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by

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PREFACE.

Several years ago I was reading Harvard Sitkoff's "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics," in the Journal of Southern History, [37, 1971]. I was surprised to learn that the Republican party had proposed stronger planks on civil rights than the Democrats in both 1940 and 1944. This seemed curious: the "conservative" Republican party offering African Americans more than the "liberal" Democratic party? Of course, I knew about Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, Emancipation and the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, but it seemed that African Americans had voted for the Democrats for a very long time. Intrigued, I decided to find out when and why African Americans had abandoned the party of Abraham Lincoln and embraced the party of Jefferson Davis.

I mentioned this to Robert Cook, my MA supervisor, and his immediate reaction was "there's a book in that." It is not a book as yet, but it has yielded several articles and conference papers and is now presented as a doctoral dissertation.

I have incurred a great number of debts, both personal and professional, over the course of the last four and a half years and I would like to briefly acknowledge some of the people who have helped to bring my thesis to fruition.

I have been fortunate enough to win a number of research grants to help me carry out my work. I would first like to thank Hans Krannebaum and the Roosevelt Study Center, in Middleburg, the Netherlands, for a grant, in the summer of 1998, to look at the papers of Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman, as well as the Congressional Record. Particular thanks go to Arjen Westerhoff.

The Faculty of Arts Research Executive (FARE) twice entrusted me with the University of Hull's money. In 1998 FARE funded a trip to the University of Indiana, Bloomington, to look at the papers of Wendell Willkie, and then in 2000 funded a trip to the University of Rochester, New York, to look at the papers of Thomas Dewey.

The staff at the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana were extremely helpful throughout my stay in Bloomington, but a special mention must go to

Helen Walsh and her son Alan for taking the time to show me the sights and sounds of Bloomington.

My research was funded in part by an Alfred M. Landon Historical Research Grant funded by the Kansas State Historical Society, Inc. I would like to thank David Haury and all the staff at the KSHS for their co-operation during my time with them.

I was also greatly assisted by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa, by their award of the Herbert Hoover Grant in 2000. Everywhere I went in America I was impressed by the knowledge and dedication of librarians and archivists, but no more so than at the Hoover Library. Special tribute has to be paid to Pat Wildenburg (and family) for both his considerable knowledge and his equally considerable hospitality and friendship.

In Rochester, I am indebted to Mary Huth and the archival staff at the Rush Rhees Library, I am also very grateful to Mary Menard for her generous hospitality during my stay with her. Thanks are also due to Tony Badger and the

Mellon Fund for their assistance while I was looking at the NAACP papers at Cambridge University.

Professor John Ashworth and Dr John White were entrusted with supervising this thesis and I am deeply indebted to both. I am especially appreciative of JA's skill as a historian and "Jay Dubya's" considerable knowledge of the civil rights movement and eye for detail.

Thanks to Henrice Altink for proof reading, tea and sympathy, Emily Gilbert for putting me up during my stint at the LSE, Sean Kelly for various instances of hospitality and Dave Masterson (and the staff of the Hooper Building, University of Lincoln) for his indulgence while I was writing up. Thanks are also due to my fellow GTAs at Hull and especially Dave Evans, my office mate for three years.

I am extremely grateful to the all the staff of Department of American Studies at the University of Hull for their help and support over the last four and a half years; I would like to pay particular tribute to Dr Jenel Virden and Dr John Osborne.

Very special thanks go to Dr William Riches, recently retired from the University of Ulster, for his support, faith and countless references over the last ten years. Without Bill's guidance and encouragement my career path would have been very different.

Love and thanks to my family for their unfaltering support. My parents, George and Ena, have always valued education and I hope I have repaid their faith in me, while my brothers, Phil and Andrew, have always been there for me. It is to my family that this thesis is dedicated.

SDT, Hull, March 2002.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Administration
AFL	American Federation of Labor
ANP	Associated Negro Press
BAAS	British Association for American Studies
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organisations
ER	Eleanor Roosevelt Papers
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FDRP	Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President
FDRP-PSF	Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President, President's Secretary's Files, 1933-1945
GOP	Grand Old Party
HH	Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers
HH-CC	Herbert Hoover, Presidential Papers, Subject File, Colored Correspondence
HH-RNC	Herbert Hoover, Presidential Papers, Subject File, Republican National Committee
LLS	Lewis L. Strauss Papers
MOWM	March on Washington Movement
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCAPT	National Campaign for the Abolition of the Poll Tax
NRA	National Recovery Administration

NYT	New York Times
OWI	Office of War Industries
PAC	Political Action Committee
PCCR	President's Committee on Civil Rights
PRP	Papers of the Republican Party
PWA	Public Works Administration
RAC	Republican American Committee
RNC	Republican National Committee
SADC	State Anti-Discrimination Commission
SCHW	Southern Conference on Human Welfare
TED	Thomas E. Dewey Papers
WPA	Works Progress Administration

Journals.

<u>JNH</u>	<u>Journal of Negro History.</u>
<u>JSH</u>	<u>Journal of Southern History.</u>
<u>MVHR</u>	<u>Mississippi Valley Historical Review.</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Political Quarterly.</u>
<u>RP</u>	<u>Review of Politics.</u>

INTRODUCTION. The Mantle of Lincoln.

“The party of Lincoln,” announced the most senior African American Republican, “has not always carried the mantle of Lincoln.” The party had to take the initiative in “reaching out to minority communities,” the African American community in particular, “and not just during an election year campaign.” There was a need, he continued, to give minorities a “competitive choice” in the forthcoming election. The speaker was Colin Powell at the 2000 Republican convention in Philadelphia.¹ Yet any African American Republican over the previous one hundred years could have made the same statement. In 1944, for instance, Robert R. Church, one of the few African American Republicans to operate with any kind of influence in the South, told the party that it had to be “courageous enough to rededicate itself to the principles upon which it was founded.” Powell’s speech demonstrates that the words of Church, and countless others, had gone unheeded. In the intervening fifty-six years, the

¹ The Guardian, 31 July 2000.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4046966,00.html> (22 January 2002.)

“party of Lincoln” had clearly not found enough of this courage and continued to stray from its founding principles.

This should perhaps not come as much of a surprise. After the Civil War, the Republican party quickly lost interest in the newly-enfranchised former slaves. African Americans remained spiritually Republicans, and the few who could vote in the years after the Civil War always marked their cross for the party of the Great Emancipator. They had little choice. Frederick Douglass famously declared the Republican party to be “the deck, all else is the sea” but more pertinently, and less famously, he revealed the true nature of the relationship when he asserted that “I knew that however bad the Republican party was, the Democratic party was much worse.” African Americans were, therefore, Republicans by default.

By the 1930s African Americans *did* have a choice. The memory of Lincoln was now distant, African Americans had moved North and exercised their democratic rights. The Democratic party, at least in the North, made tentative steps to win their votes while the Republican party, certainly during the Hoover years, seemed to be doing everything possible to give the Democrats

these votes. Most important of all, these votes now meant something. The 1930s fundamentally changed African Americans politically, and African Americans fundamentally changed American politics.

In the 1930s African Americans switched allegiance from the Republican to the Democratic party. The roots of this shift are to be found earlier, but it is apparent that at the mid-term elections of 1934 a majority of African Americans voted Democratic. This thesis will examine both the context and the process of African American political re-alignment in the 1930s and 1940s from the Republican perspective. It will illustrate that not only did the process of African American desertion of the Republican party begin as early as 1928, but that African American alienation from the GOP was affected and dictated by a number of inter-related factors connected to both racial and economic concerns. The loss of the African American vote by the Republicans must be viewed in the context of the overall political situation in 1930s and 1940s America. The problems of the GOP were exacerbated by the Depression and then compounded by electoral failure throughout the 1930s. Viewed in this respect, Republican neglect of African Americans makes much more sense.

It could be argued that the Republican party did its utmost to regain the African American vote between 1928 and 1948, that it offered genuine alternatives to the New Deal, remembered its history and acted upon it and deserves much more credit than it receives. This would make for an interesting and controversial thesis; it would also be utterly unsustainable. Certainly the GOP did more than it has previously been given credit for but its approach to civil rights was stuttering, inconsistent and half-hearted. The Republican party was not hostile to the aspirations of African Americans; it was merely ambivalent. What emerges is a strategy that was, at best, ill-defined and contradictory and at worst insincere and cynical. The question that must be asked is “Why was this the case?”

A number of important factors must be considered. It is clear that African American alienation from the Republican party pre-dated the New Deal and even the Depression. It can be concluded, therefore, that the New Deal was part of an ongoing process; the African American vote was for Roosevelt *not* the Democrats; the process continued under Truman, Kennedy and Johnson, but the longevity of this alliance was by no means assured in the 1930s and 1940s. The

reasons for the switch were largely, but not exclusively, related to the economic benefits of the New Deal, but a number of other issues, for example lynching, were also important to African Americans.

This thesis establishes why the Republican party lost the African American vote, what it did to try to win it back, the impact of the internal difficulties of the party throughout the period had on these efforts and why they ultimately failed. The party was hopelessly split throughout the period and amid the “bigger” crises that engulfed both the party and the country, African Americans became lost. The situation faced by the party in the 1930s was unprecedented, and there was a genuine fear that it was on the verge of extinction; it is perhaps not very surprising that African Americans were quite far down the Republican party’s list of priorities.

The parameters of this study are not arbitrary. The period 1928 to 1948 has been chosen in order to deal with the Republican party during its wilderness years. The party was in power from 1928 to 1932 and remained in opposition until 1952, but it is evident that the seeds of the problems the Republicans would encounter in the 1930s were sown during the Hoover years. Moreover,

the election of 1948 has been selected as the end point as it was the first presidential election in which the African American vote was demonstrably a decisive factor.

Many historians have dealt with aspects of the Republican party's attitude towards civil rights and African Americans, but the period of this study has been strangely neglected.² The years 1932 to 1948 can be loosely defined as the "Roosevelt Era" and by 1952 the GOP had spent its longest period in opposition. It was also, crucially, the time when the African American vote switched from the Republicans to the Democrats. In 1932 around 70% of African Americans voted for Herbert Hoover, the same percentage backed Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 and, in 1948, an even greater proportion voted for Harry Truman. In 1948, following the death of Roosevelt three years earlier, this vote had to be won all over again by the Democrats, and without the African American vote Truman could not have won the election.

² The only work dealing specifically with this period is From the Deck to the Sea: Blacks and the Republican Party (Longwood Academic, Wakefield, New Hampshire, 1991) by Matthew Rees. This is a general overview of the Republican party and African Americans from the Civil War to the 1980s. Rees believed, writing shortly before the 1992 presidential election, that there was a possibility that the African American would return to the GOP. The main drawbacks with this text are that it is based entirely on secondary sources and lacks an analytical edge.

The question that must be asked is how could this traditional area of Republican support have eroded so totally by 1948? The New Deal and its effects on African Americans have been examined in some detail by Harvard Sitkoff and Nancy J. Weiss among others, but the response of the GOP to the switch of the African American vote throughout the 1930s and, perhaps more importantly, the 1940s has not. This lack of even a cursory examination is all the more unusual when one remembers that it was in the 1940s that the African American vote became large enough to determine the outcome of a Presidential election.

There is clearly scope for a serious examination of the relationship between the Republican party and African Americans during these years. A brief appraisal of some of the literature of the period between 1928 and 1948 illustrates that the historiography of the era is incomplete. It would perhaps be wrong to overemphasise the importance of the relationship between African Americans and the GOP, it is obviously a peripheral issue when looked at in the context of the upheaval caused by the Depression and then World War Two. Nevertheless, it is still something that needs to be addressed if there is to be a

broader understanding of not only the political realignment which took place in American politics in the 1930s, but also the more general historiography of the civil rights movement and the Republican party.

Of all the groups that changed their allegiance to the Democrats during the 1930s none was more unexpected, nor less sought, than the switch of the African American vote. Indeed, it has been quite convincingly argued that no group, aside from Jewish voters, has remained as loyal to the Democrats as African Americans. Conversely, prior to 1934 no group was more stubbornly faithful to the Republicans. It is implicit in most of the historical discourse that the Republicans merely wrote off this constituency and made only token efforts to regain these votes in the years after 1934. This does not, however, tell the whole story.

The loss of the African American vote by the Republicans, and their attempts to regain it, will be examined on a number of levels. The relationship between the GOP and African Americans throughout the period is examined, starting with the events of the "Republican Ascendancy" from 1920 to 1932. The presidential elections from 1932 to 1948 are central and a detailed analysis

of Republican electoral strategy in each of these contests is made. An understanding of the role of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP) and the growth of African American political power throughout the 1930s and 1940s are essential, as is an appraisal of the Democratic strategy in relation to African Americans. Finally, these issues must be considered within the overall context of the political situation at the time when the certainties with which Americans had always lived were threatened, not only by the Depression itself but also by the radical and unprecedented nature of the New Deal. In looking at these various themes collectively an overall picture will emerge of just how complicated and constantly evolving the relationship between African Americans and the Republican party actually was.

The experience of Republican rule from 1920 to 1932 laid the foundations for future African American discontent with the Republican party. The presidencies of Warren Harding (1920-1923) and Calvin Coolidge (1923-1928) are, however, given only a brief examination as they have been dealt with by

other historians.³ Hoover has also attracted a great deal of attention from historians, and it can be convincingly demonstrated that the roots of the African American desertion of the party of Lincoln are to be found during the presidency of the so-called "Great Engineer." The crucial point is that the record of Republicans in the White House in the 1920s was poor as far as African Americans were concerned. It can be argued that Hoover's actions made the transfer of African American allegiance to the Democrats a much less painful experience than it should have been.

The best gauge of public opinion is, of course, the presidential election and a detailed study of the GOP's efforts to win African American votes in each election during the period is essential. None of the party's candidates between 1936 and 1948 polled more than about a third of the African American vote. Why was this the case? The Republican party was facing the biggest crisis in

³ The main authority on African Americans during this period is Richard B. Sherman the author of The Republican Party and Black America from McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933, (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1973) as well as "The Harding Administration and the Negro: An Opportunity Lost," Journal of Negro History, 49, July 1964 and "Republicans and Negroes: The Lessons of Normalcy," Phylon, 27, 1966, p72. However, the major biographers of Harding and, to a lesser extent, Coolidge do touch upon it. See, for example, Francis Russell, President Harding: His Life and Times, (Eyre and Spottiswode, London, 1968) Robert Murray, The Harding Era, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1969) Randolph Downes, The Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding, (Ohio State University Press, 1970) and also "Negro Rights and the White Backlash in the Campaign of 1920," Ohio History, 75, 1966, p100-107. Eugene P. Trani and David L. Wilson, The Presidency of Warren G. Harding, (Regents Press of Kansas,

its history during the 1930s and was unsure of how to cope with the new and uncomfortable political realities confronting it. African Americans were only one of a number of constituencies lost by the GOP during the 1930s, and the party was slow to recognise the overall realignment that was taking place. For instance, it continually underestimated the importance of the Democratic urban vote. It is easy with hindsight to view the Republican party in the 1930s merely as a home for the reactionary and extremist elements of American politics. It has to be remembered, however, that there were those who were genuinely fearful about the New Deal was leading and Roosevelt's cavalier attitude to the Constitution.

The GOP has often been criticised for its lack of support for anti-lynching legislation in the 1930s, and this is cited as evidence of its lack of interest in the African American vote. There is much to be said for this point of view, especially bearing in mind that the most vociferous critic of these bills from outside the South was Republican Senator William Borah, but the Republican

Lawrence, 1977) and Donald McCoy, Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President, (Macmillan, New York, 1967).

attitude towards anti-lynching legislation needs to be examined in the context of congressional politics of the time.

By 1936 it was apparent to both parties that the African American vote was becoming increasingly important and that they neglected it at their peril. The Democratic hold on the African American vote from 1934 onwards was not totally secure and, as a result, both parties - for the first time - made more determined efforts to court this constituency.

Equally complex are the role of the NAACP and the growing political power of African Americans throughout the period. The NAACP was the pre-eminent African American pressure group of the time and it served as a focal point for African American protest. Officially non-partisan, it is clear by the late 1930s that the organisation's fate was becoming inextricably linked with that of the Roosevelt administration. A result of this was that the organisation became increasingly alienated from the Republican party.

The internal problems and philosophy of the NAACP are addressed in order to understand more fully its political role. The 1930s were a time of major change for the organisation and it is apparent, therefore, that the NAACP was

operating under considerable financial and political pressure throughout the period and it had to adapt accordingly. The demands of the 1920s differed from those of the 1930s, while the problems brought about by World War Two and the post war world were very different again.

The inter-war period saw major demographic change with hundreds of thousands of African Americans moving from the South to the North, a process accelerated by World War Two. This meant that African Americans could exercise much greater political power than ever before and, for the first time since Reconstruction, their votes actually meant something. That the majority of African American voters chose the Democrats from the mid-term elections of 1934 onwards is not in any doubt. However, it should be pointed out that a majority remained registered Republicans during the period. This raises a number of questions, prominent among them is whether the African American vote was for the Democrats or for Roosevelt. The evidence suggests the latter, but either way it appears that many African Americans were still not entirely happy with the prospect of being Democrats. Politicians of both parties and commentators alike realised that the African American vote was becoming

increasingly important. If the overwhelming majority of African Americans voted for one party (as they have done in every presidential election with the exception of 1956), then they would be able to maximise their political influence.

Each of the historians who have dealt with African Americans and the New Deal give some indication of the nature and importance of the alliance between the Democrats and African Americans. What is clear is that it was an alliance fraught with difficulty and, in some respects, African Americans, in the form of the NAACP, were as frustrated by the incumbent Democratic administration as they had been with the previous Republican one. The transition of African Americans from Republicans to Democrats was a complicated process and the reactions of all the participants will be assessed.

The thesis does not assume that the wishes of the NAACP and the wishes of African Americans were synonymous; it merely recognises that the NAACP was the most vocal, articulate and focussed organisation that the African American community had. Furthermore, it does not assume that the goals of the NAACP and Walter White, its leader throughout the period, were synonymous.

Throughout the period the NAACP was the main, and sometimes the only, voice African Americans had in national politics. The contribution of other groups and figures is acknowledged, the National Negro Congress and the March on Washington Movement for example, but the NAACP was clearly the most important national representative that African Americans had.

There are, inevitably, gaps in this study. The twenty-year time-scale means that some areas are dealt with in less detail than others, while some topics have had to be ignored altogether.⁴ The thesis is also very broad and deals with major themes on a national rather than a state or local level. The exception to this is New York, because Thomas Dewey, the central figure in Republican politics throughout the 1940s, was the governor of the Empire State. Other local or state studies are a luxury that the thesis could not afford. They may yet follow, but for the moment it is more beneficial to have an idea of the broader political situation.

There is clearly a pressing need for this topic to be addressed, as historians have not dealt sufficiently with many of the issues outlined. While most of the

historians of the period touch upon the relationship between the Republican party and African Americans, none of them go into great detail. The intention of this thesis is to add to the scholarship of the period and complement the existing literature by dealing with areas neglected by other scholars. It is important to re-emphasise that this will add not only to the historiography of the New Deal period, but also to that of the Civil Rights movement and the Republican party generally.

Scholars examining this period all refer to the GOP's relationship with African Americans, but none deem it important enough to divert them from their primary concerns. The major historiography of the rest of the period will be dealt with in brief chapter by chapter, but as the 1930s saw a noticeable change in the loyalties of African Americans it is instructive to review briefly some of the important work that has been done on African Americans and the New Deal.

Raymond Wolters's Negroes and the Great Depression (1970) was the first major study of African Americans during the New Deal era. Wolters's

⁴ There is little in the thesis on congressional politics, Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, the

intentions were threefold: how did African Americans fare under Roosevelt's recovery plans for industry and agriculture, and how did they organise as an effective pressure group? The third of these goals is particularly important to this thesis. Wolters emphasises that he is not offering an account of African Americans during the Great Depression but is concentrating instead on "the problem of economic recovery" and African Americans. Unlike later studies, therefore, Wolters ignores the impact of Roosevelt's welfare and relief programmes on African Americans, and concentrates instead on how African Americans responded to macro-economic plans for long-term recovery.

Wolters notes that there were no specific measures taken to lessen the burden on African Americans. Part of the reason for this, he insists, was because they "were weak and poorly organised, lacking in political and economic power."⁵ It was vital that African Americans increase their political power and steps were taken to achieve this. This strengthens the view emphasised

"Black Cabinet," impact of the Great Depression on the Republican party and the NAACP on local levels. The influence of important African American figures, such as the publisher Robert L. Vann and the educator Mary McLeod Bethune, have also had to be largely neglected.

⁵ Raymond Wolters, Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Relief, Greenwood Publishing Corporation, Westport, Connecticut, 1970, pxi.

throughout the thesis that African Americans were becoming more politically vocal and exercised increasing, although always circumscribed, political power.

Walters agrees with an important contention in this thesis that the NAACP was the focal point of this new militancy. His examination of the Association, much broader than that attempted here, provides an excellent insight into the internal problems of the NAACP. It is no coincidence that after 1935 when the NAACP became increasingly dominated by Walter White, it also moved much closer politically to the Democratic party and Walters adeptly charts White's emergence as the central figure in the Association.

Harvard Sitkoff's A New Deal For Blacks (1978), the next major work on African Americans and the New Deal, asserts that the Roosevelt administration moved actively to embrace civil rights and that it was this policy which brought African Americans into the Democratic fold. He views the 1930s as a decade of rising expectations. There was a realisation that African Americans did have some power as they participated more than ever before in American society, and also that whites were not entirely ambivalent. It is hard to argue with his

contention that “the New Deal years are a turning point in race relations trends.”⁶

One of the areas that Sitkoff has to overlook is the role of the Republican party after 1936. Nevertheless, he recognises how precarious and essentially one-sided the relationship between the GOP and African Americans actually was. He identifies a number of reasons for the shift of African American loyalty from the Republicans to the Democrats, including the role of Eleanor Roosevelt, increasing numbers of African Americans employed by the federal government and the “Black Cabinet.” Aside from briefly examining the threat posed to the Democratic hold on the African American vote in 1940, he makes no examination of attempts by the GOP to regain these votes during this period.

It was Sitkoff’s hope that others would fill in some of the gaps he left and to an extent historians like Nancy Weiss, Robert Zangrando, John Kirby and Patricia Sullivan have done this. Sitkoff’s discussion of the failure of Hoover, and previous Republican administrations (as far back as Taft), is extremely useful but does not overlap substantially with this thesis. It is primarily

⁶ Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue.

concerned with the period after 1934, whereas Sitkoff is more interested in what benefits the New Deal and the Democratic party brought to African Americans. Whatever its flaws, A New Deal For Blacks remains one of the most important works dealing with this era.

