnson’s intervention in 1949. The White House mail ran heavily in favor of Truman’s action. In January 1952 General Vaughan telephoned the mayor of Phoenix when he learned of a private cemetery’s refusal to bury a Negro killed in Korea, and the mayor took action to resolve the matter locally after a dispute of nearly six weeks.

During these trying months of congressional inaction, the president also initiated a conference and established a commission, both of which helped to keep alive the issue of discrimination, to involve additional people in the civil-rights struggle, and to emphasize those areas in need of correction and improvement. In August 1949 Truman had called for a Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, and after several preliminary meetings on the local and national level, he scheduled the main event for December 1950. Sponsored by personnel of the Children’s Bureau and chaired by Oscar Ewing of the Federal Security Administration, the conference attracted over five thousand delegates and guests from home and abroad. In addition to several technical addresses, there were thirty-five working groups and thirty-one panels at the conference, in which Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Negroes participated.

The delegates were concerned about discrimination, particularly the effect of racial segregation on the “healthy personality development” of school children. The platform endorsed the “full program” of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and urged that prompt steps be taken “to eliminate all types of racial and religious segregation, and that this conference through its most appropriate channels appeal immediately to the federal government to abolish segregation in the
nation's capital, making Washington an example to the world of a truly working democracy without discriminatory practice on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin."

The president took more important steps in late 1951. In addition to creating the Committee on Government Contract Compliance, he also issued an executive order on December 29 establishing the President's Commission on the Health Needs of the Nation. Consisting of a chairman—Dr. Paul B. Magnuson, formerly of the Northwestern University Medical School—and fourteen members, the commission was directed to investigate comprehensively every aspect of the nation's health problems. Although the president admitted that he hoped the commission's findings would dissipate some of the "bitter attacks" on his proposals "to bring adequate health care to all our people," he emphasized the total freedom of its members to come in with any conclusion or recommendation. He also brushed aside the American Medical Association, whose president had publicly denounced creation of the commission.

The commission's investigation was impressive by any standard, and its final report of five published volumes constituted a mine of information. Indeed, volume three contained nearly three hundred pages of statistics, including many white-nonwhite comparisons. In 1949, for example, the death rate for nonwhite children under one year of age was nearly double that of whites, as was the death rate for adults between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four.

Of equal importance was the commission's propaganda value as a result of public hearings involving nearly four hundred witnesses in eight major cities. The commission later expressed its belief in the "tremendous educational value" of the hearings and its gratitude to the press for "the full and impartial manner in which it covered these sessions." Much of the testimony was revealing. In St. Louis, for example, only sixteen of twenty-nine general hospitals admitted Negroes, and of the sixteen only seven were integrated. In Los Angeles County, of the 6,920 licensed physicians, there were only 74 Negroes, 11 Mexican-Americans, 42 Japanese-Americans, and 7 Chinese-Americans. For Indians everywhere, the death rate from tuberculosis was more than ten times greater than for whites, and in Texas the disease took seven Mexican-Americans for every Anglo.

In its final report to the president, the commission made several recommendations involving minority groups. In personal health service, the commission argued for "services to all persons who are declared eligible, with no discrimination as to age, race, citizenship, or
place or duration of residence, and with no means test at the time care is needed." Concerned about the shortage of hospital beds for American minorities, the commission unequivocally advocated integration of all hospital facilities, since segregation "detracts from the efficiency and quality of care." For migratory labor, which generally involved Mexican-Americans, it recommended that Congress allocate additional funds and develop a cooperative plan with state and local agencies to provide better health facilities. Perhaps most significant of all, "to meet the need for additional Negroes in the health professions," the commission urged the establishment of special programs to improve preprofessional and professional opportunities. In particular, "the dual system of education in some parts of this country has made it impossible for many Negroes to receive the high quality secondary and college education needed to qualify them for professional training. The discriminatory bars which start at the secondary school level and run all the way through post-graduate training, internship, and hospital affiliation must be removed wherever they exist."

President Truman accepted the commission's report on December 18, 1952, grateful for its "fresh and constructive approach" and hopeful that it would be adopted during the next administration. On January 9, 1953, as he prepared to leave office, he sent a special message to Congress transmitting the commission's recommendations and urging their enactment, stressing especially the proposal for federal grants-in-aid for state and local action in developing comprehensive personal health services.

