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The Civil Rights Presidents: FDR to Nixon

By Brody Shields

Presidents throughout the civil rights era had different ideas and strategies on how to handle the issue and bring about equality for African Americans. When evaluating the different presidents in the era, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Richard Nixon, it is often found that the main driving forces among them to act on civil rights were necessity and political gain. Factors such as domestic unrest, political aspirations, and political influence forced these presidents to act on, or delay, civil rights legislation whether they had the desire to or not. Although they may have found civil rights to be a moral issue that deserved attention, they were careful not to agitate either Southern Democrats on one end of the spectrum and liberals from both parties on the other end. For this reason, their stances on civil rights evolved to be somewhat moderate.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, although not directly appealing to African Americans, is said to have laid the foundation for future civil rights legislation.<sup>1</sup> As Harvard Sitkoff put it, the New Deal provided "unprecedented substantive and symbolic aid to blacks," and planted "the seeds that would later bear fruit."<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the New Deal, for the first time in American history, blacks received direct aid from Washington D.C. in the time of the economic crisis. In recognition of the economic benefits brought upon by the New Deal, a majority of blacks left the Republican Party of Lincoln and joined the Democratic Party when voting for the presidency.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth O'Reilly, "The Roosevelt Administration and Black America: Federal Surveillance Policy and Civil Rights during the New Deal and World War II Years" *Phylon* (1960-) 48, no. 1 (1987): 12.

<sup>3</sup> Steven F. Lawson. *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 21.

Although the New Deal helped some blacks, that was not the goal that FDR had in mind. FDR relied on powerful southern congressmen to get his New Deal and much of what it entails reflects this fact.<sup>4</sup> He felt as though he could not afford any confrontation with southerners. When the head of the NAACP, Walter White, asked for FDR's help in passing an anti-lynching bill, FDR refused. It became a common theme of the Roosevelt administration to reject the requests of NAACP leaders and White House staff dismissed their attempts to meet with the president. White House staff deferred the many memos and informational reports from the NAACP to the Justice Department, which was not compassionate toward African American interests.<sup>5</sup>

The head of the Justice Department, Homer Cummings, was reluctant to employ federal statutes to protect African Americans. When members of lynch mobs in the South escaped state prosecution or conviction, they were never brought to trial on federal charges from the Justice Department. In response to the inaction on racial issues by the department, Walter White referred to it as the "U.S. Department of White Justice" and stated that it was not concerned with crimes "involving the deprivation of life and liberty and citizenship to Negroes." FDR did not make an effort to respond to the calls for action or complaints of African Americans and was never willing to help African Americans at the expense of offending Southern politicians.<sup>6</sup> New Deal legislation itself often excluded blacks and met the demands of Southern Democrats. This occurred through the exclusion

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<sup>4</sup> Lawson, 33.

<sup>5</sup> McMahon, 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of domestic and agricultural workers from legislation and the decentralized structure of many New Deal programs. At the local level, this led to blatant racial discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

When FDR did appeal to blacks, it was often because he understood the growing importance of obtaining the black vote in future elections and in freeing the Democratic Party from Southern control. Much of this was due to the Great Migration of blacks moving from the south to the north. In the three decades preceding the 1950s, over two and a half million blacks migrated from the south to cities in the north.<sup>8</sup> In 1934, for example, during the Democratic Convention, in an attempt to undermine conservative Southern democracy, delegates abolished the two-thirds voting rule at Roosevelt's urging. This was done to transfer control of the convention over to Democrats from the North and West, and was an effort by FDR to expand the black vote in the Democratic Party and to gain black support for the party and the Roosevelt administration.<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt began to understand that African Americans could potentially decide upcoming elections. Evidence found in an unsigned memo from the Roosevelt administration in 1940 stated that, "the Negro vote will be from 5 to 13 percent of the total vote cast in the November elections" in Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The memo then states that it "may well become the decisive factor in the presidential elections in most of these states."<sup>10</sup>

African Americans' main concern with Roosevelt was his failure to "speak out in favor of federal anti-lynching legislation and poll tax repeal bills." His excuse to Walter

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lawson, 150-151.

<sup>9</sup> McMahan, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 101.

White for his inaction on this was that he felt too constrained by the existing institutional order to push for social reform.<sup>11</sup> Clearly he felt pressure from Southern Democrats and was not willing to challenge their stronghold on the Party.

Later on, FDR would attempt to undermine the southern Democracy and remake the Supreme Court to be more liberal. One of Roosevelt's greatest achievements in civil rights was his nomination of William Hastie to the Supreme Court who would become the first African American federal judge in history.<sup>12</sup> This was part of FDR's court-packing plan that would appoint many people geared towards working for civil rights. Roosevelt's choice in attorney general, Frank Murphy, also seemed to be a proponent for civil rights. Murphy established the Civil Liberties Union that would later be renamed the Civil Rights Section. Murphy used Sections 51 and 52 of title 18 of the Federal Criminal Code to make civil rights investigation an everyday function of the federal government. Section 51 provided criminal sections against persons conspiring to deprive any citizen of their constitutional rights, while Section 52 brought local government officials under federal jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup> Eight of the nine men that Roosevelt appointed to the high bench of the Supreme Court were progressives and had the support of Walter White.<sup>14</sup> As Roosevelt's presidency advanced, he continued to challenge the existing order and tried to recreate the Court to fit his goals.

Although FDR did not pass legislation on lynching, he did publicly speak out against it and he expanded the FBI's criminal jurisdiction to cover civil rights

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>13</sup> O'Reilly, 15-17.