Nancy Weiss, in A Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR (1983), believes that economics, or rather relief, was central to the shift of the African American vote. She also argues that the New Deal was neither the beginning nor the end of the process of African American realignment as it was continued under Truman, Kennedy and Johnson. She sees a paradox in the switch of African American allegiance from the Republican party to the Democrats: the New Deal paid little attention to the needs of African Americans, yet they voted Democrat due to the New Deal, and it is this phenomenon that she seeks to examine. Her main argument is that African Americans became Democrats due to the economic benefits of the New Deal, a conscious departure from Sitkoff's contention that it was the good record of Roosevelt on civil rights that made African Americans vote Democrat. As for

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, “charges that [they] were out to revolutionise race relations were patently absurd.”⁷

Weiss’s belief that economic factors caused African Americans to vote for the Democrats is well made. She recognises that the Republicans were not able to convince African Americans of the merits of their economic plans. She argues that economic pressures meant that symbolic gestures were no longer enough, and poor African Americans voted as poor people rather than as a racial group. Survival, therefore, was more important than equality. As for the tie with the Republican party, she declares that “blacks who were suffering most from the Depression had the least to lose by leaving the Republican party. And they stood to gain most from the tangible assistance of the New Deal.”⁸ African American voter registration increased in the North and many of these were new voters to whom slavery, Reconstruction and Redemption seemed very distant. Weiss concludes that African Americans became part of the “body politic” as a result of the New Deal, but, crucially, contends that without the Depression they would not have become Democrats and would have remained marginalized.

⁷ Nancy J. Weiss, Farewell To The Party Of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR,

There is clearly much to recommend Weiss's work, yet A Farewell to the Party of Lincoln remains an incomplete account of the era. While she does discuss the actions of the Republican party during the period, it is still a work which, perhaps justifiably, is centred around the Democratic party, Roosevelt and the NAACP. Nevertheless, the Republican attitude towards African Americans cannot solely be defined by a refusal to embrace new economic policy but must also be viewed in the context of a party badly split and perhaps even on the verge of extinction. African Americans may have been low on the GOP's list of priorities, but they were lower on that of the Democrats. Republican alternatives to the New Deal will be discussed, as they were by the African American press at the time, and viewed in their historic context in more detail than Weiss allows.

Weiss's assertions are well made and convincing; they could, and should, be seen as the "orthodoxy," insofar as there is one, on African American realignment during the New Deal. This provides a starting point from which to examine the Republican perspective. For example, her view that the African

American vote was for Roosevelt and not for the Democrats supports the argument, stated here, that there was a possibility that the Republicans might have regained this vote. This thesis, therefore, fills in many of the gaps left by Weiss.

In Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era (1980) John Kirby's intentions are twofold: firstly, he seeks to examine the role of those white liberals who were part of the Roosevelt administration and sympathetic to African Americans. Secondly, he examines the response of African Americans to the Depression, the New Deal and the outbreak of World War Two. He admits that he is not attempting to make a comprehensive study of the period, and his approach involves looking at individuals, rather than taking the broader narrative approach of Weiss or Sitkoff. He attempts to trace the root of the administration's sympathy for African Americans, the philosophy behind it and the success of these endeavours, noting the many contradictions faced by those who served Roosevelt.

⁸ Ibid., p216.

Kirby recognises that many African American appointees were in purely advisory positions and, therefore, neither accountable nor responsible for government policy. This meant that their influence was often quite limited and their roles largely token. Kirby ultimately concludes, with some justification, that the New Deal left “an ambivalent legacy,” noting that while the problems of African Americans were at least recognised they were by no means solved. He feels that African Americans were in some ways hampered by their support of FDR and their reluctance to abandon him was recognition of how limited federal involvement had been prior to 1932. He feels, therefore, that political options for African Americans remained limited.

Kirby’s analysis of the Republican attitude towards African Americans largely coincides with that of Weiss and Sitkoff, again suggesting the need for a more in depth study. Prominent African American Republicans such as Robert Church, Perry Howard and Francis E. Rivers are neglected. More strangely, despite quite a detailed discussion of the influence of political scientist Ralph Bunche during the period, there is no mention of his links, admittedly unofficial and tenuous, to the Republican party. An examination of these figures would go

some way towards proving that the Democrats were not operating in a political vacuum. There was clearly a threat to the Democrats' hold on the African American vote and this needs to be examined in some detail. Nevertheless, Kirby's criticisms of many of the leading African American figures of the time, notably Bunche and White, are valid and articulately expressed as is his analysis of the "racial liberals" within the Roosevelt administration.⁹

Several good works on the NAACP have been published but Robert L. Zangrando's The NAACP Campaign Against Lynching (1980) is perhaps the strongest.¹⁰ Zangrando looks in great detail at the efforts of the NAACP to secure anti-lynching legislation from the inception of the organisation in 1909 to the general elimination of the problem by the 1950s. Much of the book deals with the most sustained campaign to secure legislation between 1933 and 1940,

⁹ Among the important African American figures looked at are: Mary McLeod Bethune (National Youth Administration), Robert L. Vann (editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and Justice Department official) and William Hastie (a federal judge in the Virgin Islands and later a civilian aide to the War Department). As well as White and Bunche among those outside the administration, the roles of John P. Davis, A. Philip Randolph, are examined.

¹⁰ Other works on the NAACP include: Robert L. Jack, History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Meador Publishing Company, Boston, 1943. Warren D. St. James, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: A Case Study in Pressure Groups, Exposition Press, 1958. Langston Hughes, Fight For Freedom: The Story of the NAACP, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York, 1962. Barbara Joyce Ross, J.E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939, Atheneum, New York, 1972. Brenda Gayle Plummer, Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960, the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1996.

and he manages to put the issue into a much broader context than merely recounting efforts to force an anti-lynching bill through Congress.

Zangrando also provides insight into the internal workings of the NAACP, especially the role of Walter White. His analysis of the difficulties faced by the NAACP, and the fact that he puts them into the context of the overall political situation, is excellent. He recognises that not only was the fate of the NAACP fundamentally linked to the New Deal (and later Harry Truman) but also that the organisation was only one of many which made demands of the administration and the Congress. This provides a very thorough and much needed overview of the activities of the pre-eminent African American pressure group of the period.

In common with the other historians looking at this area, it is not Zangrando's intention to look at how the Republicans reacted to the new political position of African Americans. Nevertheless, he is aware of the fact that by the late 1930s relations between the GOP and the NAACP (and perhaps, by definition, African Americans) were deteriorating. From a Republican perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that the party was unwilling to back anti-

lynching legislation to a greater extent than it did when it seemed that the NAACP was becoming very close to the Roosevelt administration. This is an area that this thesis deals with in detail.

In Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era (1996)

Patricia Sullivan studies the impact of the Great Depression and New Deal on the South, dealing primarily with the plight of African Americans but also looking at the wider effects on the region. She covers much the same period as this thesis, yet does not overlap with it to any great degree. Sullivan is interested in indigenous southern efforts to generate reform and the impact these had on the national Democratic party and African American political awakening in the South. She also views these events in the context of national politics in the United States. Days of Hope demonstrates convincingly that the roots of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement are to be found in the actions of southern African American communities in the 1930s and 1940s. Republicans, being an endangered species in the South during the period, merit little attention.

Wolters, Sitkoff, Weiss, Kirby, Sullivan and Zangrando have all helped to lay the foundations for a greater understanding of African Americans and the New Deal era but none has provided (nor attempted to provide) a complete picture of the period. Wolters, Kirby and Zangrando all identify the complex problems faced by the NAACP throughout the period and the political risks the organisation took by being so closely associated with the administration. There is general agreement on many of the fundamental features of the era, but important gaps remain, notably the relationship between African Americans and the Republican party. All mention the GOP and African Americans, and all are aware that there was a change in how African Americans voted and when this change occurred.

The pervading difficulty is that each historian neglects the fact that African Americans had previously overwhelmingly voted for the GOP, and none attempts to examine the switch of the African American vote from a Republican perspective. They are only interested in what happened once African American allegiance had been transferred to the Democrats, not the process itself. There is an assumption that the loss of the African American vote by the Republicans and

their subsequent efforts to regain it can be explained relatively simply. This is clearly not the case. The relationship between African Americans and the Republican party was extremely complicated and constantly evolving and this fact merits serious attention.

It is clear from the literature, therefore, that the Republican part in the whole process of African American realignment has been neglected. Moreover, it is important to consider why this is the case and it is here where this thesis departs from recent and current historiography: quite simply historians have only examined the role of the Republicans superficially. The assumption that the GOP did little or nothing to win back the African American vote needs to be, if not completely refuted, then at least properly explained. Historians emphasise the centrality of the New Deal in the switch of the African American vote. While it would be foolish to dismiss this theory, it is apparent that the New Deal, although perhaps the most important factor in African American realignment, was neither the start nor end of the process. It is clear that a number of elements combined to facilitate and then to cement this change and that the New Deal was a partial culmination of this process. This disillusionment with

the “Party of Lincoln” combined with a number of other factors, including the Depression, the “Great Migrations,” the increasingly vocal and confident nature of the NAACP and the emergence of a more liberal northern Democratic party.¹¹ The consequence was that an increasingly politicised African American community emerged at the same time as its votes were becoming important in presidential elections.

This thesis was particularly hampered by the lack of one of the major African American newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* or the *Pittsburgh Courier*, for example. This was partly compensated by the fortuitous discovery of the neglected *Kansas City and Topeka Plaindealer* at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka. The *Plaindealer* is interesting for a number of reasons, (for example, it supported the Parker nomination in 1930 and apparently even

¹¹ The First World War saw the first great wave of African American migration from the South to the North and this would eventually have a huge impact on the politics of the United States and provided an opportunity for the Republican party. From 1915 to 1918, 450,000 African Americans moved from the South to the North, followed by a further 478,000 between 1922 and 1924 (it should also be noted that there were some 25 race riots in American cities in 1919). Sherman suggests that from 1915 to 1928 around 1.2 million African Americans went north and that between 1910 and 1930 the African American population in the North increased from 1.1 million to 2.5 million. By the 1920s, therefore, about 20% of African Americans now lived in the North. The reasons for the Great Migrations were largely economic as African Americans were primarily employed in war industries but there can be no doubt that racism in the South was also a factor. When African Americans went north they moved to the same areas and this meant that they were geographically concentrated. Without the intimidation that restricted political activity in the South, African Americans could now exercise their right to vote and could actually have an influence on the outcome of elections. The increase in the number of African Americans in the North had an especially big impact in several northern cities. From 1910 to 1930 the African American population of Chicago increased from 44,103 to 233,903, in

carried advertisements for *Birth of a Nation*) but primarily because it acts as a metaphor for the relationship between the Republican party and African Americans between 1928 and 1948. It was staunchly Republican throughout most of this period, yet in 1948, it predicted, and then welcomed, Truman's victory. In the last recorded edition of the paper, published in the aftermath of the 1958 mid-term elections, the *Plaindealer* castigated the GOP for its failure to court the African American vote and charged that the party had only itself to blame for its defeat.¹²

Fundamental questions must be asked of the Republicans between 1928 and 1948. Why did they react in the way that they did to the new political realities of the 1930s and 1940s? What could they have done differently? How could the GOP have strayed so far from its roots? Why was the "Party of Lincoln" so unresponsive to its hitherto most loyal supporters? It will be necessary to examine how the Republicans appealed to African Americans at

New York it increased from 97,709 to 327,706 and in Detroit, it increased from 5,742 to 120,066. Figures from Sherman, p125-127.

¹² I had gone to the KSHS to look at the papers of Alfred M. Landon, but was disappointed by the dearth of any really good material. Instead, I decided to look at the library's holdings on African American newspapers and found the *Plaindealer*. What happened to the *Plaindealer* after November 1958 neither the KSHS archivists nor I could ascertain. The *Crisis* and the *New York Times* were also extremely useful in the absence of the *Defender* and the *Courier* and I was fortunate that many of the collections I used contained numerous clippings from these and other African American newspapers.

election time, and also through the party's attitude towards issues, such as anti-lynching legislation and an FEPC, which were important to African Americans.

An examination of the Republicans' approach to these issues will provide a much clearer picture of how sincere they were about racial matters and the feasibility of the alternatives they offered. This thesis will give a more complete understanding of the political realignment of African Americans but its primary concerns are twofold: why did the Republican party lose the African American vote and what did it do to attempt to regain it?

CHAPTER ONE. The Lily-White House.

The realignment of African Americans during the New Deal cannot be fully understood without first examining the impact of the Hoover presidency, 1928-1932. It would, of course, be foolish to underestimate the impact that the Great Depression and New Deal had upon African American political thinking but this realignment neither began nor was completed by the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. By the 1920s African American alienation from the party of Lincoln was acute, but had previously found no viable outward expression. Quite simply, African Americans had nowhere else to go. African Americans had rarely sat comfortably within the GOP's electoral alliance and, in truth, the relationship had always been an uneven one. The alternative was no better; the Democrats, the party of the South, slavery and Redemption, neither sought nor wanted African American votes. In the early 1920s the African American vote was both negligible and northern and, ignored by the Democrats, it was taken for granted by the Republicans. It is important, therefore, to examine the relationship between the Republican party and African Americans in the 1920s

and particularly during the presidency of Herbert Hoover. More than any other Republican, Hoover fractured the historic alliance between the party of Lincoln and the descendants of the slaves he had freed. An examination of the Hoover years starkly illustrates the extent to which the Republican party had departed from its historic role as the protector of African Americans. Before embarking upon this examination, however, it is instructive to review briefly the important historiography of the period.

In The Republican Party and Black America from McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933 (1973) Richard B. Sherman illustrated that the Republicans had always lacked commitment to African Americans. In a thoughtful and valuable study, Sherman demonstrates that most Republicans quickly lost interest in the plight of African Americans after the Civil war and whatever liberal or moral impulse that had motivated the founders of the party had disappeared with the party's embrace of business by the 1880s.

Sherman faults the GOP as a whole for the loss of the African American vote in the early 1930s, although he recognises that Hoover was complicit. African Americans, therefore, needed to be politically independent if they were

to exercise any political influence. The Republicans, Sherman concludes, had much to gain by courting African American voters; indeed, they could do this without betraying their roots. Ultimately, from the 1890s to the 1930s “GOP politicians appealed to the myth of Lincoln and to their party’s egalitarian ideals, even when their practices belied their words.”¹

The most important work written on Herbert Hoover and African Americans is Donald Lisio’s Hoover, Blacks and Lilywhites: A Study of Southern Strategies (1985). Lisio took the view that historians and contemporaries have pilloried Herbert Hoover unfairly over his treatment of African Americans. He re-examines the Hoover presidency and the race issue attempting to redress the historiographical balance in favour of the president. Lisio endeavours to insulate Hoover as much as possible from the charges that he was a lily-white, a racist and a bigot, arguing instead that Hoover was a victim of his own reticence, bad advice, second rate advisors and an extreme dislike of those he saw as mere “politicians.” Nevertheless, Lisio is no apologist for Hoover. He establishes that Hoover’s attitude towards African Americans

¹ Sherman, p259.

was complex, but, in doing so, he confirms much of the negativity with which Hoover has been viewed. What emerges is that Hoover had no consistent approach to the plight of African Americans, little understanding of their situation and an idealism verging on naivety when dealing with the problems of both African Americans and the South. Hoover is portrayed as someone not entirely ignorant of African American needs but, nonetheless, incapable of addressing them. Lisio stresses, however, that this did not make Hoover a lily-white bigot with a racist southern strategy.

The difficulty that emerges is whether or not one agrees with Lisio's contention that Hoover was a victim of circumstance and naivety rather than a bigot or a lily-white. Lisio believes that there is insufficient evidence to condemn Hoover as a bigot. Yet he does not adequately demonstrate why Hoover should be given the benefit of the doubt; Hoover's silence on civil rights should no more be taken as disapproval of discrimination than as approval. One must ask, ultimately, if the President of the United States can have been as naive as implied. Lisio suggests that perhaps Hoover's neglect of African Americans

was, instead, due to the ongoing crises caused by the Depression. Lisio briefly alludes to this and it is worth a more thorough examination.

George F. Garcia's excellent Master's thesis "Herbert Hoover's Southern Strategy and the Black Reaction" (1972) details the efforts of the GOP to crack the "Solid South." Garcia believed that the Republican party's approach to African Americans and the South during the period was "an ambiguous mixture of high idealism and political expediency."² Lisio owes a burden of debt to Garcia and both come to similar conclusions about the reasons for, and consequences of, Hoover's southern strategy.³ Garcia certainly recognises the inherent folly of Republican policy contending that it "not only failed to capture the South; it laid the groundwork for the subsequent exodus of black voters from the Republican party in the North."⁴ Both Garcia and Lisio agree that the intention of Hoover's southern strategy was not to disenfranchise African Americans; this was merely an unfortunate by-product of it. Like Sherman and Lisio, Garcia identifies the long-term repercussions of Republican neglect of African Americans. The Republicans did not recognise that politics was

changing, particularly in the cities and this would, of course, help condemn the GOP to minority status throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Allen J. Lichtmann, in Prejudice and The Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928 (1979), argued that the election of 1928 saw the start of the process which led to the desertion of the Republican party by African Americans. He believes, however, that at this stage it was largely the African American elite, businessmen, newspaper editors and some churchmen, who expressed discontent with the GOP. Nevertheless, he recognises that by 1936 the majority of African Americans were voting for the Democrats. Lichtmann feels that a large amount of responsibility for this lies with Herbert Hoover and the campaign he ran in 1928, especially in the South. Furthermore, he also suggests that this campaign was merely the inevitable product of eight years of neglect of African Americans by the previous two Republican administrations.

In contrast to Lisio and Garcia, Lichtmann is openly hostile to Hoover. He is in no doubt that Hoover not only approved of the southern Strategy, but was also intimately involved in its planning and execution. He cannot, however,

² George F. Garcia, "Herbert Hoover's Southern Strategy and the Black Reaction," *Masters*

offer firm proof directly linking Hoover to the southern campaign other than evidence “that can be reliably attributed to Herbert Hoover and his close associates.”⁵ If a criticism can be made of Lichtmann it is that he uses his evidence too selectively and is too willing to jump to conclusions on the basis of speculation. Lichtmann can find no categorical proof that Hoover was directly responsible for the bigotry of the southern campaign.

Kenneth W. Goings, in “The NAACP Comes of Age:” The Defeat of Judge Parker (1990), deals with one of the most infamous clashes between African Americans and Herbert Hoover. Goings challenges the traditional view that it was the influence of labour, rather than the lobbying of the NAACP and African Americans, that led to the defeat of the nomination of segregationist John J. Parker to the Supreme Court in 1930. Goings convincingly refutes this. He feels that historians, such as Nancy Weiss and Harvard Sitkoff, have downplayed the importance of race in the defeat of Parker and have been too

Thesis, University of Iowa, 1972, p2

³ Incidentally, Garcia and Lisio were both based in Iowa, Hoover’s home state.

⁴ Garcia, p2.

⁵ Allen J. Lichtmann, Prejudice and The Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1979, p147.

reliant on labour's interpretation of events. A closer reading of the situation reveals the pivotal role played by African Americans.

These historians prove beyond any doubt that African American alienation with the Republican party preceded the depression and the New Deal. Nevertheless, none of them attempt to examine this process fully: the election of 1932 seems to provide a natural barrier to further study. The historiographical debate shifts to the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt, the Second World War and so on, reflecting the tendency among historians to compartmentalise history into manageable chunks. This is as understandable as it is frustrating: the historian has to start and end somewhere. Where the Republican party and African Americans are concerned, this means that the historiography from the Hoover to the Eisenhower presidencies is as much in the wilderness as the GOP itself.⁶

i. The "Republican Ascendancy."

The presidencies of Warren Harding (1920-1923) and Calvin Coolidge (1923-1928) were unremarkable for African Americans but they did create a

pattern that Hoover would continue. Any hope African Americans may have had that the Republican party would provide an antidote to the Wilson years was misplaced. Neither president, for example, even lukewarmly endorsed anti-lynching legislation. Under Harding, the Dyer anti-lynching bill negotiated the House of Representatives in January 1922 but died in the Senate in December after a southern Democratic filibuster.⁷ Coolidge showed no interest in anti-lynching legislation. Historian Matthew Rees believes that the failure of the bill “reflected how little importance the party attached to the protection of African Americans.”⁸ Biographer Robert K. Murray asserts that Harding cannot be held entirely responsible for the failure to secure even the most limited of civil rights legislation. His Interracial Commission died in a congressional committee, the anti-lynching bill was scuppered by a Democratic filibuster, while discrimination in national life was too entrenched to be removed easily.⁹

⁶ The next work of any note on the Republican party and African Americans is Robert Burk's The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights, published in 1984.

⁷ For Harding's attitude towards lynching earlier in his career see Downes, Rise of Warren Gameliel Harding, p51. There were rumours that Harding had black ancestry, see Downes, Ohio History, 75, p100-107. In fact, there were also allegations that he was a member of the Klan. Sean Dennis Cashman is in no doubt, “Warren Harding belonged to the Klan and disgraced the White House by being inducted there.” Cashman, America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, New York University Press, New York and London, 1989, p77.

⁸ Rees, Deck to the Sea, p123.

⁹ Murray, Harding Era, p402-403.

Harding's successor, Calvin Coolidge believed in minimal federal involvement to improve the lot of the less fortunate members of society; the business of America was, after all, business. Coolidge's reputation was not helped by the perception that he was ambivalent towards the Klan. The Klan, with between four and five million members, had a considerable influence in American politics in the 1920s and was particularly strong in the Republican party in Colorado, Indiana, and Ohio. At the Republican convention in 1924 a plank to condemn the Klan was blocked, as was an attempt to publicly repudiate the organisation. The Republicans were further damaged when the Democrats narrowly failed to pass a plank condemning the Klan (by the smallest margin in convention history) and their presidential candidate, John W. Davis, condemned the Klan in a speech. Davis asked Coolidge to do the same to eliminate the Klan as an election issue; the Progressive candidate, Robert M. Follette, did likewise, but Coolidge remained silent on the subject. This stance made him the most attractive candidate to members of the Klan, provoking condemnation from the *New York Times*: "either Mr Coolidge holds his peace for mistaken reasons of

politics or policy or he tolerates the Klan.... He has shown himself by his silence deficient in judgement and courage.”¹⁰

Historian Donald McCoy believes that Coolidge’s inaction contributed to the desertion of the party by African Americans in the 1930s.¹¹ For example, in 1925, despite widespread public opposition, he allowed the Klan to parade in Washington D.C. Elbert Lee Tatum disagrees. During the Coolidge years, he argues, “the Negro had very little against which to register complaint.”¹² He justifies this view by stating that African Americans were better off than ever, there were few race riots and lynchings had decreased. Furthermore, most African American newspapers were backing Coolidge. McCoy challenges this assertion: “black Americans only shared incidentally in the prosperity of the decade, as no attempt was made to give them or smaller racial minorities a fair share.”¹³ African Americans were clearly low on the GOP’s list of priorities. As John B. Kirby notes “Republicans had little need for the still small black vote in

¹⁰ *New York Times* (henceforth *NYT*), 7 September 1924, cited in Sherman, *Phylon*, 27, p72.

¹¹ McCoy, *The Quiet President*, p329.

¹² Elbert Lee Tatum, *The Changed Political Thought of the Negro, 1915-1940*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1951 reprinted 1974, p98.