Truman's oratory and actions in 1951 did not persuade the second session of the Eighty-second Congress that there was an urgent need to enact civil-rights legislation. And the administration was therefore not about to indulge in a sham performance and put it on the "must" list for 1952. In suggestions for the president's State of the Union message on January 9, 1952, only the Departments of Justice and Commerce included recommendations for such legislation. Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer was particularly worried about the Soviet Union's "powerful propaganda appeals to the non-white population of all continents, citing discrimination against minority groups in the United States. The most effective answer we can give to this propaganda is to continue to improve the position of minority groups in this country."

Although fully aware that Congress would balk, Truman went through the ritualistic motions in his State of the Union address of calling for action "toward the wider enjoyment of civil rights." After reciting the progress of the executive branch in providing equal treat-
ment and opportunity in the armed services, in the civil service, and in private firms with government contracts, he again called upon Congress to permit civil-rights legislation to be brought to a vote. He was pleased that the Senate had scheduled early action on home rule for the District of Columbia, and he hoped for prompt adoption of legislation granting statehood to Hawaii and Alaska. In his budget message, delivered to Congress on January 21, he renewed his request for appropriations to finance a fair employment practices commission. He noted that with the establishment of his Committee on Government Contract Compliance, the executive branch had acted, “within the limits of its present powers, to see that discrimination . . . does not prevent workers from getting jobs which use their highest skills. Further progress toward this objective will require action by Congress.”

Although the State of the Union message was stronger than its counterpart of 1951, it fell short of black expectations. In probably its most critical editorial of the president since the campaign of 1948, the Afro-American counted only 104 of 5,300 words devoted to “the burning issue of civil rights. He sadly missed an excellent opportunity to come out slugging.” Walter White had also expected more and warned both parties of the political hazards in soft-pedaling the issue in the election year of 1952. The Chicago Defender never got over the president’s “weak statement.” In a biting editorial, the Defender saw it “as a disappointing shock to those who had expected an outspoken declaration in face of the reign of terror in Florida which has claimed the lives of three citizens, the wounding of a fourth and the bombings and attempted bombings of Jewish synagogues, a Negro housing project and a Catholic church.”

But civil-rights organizations were not prepared to surrender. They had known defeat before—indeed, they lived with it—and the approaching presidential campaign of 1952 provided a psychological boost. Upon the invitation of the NAACP, nine hundred delegates from thirty-five states who represented fifty-two national organizations met for the 1952 Leadership Conference on Civil Rights on February 17 and 18 in Washington. In one of the major addresses, Walter White praised Truman for his courageous actions in the past but expressed concern about recent presidential backsliding. The conference, however, concentrated mostly on Congress and the campaign politics of 1952. Once again, the delegates insisted upon passage of civil-rights legislation and revision of the senatorial rule regarding cloture. “The failure of Congress to restrain the bigots among us through enactment of civil rights measures,” the conferees declared, “has brought about a
wave of mob violence, bombing, shootings and ‘legal lynchings’ and has already proved costly to our nation in world prestige and in human life.” In conclusion, the delegates drew the only weapon left in the civil-rights arsenal, threatening to “carry this vital fight into the precincts where the people of America live and vote. We shall not rest as long as any American is daily forced to face the humiliation of racial discrimination and segregation.”

Yet neither party in Congress made even a half-hearted effort in 1952. In January the Senate Rules Committee approved a resolution to revise the cloture rule to permit two-thirds of those present, rather than two-thirds of the total membership, to invoke cloture; but the Senate took no action after the measure was reported on March 6. FEPC shared the same fate, although Truman gave it an occasional plug. The Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, with Senators Taft and Nixon dissenting, did approve an FEPC with strong enforcement powers. The measure would have created an Equality of Opportunity in Employment Commission, a euphemism to avoid the hostility engendered by the symbols FEPC, but the Senate ignored the bill.