<sup>14</sup> McMahan, 108.

investigation.<sup>15</sup> Roosevelt's New Deal and appointees did seem to create the foundation for further civil rights advances. However, for the most part, Roosevelt was reluctant to pass any legislation that would affect his political aspirations and often acted in the interest of African Americans only to increase his control of the Democratic Party.

Harry Truman made much more of an effort than FDR to fight for civil rights and it even seemed to be an issue that he was personally concerned with. Truman had been chosen to be Roosevelt's vice president due to the fact that Roosevelt's health was quickly deteriorating and those in the Democratic Party felt his old vice president, Henry Wallace, was too liberal and not fit to be president.<sup>16</sup> The much more conservative Jimmy Byrnes, of South Carolina, was also being considered for the position but was considered a political liability, as he would have cost the administration black votes.<sup>17</sup> For these reasons, it can be said that Truman was chosen because he was the most moderate choice, being from the border state of Missouri.

Truman did not waste any time in addressing the civil rights issue. Less than a month after becoming president, Truman met with Walter White of the NAACP. He made a public commitment to a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), a commitment that Roosevelt did not make while president. In October 1945, he nominated an African American attorney, Irvin C. Mollison, to the United States Customs Court.<sup>18</sup> Truman was determined to make civil rights a top priority of his presidency from its beginning.

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<sup>15</sup> O'Reilly, 25.

<sup>16</sup> David McCullough, *Truman* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 293.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

<sup>18</sup> Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2003), 26.

For Truman, the federal government was the primary vehicle in which to address the nation's civil rights issue. He called for immediate federal civil rights reform to guarantee the constitutional rights of all Americans and to help fight racist violence.<sup>19</sup> He issued Executive Order 9808, which created a multiracial Civil Rights Committee.<sup>20</sup> His insistence on using the federal government as a vehicle for civil rights reform was revolutionary and provided the public policy framework for the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights act decades later.<sup>21</sup>

Truman kicked off his federal civil rights program by becoming the first president to address the NAACP. In his speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he also became the first president to commit himself and the federal government to "civil rights and human freedom of black Americans."<sup>22</sup> Although Truman appeared to understand the inequality and discrimination that blacks faced, it is important to point out that civil rights was also part of his foreign policy. He felt that the United States had to correct its civil rights abuses if it were to succeed as the leader of the free world following World War II. He was concerned about America's global image and the influence it had on emerging democracies. His civil rights program seemed to fit right in with the Truman Doctrine of containing communism and promoting democracy across the world.<sup>23</sup>

When Harry Truman made a commitment to civil rights, it was not popular. Just 6 months after his call for civil rights before the NAACP, a Gallup poll showed that 82

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>22</sup> McCullough, 569.

<sup>23</sup> Gardner, 36.



percent of the fifteen hundred adults surveyed opposed his civil rights program.<sup>24</sup>

However, Truman was determined. After giving the speech, he told Walter White that he meant every word of what he said and was going to prove that he meant it, and civil rights became his number one priority.<sup>25</sup> Truman deserves praise for this. He was pushing for civil rights at a time when it was not popular and there was not significant domestic unrest forcing him to act.

After winning the Democratic nomination for 1948 election, Truman summoned the members of the Eightieth Congress to a special session. Here he issued two executive orders that would show his commitment to civil rights.<sup>26</sup> Executive Order 9980, Regulations Governing Fair Employment Practices Within the Federal Establishment, mandated the elimination of discriminatory practices throughout the federal government based on race, color, religion, or national origin. The *New York Times* stated that through this order, “a little FEPC is created.” To ensure that this order would take effect Truman put the heads of each federal department and agency on notice by telling them he would hold each one of them “personally responsible for an effective program to ensure that fair employment policies are fully observed in all personnel actions within his department.”<sup>27</sup>

Truman then instructed each federal department head to designate a fair employment officer. This person would be given “full operating responsibility, under immediate supervision of the department head” and had the task of carrying out the detailed mandate of Executive Order 9980.<sup>28</sup> The order also established a seven member

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 40, 69.

<sup>26</sup> McCullough, 586.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, 107.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 109.

Fair Employment Board within the Civil Service Commission that was authorized to review employment decisions of any cabinet officer in Truman's administration.<sup>29</sup> It also helped to stop discrimination by employers and labor unions.<sup>30</sup> This opened up many federal opportunities to African Americans and was one of Truman's greatest civil rights achievements. Even more important, was his issuance of Executive Order 9981, which set into motion the integration of all the armed forces in the United States. Truman ordered his military leaders to immediately begin to integrate all of the service branches.<sup>31</sup> This was arguably his greatest civil rights achievement.

Harry Truman's strategy to use the federal government as a vehicle for civil rights would prove important, as he could not achieve much in terms of legislation. This was due to the coalition of Southern Democrats and states' rights Republicans in Congress that would not tolerate legislatively mandated change.<sup>32</sup> Because of this, Truman set out to end racial discrimination where the federal government had the power to do so. In 1950, this strategy led to the desegregation of public pools in Washington D.C.<sup>33</sup>

He also went on to issue more executive orders to continue his federal enforcement of civil rights. He issued Executive Order 10210 that created civil rights employment protections under the War Powers Act of 1941 and prohibited any race-based discrimination.<sup>34</sup> He also issued Executive Order 10308, which mandated nondiscrimination in the hiring practices of all vendors doing business with the federal

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>30</sup> McCullough, 587.