¹³ Donald R. McCoy, *Coming of Age: The United States in the 1920s and 1930s*, Penguin Books, 1973, p127.

the 1920s to assure their own political power.”¹⁴ As well as helping to facilitate Garveyism, this inaction led to the eventual desertion of the GOP by African Americans. The lack of concern by the Republican party reflected a more general apathy among white Americans about the plight of African Americans but Sherman believes that this was more a by-product of the age than a deliberate policy.

ii. “Tradition and inertia.”

The experience of African Americans under Republican rule in the 1920s led many to believe that their future lay outside the GOP. The Wilson years had been bad, seeing increasing segregation within the federal government, but the administrations of Harding and Coolidge had been extremely frustrating for African Americans. Lichtmann contends that the Republicans “seemed responsive to the long memory of black people, but not to their current needs.”¹⁵ Nothing, however, could have prepared even the most alienated African American for the Hoover presidency. By the time Hoover left office in March

¹⁴ John B. Kirby, Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race, University of

1933 he had offended almost every segment of African American opinion. Many prominent African American Republicans who were personally very loyal to Hoover in 1928 refused to support him or have anything to do with his campaign in 1932. Suspicions about Hoover arose even before he had been nominated; foremost among them was the fear that the Republican frontrunner wanted to turn the party in the South into a lily-white organisation. This concern proved to be well founded, and the attempted reform of the southern wing of the GOP would continue throughout Hoover's presidency.

By 1931, Hoover had attempted to appoint an avowed segregationist to the Supreme Court, offended the mothers of dead African American soldiers, failed to prevent the effective disbandment of the country's most famous African American regiments and, of course, presided over the worst depression in American history. Worse still, all of this was done against the background of his fundamentally flawed southern policy. In the election of 1932, not only had Hoover alienated many African Americans, but the southern policy on which he

Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1980, p5.

¹⁵ Lichtmann, Prejudice, p149.

had staked so much was in ruins; the gains made in the region in 1928 were erased as the Democrats swept to power.

In 1928 many African Americans were coming to the conclusion that northern Democrats were as liberal as their Republican counterparts, while southern white Republicans and Democrats were equally racist. Kelly Miller, an eminent African American educator, articulated this concern to Hoover when he argued that it was only “tradition and inertia” which tied African Americans to the GOP.¹⁶

The Democrats generated controversy in 1928 by nominating Governor Alfred Smith of New York as their presidential candidate. The candidacy of Smith, an Irish-American Catholic, may not have posed a huge dilemma for African Americans but it did at least give them a choice. Smith had a liberal reputation as governor and, as a Catholic, was subjected to bigotry and, therefore, generated some sympathy, or more accurately empathy, from African Americans. There were those in the South, declares George Mayer, who “disliked [Smith] for what he was, and [he] could not have won their support

¹⁶ Ibid., p151.

even if he had advocated the re-enslavement of Negroes.”¹⁷ The candidacy of Smith, therefore, finally gave the Republicans an opportunity to crack the so-called “Solid South.”

There was a feeling in 1928 that the African American vote could be important, *Collier's* commented: “the Republicans and the Democrats are both worried, and no small part of that worry is caused by the uncertainty regarding the colored brother’s vote. Meanwhile the political doctors are frantically prescribing.”¹⁸ Tatum agrees, arguing that the 1928 election “sent the Negroes’ political stock skyward.”¹⁹ This is perhaps an overstatement, but there was a feeling that if Smith could take the South then he would only need New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Indiana to achieve an overall victory. This starkly illustrated the potential importance of the African American vote.

The African American vote may have been deemed more important than ever but some things remained resolutely unchanged. Both party conventions, for example, were segregated and this was especially galling to African

¹⁷ George H. Mayer, *The Republican Party, 1854-1966*, (second edition) New York, Oxford University Press, 1967 p406.

¹⁸ F.R. Kent, *Collier's*, 82, 20 October 1928, p13, cited in Tatum, p102.

¹⁹ Tatum, p104.

American Republicans.²⁰ African American leaders were so disillusioned by the actions of the Republican party that they now began to desert the GOP to such an extent that the party had trouble finding people to serve on its Colored Advisory Committee. Five men, including prominent Memphis Republican Robert R. Church, publicly declined to join citing GOP policy. Ironically, the Democrats had no trouble finding African Americans to serve on their Colored Voters Division. The African American press, which could usually be counted on to support the GOP, was initially neutral or backed Smith. The *Chicago Defender*, however, was openly hostile to the Republicans: "our readers are entitled to know that the Ku Klux Klan is taking an active part in the campaign and that it is NOT aiding the Democratic candidate."²¹ The Democrats were, nonetheless, reluctant to alienate their racist southern constituency by exploiting any potential rift between the Republicans and African Americans.²² The Republican party was also helped by the fact that, outside of New York, many African Americans were sceptical about their chances of betterment under

²⁰ See the *Cleveland Gazette*, 30 June 1928. Lewis L. Strauss Papers, box 9.

²¹ *Chicago Defender*, 20 October, 1928, cited in Lichtmann, *Prejudice*, p156. Nancy Weiss states that Smith was also the preferred choice of Marcus Garvey. Weiss, *Farewell*, p9-10

²² It should be remembered that it was not only African Americans who were being neglected by the Republicans; immigrants and the working classes were similarly ignored.

Smith. The Democrats, regardless of whatever liberal veneer Smith provided, were still the party of the South, the Wilson years were fresh in the collective memory, and many African Americans were wary of Smith's Catholicism. A frustrated NAACP issued a manifesto condemning the racism of both parties.²³

Walter White was one of the most important figures in the NAACP. A light-skinned, blue eyed, technically "colored" Atlantan, White had risen to prominence in the early 1920s through his investigations of lynching in the South. These investigations had yielded one best-selling book and identified White as the rising star of the Association.²⁴ His endorsement, therefore, would be invaluable to any presidential candidate. This was recognised by Smith's publicity director who asked him to head the Democrats' Negro Division. White refused, partly because he disagreed with the concept of segregated campaign bureaux.²⁵ Approached again prior to Smith's nomination and on leave from the Association, White was tempted. He asked Smith for a forthright statement on the plight of African Americans, clearly wishing to test his sincerity on the race issue. This statement, written by James Weldon Johnson, was never issued,

²³ Lichtmann, p156.

reflecting Smith's fear of offending the South. White had been refused permission to campaign for Smith in his official capacity but is said to have done so privately, despite the Democratic candidate's reticence. The fact that such a prominent member of the NAACP could even consider working for the Democrats reflected the Association's increasing hostility towards the Republicans.²⁶

There was also a feeling that the two parties were equally unsympathetic. W.E.B. Du Bois felt that there was little to choose between the candidates: "in our humble opinion, it does not matter a tinker's damn which of these gentlemen succeed. With minor exceptions, they stand for exactly the same thing: oligarchy in the South, color caste in national office holding and recognition of the rule of organised wealth."²⁷ He did, however, urge African Americans to choose their congressmen very carefully.²⁸ A characteristic

²⁴ Rope and Faggot was published in 1929. White was, in fact, 1/32nd black.

²⁵ Elizabeth Israels Perry, Belle Moskowitz, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987, p203.

²⁶ Weiss, Farewell, p8-9. Belle Moskowitz, Smith's publicity director, later told White that Smith regretted not issuing this statement as it may have swayed African American voters in pivotal northern and border states with which he might have won the election. Walter White, A Man Called White, Brown Thrasher Books, University of Georgia, Athens and London, 1948, p101. Also cited in Weiss, p11.

²⁷ Crisis, 35, November 1928, p381. Also cited in Sherman, McKinley to Hoover, p232.

²⁸ It seems that at least some African Americans took this advice as the Republicans' own survey of the election reported that in New York: "the colored vote was very strong for Hoover in practically all the districts. This is particularly so of the Republican districts, where Hoover's majority was much larger than the rest of the ticket." "Survey: Election of 1928, New York

expression of dissatisfaction came from Neval Thomas, the president of the NAACP's District of Columbia branch and a member of the Republican party:

I refuse to allow a crowd of oppressors who are opposed to everything Republican masquerade in its sacred name. This aggregation now parading in its name stands for everything that Republicanism condemned and destroyed. They are in solemn compact with the Bourbon South in their wicked schemes against the Negro.²⁹

African American alienation from the party of Lincoln was becoming increasingly vocal, but the alternatives remained unappealing.

iii. "We are going to lose the colored vote in the North. This knowledge could be judiciously used in the South."

The Republicans' "Southern Strategy" was the first of the many controversies that would increase African American disaffection from the party and particularly Hoover. It was a long held GOP desire to win the "Solid South." Both Harding and Coolidge had tried and failed. In 1928 the candidacy

State." Lewis L. Strauss Papers, box 15. This assessment gives some credence to the view that the Democrats were making inroads locally in the North, but confirms that African Americans were still reluctant to help to put a Democrat in the White House.

²⁹ Lichtmann, p157.

of Smith and the apparent willingness of Hoover to embrace lily-whitism offered the best chance since Reconstruction to win southern white votes.

Kansas Senator Henry J. Allen wrote to Hoover arguing that the African American vote was lost, and that the Republicans should exploit the racial situation to their advantage: "it seems rather certain for the moment that we are going to lose the colored vote in the North. If this knowledge could be judiciously used in the South, it would be helpful to us."³⁰

Historians are divided about Hoover's involvement in the southern campaign. While the circumstantial evidence implicating Hoover is quite convincing, an element of doubt remains. Alfred Kirchofer, the Republican Publicity Manager in 1928, contradicted the contention that Hoover closely controlled the southern campaign in 1928. Kirchofer explained that "there was little by way of direction, except that Mr Hoover specified three areas [prohibition, Smith's religion and Mrs Smith] in which nothing should be said without prior approval."³¹ This can be interpreted in one of two ways: if official Republican party literature dealt with any of these issues, then Hoover can be

³⁰ Allen to Hoover, 28 August 1928. Cited in *ibid.*, p154.

held directly responsible for it. Alternatively, the fact that most of the less savoury propaganda disseminated during the campaign can be attributed to anonymous or unofficial sources does help to distance Hoover from it, although it does not necessarily exonerate him.³² Kirchofer places the blame for the bigotry of the southern campaign at least in part with Mabel Willebrandt, an assistant attorney general and friend of the Hoovers. He also states that whatever efforts Hoover made to disclaim bigotry had little effect on those preaching it.

Regardless of Hoover's duplicity, Republican tactics certainly paid off. The party managed to carry West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and Texas, an achievement that had hitherto seemed unthinkable. Not only did the Republicans have their best showing in the South since Reconstruction, but they also managed to carry all the northern states with large African American populations. The success of the 1928 campaign meant that the Republicans were, according to Garcia, "more willing than their

³¹ Interview with Alfred Kirchofer by Raymond Henle, April 1969, Herbert Hoover Oral History, p8.

³² Edward Anthony, who was Associate Publicity Director on the 1928 campaign, argued that most of the anti-Catholic literature was anonymous. Interview with Edward and Esther Anthony, by Raymond Henle, July 1970, Herbert Hoover Oral History.

predecessors to sacrifice blacks and either repudiate or reinterpret the party's historical association with black advancement."³³ Lisio concurs, suggesting that African Americans were increasingly suspicious of the GOP.³⁴ The seeds of discontent with the Republican party in general and Hoover in particular were, therefore, sown prior to the party taking office, and can be seen as the start of a process, which would reach at least a partial culmination with the African American desertion of the GOP by 1936.

In the event, the Republicans lost fewer African American votes than had been anticipated, but historians are divided as to why.³⁵ Lichtmann notes that "traditional political allegiances seem to have survived both the 'Negro Renaissance' and the leadership efforts of prominent blacks," and argues that this is because too much attention was, and continues to be, paid to the views of the elite section of the African American community.³⁶ He points out that while the concerns of the masses and the elite of African American voters were very similar it was only the elite who deserted the Republicans in any significant

³³ Garcia, "Hoover's Southern Strategy," p73.

³⁴ Donald J. Lisio, Hoover, Blacks and Lilywhites, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1985, p71.

numbers in 1928. Both groups were extremely disappointed with what had been achieved under Harding and Coolidge, but African American voters were not yet ready to trust the Democrats. The support given to Smith by some African Americans merely confirmed the lack of options that they actually had in 1920s America. "Black people were confronted on the one hand," as Lichtmann notes, "by a Republican party whose friendship for their people was a tarnished memory and, on the other hand, by a Democratic party wedded to southern racism."³⁷

Overall, it can be concluded that the election of 1928 was bad for African Americans. Nancy Weiss believes that "blacks remained passively with the Republicans" but feels that a vote for Smith could have helped to assert their political independence by forcing the Republicans and the Democrats to stop taking them for granted.³⁸ She also argues that it could even have lessened the influence of the South on the Democratic party. Nevertheless, it is clear that the failure of African American leaders to prise voters away from the Republicans

³⁵ Weiss notes that the Democrats won 17% of the African American vote in Philadelphia, 27% in Cleveland and 28% in Harlem. The figure for Harlem was the same as it had been in 1924 but had gone up from only 3% in 1920. Weiss, *Farewell*, p10.

³⁶ Lichtmann, p159.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

in 1928 reflected the rather limited influence they, and African Americans generally, actually had in national politics at the time. This would, of course, change over the next eight years. In the meantime, however, the prospect of a Hoover administration can only have left African Americans extremely pessimistic about the chances for immediate progress. Hoover seemed determined to purge the Republican party in the South of African Americans, while paying little attention to those in the North. Moreover, the Democratic party offered little and promised nothing.

As if to emphasise the short-termism of the Republican strategy in 1928, and predicting the electoral problems the party would face in the 1930s, some historians note that a majority of urban voters backed the Democrats for the first time. This would be much more important politically than Hoover's short-lived success in the South but was largely ignored by the press and contemporary commentators. Furthermore, as historian John D. Hicks notes, the Democrats began to make inroads in the Mid-west. These trends are associated with

³⁸ Weiss, p12.

Roosevelt and the New Deal, but it is clear that the process of realignment preceded both the Depression and the New Deal.

iv. “The best use of tea since the night it was thrown into Boston harbor.”

Having secured the nomination, Hoover decided to reform the Republican party in the South, where the party was divided between “black and tan” and “lily-white” factions. Black and tans were inter-racial and were a throwback to the days of Reconstruction; the lily-whites felt that the only way to re-establish the GOP in the South was to exclude African Americans. It is noteworthy, according to Paul Lewinson, that lily-white Republicans “had nothing in common with organised national Republicanism but a name.”³⁹ Most lily-white and black and tan factions were nothing more than skeleton organisations.⁴⁰ It was no secret that Hoover owed his nomination at least in part to these factions, and he was uncomfortable with this.

³⁹ Paul Lewinson, Race, Class and Party: A History of Negro Suffrage and White Politics in the South, Russell and Russell, New York, 1963, p167.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p176. The exception to this was in the Border states. Elsewhere in the South, apart from Virginia and North Carolina, Republican state parties were not “active as vote-getting organisations, save in presidential years.” *Ibid.*, p179. Hanes Walton concurs, noting that Joseph Tolbert’s South Carolina black and tans “emerged every four years to go to the National Convention,” Hanes Walton, Black Republicans: The Politics of the Black and Tans, Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metucken, New Jersey, 1975, p68.

The *New York Times* agreed with the need for reform, but warned that the course of action pursued by Hoover “clearly foreshadows a Republican party in the South almost as purely a white man’s party as the Democratic party there.” It concluded that “a heavy political price may yet be paid by Herbert Hoover” if he excluded African Americans from the party.⁴¹ African Americans were deeply concerned about Hoover’s plans. The *World* cited numerous editorials from African American newspapers and noted that “Negroes are engaging in a real insurrection against the Republican party.” African Americans were “stirring up trouble for the party among the black voters of such northern states as Indiana, Illinois and some others where they hold the balance of power.” It also noted that some northern Republicans were questioning the worth of the southern strategy.⁴² Robert Church warned Hoover that his southern strategy would “leave the Republican party a wreck upon the political ocean.”⁴³

It was claimed by Hoover and his supporters that the Republican party was only interested in reforming the party in the South and not in purging

⁴¹ *NYT*, 17 March, 1929, Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers, Subject File, Republican National Committee (henceforth HH-RNC), States Files, box 257, Georgia.

⁴² “GOP Negroes in Party Revolt,” *The World*, 22 April, 1929. Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers, Subject File, box 105, Colored Correspondence (henceforth HH-CC).

⁴³ Church to Hoover, 6 November 1929. *Ibid.* Also cited in Garcia, p128.

African Americans, but this was a spurious claim. As Lichtmann argues, there were no attempts made to end corruption or remove incompetent politicians elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, as the only people prosecuted or removed in the South were African American, the sole conclusion which can be drawn is that the Republican policy was essentially racist and out to create a lily-white party in the region. Ultimately, there was a realisation that this strategy would cost African American votes in the North and for this reason the proposed purge of African American Republicans in the South was delayed until after the election.

Lisio suggests that Hoover's southern policy has been misunderstood and that it should be viewed as a genuine attempt to reform the Republican party in the region. That there was a need for reform is not in doubt. The Republicans had to disassociate themselves from Reconstruction and the perception, however inaccurate, that it was a time of black rule and corruption in government, if they wanted to re-establish a two party system in the region. It is apparent from the evidence that most southern white Republicans were only interested in purging the party of African American corruption. This is

abundantly clear from the efforts to convict Mississippi black and tan leader Perry Howard, among others, of corruption and the complete lack of similar action against lily-whites.⁴⁴

The Republican party in the South, whatever its composition, was inherently weak. It could be argued, therefore, that the most Hoover's southern policy could hope to achieve was the replacement of one group of skeletal, or essentially paper, organisations in the form of the black and tans with another, the lily-whites. Consequently, Hoover's southern policy was flawed not only because it alienated African Americans in the North but also did not understand the nature of the "Hoovercrat" bolt from the Democrats in 1928.⁴⁵ The southern revolt represented opposition to the Smith candidacy rather than any shift towards Republicanism. In addition, Republican strategy failed to recognise the actual nature of the GOP in the region and to understand that the difficulties it faced could not be solved by replacing one ineffective organisation with another. Regardless of how Hoover's southern strategy is viewed, therefore, it

⁴⁴ The charismatic and longevous Howard was twice charged with corruption in the distribution of federal patronage. He was first acquitted in December 1928 and then again in May 1929, both times by all white Mississippi juries. Howard attended Republican conventions well in to the 1950s. For more information on the attempts to prosecute Howard see "GOP Negroes in Party

was fatally flawed both in both concept and execution.⁴⁶ Ultimately, as Milton Viorst concludes, “subsequent events showed that 1928 was a particularly poor time for the Republicans to abandon proven old friends on behalf of dubious new ones.”⁴⁷

The election of 1928 saw the first African American returned to Congress for nearly a quarter of a century when Oscar De Priest replaced the late Martin B. Madden in a predominantly African American ward of Chicago. Controversy swirled around De Priest because it was traditional for the First Lady to invite the wives of newly-elected congressmen to the White House. An invitation to Mrs De Priest would, therefore, be offensive to southerners and hinder Hoover’s southern ambitions. After careful preparation by Mrs Hoover, the visit by Mrs De Priest went ahead on 12 June 1929. Mrs Hoover ensured that the rest of her guests on that day would not be offended by the presence of Mrs De Priest and would, on the contrary, make her very welcome. Southerners duly raised a storm of protest. Despite meticulous planning the De Priest tea was a disaster

Revolt,” *The World*, 22 April, 1929. Ibid. For more detail on the Howard case see Lisio, p129, Paul Lewinson, p181 and Garcia, p63.

⁴⁵ “Hoovercrat” was the name given to those southern Democrats who backed Hoover in 1928.

⁴⁶ Garcia agrees, arguing that the southern strategy was “poorly conceived and badly implemented.” Garcia, p165.

for Republican hopes in the South. It gave southern Democrats a basis from which to attack Hoover's southern policy after the candidacy of Smith and the resulting Republican gains in their region in 1928.

David S. Day contends that De Priest was keen to capitalise on the publicity generated by the controversy surrounding the tea. Furthermore, the administration "was surprised by his opportunistic appeals to black pride and the potential for black political organisation."⁴⁸ Day believes that De Priest cannily used his wife's invitation to the White House to undermine the Republican party's southern policy as well as boosting the political cause of African Americans. It seems that Republicans were not prepared for what Day terms De Priest's "aggressiveness," moreover, De Priest believed that the furore over the invitation would actually cause all African Americans to return to the Republican fold.⁴⁹

If De Priest's goal was to thwart Hoover's southern strategy then he was at least partially successful. By the end of 1929, for example, Henry Anderson,

⁴⁷ Milton Viorst, Fall From Grace: The Republican Party and the Puritan Ethic, New American Library, Inc., 1968, p164-5.

⁴⁸ David S. Day, "Herbert Hoover and Racial Politics: The De Priest Incident," Journal of Negro History, 65, Winter, 1980, p12. De Priest once declared that "before man made me a

a senior Republican from Virginia who had worked on the southern campaign, believed that the “unfortunate De Priest incident” was being used against Republicans in the state.⁵⁰ De Priest did, however, reflect uneasiness among many within the party about the direction that the GOP was taking. Given subsequent events, De Priest’s efforts to keep African Americans inside the Republican party and his courting of the NAACP may have been a better way forward for the party. Robert McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune* was pleased, and argued that if this incident served to drive southern fanatics out of the party then it was “the best use of tea since the night it was thrown into Boston harbor.”⁵¹ The furore over the De Priest tea meant that Hoover was keen to avoid any further controversy involving African Americans.

v. “A great judge or a conspicuous southerner”?

The nomination of North Carolinian John J. Parker to the Supreme Court in 1930 is perhaps the incident which best illustrates just how insensitive Hoover

Republican, God made me a Negro.” File memorandum, 23 March 1931, undated and uncited newspaper clipping: “De Priest says he will use power.” HH, Secretary’s File, box 528.

⁴⁹ Day, p12.

⁵⁰ Henry Anderson to Lewis Strauss, 19 December 1929. Lewis L. Strauss Papers, box 9.

had become to the aspirations of African Americans. It also demonstrates the growing confidence of the NAACP and the increasing importance of the African American vote. Historians have traditionally attributed the defeat of the Parker nomination to the opposition of labour and assigned the NAACP a mere supporting role. Kenneth W. Goings challenges this interpretation arguing that, on the contrary, it was the NAACP that took the lead and was ultimately responsible for the most embarrassing setback Hoover suffered in relation to appointments.⁵² What is absolutely certain is that the defeat of the Parker nomination represented the NAACP's greatest victory to date, determined its tactics for the next decade and beyond, and legitimised African American disaffection from the GOP. It could be argued that the damage caused by the Parker nomination not only fractured whatever African American support for Hoover remained but also helped to ease the transfer of African American allegiance from the Republicans to the Democrats. It is necessary, therefore, to look at the Parker controversy in some detail.

⁵¹ *Chicago Tribune*, 21 June 1929, HH-CC, "De Priest Incident," box 107. Also cited in Lisio, p140.