The Senate did heed the president’s request for home rule for the District of Columbia, when it passed a bill on January 22, 1952, that provided considerable autonomy to residents of the District. The bill then went to the District of Columbia Committee in the House, the graveyard of previous proposals because of southern domination of the committee. Truman did his best to marshal public opinion behind the measure. In a special message to Congress on May 1 transmitting a reorganization plan, he went out of his way to urge home rule. “Local self-government is both the right and the responsibility of free men,” he contended. “The denial of self-government does not befit the national capital of the world’s largest and most powerful democracy.” Again, when Truman signed the bill on June 9 that transferred the power to appoint the Recorder of Deeds from the president to the District commissioners, he explained that he approved it only because it advanced the “even more important principle” of home rule. But the House committee lived up to its reputation and refused to report the bill on home rule. Indeed, despite the entreaties of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson and despite subsequent Senate bills for home rule, the House District of Columbia Committee was consistently able to prevent final action.

The Eighty-second Congress did enact legislation on one of the recommendations included in the president’s special civil-rights message of February 1948, but it was almost an afterthought in a bill
whose primary purpose was to discriminate. In June 1952 Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, or the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act as it was popularly called. The act revised and codified all laws relating to immigration and naturalization, but its main thrust was to continue most of the discriminatory provisions of the National Origins Act of 1924 as well as to introduce a few new ones. In March, for example, the NAACP had protested one provision that restricted immigration from the British West Indies to one hundred per year. In the past, immigrants from the islands had simply been admitted under the regular British quota, and the fact that most were black was enough to convince practically everyone of the racial intent of the new provision.60

The president vigorously protested the bill. In a sharply worded veto message on June 25, Truman expressed praise for only a few of its provisions. Noting that the bill completely eliminated race as a barrier to naturalization and permitted at least a minimum quota to all nations of Asia, he reminded Congress and the nation that he had “long urged that racial or national barriers to naturalization be abolished. This was one of the recommendations in my civil rights message to the Congress on February 2, 1948.” Then he continued, “But now this . . . provision comes before me embedded in a mass of legislation which would perpetuate injustices of long standing against many other nations of the world, hamper the efforts we are making to rally the men of East and West alike to the cause of freedom, and intensify the repressive and inhumane aspects of our immigration procedures. The price is too high, and in good conscience I cannot agree to pay it.” Although he agreed with the necessity of a quota, he objected first to the overall limitation of immigrants; more ought to be admitted. To the president, however, the “greatest vice” of the immigration quota system, which was perpetuated in the bill of 1952, was that it discriminated, “deliberately and intentionally, against many of the peoples of the world.” Such a practice violated America’s traditions and ideals, the pronouncement of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, and “repudiates our basic religious concepts, our belief in the brotherhood of man.” Further, in the bill’s regulations for entry, deportation, and administration, the president found provisions “worse than the infamous Alien Act of 1798.”61

Civil-rights exponents were pleased with the president’s veto. “Against the advice of several frightened associates,” editorialized the Amsterdam News, President Truman “courageously” vetoed the “infamous” bill. To the Afro-American, “all the credit goes to the presi-
dent. The measure . . . was designed with racial discrimination as its clear intent and purpose,” for it represented the “Hitlerian master-race doctrine” and “must not be allowed to stand unchallenged on federal statute books.”

The plaudits were deserved, but the sighs of relief were premature. Within two days, the president suffered a stinging defeat, and the nation a major embarrassment, when Congress in an ugly, reactionary mood voted to override the veto. In the Senate, twenty-five Democrats and thirty-two Republicans voted to override, while only eighteen Democrats and eight Republicans stood by the president. The Senate vote barely exceeded the required two-thirds, and a switch of two votes would have made the difference. It was therefore infuriating that Majority Leader McFarland and Majority Whip Johnson voted against the president, and it was altogether simple justice that President Lyndon Johnson should later carry through President Kennedy’s campaign to revise the law.

In one area of concern, the American Indian, President Truman and Congress did cooperate occasionally on legislation. But most of the controversy in 1951 and 1952 revolved around the policies of the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Dillon S. Myer. When Myer took office in 1950, he announced his intention of withdrawing the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from the management of Indian affairs, as much and as soon as possible. This was not the first time that a proposal had been made or a hope expressed about winding up the affairs of the bureau, which had become a miniature federal government and an ever-expanding bureaucracy, indulging in such diverse activities as health, education, welfare, forestry, general construction, land management, banking, road maintenance, grazing, electric power, irrigation, tribal organization, and so forth.