<sup>31</sup> Gardner, 111.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 158.

government. This insured that federal contractors could not exclude black Americans.<sup>35</sup> It also helped obtain desegregation in the federal Civil Service.<sup>36</sup>

Truman and his appointees were also determined to overturn the *Plessy v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” doctrine.<sup>37</sup> Truman appointee Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Fred M. Vinson, in the case *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*, found the discrimination practices of segregating the black student G.W. McLaurin to be unconstitutional.<sup>38</sup> In a similar ruling, *Sweatt v. Painter*, the Court ruled that not allowing Herman Sweatt to attend the University of Texas because he was black violated the fourteenth amendment.<sup>39</sup> Truman’s appointee, Vinson, played a major role in the process of ending discrimination practices in colleges and universities.

Even though Truman made great advancements in civil rights and seemed personally sympathetic to the plight of African Americans, it is important to keep in mind his desire to improve America’s image abroad and the place of civil rights in that strategy. Truman treated African Americans with decency and respect and this included black servants at the White House who had fond memories of Truman.<sup>40</sup> However, in private, Truman still used negative racial slurs and told racial jokes.<sup>41</sup> With that said, his actions proved to be monumental in the cause of civil rights and it can be argued that he is not given enough recognition for his contribution.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 160-161.

<sup>36</sup> McCullough, 915.

<sup>37</sup> Gardner, 183.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 180-181.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 182-183.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 133-134.

<sup>41</sup> McCullough, 247.

In contrast to Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower was reluctant to associate himself with civil rights or other difficult policy decisions.<sup>42</sup> He often went to great lengths to distance himself from race problems and integration.<sup>43</sup> He also held doubts about legislation being able to fight discrimination, stating that the law itself cannot bring equality.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, he at times appeared to be sympathetic to white southerners, saying that it is “difficult to change a man’s heart.”<sup>45</sup>

Eisenhower was assuredly a moderate on the civil rights issue and willingly admitted to being one, saying “I believe that the true radical is the fellow who is standing in the middle and battling both extremes.”<sup>46</sup> He was also a proponent of states’ rights who believed that the states should resolve most civil rights issues, but he did believe the federal government should eliminate inequalities wherever possible. He had many “Southern friends” that shared this view and campaigned frequently in the South.<sup>47</sup>

One of Eisenhower’s best contributions to the civil rights struggle was his appointment of civil rights advocates. Eisenhower’s attorney general, Herbert Brownell, was Eisenhower’s main influence for acting on civil rights. Brownell filled the Justice Department with other civil rights advocates including the California Republican Governor, Earl Warren. The administration also appointed more than two dozen African-Americans including the secretary Lois Lippman, who was the first African American to

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<sup>42</sup> David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginnings of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 304.

<sup>44</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 528-529.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

<sup>46</sup> Nichols, 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

serve in the White House in a capacity other than janitor.<sup>48</sup> Eisenhower continued this pattern when he appointed five justices to the Supreme Court. Despite political pressure from the South, none of them were southerners or segregationists.<sup>49</sup>

Eisenhower was committed to ending discrimination where possible and one of his first actions was eliminating segregation in the military district of Washington D.C. Adding to this, in the *Thompson* decision, the Supreme Court prohibited discrimination in the district's eating places much to Eisenhower's approval.<sup>50</sup> When Harry Truman signed his executive order to eliminate segregation in the military, it did not set a deadline and was not strictly enforced. The Navy and Marine Corps refused to follow the order and the Air Force only implemented a limited program of compliance. Being a military general, Eisenhower was able to accomplish the transformation to desegregation of the armed forces with considerable speed through quiet negotiations with leading military officers.<sup>51</sup>

After enforcing desegregation in the military, Eisenhower then moved to military schools. Although he faced resistance, Eisenhower managed to integrate hundreds of classrooms.<sup>52</sup> He then moved to desegregate Veterans Administration hospitals and on naval bases.<sup>53</sup> Eisenhower used his military experience as an advantage to gain compliance with his desegregation efforts.

Perhaps Eisenhower's greatest civil rights achievement was nominating Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Warren and the court ruled that segregation in public schools was

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 24-25.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 42-43.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 45-48.

unconstitutional.<sup>54</sup> Eisenhower's response to the *Brown* decision has been open for criticism, as he did not state whether or not he agreed with the decision. When asked about *Brown*, he said, "the Supreme Court has spoken and I am sworn to uphold the constitutional process in this country; and I will obey."<sup>55</sup> The fact that Eisenhower never endorsed or condemned *Brown* shows that he was unwilling to upset his "Southern friends."

Eisenhower held the fear that the *Brown* decision would cause Southerners to "virtually cancel out their public education system." Warren himself wrote in his memoirs that he believed Eisenhower resented the decision and that it ended their "cordial relations." In the 1960s, Eisenhower frequently remarked that his biggest mistake was "the appointment of that dumb son of a bitch Earl Warren," although he may have been referring to other decisions Warren made.<sup>56</sup> According to Warren, at a dinner at the White House, Eisenhower also defended Southerners who were against the *Brown* ruling by saying that "all they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit in school alongside some big overgrown Negroes."<sup>57</sup> Whether Eisenhower was against the *Brown* decision or not, his response showed a willingness to work with Southerners and states rights advocates on the issue of segregation and a reluctance to associate himself with civil rights issues.