⁵² Kenneth Goings, *"The NAACP Comes of Age: The Defeat of Judge John J. Parker"*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990.

The NAACP's opposition to the Parker nomination followed the well worn path of lobbying, but also spawned a variety of new tactics, notably the targeting of specific elected representatives who had supported the nomination. At this time, litigation was perhaps the most significant and effective tactic used by the NAACP. Hence, any changes to the Supreme Court were extremely important. The Parker case can, therefore, be seen as the first major engagement in the African American rebellion against the Republican party.

Parker was the Republican candidate in the gubernatorial election in North Carolina in 1920 and did relatively well, polling some 230,000 votes, some 63,000 more than any previous Republican candidate. His nomination to the Supreme Court in 1930 was, therefore, vitally important to Republican plans to reform the party in the South. Hoover was indebted to North Carolina for his victory in 1928, and had considered appointing Parker as Attorney General in early 1929, because Parker was a member of the elite that Hoover wanted to

attract to the party. It should perhaps be added that Parker was both well qualified and generally highly rated by many within the judiciary.⁵³

Many people, in both the Democratic party and the NAACP, felt that Parker's nomination was another phase in Hoover's southern strategy, as he would replace a fellow southerner on the court. The *New Republic* wondered whether Hoover was choosing a "great judge or a conspicuous southerner."⁵⁴

Walter White, who had just succeeded James Weldon Johnson as the NAACP's executive secretary, checked Parker's background and discovered comments he had made about African Americans in the 1920 North Carolina gubernatorial election. Among other things, Parker had declared that in the South "we recognise the fact that he [the African American] has not yet reached the stage in his development when he can share the burdens and responsibilities of government."⁵⁵

⁵³ It must be noted, however, that faith in Parker's ability was by no means universal. Associate Judge Harlan Fiske Stone believed that he lacked the experience and the intellect to be Attorney General.

⁵⁴ "Mr. Justice Parker," *New Republic*, LXII, 2 April 1930, p177-78, cited in Watson, "The Defeat of Judge Parker: A Study in Pressure Groups and Politics," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 50, September 1963, p216.

⁵⁵ Goings, p23. *Charlotte Observer*, 18 April 1920. For some of Parker's comments about African Americans see: Sherman, p240-241. Similar comments appeared in the *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 April 1920, cited in Watson, *MVHR*, 50, p218. See also the *Charlotte Observer*, 18 April 1920, cited in Goings, p23.

The NAACP decided to telegram Parker to see if he still held these beliefs. He did not reply and on 28 March 1930 the organisation's campaign to thwart his nomination began. Parker's comments and Hoover's decision to nominate him to the Supreme Court outraged African Americans. The *Boston Chronicle* commented that "Mr Hoover seems to have gone far afield to add insult to injury to the Negro, [the] most loyal supporter of his party."⁵⁶ The *Chicago Defender* was equally scathing: "If ever there was evidence for a president's disregard for opinion and welfare of a great number of his constituents, it is being shown in this particular case."⁵⁷

Organised labour also opposed Parker because he had ruled favourably in a case involving "Yellow Dog" contracts.⁵⁸ White appeared before the Senate Judiciary committee on 25 April at the same time as William Green of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). White argued that Parker lacked the impartiality necessary for a Supreme Court justice, but it was the argument of the AFL on the issue of labour contracts that finally persuaded three members of

⁵⁶ *Boston Chronicle*, no date, taken from the *Congressional Record*, 71st Congress, 2d Session, Volume 72, cited in Tatum, *Changed Political Thought of the Negro*, p121-122.

⁵⁷ *Chicago Defender*, 5 May 1930, cited in Tatum, p122.

⁵⁸ A worker signing a "Yellow Dog contract" was forbidden from joining a union.

the subcommittee to vote against Parker.⁵⁹ White felt that Green was keen to avoid any suggestion that labour was working in conjunction with the NAACP to prevent the nomination.⁶⁰ White, questioned by William Borah, admitted: “frankly, we had never heard of him until he was nominated.”⁶¹

Many Republicans were nervous. Robert R. Moton the head of the Tuskegee Institute warned Hoover: “I know of nothing that would so effectively turn the tide of Negro support against the president and the party... as to deliberately place on the Supreme Court a man who has openly declared his contempt for them.”⁶² Hoover stubbornly refused to take advice, believing that Parker was being victimised. Even Senate Majority Leader James E. Watson and Vice President Charles Curtis, neither noted for their sympathy toward African Americans, urged Hoover to either withdraw the nomination or get a retraction from Parker on his racial views, but Hoover refused.⁶³

⁵⁹ It is worth noting that the AFL had a membership of 3,500,000 while the NAACP had 100,000 members. Figure for NAACP membership from *Crisis*, 37, May 1930, p161. African American and labour votes were important in Kentucky, Illinois, West Virginia, New Jersey, Kansas, Ohio, New York, Missouri, and Indiana.

⁶⁰ Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White*, Brown Thrasher Books, University of Georgia, Athens and London, 1948, p106.

⁶¹ Goings, p27. Ironically, one of the senators who voted against the Parker nomination was William Borah from Idaho. His bid for the presidency in 1936 would meet with a similar fate to Parker’s nomination to the Supreme Court.

⁶² Moton to Walter Newton (Hoover’s political secretary), 18 April 1930, cited in Lisio, *Blacks and Lily-Whites*, p217.

⁶³ Watson, *MVHR*, 50, p222.

Hoover sought the support of Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, where African American and labour votes were important. The NAACP, however, had kept Vandenberg well briefed and, as a result, he refused to support the nomination stating that

The authority of the Supreme Court depends upon the measure of public confidence it enjoys. Therefore if 18,000,000 colored citizens of the United States have a basis for feeling that Judge Parker is prejudiced against their political rights, it is impossible to ask them that they still give him their confidence in respect to these constitutional questions.⁶⁴

Writing to a constituent, Vandenberg described himself as a “literal constitutionalist” and talked of “our responsibility in a democracy where majorities must be scrupulous in respecting the rights of minorities. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution are the heart of the Constitution as far as the colored citizen is concerned.”⁶⁵ Vandenberg was

⁶⁴ Vandenberg to R.K. Smathers, 28 April 1930, cited in *ibid.*, p232. There were, in fact, only around 13,000,000 African Americans in the United States.

⁶⁵ Vandenberg did not oppose Hoover lightly. He met with the president shortly after the Parker defeat and Hoover made it clear that he bore the senator no malice: “he wanted me to know that my vote meant absolutely nothing in respect to our friendship and that we should proceed together as closely as ever.... I repeat that the hardest job of my life was voting against his nominee.” David C. Tompkins, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg: The Evolution of a Modern Republican, 1884-1945, Michigan State University Press, 1970, p56.

heavily criticised in his home state for his stance and his cause was not helped by his refusal to explain publicly his decision.

The NAACP had African Americans bombard their congressmen with telegrams and letters condemning the nomination of Parker, and many were surprised by their militancy. NAACP members, for instance, sent hundreds of telegrams to the two senators in Illinois as well as Vandenberg's colleague in Michigan and all four, who were Republicans, voted against the nomination. Lisio notes, however, that there was scepticism about those Republicans who opposed the nomination on the basis of African American hostility.

The Senate Judiciary Committee rejected the nomination on 21 April 1930, while on 7 May 1930 the nomination of Parker to the Supreme Court was rejected in the Senate by 41 votes to 39.⁶⁶ The debate in the Senate had been more about labour than race but Senator Robert Wagner of New York linked the two issues:

Mr President, I see a deep and fundamental consistency between Judge

Parker's views on labor relations and his reported attitude towards the

⁶⁶ In the Senate Simeon Fess questioned the role of the NAACP and said that Du Bois was a "Bolshevist", William Pickens of the NAACP was a communist and Felix Frankfurter was a

colored people of the United States. He is obviously incapable of viewing with sympathy the aspirations of those who are aiming for a higher and better place in the world.⁶⁷

The Associated Negro Press was quick to give the NAACP credit for the victory over Parker.⁶⁸ Hoover concurred, further widening the gulf between himself and African Americans. Kenneth Goings, confirming the central role of the NAACP in the defeat of Parker, notes that from the middle of April until the end of the campaign the race issue increasingly dominated Parker's correspondence.

The defeat of the Parker nomination represented the NAACP's greatest victory to date and also hampered the Republican party's plans for the South. The "greatest accomplishment" for the NAACP, according to Goings, was the financial support and publicity the campaign generated. In addition, the campaign helped to boost its membership as well as developing the lobbying and political skills of its members. Credit for this goes above all to Walter

defender of radical revolutionaries. Goings, p46. For more of Fess's comments on Parker's opponents see Watson, *MVHR*, 50, p227

⁶⁷ *The Afro-American*, 30 May 1930. Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers (henceforth HH), Secretary's File, box 430. See also *Congressional Record*, 71st Congress, 2nd session, p8033-37, cited in Goings, p42.

⁶⁸ The Associated Negro Press, "Parker Fight Shows Up Some Negro Friends," press release, 7 May 1930, cited in Goings, p29.

White, but he was assisted ably by Daisy Lampkin, William Pickens and Robert Bagnall.

The defeat of Parker became the NAACP's "rallying cry throughout the 1930s."⁶⁹ Goings believes that the campaign had far-reaching repercussions: "the Parker fight marked the height of the black insurgency movement against the Republicans, and black Americans began to see the Democrats as offering a viable alternative to the lily-white party of Hoover."⁷⁰ A combination of factors contributed to the defeat of the nomination and not everyone opposed it for the same reasons. For example, there was a fear among southern Democrats that Parker's nomination would help to re-establish the GOP in the region. This is particularly pertinent as it shows that there were those Democrats who feared that the Republicans, following Hoover's successful southern campaign of 1928, could successfully create a lily-white two party system in the region. Thus

⁶⁹ Goings, p34.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p35. A number of other factors were important to this "insurgency," according to Goings, including the impact of the Great Migrations, the influence of radicals such as Garvey and trade unionist A. Philip Randolph, lynchings, southern lily-white Republicans, the legal activities of the NAACP and the increasingly vocal African American press. Ibid., p38.

it is perhaps not surprising that many southerners voted against the nomination.⁷¹

Southern Democrats were clearly in a quandary: if they defeated Parker and ended the Republican party's southern reform they would also be affronting southern race relations. Alternatively, if Parker was nominated, it would strengthen the Republican party in the South and the Democrats could lose their monopoly on the lily-white vote. The outcome of the nomination depended on southern Democrats and with half of them voting against it they demonstrated that the Republicans could not reward southerners with office. Liberal northern and border state Republican senators voted against Parker not only due to issues of labour and race but also because they opposed a lily-white party in the South. Ultimately, 29 Republicans voted for the nomination and 17 against while 10 Democrats were for and 23 against. To each party the nomination of Parker seemed to epitomise Hoover's southern policy and factions within each party had cause to oppose it. In any event, Walter White was correct when he

⁷¹ A similar explanation can be offered for the failure of a Mississippi court to convict Perry Howard of corruption. It seems unlikely that an all white jury would have found him innocent under any other circumstances.

declared that “Negroes have delivered an effective blow against the Republican party’s lily-white policy,”⁷²

Hoover later admitted that the Parker defeat had damaged the prestige of his presidency and he put the blame for this defeat squarely at the door of African Americans in general and the NAACP in particular: “I don’t know what the country is coming to if things are to be run by demagogues and Negro politicians.”⁷³ Hoover refused to deny that he had made these remarks and this seemed to confirm to African Americans that he wanted them out of the Republican party.⁷⁴

Despite the importance of the Parker fight, it should be remembered that the campaign only lasted six weeks. The effect that it had upon the NAACP, however, was profound in that it had been the first time that the organisation had prevented a major candidate from achieving office. A decision was taken by the NAACP board in July to campaign against Parker’s supporters in the Senate. Du

⁷² *NYT*, 8 May 1930, cited in Sherman, *McKinley to Hoover*, p244-245.

⁷³ This comment was attributed to Hoover by Washington businessman and banker R.M. Hardy. Meeting with the president in May 1930, Hardy reported that he “could talk of nothing but the Parker case, and the part Negroes had played in having him defeated.” *Chicago Defender*, 31 May 1930. HH, Secretary’s File, box 430. Also cited in Lisio, p232.

⁷⁴ It was in the aftermath of the Parker fight that Walter White christened Hoover “the man in the Lily White House.” *Crisis*, 37, July 1930, p244.

Bois printed the names of pro-Parker senators in the *Crisis* and urged his readers to “paste this [list] in your hat and keep it there until November 1934.”⁷⁵

The campaign against those senators who had supported Parker concentrated on those with large African American constituencies such as Republicans Allen of Kansas and McCulloch of Ohio. In addition, by informing African American voters about the nature of the candidates the NAACP could boost its membership. Kelly Miller urged caution, arguing that African Americans were too weak to play what he called the “vindictive game in politics.”⁷⁶ There was no doubt, however, that the tactic did have some success. Allen was duly defeated and his vanquisher, George McGill, stated that he would not have succeeded without the efforts of the NAACP to help him win the African American vote.⁷⁷ Where McCulloch was concerned, White claimed that the NAACP was “taking no position with regard to the Republican party. It has

⁷⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois “The Defeat of Judge Parker,” *Crisis*, 37, July 1930, p225-227 and p248. This quotation is also cited in Goings, p54-55. The selection of editorials quoted by Du Bois in this article give some credence to Goings’ view that it was the NAACP rather than labour which was the prime mover in having the nomination rejected.

⁷⁶ Kelly Miller to Walter White, 13 November 1930, cited in White, *A Man Called White*, p111. It should also be noted that the NAACP actively supported those it considered to be allies, including Arthur Capper (Republican, Kansas) George Norris and J.M. Robison (Democratic, Kentucky). See also: William Pickens, “Aftermath of Anti-Parker Fight,” ANP press release, 14 May 1930, cited in Goings, p57. Shortridge, from California, was targeted and defeated even though he had been a sponsor of the Dyer anti-lynching bill in the 1920s.

made it clear it is not espousing the candidacy of Mr Bulkley [of the Democratic party]" but the Association was increasingly seen to be helping the Democrat.⁷⁸

Although McCulloch was defeated and the African American vote shifted to the Democrats, there were other factors involved, notably the Depression, McCulloch's "dryness" and the opposition of labour. When White went to Indiana to oppose James Watson, shortly after two lynchings in the state, he linked the activities of the Klan to the Republican party.⁷⁹

Attacks on pro-Parker Republicans not only emphasised how vital the ballot was but they also made it more acceptable for African Americans to vote for the Democrats. Watson, for instance, was duly defeated in 1932, albeit as part of the Democratic landslide, and it should also be noted that some of Indiana's NAACP branches actively supported the senator. Sherman argues that African Americans, alienated by Hoover over the Parker nomination, "gained a

⁷⁷ William Pickens was sent to Kansas to assist the campaign against Allen. For an account of this campaign see William Pickens, "The Negro Voter and Allen," *Crisis*, 37, October 1930, p338 and p356.

⁷⁸ Walter White, "The Test in Ohio," *Crisis*, 37, November 1930, p373-374. In this article on the campaign against McCulloch, White contends, as he would continue to do throughout the 1930s, that the African American voter was "coming of age." Bulkley was glad of the assistance and pledged to support a federal anti-lynching bill, equal public school funding and the enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments. He even attended an NAACP sponsored anti-McCulloch rally.

⁷⁹ "Lynch Law: America's Grave Problem..." press release, 30 October 1930, NAACP branch file G-60, cited in Goings, p70. White declared that "the infamous Klan has honeycombed political parties and especially the Republican party in Indiana."

new sense of the meaning of organised political power.”⁸⁰ By 1934 the campaign against Parker and his supporters was over. In December of that year the *Crisis* commented that “all the senators who voted for Parker who could be reached by the colored voter have been defeated,” but noted that African American voters had not acted alone in this endeavour.⁸¹

The Parker episode cemented the NAACP’s position as the pre-eminent African American organisation in the United States. It also served to increase the awareness of both whites and African Americans of the potential importance of the African American vote. African Americans were politicised, therefore, before the advent of the New Deal. African Americans were, Goings argues, “becoming active players, not just potential voters waiting to be seduced into the New Deal coalition.”⁸² This was particularly evident in those states with large African American populations. Ultimately, “the fight against the nomination of Judge Parker was a lesson in coalition politics that black and white people would draw upon for years to come.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Sherman, p246.

⁸¹ “Finish of the Parker Fight,” *Crisis*, 40, December 1934, p364. Also cited in Goings, p73.

⁸² Goings, p38.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p53.

Hoover's relationship with the NAACP had never been good, and the Parker nomination ensured that there would be no reconciliation. Hoover disliked "politicians" and into this category he placed the NAACP. He refused to see the NAACP as a non-partisan pressure group and even suggested that the Democrats funded it. Lisio argues that "this serious blind spot cut him off from a basically non-partisan organisation that generally used non-political legal methods of which Hoover would have approved."⁸⁴ Hoover was not helped in this matter by the fact that his secretaries often prevented the NAACP from contacting him.⁸⁵ The NAACP became increasingly vitriolic in its attacks on the administration, but in doing so effectively ended what little chance there was of advancement under Hoover.

vi. "The party label means nothing. The individual candidate is everything."

⁸⁴ Lisio, *Blacks and Lily-Whites*, p189.

⁸⁵ Requests for a message from the Republicans to the NAACP conferences in 1929 and 1930 appear to have been turned down. On 24 May 1929 James Weldon Johnson wrote to Hoover asking for such a message. French Strother (a Hoover aide), asked for his opinion, enclosed a hand-written note stating "no answer." The same request was made on 19 June and received the same internal response. When Johnson inquired again in 1930 his letter again had "NO" hand-written upon it. It is unclear whether a formal rejection was sent or whether the request was simply ignored. HH, Secretary's File, box 755.

Concurrent with the Parker episode was the controversy surrounding the Gold Star Mothers. The mothers of American soldiers killed in the Great War were given the opportunity to visit the graves of their sons in Europe, but the mothers of white soldiers would travel on navy ships while those of African American soldiers would have to go on commercial liners. Hoover, with typical disregard for the feelings of African Americans, not only refused to become involved but also refused to deny that he had ordered segregated transport and in doing so sustained a controversy which would cloud the rest of his administration. Only 58 of 450 African Americans who had asked to go on the trip actually did so; other trips followed but not many African Americans went. The *Nation* commented: "surely there was no time in the history of our country when segregation was less necessary and more cruel."⁸⁶ Sherman agrees: "Hoover turned a well meaning gesture into a painful insult."⁸⁷

In the 1930 mid-term elections Du Bois urged the abandonment of loyalty to party labels: "we can afford to vote for northern liberal Democrats in spite of the South... the Republicans are supporting the rotten boroughs of the South

⁸⁶ *Nation* 131, July 1930. Cited in Sherman, McKinley to Hoover, p248.

just as steadfastly as the Democrats. The party label, then, means nothing. The individual candidate is everything.”⁸⁸ Moton suggested the creation of a “Black Cabinet,” this recommendation, however, became lost amid the election campaign.⁸⁹ According to Lisio, the Republicans did nothing to hold the African American vote in 1930; Hoover ignored African American leaders and refused to make any direct appeal to African American voters. One consequence was that the Democrats managed to win 25% of the African American vote in Harlem.⁹⁰ The *Pittsburgh Courier* was scathing: “it looked like the President tried to do everything in his power to humiliate faithful Negro Republicans.”⁹¹ Fourteen of the 24 Republicans elected to Congress from the South in 1928 were defeated in 1930. The African American press rejoiced in the defeat of a number of Republicans.⁹²

⁸⁷ Sherman, p248.

⁸⁸ *Crisis*, 37, November 1930, p389.

⁸⁹ In October 1930 Dr T.J Woofter, Jr.’s report on “The Economic Status of the Negro” appeared. Shortened from its original length of 38 pages to a mere three pages, its recommendations were ignored by Hoover. Dr T.J Woofter, Jr., “The Economic Status of the Negro,” HH-CC, box 106.

⁹⁰ Weiss believes that it is important to remember the actual voting strength of African Americans when considering the attention given to them. In 1930 they constituted 10% of the total population of the United States but two thirds of them lived in the South or Washington D.C. The reality was, therefore, African Americans who could actually voted only accounted for about 3% of the electorate, and for this reason, she believes it was “not realistic to expect more attention.” Weiss, *Farewell*, p23.

⁹¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 November 1930. “Republican Party General Political Survey, April 1931,” part 2, section 5, page 49. HH, Subject File, box 273A.

⁹² For further editorial comment from the African American press, see *ibid.*, p48-54.

When the Republicans assessed their performance in 1930 they managed to display some optimism. Yet what is perhaps most significant about the “Republican Party General Political Survey” of April 1931 is that it seemed to recognise the futility of attempting to break the Solid South. The report contended that the Democrats were not popular in the country at large but it also made the rather obvious observation that they were very deeply entrenched in the South.⁹³ The report maintained, however, that while “the country prefers a Republican in the Presidential office” people were not satisfied with the current situation.⁹⁴ If this was not food for thought enough for Hoover, the report’s assessment of the African American vote would have made depressing reading. It noted that “one of the most notable features of the 1930 congressional elections in the states north of the Potomac and the Ohio was the support given to Democratic nominees by the black vote.”⁹⁵ This turn of events saw 7,000 African Americans register as Democrats in Baltimore, while two judges and one assemblyman were elected in New York on the Democratic ticket.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ The *New York News* commented: “in the rock-ribbed Harlem district they voted nearly two to one Democratic.” *New York News*, 6 November 1930. *ibid.* While the election of African

After the 1930 elections there was at least a partial realisation by Hoover of the gravity of the situation relating to African Americans. This was coupled with an acknowledgement that many southern white Republicans were interested in patronage rather than reform. Had Hoover attempted to consolidate the African American vote in the North it would have made little difference to the Republican party in the South, and might have checked the desertion of the GOP by northern African Americans.

In May 1931 White asked Hoover to supply a message of greeting to the NAACP's annual convention, providing the president with the possibility of repairing relations not only with the NAACP itself but also with the greater African American community. Hoover disliked the NAACP and offered only a curt message to which White responded with a vigorous attack on the president. In fact, according to Lizio, White "sought to incite a black political crusade against the Republican party."⁹⁷ White portrayed Hoover as anti-black and

Americans on the Democratic ticket in New York is significant, it is also worth noting that the electoral boundaries in Harlem were gerrymandered to ensure that the district would have African American representation. Francis Rivers, "Negro Judges for Harlem," *Crisis*, 37, November 1930, p377 and p393. It was a Republican bill, drafted by Francis Rivers, which redrew the electoral boundaries in Harlem. From 1929 to 1974 only one African American Republican was elected from Harlem. Edwin R. Lewinson, Black Politics in New York City, Twayne Publishers, Inc., New York, 1974, p67.

⁹⁷ Lizio, Blacks and Lily-Whites, p249.

outlined numerous grievances that the community held against the president. Hoover failed to recognise just how unpopular he was becoming in the African American community, and the problem was exacerbated by the controversy surrounding the 10th Cavalry.