Myer’s first point of business was to bring some order to the BIA’s operations, which had suffered from a parade of commissioners and acting commissioners since the resignation of John Collier in 1945. Although a well intentioned, efficient administrator, Myer quickly ran into trouble with Indian organizations, tribes, and advocates. Lacking the human touch and outwardly indifferent to Indian sensibilities as well as to some of their rights, he proposed policy without consulting the tribes involved and sometimes without sufficient thought in regard to normal due process. Thus, in 1952 he sponsored legislation that would have permitted employees of the bureau to carry firearms and to make arrests, without benefit of a warrant, for violations of regulations. The Association on American Indian Affairs denounced the proposal as
a declaration of cold war, one that would “probably set Indian relations back at least half a century.” Although Myer subsequently explained that the bill would only give bureau employees the same authority as federal marshals and would simply restore power that had inadvertently been withdrawn from bureau agents in an act of 1948, Congress would have none of it and backed away from the proposal. Myer further invited suspicion when his accession to office in 1950 resulted in several resignations, both voluntary and forced, of some influential, dedicated, and highly respected members of the BIA.

He got into trouble in 1951 with the appropriation bill for the Interior Department, which contained a restriction prohibiting the use of federal appropriations or tribal funds for the acquisition of land or water rights in four western states. Oliver La Farge, president of the Association on American Indian Affairs, pronounced it “discriminatory in the extreme.” The president of the National Congress of American Indians agreed, and he informed Truman that “this country has never forbidden any group of people to purchase land, except in some few cases where war hysteria and prejudice has dictated such laws with respect to certain Orientals.” Although he recognized that Truman could not veto the entire appropriations bill, he requested that the president publicly express disapproval of this particular provision. Truman chose, however, to sign the bill without comment.

But it was Myer’s proposed revision of the federal code of regulations as it applied to Indians that provoked the most concerted opposition. The revision required tribal leaders to pursue grievances through a prescribed chain of command, presumably to cut down on the number of Indian pilgrimages to Washington, and permitted the commissioner to reject an attorney with whom the Indians had made a contract if “reasonable cause” existed to indicate that the attorney had solicited the contract. Myer, of course, was concerned with “ambulance chasing,” whereby attorneys had become wealthy through representation of Indian claims; but the new rule clearly infringed upon the right of Indians to choose their own attorneys.

Indian advocates were outraged. Far from seeking the withdrawal of the BIA, they contended, Myer was attempting to establish a dictatorship. The Association on American Indian Affairs saw the new code as tending to “destroy those beginnings of self-expression and self-government that have given the Indian people and their friends some hope for an Indian future of unrestricted, unsupervised, constructive citizenship.” A special committee of the American Bar Association opposed most of the proposals. In fact, the New York
Times could find no one, except Myer, in favor of the new regulations. In an article in the New Republic in May 1951, former Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes denounced Myer as “a Hitler and a Mussolini rolled into one.” And in August he wrote a long letter to Interior Secretary Oscar Chapman, in which he devoted four pages to the proposed revision. Myer was setting himself up as a “little tin Hitler” and as the “Commissar” of Indian affairs, Ickes complained to his friend and protégé, and “he should be scourged from his office as an unfaithful public servant who has been persistently recreant to his trust.” The old curmudgeon was in fine form. Chapman was not about to fire his subordinate, but he did the next best thing and countermanded the new regulations over Myer’s objections.

The controversy over Myer’s inept attempts to streamline the bureaucracy and to prevent injustice to the Indians by indulging in some of it himself tended to obscure his main goal of eventual liquidation of the BIA and the integration of the Indian into the mainstream of American society. Since 1948 the Truman administration had moved consistently in the direction of integration of all minority groups; and the Democratic platform of 1952 not only pledged continued efforts to advance “the health, education, and economic well-being of our American Indian citizens” but also expressed the belief that “the American Indian should be completely integrated into the social, economic and political life of the nation.”

For the Indian, the administration’s program thus had two prongs—the one was exemplified in the ten-year attempt to rehabilitate the Navajo and Hopi tribes, to help those who could not help themselves, and to make the reservation as self-sufficient as possible; the other involved releasing tribes from federal jurisdiction and seeking to integrate Indians into the American economy. For this task, Myer seemed eminently qualified as a result of his experience with the War Relocation Authority in reintegrating Japanese-Americans into the economic, if not the cultural, life of America. The reservation Indian was not only culturally different but he also lacked the necessary skills for economic advancement in an alien world. Yet something had to be done. The reservations could not support the existing Indian population, and the Indian birth rate was far greater than the national average.