Eisenhower's first endorsement of civil rights legislation came when he promised to support Brownell's proposed civil rights legislation in 1956.<sup>58</sup> With Eisenhower's

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<sup>54</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 190

<sup>55</sup> Nichols, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Nichols, 104.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

endorsement, the bill passed through the House and the GOP platform agreed to “accept” the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown*.<sup>59</sup> The Senate, with the help of Lyndon Johnson, would eventually vote to change the bill to contain an amendment requiring a jury trial for the prosecution of criminal contempt for voting rights violations, much to Eisenhower’s dismay who said that he did “not believe in any amendment” to the bill.<sup>60</sup> This was because Southern juries would never convict officials for refusing an African American their right to vote.<sup>61</sup> Eisenhower’s Vice President, Richard Nixon, shared Eisenhower’s opinion, calling the amendment “a vote against the right to vote.”<sup>62</sup> The watered-down Civil Rights Act of 1957 did get passed as much weaker legislation than what was proposed, but without the jury trial amendment to appease Southerners, it might not have been passed at all.<sup>63</sup>

Eisenhower’s most memorable achievement for civil rights was when the Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus defied the *Brown* ruling and federal orders by blocking the integration of Central High School in Little Rock.<sup>64</sup> Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to block the entrance of nine black students attempting to enter the school, which turned into violence when mobs of white people showed up to protest integration. Although Eisenhower did not want to send in troops, he was eventually forced to by the deteriorating situation. Eisenhower mobilized the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 134-135.

<sup>60</sup> Lawson, 193.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>62</sup> Nichols, 160-161.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 170.

Division and nationalized the Arkansas National Guard in order to assure the students were admitted into the school.<sup>65</sup>

Eisenhower's last achievement for civil rights was the Civil Rights Act of 1960. The act provided basic protection of voting rights for African Americans, authorized the appointment of voting referees, and allowed for contempt of court charges to anyone who obstructed a qualified African American from voting.<sup>66</sup> This was the last piece of civil rights legislation of Eisenhower's presidency. Although his appointees proved to be significant for the cause of civil rights, Eisenhower was too reluctant to associate himself with the cause. His moderate position often showed reluctance to upset Southern Democrats and states' rights Republicans. He did not appear to show a desire to propose civil rights legislation and seemed to only act on civil rights issues when it was necessary or to advance his political aspirations.

In contrast to Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy's fight for civil rights began in the Senate. As a Senator, Kennedy supported the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and much like Eisenhower and Nixon, he was against the jury trial amendment.<sup>67</sup> However, Kennedy voted for the amendment due to pressure from Southerners and to avoid jeopardizing the entire bill.<sup>68</sup> It became a common theme for Kennedy to try to use both sides of the civil rights issue to his political advantage.

He would continue this strategy when he introduced an anti-bombing bill. He saw this as an opportunity to strengthen ties with southern leaders and gain support from

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<sup>65</sup> Lawson, 204.

<sup>66</sup> Nichols, 254-255.

<sup>67</sup> Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 70-71.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 75.



African Americans. The bill would make it a federal crime to import or transport between states any explosives that were to be used unlawfully. By restricting its reach to bombings carried out with explosives transported over state lines, the bill simultaneously managed to support civil rights and states' rights.<sup>69</sup> This bill appealed to both Southerners and Northerners and was later incorporated into the Civil Rights Act of 1960.<sup>70</sup>

Kennedy moved away from this strategy when he was campaigning for the 1960 presidential nomination. He began to actively pursue black support and attempt to woo blacks that were skeptical of him. He also took up the opportunity to chair the newly created Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs and called on America to adopt a "strong Africa policy."<sup>71</sup> Kennedy planned to campaign in the North and West and planned only a few detours in the South. He thought it would be wise to distance himself from segregationists since he was certain the South would support Lyndon Johnson and he did not want any support from the South to affect his North-centered campaign.<sup>72</sup> Kennedy saw gaining black support to be crucial to his campaign. For this reason, Kennedy decided to run as a liberal Democrat.<sup>73</sup>

In a speech given in Milwaukee, Kennedy outlined a strong stance on civil rights that included a new four-point plan. This plan included stressing the right of every citizen to vote in all elections, calling for the attorney general to be granted powers to protect the right to vote, calling for the enactment of his anti-bombing legislation, and the fourth point urged Congress to accelerate the process of school integration through legislative

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 112.

and executive action.<sup>74</sup> Kennedy began to distance himself from the South and in just a two-week period, he recast himself as a strong supporter of the civil rights struggle. How sincere Kennedy's stance on civil rights was at the time is questionable. Every change in his stance on civil rights coincided with a twist in the fight for nomination. For example, when Johnson emerged as the favored candidate in the South, Kennedy and his staff quickly reexamined his civil rights strategy and carved out a stronger stance on the issue.<sup>75</sup>

Kennedy won the Democratic nomination due to his strong civil rights stance.<sup>76</sup> After winning the nomination, he again began to sway in his stance on civil rights by appointing Lyndon Johnson to be his running mate. This caused uproar in Kennedy's civil rights office, especially from Bobby Kennedy, and brought about criticism from liberals and blacks. Kennedy saw appointing Johnson as the only way to win support in the South.<sup>77</sup> This would prove to be a smart move as Johnson's presence on the ticket helped Kennedy considerably in the South.<sup>78</sup> Kennedy, ever the opportunist, was willing to shift his stance on civil rights if it would help to advance his own political aspirations.

The appointment of Johnson seemed to parallel the modification of Kennedy's approach on the issue of civil rights. Kennedy began to try to appeal to both liberals and southerners. Kennedy and his campaign assured liberals and blacks that they had nothing to fear from the appointment of Johnson, and were simultaneously trying to convince southerners that they had little to fear from Kennedy's presidency. In a meeting with

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 148-149.

<sup>78</sup> Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1977), 53.