The 10th Cavalry was the country's most famous African American regiment and represented the link between African American military service and citizenship since the Civil War. It was, therefore, of huge symbolic importance to African Americans but in August 1931, as part of military reforms, General Douglas MacArthur decided to reduce the size of the regiment. There was an immediate outcry, and Hoover was warned that this could cost him African American votes in northern and border states if he did not act to save the regiment. Hoover did nothing and the regiment suffered the ignominy of being effectively disarmed and effectively reduced to non-combat status.⁹⁸

In April 1932 *Opportunity*, the journal of the National Urban League, reported that over half of African Americans intended to vote for the

⁹⁸ For more detail on the disbandment of the 10th Cavalry see HH-CC, box 106. This contains the original order changing the status of the regiment as well as correspondence involving Walter White, Douglas MacArthur, Emmett Scott (of the Republican National Committee's Colored Division), Secretary of War Patrick Hurley and Acting Secretary of War F.H. Payne, as well as NAACP press releases.

Democrats. By May the proportion had grown.⁹⁹ African American discontent with Hoover and the Republicans was becoming increasingly vocal. In September, erstwhile Republican and owner/editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Robert L. Vann announced his break from the Republican party. Vann, who had been continually passed over for patronage positions, made a speech entitled “The Patriot and the Partisan” in which he famously predicted the end of African American support for the Republican party. “I see millions of Negroes,” he declared, “turning their pictures of Abraham Lincoln to the wall. This year I see Negroes voting a Democratic ticket.”¹⁰⁰

Ironically, given subsequent events, the Democrats’ choice of candidate actually helped the Republicans. Franklin Roosevelt, the governor of New York, was cultivating support among southern states to the point where it sometimes appeared that the Klan had helped him. Many African Americans viewed Roosevelt, who had spent considerable time in Georgia receiving treatment for

⁹⁹ *Opportunity*, 10, April 1932, p115. Also cited in Garcia, “Hoover’s Southern Strategy,” p144.

¹⁰⁰ Robert L. Vann, “The Patriot and the Partisan,” speech made in Cleveland on 11 September 1932, cited in Weiss, *Farewell*, p15 and also Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974, p194. Buni believes that Vann’s break with the Republicans led to the creation of Democratic organisations in areas in Pennsylvania’s African American districts. Pennsylvania was, arguably, the first northern state to see the transfer of African American allegiance to the Democrats. Having joined the Democrats, Vann was appointed special assistant to Attorney General Homer Cummings but he was soon disillusioned by his new role. See Buni, p198-211.

polio, with suspicion.¹⁰¹ White, for example, felt that his nomination would give the African American vote to Hoover. The nomination of Roosevelt, together with the selection of John Nance Garner, a Texan, as his running mate and the lack of any mention of African Americans in the Democratic platform meant that there was little alternative to Hoover.¹⁰² African American Republicans emphasised the possibility that southerners would dominate a Roosevelt administration or that Garner could become president.¹⁰³

Opportunity leaned towards FDR: “there appears to be convincing evidence that it [the African American vote] has partially broken away from its traditional moorings.”¹⁰⁴ The *Crisis* commented on the lack of merit of either candidate: “Mr Roosevelt’s record on the Negro problem is clear. He hasn’t any, [while] Mr Hoover’s record on the Negro problem is not clear and in that respect it resembles his record on everything else.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ For some information on Roosevelt’s perceived racial attitudes at this time, see Weiss, p18-19.

¹⁰² The *Chicago Defender* commented in December 1931 that despite Hoover’s record “four more years of [Hoover] as a Republican will be better than a possible eight years of any Democrat.” *Chicago Defender*, 19 December 1931, cited in Weiss, p15.

¹⁰³ In an interview with the ANP, Garner was generally evasive about issues pertaining to African Americans. He did not approve of lynching and said that he would, if elected, seek to enable African Americans in the South to vote but was reluctant to answer questions about the 14th and 15th Amendments. *Plaindealer*, 4 November 1932, p2. See also Weiss, p24-25.

¹⁰⁴ *Opportunity*, 10, November 1932, p336.

¹⁰⁵ “As The Crow Flies,” *Crisis*, 39, August 1932, p247.

Predictions that the Democrats would make gains among African Americans in Harlem, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Detroit, Manhattan and Kansas City proved to be accurate. This perhaps illustrated a more general shift to the Democrats in urban areas but it should be noted that the Republicans actually increased their support in the African American communities of Chicago, Cleveland, Knoxville, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Baltimore.¹⁰⁶

Roosevelt did not inspire much confidence among African Americans and, as a result, most continued to vote Republican. Despite Democratic gains, it has been argued that defections were greater among the African American leadership than they were among the masses.

Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* argued in *Opportunity* that African Americans had not become politically independent but had turned against the Republicans, largely because of the Depression. He continued: "to my mind, it was a splendid revolt. The Negro, in brief, voted as a citizen on Hoover and Roosevelt, forgetting Lincoln and Jefferson Davis." He felt that any switch of the African American vote to the Democrats would be temporary: "he will vote

¹⁰⁶ For percentages see Weiss, p30-31

Republican again when that party shows the least reason to merit it.” Krock concluded, however, that African Americans were moving toward political independence.¹⁰⁷ The shift of other ethnic voters to the Democrats was much more pronounced than the minimal shift of the African Americans.¹⁰⁸ But were they voting for Roosevelt or against Hoover? If the latter were true, then it was merely a temporary protest vote. In the South the Republicans achieved their lowest vote since the Civil War, dropping from 1.5 million in 1928 to less than half a million in 1932. Therefore, the Republicans had begun to alienate African Americans without managing to crack the “Solid South”.

Throughout the so-called “Republican Ascendancy,” from 1920 to 1932 the GOP’s record was bad on appointments, anti-lynching and the Klan because, according to Sherman, “there was no immediate political necessity for most Republicans to listen to the Negroes’ complaints.”¹⁰⁹ He agrees that African Americans needed to be politically independent: “Negroes had to abandon their automatic allegiance to the Republican party if politicians were to cease taking

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Krock, “Did the Negro Revolt?” *Opportunity*, 10, November 1932, p19 and 28.

¹⁰⁸ See figures provided by Weiss, p33.

¹⁰⁹ Sherman, McKinley to Hoover, p257.

their votes for granted.”¹¹⁰ He also notes that “it would have been politically wise, as well as consistent with the heritage of their party for Republicans to have cultivated these northern urban black votes.”¹¹¹ That they did not do so suggested that there was a loss of idealism within the party combined with “a lack of political good sense as too many Republicans clung to an outmoded concept of America.”¹¹² The Republicans refused to adapt to America’s increasingly urban, multi-ethnic society, whereas the Democrats embraced it.

Hoover’s record was worse than that of many of his predecessors and a number of factors combined to make his presidency the catalyst for the desertion of the GOP by African Americans. The 1920s saw a rise in the expectations of African Americans and, combined with their growing numbers in the North, meant that their votes became more important with every election. Often exaggerated by African American leaders, this new dynamic in American politics was at least recognised by liberal northern Democrats. As a consequence, by the late 1920s this wing of the party was actively courting the African American vote. This was, of course, concurrent with Hoover’s southern

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

policy, which symbolised the GOP's apparent abandonment of African Americans.

The historic relationship between the Republican party and African Americans was, therefore, being reassessed by both. As Sherman observes, "by the early 1930s the allegiance of most blacks to the Republican party was an anachronism that was more a result of legend and habit than a response to constructive programmes designed to protect and advance their special interests."¹¹³ Moreover, African Americans were hit hardest and helped least when the Great Depression struck. The apparent indifference of Hoover to the economic plight of African Americans further imperilled the relationship between descendants of the emancipated and the party of their emancipator.

The view that the African American elite was disillusioned with the GOP is challenged by a survey in *Opportunity* in April 1932, which suggests that disaffection with the Republican party among African Americans was actually much less pronounced within the higher social strata. Physicians, teachers and clergy were overwhelmingly pro-Republican as were a majority of social

¹¹¹ Ibid.

workers and lawyers, whereas the vast majority of students, labourers, domestics and civil servants were pro-Democrat. This suggests that African Americans were beginning to vote along conventional class lines. Admittedly, only 2,680 people participated in the poll, and it was carried out more than six months prior to the election (and before Roosevelt had even been nominated), but it nonetheless remains an indicator of African American restlessness.¹¹⁴ Clearly, there were those, usually from the older generation, who would forever be Republicans, but younger African Americans were much more pragmatic in their outlook and refused to be defined merely by party labels.

Lisio challenges the accepted wisdom on the Hoover presidency and African Americans. While he never entirely convinces, it remains important that he has at least attempted to provide a more balanced view of the subject. What emerges is that Hoover had no consistent approach to the plight of African Americans and little understanding of their problems. Lisio has to admit that Hoover “was no champion of black rights; he neither issued executive orders

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p252.

¹¹⁴ “Opportunity Presidential Candidates Poll,” *Opportunity*, 10, April 1932, p115. This poll also showed that the Democrats were supported by a majority of African Americans (1,344 to 1,186) and that Roosevelt was the preferred choice for the Democratic nomination.

nor sponsored legislation to challenge racial bigotry.”¹¹⁵ The fact was that Hoover was “woefully unprepared, and, in time, would prove himself inept in the politics of democratic leadership.”¹¹⁶ A prime example of this is Hoover’s antagonistic attitude towards the NAACP. Viewing it as a “political” organisation, which was possibly a tool of the Democrats, he demonstrated a complete absence of any understanding of the organisation’s purpose and, by robbing himself of a very important potential ally, he actually created his most effective opposition among African Americans.

In 1932, it appears that despite the indignities inflicted upon them by the Hoover administration, African Americans were not yet ready to trust the Democrats and, lacking real alternatives, voted Republican as usual. When the Republicans comprehensively lost the African American vote in 1936 this loss was very firmly rooted in the events of the Hoover presidency and the “Republican Ascendancy” from 1920 to 1932 as a whole. In 1936, reflecting on the Hoover presidency with the nomination of Parker to the Supreme Court, southern reform, the Gold Star Mothers, the 10th Cavalry and the Depression,

¹¹⁵ Lisio, Blacks and Lily-Whites, p275.

African Americans must have wondered how the Democrats could possibly have been any worse.

There can be no doubt that in the 1920s most African Americans still saw the Republican party as their spiritual home, but in 1928 there were discordant voices within the African American community urging a change; by 1930 the Democrats began to breach Republican citadels in the North. In 1932 the Democratic ticket offered little comfort to most African Americans and support for Hoover was fairly solid. By 1934, however, the New Deal had begun to appreciably improve the lives of African Americans and for the first time a majority of them voted for the Democratic party.

The shift away from the Republican party by some African Americans in 1928, eight years before the major shift to the Democrats would occur, confirms is that it was not the New Deal alone which caused African Americans to change their allegiance. Rather, it was a combination of factors, many of which preceded both the Depression and the New Deal, and this suggests that events during the New Deal actually continued a process that had already begun. The

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p276.

nature of the two parties, at least in the North, meant that there was always a possibility that the African American vote would defect to the Democrats. This process was mirrored in other voting groups and illustrated the serious weaknesses within the Republican electoral coalition. These weaknesses would be magnified by the events of the 1930s and one consequence of this, among many, was that the Republican party would lose the votes of African Americans.

CHAPTER TWO. Abraham Lincoln is not a candidate.

Some excellent work has been done on the Republican party and African Americans from 1920 to 1932: Lisio, Sherman, Goings, Garcia and Lichtmann, as noted, all stand out. However, the student of the GOP and race relations in the 1930s and 1940s feeds on meagre scraps. Weiss, Wolters, Sitkoff, Zangrando, Wynn and more recently Sullivan, have written about the African American and the New Deal and World War Two but the role of the Republican party is largely ignored. Equally, literature on the Republican party in the period, and the definitive work is yet to be written, skims over the abandonment of the party by African Americans. George Mayer, Clyde Weed and a host of biographers allude to the historic relationship between African Americans and the party of the Great Emancipator but this often interesting analysis is lost amid “bigger” and more “important” issues. Historians recognise the centrality of the New Deal to the realignment of the African American vote but there seems to be a subconscious assumption of Republican passivity in the whole process. It is easy to understand the rationale behind this interpretation but that does not

eliminate the necessity of explaining why the Republicans acted in the way that they did.

George Mayer's The Republican Party, 1854-1966 is an examination of the Republican party from its inception in the 1850s to the fallout after Barry Goldwater's failed bid for the presidency in 1964. It is perhaps the strongest study of the Republican party in the twentieth century.¹ Mayer's emphasis is on the personalities who dominated the party as he believes that these people are central to the development of the party's identity and philosophy. This, therefore, is quite a broad study of the party on a national level. He argues that other historians of the GOP (whom he neglects to name) have only concentrated on the party at election time, whereas he wants to give a more detailed account of the internal problems faced by the Republicans throughout their history.

Among the areas of interest discussed by Mayer in the second half of the book are the role of many of the major figures in the GOP and the Republican-

¹ Other works on the Republican party include Charles O. Jones's The Republican Party in American Politics (MacMillan Co. New York, Collier MacMillan Ltd, London, 1965), Milton Viorst's Fall From Grace: The Republican Party and the Puritan Ethic, (New American Library, Inc., 1968), Conrad Joyner's Republican Dilemma (University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona, 1963) and more recently Robert Rutland's The Republicans from Lincoln to Bush (University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 1996). Nevertheless, Mayer's The Republican Party, 1854-1966 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967) remains perhaps the strongest general study of the GOP.

southern Democrat coalition in Congress. Mayer also tackles the internal problems faced by the party in the 1930s, the GOP's new status as a minority party, and the legacy left by these issues in the 1960s. He provides some understanding of the relationship between African Americans and the Republican party during the period, but, although important and perceptive, this is a very minor part of his thesis. He discusses the 1948 presidential campaign, and recognises the importance of the African American vote in the 1950s and 1960s.

Many of the major Republican figures of the period are examined, often quite perceptively. William Borah, for instance, is portrayed as a maverick, divisive influence, who had an inconsistent voting record and little support outside his native north-west. This view of Borah not only helps to explain his failure to win the party's presidential nomination in 1936 but also supports charges made by the NAACP that his opposition to anti-lynching legislation on constitutional grounds was incompatible with the stance he took on other issues.

Mayer charts the Republican party's descent to minority status and its inability to either recognise the realignment which was taking place in American

politics or cope with it. He argues that by the 1940s the Republicans had become the minority party in America and remained so at the time of writing in 1967. Mayer often returns to the fact that the Republican party lacked the issues, throughout the period, which were needed to galvanise the party and create public support. The Republican coalition of Mid-western farmers, business, native born workers and what he describes as “the old middle class” no longer constituted the majority in American life and no longer saw themselves as natural Republicans. “The continued loss of the disaffected groups,” continues Mayer, “coupled with the loss of the Negroes and the decrease in the farm vote, doomed the Republican party to minority status.”²

Mayer, a dedicated Republican, had attempted to find out why the GOP had become the minority party, and tries to understand the crises which had engulfed generations of the party. He recognises that the political landscape was constantly evolving and that the growth and pivotal nature of the African American vote was a factor in this evolution. Writing in 1973, as part of Arthur Schlesinger’s History of United States’ Political Parties, Mayer sees the folly of

² Mayer, p557.

trying to court the southern white vote in 1948, as it would have alienated the vital northern African American vote. Moreover, apathy rather than hostility determined this policy.³ This is a compelling but nevertheless flawed theory. It could have been very simple for the Republicans to reactivate this former policy. Yet this does not take into account the fact that much of the legislation that African Americans wanted enacted during World War Two and its aftermath, an FEPC for instance, was opposed by many Republicans in Congress. While Mayer could be accused of being too idealistic about the potential for the Republican party to regain the votes of African Americans, it is important that at least the issue has been examined and from a Republican perspective.

One of the only works dealing directly with the Republican party during the 1930s is Clyde Weed's The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party During the New Deal. Weed's main focus is on the realignment that took place in American politics in the 1930s and how the Republican party understood and reacted to it. Weed is interested in how the Republicans dealt with the new

³ George Mayer, "The Republican Party, 1932-1952," from Arthur Schlesinger, History of United States Political Parties, 1910-1945, 3, Chelsea House Publishers, New York, in association with R. R. Bowker and Company Ltd, New York and London, 1973, p2285.

political reality with which they were faced in the 1930s.⁴ Weed, dealing with the period from the Republican electoral defeat in 1932 to the establishment of a congressional coalition with southern Democrats in 1938, refers to the Republican electoral coalition without really identifying what groups constituted it.

The strongest elements of Weed's work are his examination of the Republicans on a national level and his detailed appraisal of the internal problems of the party during the period. He recognises that there was a very serious East-West split within the party, a difficulty that would plague the GOP throughout the thirties. He also notes that the Republicans failed to take into account new political realities by not recognising the importance of urban politics in the East. The effect of, and response to, continual failure at the polls is dealt with, as is the congressional strategy of the party. What Weed illustrates is that the Republicans were fundamentally divided, politically weak and, at best, unwilling or, at worst, unable to respond to the New Deal. This suggests that, far from being merely reactionary in their opposition to the New Deal, there was a

⁴ Clyde P. Weed, The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party during the New Deal,

genuine fear among Republicans about the unprecedented nature of Roosevelt's policies. Weed recognises that even as early as 1934 there was a fear that the Republicans could go the same way as the Whigs. Furthermore, the suggestion of the 1936 vice-presidential candidate, Frank Knox that the GOP change its name to the Constitutional party is "ample testimony to the level of Republican discouragement in 1937."⁵

Weed's contention that by the late 1930s the Republican party was largely united and on some sort of electoral recovery is well made, but it would have been more convincing had he extended his analysis to look at the approach to the Second World War. It is apparent that party unity was superficial and extremely short-lived. The splits which had plagued the Republicans until 1938 over domestic policy were mirrored by the issue of isolationism. Had Weed prolonged his study then he could have dealt with the nomination of Wendell Willkie and the divisions that this caused within the party. The nomination of Willkie, which was at least in part because of his internationalist stance on foreign policy, undid much of the work that had led to the renewed hope within

the GOP after 1938. This omission does not necessarily invalidate Weed's arguments, but it would have added to his thoughtful and detailed account of the east-west split within the party. Perhaps Weed feels that the realignment he has identified in American politics was essentially complete by 1938, but he could have argued this point much more convincingly had he provided some long term evidence of Republican harmony. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Republican party had entered a new phase electorally, after 1938; they would go on to lose three more presidential contests. It is obvious, therefore, that the problems of the GOP transcended mere regional differences. A much more comprehensive study would have dealt with the groups of voters who deserted the Republicans and the reasons for this desertion. Aside from business, no other group, including African Americans, is given much attention.

Despite these flaws The Nemesis of Reform still offers much. The discussion of the internal problems of the GOP indicates that the party had other priorities than the maintenance of the votes of African Americans and even other traditional constituencies. It is apparent that the Republicans

⁵ Ibid., p191.

misinterpreted the new political realities with which they were confronted, and this too goes some way to explaining their attitude towards African Americans.

The criticism levelled at the party over its failure to support anti-lynching legislation, for example, has to be viewed in the context of the party's difficulties during the decade.

i. "You can't eat the Constitution."

When examining the Republican party's loss of the African American vote in the 1930s it is necessary to consider the position of the GOP throughout the decade. There is an implicit assumption that not only was the switch of the African American vote virtually inevitable, but that it can be explained relatively simply. The alienation from the GOP experienced during the Hoover presidency is fundamental to any understanding of why African Americans deserted the Republicans in such numbers during the 1930s. The benefits brought by the New Deal, or perhaps the contrast between little or no positive action by successive Republican administrations compared to the help, given to African Americans by Roosevelt, go a long way to explain the shift but do not

tell the full story. It is also important to consider the switch of the African American vote in the context of the problems faced by the Republican party throughout the 1930s.

The 1930s represented the lowest point in the history of the Republican party. The GOP saw itself as the natural party of government, having occupied the White House for 56 of the 72 years since the start of the Civil War, but it was now dealing, for the first time, with the prospect of a prolonged period in opposition. "The election of 1932 was more than the defeat of a political party;" contends E.E. Schattschneider, "it was something very much like the overthrow of the ruling class."⁶ As George Mayer asserts, the Republicans did not know how to deal with defeat: "the unfamiliar frustrations of minority status embittered GOP leaders, clouded their judgement, and goaded them into political errors. Each blunder led to mutual recriminations and a deterioration of morale, which in turn provoked a fresh disaster at the polls."⁷ The party, a diminishing force in Congress and blamed for the Depression, was losing its traditional core constituencies. Fundamentally weak in large parts of the country, it was deeply

split over how to extract itself from the morass in which the scale and manner of the 1932 defeat had left it. The GOP's exile from government was a deeply unhappy one; leaderless, split and groping for issues, the party staggered from one electoral catastrophe to the next. It is necessary, then, to briefly consider the divisions within the party during the early years of the New Deal in order to understand why the GOP neglected African Americans, hitherto its most loyal group of supporters.

The party was divided between progressives or liberals and conservatives, with the former based primarily in the West and the latter in the East. As the mid-term elections of 1934 approached, the party had to decide how it was going to contend with the remarkable popularity of the New Deal. One difficulty was that the figure of Herbert Hoover still loomed large over the party, and he and his supporters wanted to oppose the New Deal in its entirety. Hoover's supporters gained control of the Republican National Committee, which they used to assail the New Deal. In doing so, they implicitly criticised those Republicans in Congress who had backed it and threatened their prospects

⁶ E.E. Schattsneider, The Semi-Sovereign People, New York, Rinehart and Winston, 1960, p86,

for re-election.⁸ The election of 1934 is noteworthy as, traditionally, the party that wins the presidency usually loses support in mid-term elections. The election of 1934, despite some predictions, reversed this trend. This year also marked the point at which a majority of African Americans voted Democratic for the first time. The Democrats strengthened their position by gaining nineteen seats in the House (increasing from 313 to 332) and ten in the Senate (up to 69). The New Deal had won, announced Arthur Krock in the *New York Times*, “the most overwhelming victory in the history of American politics.”⁹ The Republican party was now in full retreat across the nation.¹⁰

Many within the GOP felt that the Democrats had poured relief into strategic areas: “it was more like an auction than an election” moaned one.¹¹ On this basis, Old Guard Republicans did not view the defeat as representing a change in voting patterns, whereas liberal westerners saw it as a repudiation of conservative leadership. The Republicans were faced with a dilemma: did they

cited in Charles Jones, *Republican Party in American Politics*, p9.

⁷ Mayer, p428.

⁸ Mayer notes that many Republicans who were standing re-election were being urged to support the New Deal by their constituents and “secretly cursed the national committee.” *Ibid.*, p432.

⁹ Weed, 45.

¹⁰ The election of 1934 meant that there were now 104 Republicans in the House and 25 in the Senate.