Myer had no master plan, although he could utilize the program developed by William Zimmerman in 1947, which proposed a rough timetable for the release of various tribes over the next twenty-five to fifty years. Myer believed that any master plan would be “one of the
worst mistakes we could possibly make” in view of the diversity of Indian wealth, education, and acculturation. Instead, his approach was piecemeal. When Truman signed a bill in August 1951 that provided for the disposition of claims granted to the Ute Indians, he noted that the award “has made it possible for the Indians to put their own affairs in order and to prepare themselves for the fullest participation in the affairs of our nation.”

Myer also sponsored and supported legislation that would transfer criminal and civil jurisdiction over Indians from the federal to the state governments. The first was the Bosone bill of 1950, which provoked a storm of protest from Indian advocates who feared exploitation by the states and premature attempts at integration. Although the bill never cleared the Senate, Myer continued his efforts to arrange for transfers of authority and reported in March 1952 that legislation for this purpose was pending. But that bill, and legislation to remove discriminatory policies toward Indians, did not pass until the Eisenhower administration. In 1953 Congress removed the federal prohibition against serving liquor to Indians and transferred criminal and civil authority over several tribes to various state governments. The two houses also agreed to a resolution that expressed the desire for further transfers of authority and directed the secretary of the interior to prepare legislation to accomplish this. The “termination” program appealed to Congress not only because it seemed logical but also because it would result in decreased federal expenditures, which delighted the penny pinchers.

The Indians and their white advocates were understandably distraught, although all too often they seemed to want it all their own way—more federal money, less federal control, and no state supervision or authority whatever. “Termination” became a dirty word on the reservations, and it had adverse effects on the Indian, if not on the federal pocketbook. Between 1953 and 1957, for example, the Indians lost roughly 12 percent of their trust lands through unwise sales to non-Indians. There were other unfortunate results, and eventually the Department of the Interior all but halted the “termination” policy, a decision officially endorsed by President Richard Nixon in 1970.

Nor was the last part of Myer’s program to integrate the Indian much more successful. The administration seemed to have only two alternative solutions to the problem of the increasing Indian population—to ask Congress for even larger appropriations to purchase additional land for the reservations or to ask for smaller sums to develop economic skills and to relocate Indians in jobs on and off the reserva-
tion. Myer and the Truman administration chose the latter course and initiated a modest program in 1951, which included provisions for transportation to the city and financial support for participants until they received their first paychecks. In his budget message of January 21, 1952, Truman requested a $15-million increase for the BIA, of which roughly $7 million was "to conduct a constructive program to provide the Indians with training and off-reservation relocation opportunities and to help them to make satisfactory adjustments in new locations."

But if the program ever had a chance of success, Congress jeopardized it with pitiful appropriations. As late as 1957, Congress had increased the appropriation only to $3.5 million, about half of what Truman had requested in 1952, and the results were mixed at best. In moving to the city, Indians discovered what Negroes had known for decades, that both employers and unions discriminated against minorities. In 1961 the Commission on Civil Rights reported that "employment opportunities for Indians appear to be as restricted as they are for Negroes." Forced to live in slums, Indians aggravated the problems of already overburdened cities, often without any benefit to themselves. Some returned, disheartened, to the reservation; some successfully adjusted to the new life of the city; and a few resorted to crime. The increasing urban population also brought about other complications. When new, activist Indian leaders appeared in the late 1960s, they sometimes found their attempts to formulate unified programs jeopardized and their cries of "red power" muted by the conflicting demands of the reservations and the urban Indian population. In any event, because of discrimination on the part of whites and because of the cultural and educational handicaps of Indians, the relocation policy initiated during the Truman administration might have failed even with generous congressional support. But Truman at least could have said that his administration had attempted to solve a problem that is still very much a part of America and which still defies solution.