Governor Ernest Vandiver of Georgia, Kennedy even promised that he would never send federal troops into Georgia to enforce school desegregation.<sup>79</sup>

In his attempt to appeal to both the North and the South, Kennedy adopted a strategy that often only showed symbolic support for civil rights and the advancement of equality for blacks. He ran an integrated campaign, formed the Civil Rights Section, and brought a black aide with him at all times throughout the campaign.<sup>80</sup> Possibly the biggest symbolic gesture of his campaign happened when Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested during a sit-in protest in Atlanta.<sup>81</sup> Kennedy realized the importance of supporting King in gaining support among African Americans. He called King's wife, Coretta, to show his concern for her and her husband.<sup>82</sup> This gesture became the ultimate symbol of Kennedy's sympathy with the black struggle and came at no real political cost.<sup>83</sup> Carl Brauer even suggests that it may have been the major factor in winning the election.<sup>84</sup>

This marked the beginning of a new civil rights strategy for Kennedy. He realized that a minimalist civil rights policy, with high profile appointments and grand gestures, would be sufficient to secure his popularity. Kennedy would never fulfill many of the promises he made in his campaign.<sup>85</sup> This can be seen in the adoption of his minimal legislative program. His administration would seek to raise the minimum wage, help promote economic development in depressed areas, grant federal aid to education,

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<sup>79</sup> Bryant, 151.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 160-161.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>82</sup> Brauer, 46.

<sup>83</sup> Bryant, 189.

<sup>84</sup> Brauer, 46.

<sup>85</sup> Bryant, 190.

provide new housing, and offer medical care to the elderly. Civil rights was not on his list. He never had a desire to lead an assault on segregation, began to back away from civil rights, and much like Eisenhower, he became a gradualist.<sup>86</sup>

Kennedy's first challenge on civil rights after becoming president was the battle over the revision to the filibuster rule in the Senate. Liberal Democrats wanted to change the rule so the Senate could close off debate with majority cloture of votes to end a filibuster.<sup>87</sup> Kennedy refused to intervene in the struggle and the rule was not reformed. Had Kennedy intervened, it is likely that the rule would have been changed.<sup>88</sup>

Kennedy continued his strategy of distancing himself from civil rights politically while symbolically associating himself to the cause. For example, blacks were featured heavily in his inaugural celebrations but were barely mentioned in his inaugural address.<sup>89</sup> He appointed numerous African Americans, including the first African American appointed to the secret service, although none were appointed to his cabinet.<sup>90</sup> Kennedy understood the symbolic importance of appointing blacks although he rarely met and conferred with the blacks that he appointed.<sup>91</sup>

In his 1960 campaign, Kennedy promised to pass a housing order that would end discrimination in federally assisted public housing.<sup>92</sup> When he became president, he put off these plans as he distanced himself from acting on civil rights.<sup>93</sup> Although he eventually did issue the housing order as Executive Order 11063, it fell short of the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 191-192.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 205-206.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>92</sup> Brauer, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Bryant, 226.

expectations of civil rights activists.<sup>94</sup> Kennedy made many promises in his campaign that he did not deliver on once he achieved his political aspirations.

Kennedy's attorney general and brother Robert Kennedy was much more willing to act on civil rights and often urged John Kennedy to act on behalf of civil rights. When civil rights activists participating in the Freedom Rides protesting segregation on buses were met with violence in Birmingham, Alabama, Kennedy did not intervene.<sup>95</sup> Bobby Kennedy on the other hand, ordered federal marshals in to protect the activists, and he also wanted to file suits against the police in Montgomery and Birmingham.<sup>96</sup> Too often, Bobby Kennedy was left to deal with the civil rights issues that John F. Kennedy did not want to confront. Even before the Freedom Rides, the attorney general had become the moving force within the administration for a Presidential initiative on behalf of civil rights.<sup>97</sup> In terms of legislation, John Kennedy would back new legislation but not introduce it. However he failed to fight for a voting rights bill introduced by the Justice Department that would put an end to literacy tests.<sup>98</sup>

Other issues would force Kennedy to act on civil rights. When activists in Albany, Georgia faced violence when protesting segregation in the city, Kennedy spoke out against violence towards blacks and for the first time while in office, he sided with the demonstrators.<sup>99</sup> When Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett blocked the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi, Kennedy was obligated to enforce the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 361.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 269, 277.

<sup>97</sup> Brauer, 245.

<sup>98</sup> Bryant, 298.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 323.

rulings of the Supreme Court.<sup>100</sup> Once again, Bobby Kennedy was the mediator in the conflict and was in regular contact with Barnett.<sup>101</sup> Although Kennedy eventually sent in federal troops to secure Meredith's admission, much like Eisenhower in Little Rock, he did not handle the situation well.<sup>102</sup> Kennedy had given too much leniency to Barnett in attempts to address the situation without having to send in federal troops. This allowed the situation to escalate, which resulted in riots in which two people were murdered and Meredith was almost lynched.<sup>103</sup>

When sit-in protests in Birmingham resulted in the arrest of Martin Luther King, Kennedy again showed his support by calling Coretta Scott King.<sup>104</sup> The sit-ins resulted in racial unrest that included the police using fire hoses and dogs to disperse the protestors.<sup>105</sup> When three bombs went off in Birmingham it appeared to be an attempt to intimidate King and his family. This resulted in a mob of 2,500 angry blacks rampaging through the streets, raiding stores, wrecking police cars, and burning buildings.<sup>106</sup>