¹¹ Senator David Reed to Herbert Hoover, 24 November 1934. Cited in Weed, p46.

continue to oppose the New Deal and go down the road of conservatism, or embrace aspects of it and become more liberal? William Borah, senator from Idaho, was in no doubt: “unless the Republican party is delivered from its reactionary leadership, and reorganised in accord with its one time liberal principles, it will die like the Whig party of sheer political cowardice.”¹² The problem the Republicans had was that the only alternative they were offering to the New Deal was the Constitution and, as Borah rightly pointed out, “you can’t eat the Constitution.”¹³

Borah, for all his faults, at least recognised the seriousness of the Republican predicament.¹⁴ He repeated his call for liberalism in December 1934 arguing that the party had reached its “lowest ebb,” and this was at least partly due to an unwillingness to “meet the great problems confronting us upon a broad and humanitarian basis.”¹⁵ He maintained, however, that he did not want a third party or the abandonment of the Republican name. The Republicans, he argued, risked losing disenchanted voters permanently if they did not start to

¹² *NYT*, 9 November 1934, p2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 December 1934, p1.

represent the views of ordinary Americans.¹⁶ Charles McNary, the Republican floor leader in the Senate, backed Borah's call arguing that the party "should quit its abstractions and alarms and get down to the level of human sympathy and human understandings." There was, he believed, little to be gained by complaining about "regimentation and bureaucracy" when people did not know where next month's rent was coming from.¹⁷

By the beginning of 1935 the Republican party, according to Weed, "reflected a coalition of groups that had come to feel extraordinarily threatened by the policy changes induced by the re-alignment then underway, and this severely limited the party's ability to undertake electoral readjustments."¹⁸ A recurring fear within the party was that it would suffer the same fate as the Whigs unless something drastic was done. Mid-western elements now felt that they should set the agenda within the party. Easterners had largely controlled the GOP since its inception but it was becoming clear, even to them, that they were an electoral liability. This was, Mayer asserts, "a humiliating situation for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p2.

¹⁸ Weed, p5.

the section which had controlled the party for much of its history.”¹⁹ It was obvious that if the party was to have any chance of victory in 1936 it had to dissociate itself from eastern business interests and look to the West for a candidate.²⁰ With this in mind, western Republicans met in Topeka, Kansas in January. Even at this point Alfred Landon, the governor of Kansas, was being suggested as a potential presidential candidate in 1936.²¹ The meeting urged the GOP to liberalise, both in terms of policies and candidates, and agreed to meet again in May to discuss a declaration of principles. This effort to revive the fortunes of the party was met with approval in both the West and the East, particularly in New York.²²

William Allen White, the noted Republican editor from Kansas, welcomed the move to liberalise the GOP. Articulating, but also exaggerating, the concern that many Republicans had about the New Deal, he feared that unless something was done “America may drift into fascism.” He felt that there was currently a challenge to “our ancient democratic liberties” but it could only

¹⁹ Mayer, p436.

²⁰ Borah believed that reform was crucial to Republican prospects in 1936. “In my opinion,” he declared, “there must be a complete and bona fide reorganisation of the Republican party... if we expect to have any showing in 1936.” *NYT*, 24 April 1935, p2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1935, iv, p6.

be countered by offering the common man more in terms of economic security.

He urged Republicans to turn away from business and return to the “humanity of Lincoln.” “We can save America,” he concluded, “but America cannot be saved by merely denouncing the faults of Roosevelt.”²³

A “Grass Roots” Republican convention began on 10 June in the highly symbolic setting of Springfield, Illinois, the home of Abraham Lincoln. The convention would only discuss principles; candidates and talk of candidates were forbidden.²⁴ The main theme of the convention was to “Save the Constitution,” and there was even talk of changing the name of the party to the Constitutional party.²⁵ Interestingly, some of those advocating the name change did so to appeal to conservative white voters in the South, suggesting that the folly of Hoover’s southern policy had not been entirely recognised. There was a private acceptance by easterners that the next Republican presidential candidate must come from the West and must not be a conservative.²⁶

²² Ibid., 28 March 1935, p17.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 1 June 1935, p14. Despite the desire not to discuss potential candidates, Landon was already being talked of as the most likely nominee.

²⁵ Ibid., 8 June 1935, p1.

²⁶ Ibid., 7 July 1935, v, p7.

Another GOP faction, "Republican Crusaders," announced a platform in Cleveland, Ohio, on 10 July 1935. The Crusaders were from six states, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and West Virginia, and apparently had the blessing of chairman Henry Fletcher, a New Yorker unpopular with many westerners. They declared their allegiance to the principles of the Republican party and the Constitution. They claimed that Roosevelt was a threat to the Constitution and was trying to replace it with a dictatorship. Among other things, they condemned lynching as the "oppression of the colored race" and demanded a federal law that would "conform to the Constitution."²⁷ A number of regional Republican conventions had, therefore, taken place in an attempt to dictate the future course of the party.²⁸ Arthur Krock agreed that the eastern wing of the party would yield to the West over the choice of presidential candidate and the composition of the platform. It was very clear that Hoover's re-nomination, however much he wanted it, would be political suicide by the Republicans.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1935, p11. See also "The Cleveland Conference," *ibid.*, 11 July 1935, p20.

²⁸ For more information on these and other regional conferences, see Weed, p68-72.

²⁹ Arthur Krock, "Republicans still see Landon as strongest for party head," *NYT*, 18 December 1935, p24.

The prospects for African Americans did not look bright regardless of which faction gained control. African Americans were faced with a Republican party which, on the one hand, had a liberal western faction whose liberalism did not extend to supporting anti-lynching legislation and, on the other, a conservative eastern wing which decried the liberalism of the western wing and the New Deal. The most vocal westerner was Borah and his opposition to anti-lynching legislation was well known; in fact, aside from Arthur Capper of Kansas, it was difficult to identify any Republican senator who would be publicly and vocally associated with anti-lynching legislation. The prospects of the Republican party embracing a civil rights agenda, therefore, were not good. In some respects, this should not be surprising. Republicans in the far west had few African American constituents and, therefore, had little to gain by advocating civil rights. Those in the Mid-west (particularly Illinois and Ohio), and in New York and Pennsylvania should have realised that an appeal to African American voters, even on the basis of self-interest, made sense politically. That they did not makes them more culpable than Borah for the loss of the African American vote.

It seemed that the West had won the argument when Landon, the frontrunner for most of the previous year, was nominated on the first ballot in June 1936. Eastern conservatives were by no means vanquished and the foolhardy campaign they and others waged against the New Deal contrasted with the more liberal philosophy that westerners had hoped to promote. The election of 1936 represented the Republicans' nadir and still did not resolve the vexed question of whether the party was going to adopt liberal or conservative principles. Bloodied, the GOP sought an alliance with southern Democrats, an alliance that, according to Mayer, would dominate American politics for at least ten years.

ii. "The average Negro in the street has never heard of the Association."

The early 1930s were also a crucial period in the history and development of the NAACP. From its formation in 1909 as an inter-racial organisation, the NAACP sought to improve the lot of African Americans by trying to help them to secure their constitutional rights. The Association, which was traditionally non-partisan, went through a metamorphosis in the 1930s and 1940s. It became

more active in politics, began to forge links with other protest groups, both black and white, and sought closer ties to the labour movement. The Association also moved away from both its inter-racial and essentially middle class beginnings. By the early 1930s, for instance, the vast majority of the NAACP's senior officers were now African American.

Like the Republicans, the Association was facing the most difficult period of its history. It is important, therefore, to consider briefly the problems the Association faced, both internal and external, during these years. What becomes clear is that the Association often viewed change suspiciously and embraced it reluctantly. Moreover, the Depression had pushed African Americans even further down the economic ladder and adversely affected the Association's membership and funds. Furthermore, the Communists had outflanked the Association over Scottsboro, there was little prospect for anti-lynching legislation and Du Bois was becoming restless. Significantly, in the credit column the Association could list the defeat of the Parker nomination and a number of those senators who had supported him.

Walter White was becoming increasingly prominent in the Association, but this was perhaps a mixed blessing as he clashed with other senior members, notably Du Bois, over future direction.³⁰ The 1930s also saw the Association consider, then largely ignore, an economic interpretation of the plight of African Americans. By mid decade, crucially, White dominated the Association, and would do so until his death in 1955. His preferred programme and tactics, emphasising civil liberties, anti-lynching legislation and the benefits of effective lobbying, would form the basis of the NAACP's appeal.

The NAACP had often been criticised for being a middle class organisation with essentially middle class goals. It was also, according to Raymond Wolters, undemocratic, centralised and dominated by the national office in New York: "the influence of the branches and the mass membership was virtually negligible."³¹ There are those who believe, with some justification, that it was more interested in publicity than actually addressing the basic needs of African Americans. Political scientist Hanes Walton falls into this category,

³⁰ In the acrimonious run up to his resignation as editor of the *Crisis*, Du Bois would comment editorially that "Walter White is white. He has more white companions than he has colored. He goes where he will in New York City and naturally meets no Color Line, for the simple reason that he isn't 'colored.'" "Postscript by W.E.B. Du Bois: Segregation in the North," *Crisis*, 41, April 1934, p115.

arguing that the NAACP treated “the symptoms rather than the causes” of African American problems.³²

Walton perhaps exaggerates, but it is a point of view recognised by those sympathetic to the Association. Kenneth Goings, for example, notes that “critics later said [after Parker] that the publicity efforts of the Association appeared to aggrandise the Association more than [they] highlighted the injustice that was targeted for correction.”³³ The Association’s critics do not always take into consideration the very serious constraints, both financial and racial, under which the NAACP operated, and as Goings contends, “publicity and mass protest have proved to be effective tools” in the civil rights struggle.³⁴ Nonetheless, the NAACP’s tactics are open to criticism.

The Association was faced with a number of problems on the eve of the New Deal. The state of its finances was precarious, while White’s handling of them came in for criticism. There was also discontentment among senior members of the Association and a growing feeling that it needed to broaden its

³¹ Wolters, Negroes and the Great Depression, p316.

³² Walton, Black Political Parties: An Historical and Political Analysis, The Free Press, New York, Collier-MacMillan Limited, London, 1972, p35.

³³ Goings, NAACP Comes of Age, p18.

³⁴ Goings, p18.

programme and its appeal; it had to move away from what Robert Zangrando calls “the high plain of abstract victories.”³⁵ The NAACP needed, therefore, to do more to help disadvantaged members of the African American community.

In the early 1930s Association President Joel Spingarn increasingly recognised that the problems of African Americans would not be solved simply by the attainment of full political and constitutional rights. He, like Du Bois, realised that economics lay at the heart of the problems of African Americans but this view was at odds with most other senior members of the Association.³⁶

Frustrated at its failure to call another Amenia conference, Spingarn tendered his resignation in March 1933.³⁷ Whether this was designed to force the NAACP’s Board of Directors to call a conference or whether he was determined to resign is a matter of some conjecture. An indication as to Spingarn’s state of mind is revealed in a letter to Mary White Ovington in which he complained that the Association was losing its way: “now we only have [legal] cases, no programme, and no hope.”³⁸ There was, he felt, too much emphasis on dramatic

³⁵ Zangrando, *Crusade*, p109.

³⁶ Ross, *Spingarn*, p172.

³⁷ The first Amenia conference was held in August 1916 shortly after the death of Booker T. Washington.

³⁸ Ross, p174. For more detail on Spingarn’s resignation see Ross, p171-178.

cases rather than an overall programme; the Association had lost the crusading zeal of its earlier years.

White enlisted James Weldon Johnson to help him persuade Spingarn to withdraw his resignation. By June, Spingarn had retracted his resignation and shortly thereafter a second Amenia conference was called, although, as Robert Zangrando notes, it “was to have no formal connection with the Association.”³⁹ The conference concluded that for African Americans “the primary problem is economic” and that African American and white labour had to work together to reform the economic system.⁴⁰ The general thrust of the conference was much more radical than anything the NAACP had ever advocated.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the conference did not entirely please anyone. Spingarn was concerned that no plan for implementing its conclusions was proposed; Ovington was relieved

³⁹ Ibid., p178. The conference was suggested by Du Bois, although actually called by Joel Spingarn, as an opportunity for African American groups to find common ground. Around fifty people attended and discussed objectives including education, African Americans in industry, politics and discrimination. No formal programme was offered but the attendees agreed upon a number of resolutions including: a recognition of the need for education and political freedom and for greater understanding among those who had essentially the same goals for African Americans. Amenia was not officially an NAACP endeavour, but the Association was instrumental in organising and running the conference. Du Bois, anxious not to antagonise Booker T. Washington’s supporters, remained in the background. Langston Hughes believes that “a further unity of liberal thought among progressive Negroes and whites” was achieved at Amenia. For more comment see Kellogg, *NAACP*, p87-88 and Hughes, *Fight for Freedom*, p31-32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p181. For more detail on the conference see *ibid.*, p179-185.

⁴¹ Ralph Bunche would later say that “this conference had no great significance” and showed a “discouraging lack of any evidence of any clear thinking and courageous approach to the Negro problem.” *Ibid.*, p184.

that, by and large, it did not challenge the Association's historic programme; while Du Bois was disappointed that the "economic factor" was not given more prominence.⁴² From this point on, Du Bois began openly to advocate voluntary segregation, heralding his eventual break from the Association the following year.⁴³

Amenia may have turned out to be little more than a talking shop, but it illustrated that some within the NAACP were starting to reassess its historic role. The financial pressures resulting from the Depression perhaps ensured that little could be done to alter the NAACP's traditional approach to the problems of African Americans, but at least the Association was aware that its programme was flawed. Nevertheless, as Zangrando notes, a reluctance to change remained among its leaders.⁴⁴ In June 1934, the Board established a Committee of Future Plan and Program chaired by African American economist Abram L. Harris. Harris, one of the younger more militant members of the NAACP, felt that it

⁴² Ibid., p185.

⁴³ For Du Bois's views on segregation see, "Postscript by W.E.B. Du Bois: The NAACP and Race Segregation," *Crisis*, 41, February 1934, p52-53. This was followed by a symposium on segregation in the *Crisis* in March 1934. "Segregation- A Symposium," *ibid.*, March 1934, p79-82. The debate continued in the pages of the *Crisis* until Du Bois's resignation in August 1934. See "Postscript by W.E.B. Du Bois: Segregation in the North; 'No Segregation;' Objects of Segregation." *ibid.*, April 1934, p115-116. Also J.B. Watson, "Du Bois and Segregation," *ibid.*, August 1934, p243-244, Ferdinand Q. Morton, "Segregation," *ibid.*, p244-245 and "Dr. Du Bois Resigns," *ibid.*, p245-246.

was too middle class, too reliant on white liberals and impervious to change. A preliminary report, mirroring much of what was discussed at Amenia, was submitted in September.

The report argued that the NAACP should move into economic activities and seek closer ties between black and white workers. Neither White nor the Board of Directors was very keen on the committee's proposed shift to the left and a frustrated Harris resigned in March 1935. The Association's 26th Annual Conference in St. Louis that summer discussed and endorsed some of the issues raised by the Harris report.⁴⁵ There was certainly more emphasis on economic matters than previously with Spingarn referring to economics in his keynote speech and the adoption of an economic programme. The *Crisis* reported that "the new plan proposes the adoption of economic education by the Association and the perfection of machinery to speed the improvement of the economic plight of Negro workers. It provides, also, for some structural changes in the

⁴⁴ Zangrando, p110.

⁴⁵ Resolutions adopted by the 26th annual conference, "Along the NAACP Battlefront," *Crisis*, 41, August 1935, p248-250. In 1936, the NAACP's annual conference, held in Baltimore, made no mention of an economic programme in its resolutions, concentrating instead on anti-lynching and politics. "Baltimore Conference Resolutions," *Crisis*, September 1936, 41, p277-278.

organisation of the Association... as soon as funds will permit.”⁴⁶ Wolters declares that “the rhetoric of the Association moved to the Left, but the program continued in the traditional civil-libertarian framework.”⁴⁷

Some African Americans tried to respond to the economic crisis by looking to more radical leadership, while others were becoming more active in unions. All this led to a conference on the “economic status of Negroes under the New Deal” at Howard University. This was sponsored jointly by the Social Science Division of Howard and the Joint Committee on National Recovery and would hear submissions from a variety of groups. John P. Davis hoped that the conference would lead to the formation of a “*National Negro Congress*” to articulate the concerns of African Americans.⁴⁸

The National Negro Congress was a potential threat to the NAACP’s role as the voice of African Americans in national politics. The Congress was the idea of a number of young African American intellectuals including John P.

⁴⁶ “Along the NAACP Battlefront,” *Crisis*, August 1935, 41, p248. For the resolutions passed at the conference see *ibid.*, p249-250.

⁴⁷ Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression*, p330. For a detailed discussion of the Harris report, see *ibid.*, p302-331. Wolters believes that “if enacted, the proposals of the Harris committee would have significantly changed the NAACP, for in addition to reformulating the association’s basic strategy and tactics, the report proposed to diminish the authority of the organisation’s board of directors.” *Ibid.*, p315.

⁴⁸ John P. Davis, “A Black Inventory of the New Deal,” *Crisis*, May 1935, 41, p141-142 and 154-155.

Davis, Robert C. Weaver, Abram Harris, Ralph Bunche and E. Franklin Frazier.

According to historian Paula Pfeffer, they “had become disenchanted by the failure of established black rights organizations to cope with the economic distress of the Depression.”⁴⁹ Bunche articulated this view: “the NAACP does not have a mass basis. It has never assumed the proportions of a crusade, nor has it attracted the masses of people to its banner. It is not impressed upon the mass consciousness, and it is a bald truth that the average Negro in the street has never heard of the Association nor any of its leaders.”⁵⁰

In May 1935 the Joint Committee on National Recovery reported that “New Deal planning has availed him [the African American] little either because of its underlying philosophy, or because its administration has been delegated to local authorities who reflect the unenlightened mores of their respective communities.”⁵¹ From this the National Negro Congress was eventually set up in February 1936. It was designed to act as an umbrella group for non-partisan African American organisations, and 817 delegates

⁴⁹ Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1990, p32.

⁵⁰ Wolters, p357.

representing 585 organisations attended its inaugural meeting. The National Negro Congress was, like the NAACP, essentially non-partisan and self-consciously inter-racial in its outlook. The diversity of those attending the inaugural meeting was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it provided a voice for African Americans that numerous smaller groups working independently could not, but this in turn meant that no overall programme could be agreed upon. In fact, the only major item that was agreed was that the Congress should remain non-partisan. There can be no doubt that the NAACP viewed the National Negro Congress as a possible menace to its position.

The NAACP was wary of the new organisation and, although many of its members joined the new group, the Association was never affiliated with the Congress. White, for instance, feared that there would be duplication of programmes between the Congress and the NAACP. Furthermore, a successful Congress could affect the NAACP's influence upon the African American community. Roy Wilkins, for example, reported that the Congress had

⁵¹ "The National Conference on the Economic Crisis and the Negro," Journal of Negro Education, V, January 1935. Cited in Harrell, James A., "Negro Leadership in the Election Year 1936," Journal of Southern History, 34, August 1968, p547.

discussed, albeit informally, supplanting the NAACP.⁵² Added to this was concern about the left wing stance of the Congress and in particular the Communist sympathies of Davis, its main spokesman.⁵³

The more the NAACP learnt the less enamoured it became with the Congress. Wilkins reported that “all the old myths” about the NAACP were being “paraded as truths” while William Pickens reported that Davis was “trying to displace the NAACP in every way, everywhere [he] can do so.”⁵⁴ Davis’s agitation for an anti-lynching bill in 1938 amply demonstrated this, but the NAACP believed, with good cause, that this effort was motivated by a desire to raise money for the Congress rather than any realistic expectation of success. However, the NAACP was also well aware of the publicity and money generated by anti-lynching campaigns.

By 1940 Communists dominated the Congress. The signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 meant that American Communists moved away from the anti-fascist stance they had held throughout the 1930s and began to attack Roosevelt’s pro-allied policies. Once A. Philip Randolph, the prominent African

⁵² Wolters, p364.

American trade unionist who led the organisation until 1940, realised the extent of Communist infiltration into the Congress he refused re-election. He declared that "I am convinced that until the stigma of the Communist Front is wiped from the Congress, it will never rally the masses of the Negro people."⁵⁵ It was apparent that white Communists wanted to dictate the direction of the Congress. By America's entry in to World War Two, therefore, the National Negro Congress, which had frankly never generated much enthusiasm among poor African Americans, was a spent political force.⁵⁶

It was apparent at the start of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency that the NAACP needed to reassert itself. Three years had passed since the defeat of Parker and the campaign against those senators who had supported him was winding down. The election of Roosevelt gave the Association renewed hope that anti-lynching legislation could be passed, and the bulk of the NAACP's energies during the 1930s were directed towards this end. The Association was,

⁵³ African American churches were also wary of the Congress. *Ibid.*, p364-365.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p365.

⁵⁵ Pfeffer, p40. Wolters suggests that Randolph was also concerned about the shift of power in the Congress from African Americans to whites. Where communism was concerned, Randolph did not want "to add to the handicap of being black, the handicap of being red." Wolters, p372.

⁵⁶ It is also worth noting that the CIO had considerable influence over the Congress. For more detail on the National Negro Congress see: Wolters, p353-376, Pfeffer, p32-43, Kirby, p164-170, Harrell, p547-548. James A. Harrell tries to view the Congress positively, arguing that its actions and those of the NAACP were "revolutionary in character." Furthermore, he believes

as noted, facing a number of problems but the campaign for an anti-lynching bill was a way of raising funds as well as keeping the Association in the public eye.

With Du Bois gone and a more militant programme stymied, Walter White, according to Goings, “increasingly exerted his control over the national staff.”⁵⁷ Wolters comments that “by 1936 the major critics of White’s leadership had left the organisation, and the secretary’s power within the association was dominant and virtually unchallenged. The militants were convinced that their demise was largely the result of White’s devious and unscrupulous tactics.”⁵⁸ White became the public face of the organisation and his preferred option of lobbying for anti-lynching legislation became the focus of the Association’s energies for the remainder of the decade.

White also recognised, and often exaggerated, the potential of the African American vote. At every election White would remind African Americans, the press and politicians about the “pivotal nature” of the African American vote. He also declared that African Americans would vote for “men and measures”

that the two organisations “were the standard bearers for a people knocking at the door of white

rather than political parties and that they would sell their votes to the “highest bidder.” White wanted African Americans to be politically independent but by the end of the decade it seemed that African Americans were becoming as entrenched in the Democratic party as they had been in the Republican party. In 1936 White sought to put the African American vote on the political map.

iii. “Abraham Lincoln is not a candidate in the current campaign.”⁵⁹

The Democratic victory in 1936 is vitally important to any assessment of the Republican loss of the African American vote. Indeed, when one is examining the growth of African American political power the election of 1936 was, in many ways, a watershed in the history of racial politics in the United States. This election is usually remembered as one of the greatest landslides in American history, a thankful electorate endorsing the programme of Franklin Roosevelt. While this is undoubtedly true, there is a danger that, with the benefit of hindsight, this landslide can be seen as inevitable. The reality is that in 1936

society and asking entrance.” Harrell, p559.

⁵⁷ Goings, *NAACP Comes of Age*, p55.

⁵⁸ Wolters, p340-341.