The Truman administration also grappled with the grievances of another minority, the Mexican-American, though it came late to the problem and never made a large commitment. The administration's interest was engaged initially because of the farm-labor program, which involved many migratory Mexican-Americans and Negroes as well as contract and illegal labor from Mexico. As a result of a labor shortage during the Second World War, the Roosevelt administration had negotiated a series of agreements with Mexico for the importation of braceros for seasonal work in the United States. The wartime program expired in 1947, but the Truman administration had heeded the
pleas of growers and arranged new contracts with Mexico from 1947 to 1949. Employers of farm workers also exploited “wetbacks”—Mexican nationals who crossed the border illegally—and by 1949 a sharp domestic controversy had developed. In 1949 the government apprehended and returned about three hundred thousand illegal entrants, and in 1950 the number reached half a million.\textsuperscript{73}

The growers insisted upon the necessity of bracero and wetback labor. American workers were unreliable, they contended, and sometimes deserted the fields at harvest time. Indeed, they might even strike when the crops were ripe, which was tantamount to un-Americanism. They also argued that Americans disliked the stoop labor required in harvesting certain crops, and Mexicans were much more productive anyway. It was a theme that would become monotonous, although it was always persuasive to some. In 1947 growers in Texas complained that resident labor refused to work in the fields and urged an expanded bracero program. An investigator, however, noted that for a ten-hour day, seven-day week, the worker received $17.50. Yet if he happened to be a veteran, he could draw unemployment compensation of $20.00 per week for fifty-two weeks. A choice between the two was not difficult to make. The growers and their representatives in Congress also urged Truman to permit the use of wetbacks and to order immigration agents not to return them to Mexico.\textsuperscript{74}

The spearhead of the opposition to the bracero program as well as to the exploitation of wetback labor came from LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens. Organized in the late 1920s, the organization peaked in membership in 1940, although it had never had much influence. During the war, in contrast with the phenomenal growth of the NAACP, LULAC dropped dramatically in membership. By 1951, however, it had about regained the membership of 1940, but it still lacked a strong professional core because of the tendency of middle-class Mexican-Americans, particularly those who were light-skinned, to disappear into Anglo society. In the postwar period the organization concentrated on improving educational advantages of Mexican-Americans and in curbing the invasion of workers from Mexico. The latter concern was understandable, for Mexican labor inevitably caused a drop in the wage scale for Negroes and Mexican-Americans engaged in the same work. The president’s appointment of his Committee on Civil Rights, which dipped briefly into the problem of migratory labor, convinced some LULAC leaders that they had a friend in the White House. When wetbacks flooded across the border
at El Paso in 1948, LULAC leaders deluged the president with appeals to tighten border security.\footnote{75}

In its opposition to wetbacks and the bracero program, LULAC had some influential allies. Foremost in the group was the AFL's National Farm Labor Union, headed by H. L. Mitchell, who insisted that the domestic labor supply was ample to meet harvesting needs. He also maintained that Mexican nationals lowered wages for American labor, and he denounced their use as strikebreakers. The CIO agreed. So, too, did the NAACP; and in October 1949 Roy Wilkins fired off a letter to Truman protesting the use of Mexican nationals to break a farm strike in California. The Community Service Organization (CSO) was also establishing chapters in various California cities to organize Mexican-Americans into a power bloc at the polls. One of its voluntary leaders was a young migratory worker named Cesar Chavez, who eventually dropped out of the CSO because of its lack of interest in organizing farm workers.\footnote{76}

In the initial stages of the domestic controversy, the growers seemed to have the president's ear. When in 1949 Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico complained about the alacrity with which immigration authorities were returning wetbacks to Mexico, Truman seemed persuaded that the growers needed additional labor. H. L. Mitchell informed him of the denial of civil rights to American agricultural labor, but Truman responded: “No information had come to me prior to the receipt of your letter concerning any violation of the civil rights of agricultural workers. I am referring your letter to the attorney general for such action as appears warranted, and I believe he undoubtedly will request further facts concerning the instances you cite.”\footnote{77}

By the summer of 1949, however, the administration was aware of the increasing complexity of the problem. One government official, noting the growing power of LULAC, warned that Mexican-Americans “have not, as yet, become Balkanized into a minority political bloc as they have been Balkanized in slum areas. They are, however, by the inexorable exigency of circumstances, being driven more and more to such extremity.” He urged that Truman either establish a commission to investigate the problems of Mexican-Americans or that he assuage their leadership with some appointments to governmental positions. As early as June 1949 White House assistant David Niles advised the president to formulate a more just and consistent policy. In particular, he stressed the necessity of considering together the questions of illegal migration and the welfare of three million Mexican-Americans. Tru-
man agreed with the suggestion and urged assistants to come up with some answers. In November 1949 Truman revealed that the Department of Labor was considering the advisability of a presidential commission, and the public response to the news was favorable. In addition to domestic pressure, the administration also had to worry about the Mexican government, which had been making noise about not renewing the 1949 agreement (which expired in 1951) unless the United States established additional safeguards to protect Mexican nationals in the bracero program.\(^7\)