This Birmingham crisis began to change Kennedy's view on civil rights and legislation. Bobby Kennedy was also a major influence on his brother and the idea of proposing new legislation was brought up.<sup>107</sup> In response to growing violence in the civil rights movement, Kennedy introduced a new civil rights bill to Congress. The bill included measures boosting voting rights in federal elections, prohibited discrimination in places of public accommodation, allowed the attorney general to initiate school

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<sup>100</sup> Brauer, 189.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Bryant, 349.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 355.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 383-384.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 386.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 391-392.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 401-402.

desegregation suits, called for the establishment of a Community Relations Service, extended the Civil Rights Committee, and prevented discrimination in federally assisted programs.<sup>108</sup> It is likely the bill would have become law before the 1964 presidential election but due to Kennedy's assassination, it was put on hold.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout his participation in civil rights issues, Kennedy used it to his advantage to gain political support. After obtaining the presidency, he backtracked frequently on his civil rights stance. He seemed only willing to support civil rights when it would help him politically or when violence made it a necessity. He left many of the issues he faced to be dealt with by Robert Kennedy and others in his administration. It is easy to remember Kennedy as a champion of civil rights, but in actuality, he was a moderate.

Like Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson first began to deal with civil rights issues while he was in the Senate. Johnson's views on civil rights changed drastically over the time of his political career. When Johnson ran for the United States Senate in 1948, he ran as a Southerner and therefore, he expressed Southern views and was a vocal segregationist. He denounced Harry Truman's civil rights proposals and stated, "I voted against the so-called and mis-named civil rights bills; and I expect to continue fighting them in my six years as a Senator." He often used race to further his ambitions and this is the strategy he used to become a Senator.<sup>110</sup>

Even before becoming a senator, Johnson helped the cause of African Americans through his work as the director of National Youth Administration for Texas. When it

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 427.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 458.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Stern, *Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson & Civil Rights* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1992), 115.

came to providing basic economic aid, Johnson crossed the color line and provided aid to people who needed it regardless of their skin color. However, he never appointed an African American to a supervisory role in the administration.<sup>111</sup> He seemed to be committed to helping the poor of all races. In his first term in Congress, he managed to get one of the first low rent federally subsidized housing projects built in Austin in which sixty of the units went to black families. He also backed most of the New Deal economic legislation that came to the floor.<sup>112</sup>

As a Congressman, however, Johnson usually acted in the interest of Southern views. He voted against every piece of civil rights legislation that came to the floor of the House. This included anti-lynching proposals in 1938 and 1940; poll tax abolition bills in 1942, 1943, and 1945; a fair employment bill in 1946; and an antidiscrimination amendment to the federal school lunch program in 1946. He stated views that had felt he had to stand with the South and if he did not, he would not be able to further his political ambitions.<sup>113</sup> Johnson would not act on civil rights issues if it was a threat to his election or reelection to office.

He continued this strategy in the Senate when he used his first speech to attack a proposal to liberalize the filibuster rule that allowed southerners to keep civil rights legislation from being passed. His speech also defended the traditional view of civil rights but stated that when spoke out against proposals; he was not “speaking against the Negro race... This is not the way to accomplish what so many want to do for the Negro

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 120.



race.”<sup>114</sup> Here Johnson expressed the southern view on civil rights although distancing himself from the racist aspects of many of the southerners’ views.

When Johnson became the majority leader of the Senate, he had to respond to the mood of the Democratic Party. Johnson showed mild disapproval of the *Brown* decision but did seem to respect the Supreme Court’s ruling. Even though he did not necessarily agree with the ruling, he did not sign the Southern Manifesto that condemned the decision.<sup>115</sup> This appears to be when Johnson began to split from segregationist southern views.

One of the main factors that led to Johnson supporting civil rights legislation was the desire to gain black support for the Democrats. Johnson played a key role in molding Eisenhower’s 1957 Civil Rights Act. He managed to exclude part of the bill that outraged southerners: the granting of injunctive powers to federal court judges in civil rights violations.<sup>116</sup> Adding to this, he was able to add the jury trial amendment that would allow southern juries to be appointed to cases of the violation of voting rights. It was understood that no southern jury would convict a white person for blocking the voting rights of a black person.<sup>117</sup> Through these actions, Johnson was able to get a bill that both southerners and northerners could accept. Without these changes, the bill might not have passed at all. However, the act did little to increase black voting and did nothing to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 130-131.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 133-134.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 137.

protect other civil rights.<sup>118</sup> Also, Johnson saw protecting the rights of blacks in the South to be crucial to his bid for presidency in 1960.<sup>119</sup>

Johnson even introduced his own legislative measures. Due to the crucial role that civil rights would play in the 1960 presidential election, Johnson introduced the first civil rights bill by a southerner since Reconstruction. This proposal offered a program that established an independent conciliation service to mediate racial disputes in tense communities, extended the life of the Civil Rights Commission for two years, provided for federal investigation and penalties in bombing cases, and granted the attorney general the right to subpoena documents concerning registration.<sup>120</sup> Johnson would also support and help gain support for the Civil Rights Act of 1960.<sup>121</sup> Johnson understood the importance of promoting civil rights in helping his chances to win the presidential election in 1960.

When Kennedy was elected and Johnson became Vice President, he was not happy about it. Neither was Bobby Kennedy who would oppose anything that Johnson proposed. For this reason, he never had much power as Vice President.<sup>122</sup> John Kennedy did not want Johnson managing the legislative program of the administration and appointed him to the head of the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity (PCEEO).<sup>123</sup> Johnson used his position as chairman of the PCEEO to make his first positive contact with national black leaders. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP stated that that

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Dallek, *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President* (Oxford, England: Oxford University, 2004), 106.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>120</sup> Lawson, 222-223.