⁵⁹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 October 1936. Cited in Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1966, p312.

many pundits (and not just those from the infamous *Literary Digest* poll) were predicting a close election, one in which each party had to campaign for special interest votes.⁶⁰ African Americans were, arguably for the first time, paid special attention. For this reason, the election of 1936 can be seen as a pivotal moment in the emergence of African American political power.

The election of 1936 confirmed that African Americans were no longer wedded to the Republican party; memories of Lincoln had faded amid the despondency of the Depression and grew even dimmer when the New Deal offered new hope to African Americans. The switch of the African American vote was remarkable, and the scale of the switch more remarkable still, but more important was the long-term impact of the realignment on American politics.

This was not, as noted, an overnight change, and the 1930s were a bad time for the Republicans to alienate further any of their core constituencies, however small. The lack of concern shown by Republicans for African Americans had never been an electoral handicap as there had never been enough African Americans voting to make any difference, whereas any perceived or

⁶⁰ The *Literary Digest* poll had come within 1% of predicting the popular vote in 1932 and

overt sympathy could have been electorally damaging. Since the Civil War, the Republicans believed that they could maintain the African American vote with the minimum of effort and this was certainly true until 1934. The situation was now very different. The *Crisis* argued that the Republicans could no longer rely on “Lincoln, flag-waving and mammy stories... to charm votes into ballot boxes.”⁶¹ The national press recognised the importance of the African American vote, but even the *New York Times* was reluctant to predict which party would eventually win it.⁶²

The African American vote was reckoned to hold the balance of power in at least ten states. The Democrats were alive to this possibility and were able to capitalise on it, whereas the Republicans were reluctant to substantially modify appeals that had been used for generations. By mid-decade an appeal to African Americans in the North based on the tradition and history of the Republican party would be much less effective in the face of a Democratic appeal on the

forecast a victory for Landon throughout the 1936 campaign. A Gallup Poll in September 1936 predicted that Landon could win anything between 99 and 272 electoral votes. Weed, *Nemesis*, p104-5.

⁶¹ “Frightened Republicans,” *Crisis*, 44, October 1936, p305.

⁶² *NYT*, 10 November 1935, iv, p3. Cited in Weed, *Nemesis*, p92. Earlier, Arthur Krock, in the *New York Times*, had predicted that four groups would decide the outcome of the election: new voters, African Americans, labour and agriculture but new voters and African Americans had not been adequately canvassed in order to determine which way their votes would go. *Ibid.*, 4 October 1936, p18.

basis of relief and employment opportunities. The onset of the Depression and the benefits provided by the New Deal meant that African Americans no longer voted on the basis of traditional loyalty or mere habit; they now, for the first time, would vote as poor people rather than as people with a political debt to repay. The Republicans, no longer assured of this vote, actually had to campaign for it.

To the NAACP, and many African Americans, the main issues of the 1936 election were relief and anti-lynching legislation, and the party that offered these would be best placed to win the African American vote. The Republicans were hurt in this regard when William Borah, the implacable foe of anti-lynching legislation, emerged as a potential presidential candidate. Borah replaced Parker as the NAACP's bogeyman and was successfully halted during the primary elections. Alfred M. Landon, the Republican candidate, was quite progressive on racial matters but lost ground with African Americans due to the suspicion that he would give control of relief distribution to the states.⁶³

⁶³ More generally, Landon was hampered by conservatives in the GOP, especially his running-mate Frank Knox and the Republican National Committee chairman John D.M. Hamilton.

The loss of the African American vote by the Republican party could not have come at a worse time. By 1936 African Americans could compare four years of the Democrats with twelve years of the Republicans and the gains made in these four years put into perspective the lack of action of the previous twelve. Moreover, the number of northern African American voters, negligible in the 1920s, was increasing and this coincided with a new political awareness amongst African American leaders, particularly within the NAACP. This meant that African Americans had to be courted by politicians in the same way as any other group. The Republicans, at least partially, grasped this but they failed to regain the African American vote not only because of their previous failures but also because their appeal was fundamentally flawed. The GOP advocated orthodox but conservative economic policies built around the concept of a decentralised federal government, but this was unlikely to win the votes of many African Americans at the height of the Depression.

It is apparent, therefore, that the 1936 presidential election would be unlike any other as far as African Americans were concerned. Walter White recognised that the election could be close and urged African Americans to

ignore party labels in favour of individual candidates.⁶⁴ White, as noted, often exaggerated the strength of the African American vote but there was no doubt that this time he had a point. White claimed that it could be pivotal in up to seventeen states with a combined electoral vote of 281 (out of a total of 535) in 1936. He felt that the African American response to both the Parker nomination and Borah's attitude to anti-lynching legislation were a good indication that they were largely united on the main issues effecting their community.⁶⁵

Analysts frequently mentioned Illinois, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania as states where the African American vote could prove important. Of these New York, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Illinois were usually Republican strongholds but had all gone Democratic in 1932, taking with them 157 electoral votes. These states, together with Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee, which were already thought to be safely Democratic, had enough African American voters to swing the election either way. In all, the states where the African American vote was

⁶⁴ Memorandum from Walter White, 1 January 1936, NAACP Papers, part 11, series B, reel 22, frame 303-4 (henceforth NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 303-4). A similar sentiment is expressed in "1936 Negro Vote is Called Decisive," *Crisis*, 44, February 1936, p56-57.

⁶⁵ Walter White, "An Estimate of the 1936 Vote," *Crisis*, 44, February 1936, p46-47. This article includes a *Literary Digest* poll from December 1935. White cites election data from

considered important accounted for over 200 electoral votes, compared to the South's 140.

The logic of the NAACP was quite simple: the African American vote in the North could negate or exceed that of the white South and both the Republicans and Democrats had to be made aware of this. Furthermore, by predicting that African Americans would vote for one party there was the potential of wringing concessions from the other. This, of course, assumed that African Americans would vote as a bloc, but it was theoretically possible to win the election without the South. As a result, both parties should have been extremely wary of offending African American voters in potentially pivotal northern states by appealing to relatively unimportant lily-white sentiment in the South. Rhetoric alone, therefore, would no longer convince African Americans of the merits of a particular party.⁶⁶

White maintained that the main problem African Americans had with Roosevelt was that they felt that he was too dependent on southerners. He

1924, 1928 and 1932 from marginal states together with the potential African American vote, to reinforce his argument about the pivotal nature of the African American vote.

⁶⁶ For the increasing importance of the African American vote see *Time*, 17 August 1936, p10 (cited in Sitkoff, *New Deal For Blacks*, p91) and Paul W. Ward, "Wooing the Negro Vote," *The Nation*, 143, no. 5, 1 August 1936, p119-120.

asserted that the administration had to decide whether it was going to listen to a handful of southern white voters or the “thoughtful people of both races in the seventeen states with more than twice as many electoral votes.”⁶⁷ White was confident that southern Democrats would not bolt from the party on the race issue as they would lose their influence on congressional committees.

iv. “It is hard to convince a man that it is unconstitutional to save his life.”

William Borah had presidential ambitions in 1936, ambitions that the NAACP sought to thwart. When it became evident that Borah would be seeking the Republican nomination, Walter White wrote to him on the subject of lynching. Citing Borah’s role in the defeat of both the Dyer and Costigan-Wagner bills, White stated that the Idahoan had “the somewhat dubious honor of having been the executioner of two distinctly hopeful opportunities to pass federal legislation.”⁶⁸ White reminded Borah that since his call to respect states’ rights, fourteen people had been lynched: “do you feel proud of your handiwork, Senator Borah? And does it disturb your conscience to the slightest

⁶⁷ Walter White, “An Estimate of the 1936 Vote,” *Crisis*, 44, February 1936, p46-47.

extent that there is the possibility that had the Costigan-Wagner bill passed that [these] lynching[s] might not have occurred?"⁶⁹ White argued that African Americans might hold the balance of power in the forthcoming presidential election. "There are many Americans," White continued, "who no longer believe in the sincerity of members of the Senate who forget states' rights when such issues as prohibition are being discussed, but wrap themselves in the mantle of 'constitutionality' when the lives of human beings are being taken by lawless mobs."⁷⁰ The NAACP, and White in particular, saw the chance for a new political crusade akin to that against the Parker nomination.

Early in 1936, the Association warned the Republicans of the possible consequences of a Borah candidacy.⁷¹ Borah, in an interview with the Associated Negro Press, tried to mend fences with African American voters: "I regret so much that Negroes over the country feel as they do toward me. Why, there is not a member in the United States' Senate that thinks more of the Negro

⁶⁸ Walter White to William Borah, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, reel 19, frame 0196 (henceforth ER, 19, 0196). Also quoted in the *Plaindealer*, 29 November 1935, p1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ NAACP press release, "Ohio Republicans are warned on Borah," 3 January 1936, NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 299.

than myself.”⁷² He reiterated that he was not opposed to an anti-lynching bill in principle and understood the need to stop the crime, but maintained that those bills brought before the Senate were unconstitutional. When consulted by the bill’s sponsors he restated this view, explaining that “I couldn’t see the sense of going through the motion of doing something that would not benefit the Negro race.”⁷³ He stated that many in the Senate agreed with his stance but those with large African American constituencies “got scared and left me holding the bag.”⁷⁴ Borah believed that his major error was to state his views publicly when other politicians refused to.

Hamilton Fish, a congressman from New York and Borah’s eastern campaign manager, was becoming increasingly frustrated by attacks on the senator. He wrote to White demanding that the NAACP publicise the views of other potential Republican candidates and President Roosevelt on the constitutionality of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill. Fish then challenged White to make their views public.⁷⁵ The Association preferred,

⁷² *Plaindealer*, 21 February 1936, p1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Hamilton Fish, Jr., to Walter White, 3 March 1936. Lewis Strauss Papers, box 51E. For Fish’s efforts to defend Borah see the *Plaindealer*, 6 March 1936, p1.

however, to trawl Borah's past to damn the senator with his own words; it certainly had plenty to chose from. "I will say very frankly," Borah had told the Senate in 1914, "I am one of those who believe that it was a mistake to bestow upon the colored people at this particular time [after the Civil War] the right to vote."⁷⁶

The Association's concerted campaign against Borah forced him to withdraw from the Ohio primary. The *Chicago Tribune*, a Republican newspaper which was often sensitive to the party's historic links with African Americans, reported that Borah was blaming his defeat in the Ohio primary on the anti-lynching question and the fact that he was honest in his opposition while others were insincere in their support.⁷⁷ Borah then lost in Illinois, where there were 226,000 African American voters, by 80,000 votes and this effectively ended his bid for the Republican nomination. White celebrated another triumph, declaring: "the Negro vote is coming of age and is no longer the chattel of any one party."⁷⁸ He believed that a further precedent had been set

⁷⁶ Louis L. Redding, "Borah: What Does He Stand For?" *Crisis*, 44, March 1936, p70-72 and p82. In this article, which the NAACP reprinted for supporters, Borah's record on lynching, the Brownsville riot and the link between female and African American suffrage were examined.

⁷⁷ Undated *Chicago Tribune* editorial cited in the *Plaindealer*, 29 May 1936, p7.

⁷⁸ NAACP Press Release 15 May 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 24, 124.

by the defeat of Borah in that African Americans could not be taken for granted.

White wrote to the senator attributing his defeat to an “entire record [which] has been one of almost invariably consistent hostility to the Negro’s ambitions, and when your attitude was not characterized by hostility it was at best one of indifference and apathy.”⁷⁹ White finished his attack by quoting political commentator Jay Franklin: “it is hard to convince a man that it is unconstitutional to save his life.”⁸⁰

As was the case with the Parker nomination, the demise of Borah’s ambitions was not due solely to the efforts of the NAACP. Borah, although popular in the West, had always been a maverick within the GOP. He had turned down Coolidge’s offer of the vice-presidential nomination in 1924, implying that he himself should head the ticket. Borah had failed to campaign for Hoover’s re-election and in the wake of the Republicans’ defeats in 1932 and 1934 he had advocated a more liberal party. These last two factors had alienated him from conservative Republicans, and in all likelihood cost him

⁷⁹ Walter White to William Borah, 18 May 1936. ER, 19, 0271.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 0272. White’s hostility towards Borah extended beyond lynching. White’s research on the senator discovered that in April 1908 Borah had referred to African American soldiers as traitors: “if this doesn’t alienate every Negro vote in the country, I’ll eat my oldest hat.” Walter White to Lewis Strauss, 22 November 1935. Lewis Strauss Papers, box 51E. Borah’s comments

whatever chance he had of being the GOP's standard-bearer. By the time of his defeat in the Illinois primary his support had largely dissipated.

Whether or not Borah was ever a serious candidate for the nomination is not really the issue; what remained important throughout was that African Americans were very vocally refusing to be taken for granted, and with their potentially crucial votes, they could not be. The Republicans clearly suffered in this regard; Borah was, after all, one of their own. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* declared that "Borah stultifies whatever reason the Negro might have had for holding out any hope that the GOP might be his salvation. The party... comes forward with a prospective leader for 1936 who openly and unashamedly opposes a measure that would safeguard his human rights."⁸¹ It warned that African Americans would desert the Republican party completely if Borah was nominated. That Borah could even be considered by the Republicans as a

were made in relation to the actions of the 25th Infantry in the Brownsville riot of 1906. *NYT*, 21 April 1908

⁸¹ *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, editorial, 30 November 1935. NAACP, pt11, B, 24, 302-3. Not all of the African American press condemned Borah outright. The *Plaindealer* believed that the senator's stance on anti-lynching legislation was based on principle and not prejudice arguing that he had been "honest, sincere, frank and courageous." The *Plaindealer* maintained, however, that this was not the point and African American voters demonstrated in the primary elections that they wanted someone in the White House who would stand up for their rights. *Plaindealer*, 22 May 1936, p7.

potential presidential candidate proved to many African Americans that the party simply could not be trusted.⁸²

v. "In the house of his friends."

The Republican convention in Cleveland did little to reassure African Americans as there was still a preoccupation, although much less overt than in 1928, with establishing the party in the South. The Credentials Committee seated lily-white delegations from Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina as well as a black and tan delegation from Mississippi led by "the elusively surviving" Perry Howard.⁸³ No evidence of wrongdoing was found against these states, but there was a fear that the party's southern policy could cost it between one and four million votes in the North.⁸⁴ Several African American delegates threatened a floor fight against the lily-white southern delegations and as a

⁸² It was not only the African American press that was critical of Borah. The *Chicago Tribune* took the senator to task for prejudging the constitutionality of the anti-lynching bill: "it was well understood that the South would not voluntarily raise the Negro to the full status of an American citizen." The *Tribune* noted that under the terms of the Fourteenth Amendment Congress had to provide citizens with equal protection under the law. Furthermore, bearing this in mind, there was no reason to believe that anti-lynching legislation would necessarily be unconstitutional. The Costigan-Wagner bill was no more likely to be unconstitutional than the NRA or the AAA. The editorial concludes by accusing Borah of thinking "that no legislation against lynching can be appropriate. That is a large assumption." Undated editorial, *Chicago Tribune* cited in the *Plaindealer*, 29 May 1936, p7. Ironically, the AAA and the NRA were declared unconstitutional.

⁸³ "The GOP Speaks," *Crisis*, 44, July 1936, p209.

result “Tieless Joe” Tolbert’s black and tan delegation from South Carolina was seated, overturning the previous decision to seat the lily-white delegation from the state.⁸⁵

Walter White believed that the seating of the lily-whites would hamper Republicans.⁸⁶ The GOP did, however, set a precedent by having an African American minister, Bishop James W. Brown, give the opening prayer at the night session of 12 June.⁸⁷ After the Democratic convention, the *Crisis* remarked acidly, that “if the Republicans said little of the Negro in their platform, the Democrats went one better by saying nothing.”⁸⁸ The *Crisis* did not pretend to be surprised by the Democrats’ stance on lynching but “only the Lord knows what curious quirk of reasoning kept the Republicans from

⁸⁴ *NYT*, 4 June 1936, p2 and 7 June 1936, p32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 June 1936, p15 and 11 June 1936, p36.

⁸⁶ Walter White, letter to Lewis L. Strauss, 8 June 1936, NAACP, pt11, B, 24, 377.

⁸⁷ A similar gesture at the Democratic convention two weeks later precipitated a walkout by “Cotton Ed” Smith. Smith of South Carolina said that he would not support “any organisation that looks upon the Negro and caters to him as a political and social equal” and asserted that the Democratic party did not need the African American vote. *NYT*, 25 June 1936, p12. Paul Ward of *The Nation* felt that Smith’s walkout actually benefited the Democrats where African American voters were concerned. Moreover, he notes that because the Democrats had Eleanor Roosevelt and the WPA, they had, therefore, made both a symbolic and a substantive commitment to black Americans. Ward, *The Nation*, 1 August 1936, p119-120.

⁸⁸ “The Democrats Speak,” *Crisis*, 44, August 1936, p241. Also cited in Weiss, *Farewell*, p184. In the course of the Democratic convention the “two-thirds rule,” which had given a disproportionate amount of power to the South by requiring a two-thirds majority to pass resolutions, was abandoned. This lessened the power of the South within the party while potentially enhancing the position of African Americans. The abandonment of the two-thirds rule was also part of the reason for Smith’s walk-out. See also, NAACP undated press release, “FDR told omission of lynching is disappointment,” NAACP, pt11, B, 24, 446 and a telegram from Walter White to Roosevelt, *ibid.*, 446.

mentioning the crime.”⁸⁹ The Association recognised that lynching, in the context of the economic plight of African Americans, was perhaps not a major issue in the campaign, but maintained that the problems of African Americans, which also included suffrage and education, were all linked. There was, however, a glimmer of hope for African Americans as the two candidates seemed “much better than their platforms.”⁹⁰

The *Crisis* felt that the Republicans had learnt nothing from their preoccupation with the South in 1928 and their defeat in 1932. It was concerned that the Republican party was too dependent on old-style, conservative African Americans for its policies: “these Dixie delegates cannot speak for the three million Negroes in the North who have the vote.”⁹¹ It argued that as the South would remain Democratic it made more sense for the Republicans to listen to those African Americans who could vote, citing the Parker and Borah episodes as evidence that northern African Americans “mean business.”⁹² African Americans had two main concerns: equal employment opportunities and pay

⁸⁹ “The Democrats Speak,” *Crisis*, 44, August 1936, p241. See also, NAACP press release, “GOP Platform Does Not Mention Lynching,” 12 June 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 24, 395.

⁹⁰ “The Democrats Speak,” *Crisis*, 44, August 1936, p241

⁹¹ “The GOP Speaks,” *ibid.*, 44, July 1936, p209.

⁹² *Ibid.*

and no restrictions on the right to vote: “with these two pledges carried out the Negro himself will take care of such matters as education, lynching, segregation and discrimination.”⁹³

If the Republicans were serious about consolidating the African American vote then they got off to an inauspicious start. To their credit, they did at least supplement their usual rhetoric with a ‘Negro’ plank, albeit under the heading “Furthermore” at the end of their platform. In this, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) was attacked for pushing African American sharecroppers towards poverty; Roosevelt’s silence on racial issues was condemned as were the lack of anti-lynching legislation and the inaction of the Justice Department on interstate lynchings. The Republicans felt that Roosevelt’s inaction was particularly difficult to justify as the Democrats had majorities in both houses of Congress. The GOP was obviously hoping that African Americans had forgotten their inactivity from 1920 to 1932. The platform summed up: “we condemn the present New Deal policies which would regiment and ultimately eliminate the colored citizen from the country’s

⁹³ Ibid.

productive life, and make him solely a ward of the federal government.”⁹⁴

Landon approved the platform in “word and spirit” and prepared to campaign on the basis of it.⁹⁵ Indeed, in August the party announced “plans for the most intensive campaign among the Negro race ever waged by the Republican party.”⁹⁶

Landon was one of the few Republicans to win office in 1932 when he became governor of Kansas. Admittedly, his victory had come in a three cornered contest, but his record as state chairman from 1928 and as governor, had been good enough for him to be viewed as a potential presidential candidate as early as January 1935. Landon realised that the African American constituency was one of the many that had to be brought back to the GOP fold. As a result he became the first modern Republican presidential candidate to

⁹⁴ Donald Bruce Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, National Party Platforms, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1973 (5th edition), p369.

⁹⁵ Paul T. David, Ralph M. Goldman, and Richard C. Bain, The Politics of National Party Conventions, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1960, p247.

⁹⁶ Republican National Committee Press Release, 3 August 1936, cited in Weiss, Farewell, p186. The Republicans also sought to woo African American voters by recruiting Jesse Owens. He had just returned from the notorious Berlin Olympics with three gold medals and had rejected overtures from the Democrats in order to campaign for the Republicans. His attitude, however, demonstrated a lack of real enthusiasm among many African Americans for either party: “I do not want to knock the present administration; President Roosevelt has done something, but not enough, to benefit the people of the colored race. But I believe that the election of Governor Landon will be good for the people of America and the colored race. Governor Landon does not promise very much, but what promises he does make I think he will keep.” This was hardly a ringing endorsement of Landon’s candidacy. *NYT*, 3 September 1936, p10. When Owens later visited Indianapolis for the Republicans, four of the nine cars in his

campaign actively for the African American vote. This did not go unnoticed among African Americans. In the *New York Times*, Henry Lee Moon contended that “the present Republican campaign for the Negro vote differs from that of previous years. It is no longer a gesture to hold these votes. It is now a strenuous effort to woo these voters back from the Democrats.”⁹⁷

Landon’s record in race relations was fairly progressive. He had twice left the party, firstly to work with Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressives, and then in 1924 to help William Allen White in his fight against the Klan. In 1928 as state chairman he had appointed William M. Bradshaw as assistant chairman, the first African American to hold such a high position in the state’s Republican party. He also set a precedent by appointing three African Americans to jobs at the party’s state headquarters. In 1929 Bradshaw was promoted to special assistant to the state Attorney General, and was in charge of courting the African American vote in Landon’s gubernatorial campaign in 1932. It was Landon’s intention, according to Donald McCoy, to help “Negroes feel that they were part

motorcade sported FDR stickers, *ibid.*, 26 October 1936, p2. Owens was, in fact, paid for his services to the GOP in 1936.

⁹⁷ Henry Lee Moon, “Negro Vote Vital In A Close Election,” *NYT*, 18 October 1936, iv, p7.

of the party.”⁹⁸ To this end the state Republicans advocated equality (without actually saying what this meant), very probably as a response to the candidacy of John W. Brinkley who also favoured “equality.” African American voters in 1936 could, therefore, have at least some confidence in the GOP candidate.