Faced with pressure at home and abroad and lacking any clear-cut proposals for solving the problem of migratory labor, the president established a five-member Commission on Migratory Labor on June 3, 1950. Maurice T. Van Hecke, professor of law at the University of North Carolina, was named as chairman. Although no Mexican-American was included on the commission, an omission that undoubtedly reflected their relative lack of political muscle, the appointment of Robert E. Lucey, Catholic Archbishop of San Antonio, was the next best thing, for he possessed knowledge and experience of the problems of Mexican-Americans in Texas. In its covering announcement, the White House explained the commission’s tasks, which included the related questions of the “social, economic, health, and educational conditions among migratory workers in the United States,” the problems resulting from the bracero program, and the extent of wetback infiltration.\(^7\)

After twelve public hearings and numerous conferences with federal and state officials and with representatives of Mexico and Puerto Rico, the Commission on Migratory Labor reported to the president in April 1951. The commission recommended, above all, the establishment of a Federal Committee on Migratory Farm Labor to coordinate all federal activities concerned with itinerant farm workers. It also urged Congress to strengthen the penalties for use of wetback labor, to enact minimum-wage legislation for farm workers, to extend collective bargaining and unemployment compensation to agriculture, to provide minimum standards for housing for migratory workers and appropriations for federal assistance, to supply school aid to migratory children, to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide matching grants to states for health programs, and to restrict the employment of school-age children.

The commission also recommended that the United States systematically reduce its dependence on foreign labor until it was no longer required. When additional labor was needed, first preference should
go to American citizens in Puerto Rico and Hawaii. Finally, although the commission found it difficult to measure accurately the effect of foreign workers on the wages of American workers, it did report some interesting statistics. From 1947 to 1950, for example, employers of farm workers in Texas, “blessed” with an abundance of braceros and wetbacks, reduced wages 11 percent, while in California, where there were fewer of both, wages rose 15 percent.80

Farm employers found large portions of the report unpalatable, as did some influential newspapers in the Southwest and on the Pacific Coast. Nor were many congressmen impressed with the commission’s entreaties for additional legislation. On June 30, 1951, Congress passed a Mexican labor importation bill, sponsored by Representative W. R. Poage of Texas and Senator Allen J. Ellender of Louisiana, which established procedures to permit the administration to negotiate a renewal of the bracero program that would be agreeable to Mexico. But it included little else; and therefore LULAC, the CIO, and the AFL were all unhappy. William Green urged a presidential veto, noting that the Poage-Ellender bill “discriminates against American workers employed in large scale agriculture and provides no means of setting standards of wages or working conditions for our own citizens.”

Green also pointed out that the bill contained no provision for penalizing growers who employed wetbacks and that it permitted the employment of braceros in food-processing plants, which would have the effect of destroying AFL unions.81

Nor was the White House staff enthusiastic about the bill. In a memorandum to the president, David Stowe saw “no clear cut statement of the advantages of veto versus signature as you requested. However, we are all agreed on the deficiencies of the bill and on measures to correct this situation.”82

Truman finally decided to sign the bill, but only because it contained the conditions necessary for renewal of the bracero program with Mexico and only after the Democratic leaders in Congress promised to take immediate action during the first session to correct its deficiencies.

In his message of approval, Truman pointed out that although the bill permitted a new agreement with Mexico, it represented “very limited progress, which hardly touches our basic farm labor problems.” He urged legislation to penalize those who employed illegal entrants, to authorize the Immigration and Naturalization Service to inspect fields without a warrant, and to appropriate funds for an increase in border personnel for purposes of inspection and detention. He also promised to submit a supplemental budget request to enable the Labor
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Department's Farm Placement Service to expand labor-market studies and to determine the possibility of reducing American dependence on foreign labor. In conclusion, he observed that various executive departments were also examining other recommendations of his Commission on Migratory Labor, including provisions for improvement of housing, education, health, and social security for migratory workers.83