<sup>121</sup> Stern, 148.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

<sup>123</sup> Dallek, 125.

he saw “the first real change in Johnson when he was Vice President.”<sup>124</sup> He launched the Plans for Progress program to obtain voluntary compliance by government contractors to meet increased black employment goals. Through his efforts, federal jobs held by blacks increased 17 percent in 1962 and another 22 percent in 1963, and Johnson directed private contractors to correct nearly 1,700 complaints from black employees. However, his gains in the PCEEEO barely made a dent in black unemployment or satisfied the demands for civil rights legislation.<sup>125</sup>

Johnson was beginning to be an articulate and vocal administrative spokesman for civil rights. In 1963, he delivered a Memorial Day speech at Gettysburg that was arguably a more expansive and passionate speech on civil rights than Kennedy had ever given.<sup>126</sup> After this, Johnson was consulted more by the administration on civil rights issues and became an active member of the White House civil rights team.<sup>127</sup> He would continue his efforts to fight for civil rights after President Kennedy’s assassination.

When Johnson became President, his first priority was civil rights and he expressed this in a televised address to Congress in which he called for passage of the civil rights bill that Kennedy had proposed.<sup>128</sup> Here Johnson showed strong resilience as he was not willing to compromise on the bill and wanted it passed just as it was.<sup>129</sup> He expressed that “no eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory” than the passage of his civil rights legislation.<sup>130</sup> He was clearly committed to the bill and

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<sup>124</sup> Stern, 153.

<sup>125</sup> Dallek, 135-136.

<sup>126</sup> Bryant, 406.

<sup>127</sup> Stern, 159.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>130</sup> Dallek, 147.

sought cloture to combat a filibuster, and managed to get the first successful cloture vote with a civil rights bill pending.<sup>131</sup> The bill remained strong and maintained Kennedy's proposals. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was already thinking of future civil rights legislation.<sup>132</sup> He showed a major shift in his time as president from his time as a senator and seemed committed to civil rights, but he was also concerned with winning the Presidential election of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped him secure the victory.<sup>133</sup>

Johnson still stayed committed to maintaining southern support, however. When the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) planned to send delegates to the 1964 Democratic National Convention to challenge the credentials of the all-white Mississippi Democratic party delegation, Johnson wanted to keep them from disrupting the convention, and he saw their challenge as an ingratitude.<sup>134</sup> When Fannie Lou Hamer presented MFDP's case at the convention, Johnson called for a televised news conference in the middle of her testimony.<sup>135</sup> Eventually, a compromise was made to allow the MFDP to seat only two delegates.<sup>136</sup> Johnson even picked the delegates, which angered the MFDP. Johnson was worried he would lose Southern support if he allowed the party to be seated at the convention.<sup>137</sup> He showed his limitations and that he was not willing to fight for civil rights if it would cost him support in the South.

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<sup>131</sup> Stern, 173, 182.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 186-187, 198.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 204-205.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 208.

Understanding the importance of black support in the future of the Democratic Party and in offsetting white southerners' control of the party, Johnson and his staff decided to write up a voting rights bill.<sup>138</sup> When violence from state troopers met nonviolent protestors in Selma, Alabama, the administration accelerated efforts to draft a bill. Johnson told Attorney General Katzenbach to "write the goddamndest, toughest voting rights bill that you can devise."<sup>139</sup> In a televised joint legislation of Congress, Johnson introduced the new legislation. The bill would strike down restrictions denying blacks the right to vote, establish a standard for registration, send federal officials empowered to register blacks wherever state officials refused to register them, and ensure that properly registered individuals are not prohibited from voting.<sup>140</sup> It became the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>141</sup> Johnson would later say that this was his greatest accomplishment.<sup>142</sup>

Another aspect of Johnson's efforts towards advancing civil rights was his War on Poverty. He asked Congress for bold proposals including "the most far-reaching tax-cut of our time," the most effective and efficient foreign aid program ever, and building more homes, schools, libraries, and hospitals than any single session of Congress in history.<sup>143</sup> Due to the Vietnam War, Johnson's War on Poverty programs diminished. Adding to this, urban race riots broke out in thirty-eight cities in 1966 that substantially stalled his civil rights measures for the remainder of his presidency as race riots continued into

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>139</sup> Hugh Davis Graham, *Civil Rights and the Presidency* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 1992), 93-95.

<sup>140</sup> Stern, 226.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>143</sup> Dallek, 148.

1967.<sup>144</sup> Johnson was more concerned with avoiding a race war between blacks and whites and sought to find ways to bring about more peaceful change.<sup>145</sup> He tried to sustain black gains through the courts that would require the least amount of government spending, and he tried to keep all political costs to a minimum.<sup>146</sup> One of Johnson's last successes in civil rights was helping the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968.<sup>147</sup>

Although Lyndon Johnson made great strides in obtaining civil rights, he often did so to achieve his own political aspirations. He did not want to upset his supporters in the South and avoided doing so whenever possible. Johnson used his support of civil rights to gain black support for himself and the Democratic Party in general.

Richard Nixon was much more conservative on civil rights than Johnson. Although he enthusiastically endorsed the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the Voting Rights act of 1965, he was much more reluctant to pass legislation when president.<sup>148</sup> Nixon had many interests in the South, courted white southerners, and made little effort to gain African American votes.<sup>149</sup> He also believed in improving the equality of blacks through promoting their financial interests and securing jobs for them, not through welfare programs.<sup>150</sup>

In the issue of desegregation, Nixon wanted to enforce the law to attack de jure segregation but not de facto segregation. He hoped to separate desegregation and

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>147</sup> Stern, 230.

<sup>148</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician 1962-1972* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 89.

<sup>149</sup> Dean J. Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2001), 20.

<sup>150</sup> Ambrose, *Nixon*, 124-125.

integration and opposed the busing of students to different school districts to achieve integration. He believed that children, regardless of their race, should attend the school nearest to their homes.<sup>151</sup> Nixon stated his beliefs that busing a child into a strange community would “destroy that child.”<sup>152</sup> Just as he believed that segregation was wrong, he believed that forced integration was just as wrong.<sup>153</sup> He left the means to fight bias to litigation in desegregation and in fair housing, sought gradual, voluntary integration and stepped up the Justice Department’s prosecution of housing bias.<sup>154</sup> Clearly Nixon was not willing to tackle desegregation and discrimination in housing head on.

One of Nixon’s civil rights achievements was the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1970. This act extended the Voting Rights Act of 1965 for five more years and ended the use of literacy tests in registering to vote.<sup>155</sup> Nixon knew that vetoing this act would further divide the country and he wanted to prevent the “goddamn country” from “blowing up.”<sup>156</sup> He seemed only willing to pass legislation when it was necessary to prevent violence or disorder in the country.

Above all strategies, Nixon believed in affirmative action and increasing economic opportunities for African Americans as the best way for them to gain equality.<sup>157</sup> Nixon called for greater enforcement of fair employment and was committed to opening construction unions to minorities.<sup>158</sup> He also ordered the Civil Service Commission to review the government’s hiring practices. That led to Executive Order

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<sup>151</sup> Kotlowksi, 32-35.

<sup>152</sup> Ambrose, *Nixon*, 169.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 521.

<sup>154</sup> Kotlowksi, 44, 60.

<sup>155</sup> Graham, 140-141.

<sup>156</sup> Kotlowksi, 71-72.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

11478, which urged federal offices to take “positive action” to eliminate bias. Nixon also signed the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 that permitted individuals to sue universities suspected of bias.<sup>159</sup>

Nixon pursued the strategy of “black capitalism” by increasing employment opportunities for blacks. He established the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, expanded federal procurement from firms owned by African Americans, and laid the basis for contract set-asides from minority-owned firms.<sup>160</sup> He also proposed tax incentives to corporations investing in depressed neighborhoods, expansion of tutorial assistance and job training, and government loans to black entrepreneurs and homeowners.<sup>161</sup> He signed Executive Order 11458 that founded the Office of Minority Business Enterprise within the Commerce Department. In pursuing this strategy and ignoring other civil rights matters, Nixon underestimated the complexity of African American social and economic concerns and ignored the fact that discrimination in home sales and wage scales helped keep African American in urban ghettos.<sup>162</sup> In this way, Nixon’s strategies were not enough address all of the civil rights issues.

Nixon continued his strategy of black capitalism when he increased federal deposits in minority owned banks.<sup>163</sup> Nixon significantly expanded federal aid to black colleges. Subsidies to black colleges increased from \$108 million in 1969 to \$167 million

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 133-134.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 144-145.



in 1971.<sup>164</sup> Nixon was reluctant to pass legislation attacking issues on civil rights that did not have to do with their higher education, housing, or economic opportunity.

Nixon's relationship with civil rights leaders was not a good one and he sometimes seemed upset that he had to handle the civil rights issue at all. After a confrontation with Ralph Abernathy of the SCLC, Nixon stated that he was becoming "pretty fed up with blacks and their hopeless attitude." He was becoming convinced that civil rights activists preferred confrontation to compromise.<sup>165</sup> There was also Nixon's belief in "benign neglect" on the civil rights issue. This was the idea that the issue could use a period in which it is not acted on, black progress continued from what has already been achieved, and racial rhetoric faded. This belief caused much controversy and criticism from African Americans of Nixon and his administration.<sup>166</sup>

Ironically, more school desegregation happened under Nixon than any other president.<sup>167</sup> This was not Nixon's doing, however, and he even disagreed with the decision that provided for this, *Alexander v. Holmes County*, which ruled that every school district had to terminate segregated schools immediately.<sup>168</sup> Nixon used federal power to integrate the workplace, but not in neighborhoods or public schools due to his anti-busing and ignorance of discrimination.<sup>169</sup> Without pressure from the federal government, suburban integration faded and by the 1990s, it was not even on the national agenda. Without busing, blacks and whites remained isolated and Nixon allowed de facto

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 153-154.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 316.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 260.

segregation to continue to exist.<sup>170</sup> His administration was marked by public disputes over busing and Supreme Court nominations that seemed to increase racial polarization.<sup>171</sup>

Nixon seemed to retreat from the presidents before him that pushed for civil rights. Nixon seemed reluctant to push the issue and was never willing to sacrifice his southern support to help African Americans. Much like the other civil rights presidents, he seemed to only push for civil rights when it was necessary or when it could gain support for himself, and ultimately was a moderate on the issue of civil rights.

It seems as though Harry Truman deserves more praise than the other presidents that have been explored because he acted on an issue that at the time was rather unpopular and did not appear worried about the consequences. However, he did understand the importance of obtaining the black vote and how civil rights affected America's image abroad. Having said that, it can be understood that each one of these presidents acted on civil rights out of necessity, out of influence from political pressure, or to further their political aspirations. It seems that the classical view of Kennedy and Johnson being champions of civil rights could use some reevaluation.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>171</sup> Graham, 235.

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