Clearly, the president was no longer thinking primarily of the interests of American farm employers. His shift was evident in his letter to the president of Mexico in which he pointed out that congressional leaders had promised additional legislation, which would result in improved working and living conditions for American and Mexican farm workers alike. Further, he proposed that their new bracero agreement be limited to six months, a time restriction that would force Congress to come through with the promised legislation.84

Truman kept his part of the bargain and negotiated the new agreement, which went into effect on August 11, 1951. Not surprisingly, however, Senators McFarland and Johnson failed to guide the promised legislation through the first session of the Eighty-second Congress. But the six-months limitation had part of its intended effect. Faced with the expiration of the bracero program on February 11, 1952, mindful of Truman's threat not to renew it again unless Congress acted, and worried about what growers in Arizona and Texas would think, Senator McFarland urged quick action and presented Truman with a bill early in March 1952, which he signed.

The so-called wetback bill made it a felony to employ or harbor illegal immigrants, and it authorized immigration agents to search factories and fields without a warrant—both of which were provisions that the president had requested. The House, however, cut the requested appropriations for expanding the operations of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and Truman briefly considered a special message, until the Senate restored the funds. But neither house acted upon the proposal to establish a Federal Committee on Migratory Labor, although the Senate Labor Committee reported such a bill. Nor did Congress heed requests for increased appropriations to enable the Justice Department to expand its activities in trying to curb the flow of illegal labor. Yet the wetback bill of 1952, coupled with the Eisenhower administration's "Operation Wetback" in 1953 to strengthen border supervision, did result in a significant decline in the use of wage-depressing illegal Mexican nationals within the United States; but not until the Kennedy-Johnson administrations would the government move to terminate the bracero program.85
Congress also took its time in dealing with other recommendations of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, although Truman also chose not to give them high priority in 1952. An interdepartmental task force comprising various executive administrators elected to defer requests for major legislative action on most of the recommendations until more technical studies were available. But the president did take the first step in his budget message of January 21, 1952, when he requested legislation to prevent "unscrupulous agencies and labor contractors" from exploiting workers in operations that crossed state lines. He also promised that the Department of Labor would step up its efforts to enforce the anti-child-labor provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Concerned about the inadequate education of children of migratory workers, he requested funds to permit the Office of Education to study possible solutions in cooperation with the states. It was not much, but it represented a beginning. The administration also sought to aid Puerto Ricans under the contract programs, and in 1952 some twenty thousand of them were flown to the United States for seasonal farm work. The Labor Department also launched a migration program for industrial workers for the purposes of providing employment for Puerto Ricans in various industrial cities in the United States and, at the same time, dispersing migrants to prevent additional concentrations like that in New York City.86

When the Eighty-second Congress adjourned on July 8, 1952, it could boast of few accomplishments in the field of civil rights. In August 1951 it passed a bill that permitted Americans who had voted in Italian elections in 1946 and 1948 to reclaim their citizenship, which affected only a handful. In 1952, five days before adjournment, Congress also approved a bill that granted to federal employees of Japanese ancestry the seniority, grade, and pay that they would have had "except for certain World War II security measures," which affected another handful.87

That was it. The record of the Eighty-second Congress on civil rights clearly fell short of the achievements of its two predecessors, although the Eightieth and Eighty-first had little to boast about either. Congress had enacted legislation to settle the claims of American Indians and Japanese-Americans, to remove racial barriers from naturalization, and to provide more self-government for the territories. But the major demands of black America remained unfulfilled. From 1942 to 1952 a total of seventy FEPC bills had been introduced in both houses. Only one, the toothless McConnell bill of 1950, ever got through the House, while the Senate only fought over motions to con-
sider FEPC. Beginning in 1942 the House also passed several anti-poll-tax bills, but Senate filibusters or threats thereof killed them all. The House approved statehood bills for Hawaii and Alaska, but the Senate balked. Neither house passed an antilynching bill during the Truman administration, although the House had approved bills in 1922, 1937, and 1940. It was a sad record; and the big stumbling block was the senatorial rule on cloture, which permitted southern Democrats and a handful of conservative Republicans to dictate what the Senate should consider. Yet congressional and White House liberals would also have to share the responsibility, for they were too often disposed to sacrifice civil rights for welfare, economic, and foreign policy legislation. Time had about run out on the Truman administration. It was also running out on America, although too many congressmen seemed not to know enough to care.