Landon’s comments and record did not necessarily mean that the Republican party was about to start taking the concerns of African American seriously. The NAACP had submitted a document to the Republican convention which contained many demands: anti-lynching legislation; an end to discrimination in relief, welfare and employment; the enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments; an end to photographs on civil service applications; and an end to discrimination in educational funding.⁹⁹ Landon fulfilled some of these requirements when the Associated Negro Press was informed that he

⁹⁸ McCoy, Landon, p56. For a sympathetic appraisal of Landon see Roy Garvin (editor of the *Kansas City Call*), “Alf Landon as I Know Him,” *Crisis*, May 1936, 44, p139 and 142. Garvin later informed White that “I am told by those who know him better than I that he is all right on the colored question.” Garvin to White, 20 October 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 615. See also a letter from Harry Davis, an African American Republican, to White after the announcement of the Republican platform: “I have some hopes that Governor Landon is the type of candidate who will not hesitate to amplify the platform if he can be convinced it is a strategic move.” It is difficult to ascertain precisely what Davis means by this statement, but he seems to be implying that Landon would go beyond the constraints of the platform to help African Americans. Harry Davis to Walter White, 15 June 1936, NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 397.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 381-4. This followed a letter sent to all potential Republican candidates on 5 March 1936, asking for their views on issues relating to African Americans. *Ibid.*, 324-5.

opposed lily-white Republicans, condemned lynching and urged an end to discrimination in civil service recruiting.

The election of 1936 was a referendum on the New Deal and the benefits it was seen to have brought. The Republicans, fearful of losing the African American vote permanently, had to come up with an alternative to the New Deal that was consistent with both their conservative attitude towards the role of the federal government and their traditional alliance with African Americans. On the one hand the GOP appealed to history. For instance, Landon told African Americans:

When the Negro maintains his allegiance to the principles of the Republican party, he is in the house of his friends. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments are Republican Amendments. They made the word citizen a real word in the lives of the colored people and brought them under the protecting shelter of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, however, there was a conscious effort to offer an alternative to the New Deal, specifically the negative effect of relief. Landon argued that “the attempt of the New Deal to use relief rolls as modern reservation[s] on

¹⁰⁰ *NYT*, 11 October 1936 p46.

which the great colored race is to be confined forever as a ward of the federal government... is not only disastrous to a great people but of alarming consequence to our entire economic and social life.”¹⁰¹ The Republican National Committee proclaimed Landon’s words as a “new Emancipation Proclamation” and, to be sure, there was at least some enthusiasm for him in the African American press. “Your Party,” gushed the *Chicago Defender*, “never had a better candidate than Landon,” and contrasted his stance on racial issues with the silence of Roosevelt.¹⁰²

Francis E. Rivers, eastern campaign manager of the Republican National Committee’s Negro Voters Division, followed a similar line of attack:

Negroes should not fall for the confusing tactics of the president, who exploited the personality and liberal viewpoint of his wife. Nor should they be led astray by the sham social progress promised by the myriad New Deal agencies. The real colors of the president’s party were to be seen in his refusal to appoint any Negroes to permanent Civil Service and his choosing to segregate them in emergency colored divisions.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Topeka Capital*, 2 October 1936, cited in McCoy, *Landon*, p312.

¹⁰² *Chicago Defender*, 17 October 1936, cited in *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Francis E. Rivers, “The Negro Should Support Landon,” *Crisis*, 44, October 1936, p296. Also cited in Harrell, *JSH*, 34, p553. For further details on the Republican party’s efforts to undermine the New Deal among African Americans see “Balance of Power” a booklet issued by

Rivers condemned many New Deal agencies. For instance, the AAA used African American labour because it was cheaper, the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) discriminated in its payments, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) put most African Americans in unskilled jobs and social security legislation excluded many more. These were all extremely valid criticisms of the New Deal but, as Nancy Weiss argues, too many African Americans had benefited from New Deal programmes for this approach to be effective: “it was a sophisticated argument but there was no way it could appeal successfully to the majority of black Americans in the 1930s.”¹⁰⁴

African Americans had long memories and many simply did not trust the Republicans. The African American press was largely unsympathetic. The *Afro-American* saw Landon as an advocate of states’ rights and told its readers that it would be “plain suicide” to support him.¹⁰⁵ Robert R. Church met Landon on 5 October and issued a statement on the candidate’s behalf:

the Republican National Committee, Alfred M. Landon Papers, box 61, folder 7. An NAACP press release also used the balance of power argument, stating that “in no other presidential campaign has the Negro vote been so seriously considered as in 1936.” NAACP press release, “Congressional candidates polled by NAACP on lynching, jobs, relief and civil service,” 4 September 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 502. Rivers was an African American from New York.

¹⁰⁴ Weiss, *Farewell*, p197.

¹⁰⁵ The *Baltimore Afro-American*, 26 September 1936, cited in McCoy, *Landon*, p311.

In common with all law-abiding citizens of this country, I am unalterably opposed to lawlessness in all its forms and, of course, this includes lynching, which is a blot on our American civilisation. We must devise some legal means which will be effective in ending this great menace to our institutions.¹⁰⁶

At the same time Landon restated his belief in equality in the distribution of relief and in federal employment based on merit. White was not convinced by this anti-lynching stance. He described the term “some legal means” as “puzzling.” Did the governor advocate state or federal laws to combat lynching? He suspected that Landon was being deliberately vague. It is possible that Landon was advocating state action on lynching as Kansas had an anti-lynching law (passed before his governorship) and he referred to it on occasion during the campaign.¹⁰⁷ The Association did, however, praise Landon’s belief that more jobs needed to be created for African Americans as “a significant statement which goes to the root of the Negro’s economic plight” but wanted more

¹⁰⁶ *NYT*, 6 October 1936.

¹⁰⁷ Many states, including several in the South, had anti-lynching laws and they were rarely effective. Georgia, for instance, had introduced an anti-lynching law in 1893 but between its introduction and 1934 there had been 403 lynchings in the state, again proving to African Americans the need for a strong federal law that would be enforced. In addition, state anti-lynching laws may have been used to pre-empt federal action.

specifics on how it would be achieved.¹⁰⁸ The *Crisis* hoped that this was part of a maturation of Republican policy: “the fact that the GOP promises to do it [provide jobs] shows that the party is at last beginning to come out of the Abraham Lincoln clouds to solid earth.”¹⁰⁹ The Association agreed that relief was not the answer but remained deeply concerned about the governor’s “recently acquired enthusiasm for the doctrine of states’ rights.”¹¹⁰

Four million African Americans were on relief and one of the reasons they had begun to turn to the Democratic party was that it had provided federal relief which, while not free from discrimination, did at least benefit them.¹¹¹ African Americans wanted relief to continue to be administered by the federal government and not by the states. If the states, and especially southern states, were given control of relief budgets then there was the very real prospect of discrimination. Moreover, there was a justifiable concern that a re-elected Republican party, advocating the decentralisation of federal power, would transfer relief into the hands of the states.

¹⁰⁸ NAACP press release, “Landon statement not clear to NAACP,” 9 October 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 579.

¹⁰⁹ “The Campaign,” *Crisis*, 44, November 1936, p337.

¹¹⁰ NAACP press release, “Landon statement not clear to NAACP,” 9 October 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 579.

Unfortunately, Landon confirmed African American fears that he was essentially a states' rightist by advocating state control of relief. White immediately condemned this idea.¹¹² Roosevelt had only been partially successful in keeping discrimination out of relief but, as the *Crisis* noted, "even with their failures, they [relief agencies] have made great gains for the race in areas which heretofore have set their faces steadfastly against decent relief for Negroes."¹¹³

The role of Eleanor Roosevelt was very important in the Democrats' quest to win African American votes and there can be no doubt that her sympathy for African Americans, and her friendship with Mary McLeod Bethune and White, was genuine.¹¹⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt did her husband no harm and actually allowed him to be vicariously portrayed as an advocate of African American rights through her good deeds. Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior and a

¹¹¹ This accounted for about 30% of the total African American population of the United States. Harrell, *JSH*, 34, p560.

¹¹² Telegram from White to Landon, 14 October 1936, made public 16 October 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 593 and 599. See also NAACP press release, "Landon relief plan protested by NAACP," 16 October 1936. *ibid.*, 599.

¹¹³ "The Campaign," *Crisis*, 44, November 1936, p337.

¹¹⁴ Roosevelt had made a number of significant African American appointments, including former Republican Bethune to head the Negro Division of the National Youth Association (NYA). Other significant appointments included: Ida De A. Reid, an Atlanta University sociologist, who joined the WPA; Eugene Kinkle Jones of the National Urban League was appointed to the Commerce Department's Division of Negro Affairs while Robert C. Weaver joined the Public Works Administration (PWA). See Harrell, *JSH*, 34, p554. For a detailed

former Republican, addressed the NAACP convention in 1936 declaring that “political calculus took precedence over moral outrage” where lynching was concerned.¹¹⁵ The “Black Cabinet,” a number of unofficial African American advisers on racial matters, was also of great value to the Roosevelt administration. The reality was that the Black Cabinet’s importance was more symbolic than substantive but, as Weiss asserts, “it shows once again the skill of Franklin D. Roosevelt in turning limited departures from past racial practices to his own advantage.”¹¹⁶

In September 1936 Landon was accused of being a racist and an anti-Semite. Speaking in New York in late October, he angrily refuted these charges: “if ever in this country there is an attempt to persecute any minority on grounds of race, religion or class, I will take my stand by the side of the minority.”¹¹⁷ It would be unfair to question Landon’s sincerity on racial matters,

appraisal of African Americans within the Roosevelt administration see Kirby, Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era, chapter 6.

¹¹⁵ Weiss, Farewell, p119. Ickes was responsible for the PWA, which was popular with African Americans.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p156. Ickes’ speech would have been more forthright had it not been censored by Roosevelt’s secretary Stephen T. Early, a southerner. For the text of Ickes speech to the NAACP conference in 1936 see Harold Ickes, “The Negro As A Citizen,” *Crisis*, 44, August 1936, p230-231, p242 and 253.

¹¹⁷ *Kansas City Times*, 30 October 1936, cited in McCoy, Landon, p332-3. On 23 October, while visiting Detroit, Landon had met Henry Ford who was known for his anti-Semitic views. This move was strongly criticised by William Allen White who felt that it would alienate Jewish

but ultimately he was fighting a losing battle. Most African American churchmen, for example, were usually Republican stalwarts, but now they were backing Roosevelt, as was most of the African American press.¹¹⁸ Perhaps most embarrassing of all, however, were the reports that Republican meetings in Topeka were segregated and Landon's African American employees' claim that they were underpaid, his cook declaring that she would be voting for Roosevelt.¹¹⁹

Joel Spingarn, the NAACP President, decided to campaign for the Democrats. Spingarn's stance was a departure for the traditionally non-partisan NAACP and although he campaigned as a private citizen, the implication was clear: after all, NAACP officials had turned down similar requests from the Republicans.¹²⁰ Roosevelt, Spingarn argued, had done more for African Americans than "any Republican since Lincoln." He was careful, however, to

voters. Weed, *Nemesis*, p110. Landon felt that there were attempts by the Democrats to depict him as a racist. *Topeka Capital*, 2 October 1936. Cited in McCoy, *Landon*, p311.

¹¹⁸ Weiss lists *The Chicago Defender*, *Cleveland Gazette* and *The New York Age* as being pro-Landon, while *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *Atlantic World*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *St. Louis Argus* and *Chicago Metropolitan News* among others were supporting Roosevelt. Weiss, p203.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p201.

¹²⁰ Walter White received numerous offers to serve on political campaigns in 1936, including one from the National Allied Republican Council which urged him to help "Save America from the Roosevelt-Bolshevik-Fascistic-Anarchistic-Communitic and Socialistic administration." Needless to say, he turned this, and other offers, down. E.W. Martin, Vice Chairman of the

emphasise that he was not representing the NAACP, which would remain non-partisan: “I am not speaking for the Association but for myself when I say that in this election we must not think of the Democratic party but of Franklin Roosevelt.”¹²¹ Spingarn made speeches in eight cities where the African American vote was important.

vi. “Roosevelt, *in spite* of the Democratic party.”

Ultimately, in spite of some predictions, Roosevelt won a crushing victory and the African American vote was not crucial. Roosevelt won 27,751,597 popular votes to Landon’s 16,679,583 and 523 Electoral College votes to Landon’s eight. The issue of the election had been the New Deal and it had received an overwhelming endorsement from the electorate. African Americans were no exception: 76% of northern African Americans voted for Roosevelt,

National Allied Republican Council, to Walter White, 30 April 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 354-356.

¹²¹ Calvin Service Flash, “Head of NAACP to make eight speeches for Roosevelt,” 10 October 1936. *ibid.*, frame 0585-0586. Some members of the Association were outraged by Spingarn’s stance. The Cleveland, Ohio, branch was particularly vocal stating that “98%” of its members were backing Landon and expressing the view that the “national office has gone for Roosevelt.” Telegram from Chester A. Gillespie, of the Cleveland NAACP, to Walter White, 17 October 1936. *ibid.*, frame 601. They also pointed out that news items about Spingarn always emphasised his links to the NAACP. Another member of the branch accused the national office of double standards: “people here remember the fight on Borah... and Roosevelt’s silence on lynching.” Telegram from Charles H. White of the Cleveland NAACP, to Walter White, 17

and in every northern city except Chicago at least 60% voted Democratic (in Chicago the figure was 49%). The Democratic vote among northern African Americans had increased by between 60% (New York) and 250% (Cleveland).¹²²

The Republican strategy of appealing to history and attacking the New Deal had failed in the face of the tangible benefits African Americans had seen since 1932. African Americans showed that not only were they responding to the New Deal, but also that they were reacting to the indifference of their erstwhile allies. Four years of the New Deal and a liberal Democratic administration had shown how some government intervention could appreciably improve the lot of African Americans, but even limited intervention remained an anathema to most Republicans. African Americans, it must be re-emphasised, had not been targeted for special treatment by the New Deal; it took the Great Depression and the millions of whites it put onto the relief rolls to bring African Americans into the protective embrace of the federal government. African Americans were clearly accidental beneficiaries of the

October 1936. *ibid.*, frame 605. This was particularly galling to Republican members of the

New Deal, but they were beneficiaries nonetheless. They had been among the most stubborn Republicans until 1934 and, historically and presently, had good reason to remain so when confronted by a Democratic party apparently controlled by southern whites. After Roosevelt's victory the *Crisis* asserted that African Americans had "voted for Roosevelt, *in spite* of the Democratic party" and "had a feeling that Mr. Roosevelt represented a kind of philosophy in government which will mean much to their race."¹²³ It believed that anti-lynching legislation, reform of the civil service and an end to discrimination was the price Roosevelt would have to pay for continued African American support.

It would be unfair to attach too much blame to Landon for the GOP's failure to regain the African American vote. He paid the price for the sins of previous Republican administrations, yet he was altogether more progressive in race relations than his counterparts in the 1920s. Indeed he had a better reputation than Roosevelt on the issue. He had made strides to liberalise the GOP in his own state as governor but in 1936 he was tainted with states' rights

Association, given Walter White's attacks on Landon over lynching and relief.

¹²² Weiss, p206.

¹²³ "Roosevelt's Opportunity," *Crisis*, 44, December 1936, p369.

and African Americans were worried that he would subvert the gains that they had made under the New Deal.

In 1936 economics lay at the heart of the Republicans' dilemma: they were not prepared to take the action deemed necessary to alleviate the plight of African Americans. African Americans were primarily wedded to the New Deal by economics rather than any perceived racial liberalism within the administration. It was unfortunate for the Republicans that African Americans became the unintended beneficiaries of the New Deal at a time when their votes in key northern states were becoming potentially crucial in presidential elections. This was as apparent to many Republicans as it was to African Americans.

The Republicans tried to redeem themselves in the eyes of African Americans in 1936 but their efforts failed for a number of reasons. Paramount among these was the success of the New Deal in providing relief to African Americans. Republicans argued, not without some justification, that relief was being given in marginal wards (although not specifically African American

areas). This affected voting patterns: “you can’t run against Santa Claus”

Landon would later say of his defeat.¹²⁴

After the Republican rout in the presidential election, White wrote to Chester C. Bolton, a sympathetic Republican congressman from Ohio, who had been swept away in the Democratic deluge. White outlined why he thought the GOP had lost the African American vote. One reason, he argued, was “the almost incredible stupidity of much of the publicity put out by the Republican party so far as Negroes were concerned, and a general ineptitude, especially on the part of some of the older Negro politicians who have long since lost caste with thoughtful Negroes. Some of these politicians seemed to be able to only fool white people.” White contended that the Republican cause would have been helped had the party endorsed an anti-lynching bill. He stressed, however, that he believed that the African American vote would now be mobile.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Patrick E. McGinnis, “The Republican Resurgence in Congress, 1936-1946,” PhD thesis, Tulane University 1976, p3.

¹²⁵ Walter White to Chester C. Bolton, 5 November 1936. NAACP, pt11, B, 22, 700-701. Bolton seemed to agree: “I still believe that the action you and I sought could well have been taken and no doubt would have had a salutary effect [on the African American vote].” Bolton to White, 19 November 1936. *Ibid.*, frame 743. An NAACP press release expanded upon the notion that African Americans were now independent and had not become a “chattel of the Democratic party.” NAACP press release, “Warns that Negroes are now free agents and may switch to other parties in 1938 and 1940 if nothing is done for the race.” *Ibid.*, frame 714.

The traditional Republican-African American alliance had, in some respects, run its course. The Civil War, slavery and Emancipation all seemed a long time ago to many younger African Americans. They were drawn to urban liberal Democrats in the North who were often keen to distance themselves from the party's southern wing. Furthermore, 1936 was the first time that the African American vote had anything beyond symbolic relevance in a presidential contest and this in turn generated a greater political awareness among African Americans, especially younger voters. African Americans, therefore, looked at the policies of the two main parties rather than their history and Roosevelt seemed to offer a better deal. Republican efforts, although determined, were still inadequate. African Americans had been let down just too often and were now prepared to break from the past. The Republicans, admittedly, had more pressing problems with their party split and their electoral coalition fragmenting but while other constituencies would eventually come back to the fold, never again would the African American vote be "in their top pocket."

CHAPTER THREE. Parties Unknown.

i. "At the hands of parties unknown."

The persistence of lynching in the 1930s represented the most visible reinforcement of African Americans' second class citizenship. The campaign for anti-lynching legislation, therefore, simultaneously demonstrated both the precarious nature of life in the United States for African Americans and the growing, although perhaps misplaced, confidence of the NAACP. To the NAACP, anti-lynching legislation was a test of political sincerity on racial issues and, as a result, this quest became a panacea for the Association and the particular obsession of Walter White. The campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s also reflected the shifting loyalties of African Americans: in the 1920s anti-lynching drives were the almost exclusive preserve of Republicans, by the 1930s the GOP was conspicuous by its apathy.

Anti-lynching should have provided the Republicans with an opportunity to revive their flagging fortunes among African Americans; instead it illustrated just how far the party had departed from its roots. The party was not hostile

towards anti-lynching legislation; it was merely ambivalent. Unfortunately, this ambivalence was not limited to lynching; when the NAACP broadened its programme in the 1940s to include demands for anti-poll tax and fair employment legislation, the Republican response was again perfunctory and half-hearted. What made this worse was that Republican ambivalence in the 1930s was born of political weakness; in the 1940s it was born of political strength.

The Republican victory in 1920 seemed to provide an ideal opportunity for the enactment of an anti-lynching bill. In 1922 Leonidas Dyer, a Republican congressman from an African American area of Missouri, proposed an anti-lynching bill. There was, however, more to this sudden Republican interest in anti-lynching than a tearful remembrance of Lincoln. Due to migration from the South to the North, African Americans now exerted increasing, but still limited, influence in northern politics. Some Republicans recognised the changing nature of politics in the North. The first hint that the political future of African

Americans might not lie with the Republican party came when eight Democrats supported the Dyer bill which passed the House by 231 votes to 119.¹

It came as little surprise when the bill failed but *Dyer* did at least set a precedent for future bills. Cynics argued that the bill was not designed to become law; it was merely meant to appease African American voters, a criticism which was arguably true of later efforts. President Harding was not prepared to sacrifice his entire legislative programme for an anti-lynching bill and, in the face of a southern filibuster, the Republicans abandoned the bill in December 1922. There was a suspicion among African Americans that the Republicans could have put up more of a fight to pass *Dyer* but, argues Sherman, “a concerted GOP effort [on lynching] would have been inconsistent with its half-hearted gestures on most racial matters.”² Disappointment over the failure of *Dyer* did, however, put African Americans on the road to political independence as it facilitated a growing belief that party labels should be ignored and politicians judged individually.³ The publicity generated by the bill

¹ Three of these Democrats were from New York and there was one each from Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Illinois, and Kentucky

² Sherman, *McKinley to Hoover*, p200.

³ The NAACP began a campaign against those congressmen who had voted against the Dyer anti-lynching bill. The Association gained invaluable experience dealing with Congress and this

did, moreover, lead to a drop in lynching.⁴ There was little further agitation for an anti-lynching bill throughout the remainder of the 1920s although the issue did re-emerge occasionally during the Hoover presidency.⁵

There were frequent efforts to enact anti-lynching legislation throughout the 1930s. Almost every session of Congress between 1934 and 1940 saw an attempt to pass an anti-lynching bill. Each endeavour followed a familiar pattern: at the start of a congressional session the bill would pass through the House of Representatives without too much trouble; it would then be dropped by the Senate after a southern filibuster to make way for more “important” legislation. A lack of commitment from supporters and the absence of encouragement from the White House contributed to these failures. The bills were all variations on the original Costigan-Wagner bill of January 1934, but it would not be until 1940 that a Republican publicly sponsored anti-lynching legislation.

would be called upon in the battle that lay ahead against the nomination of John J. Parker to the Supreme Court in 1930 as well as future attempts to pass an anti-lynching law.

⁴ There were 122 reported lynchings in 1921 and 1922. This dropped to 33 in 1923 and 16 in 1924. Sherman, p198-199.

⁵ Hoover refused to use the 1930 southern governors’ conference on drought to discuss lynching although he did condemn the crime. [Sam H. Reading to Hoover, 9 August 1930, Hoover to Reading, 13 August 1930. HH, President’s Personal File, box 170.] He met the Anti-Lynching Congress in November 1930 but refused to offer a strong condemnation of lynching. Adding

Clearly most politicians, Republican or Democrat, were not prepared to make anything more than a token stand on anti-lynching. Ideally, the campaign should have offered the possibility of securing African American rights; in reality these bills gave politicians the chance to pay lip service to African American needs without actually having to do anything substantive. There were, of course, politicians who genuinely wanted these bills to pass: both Arthur Capper and Robert Wagner, for example, had sincere and consistent records on racial matters. In fairness, few northern politicians actively opposed anti-lynching legislation but most lacked any real commitment to it.

If the prospects for anti-lynching bills were so bleak, why did the NAACP spend so much time and effort promoting them? By the early 1930s the NAACP felt that the time was right for another attempt to secure anti-lynching legislation. The Parker episode had shown that the organisation could have some influence on national politics, but in the process it had alienated Hoover thus making any action to benefit African Americans by his administration unlikely.

further insult, the customary Republican commitment to anti-lynching was omitted from the

After the election of Roosevelt in 1932 the NAACP decided to try again. White, the chief architect of the campaign, calculated that the time was right for a concerted effort. Because lynching was extremely difficult to justify, attempts to eradicate the crime could attract support from blacks and whites as well as Republicans and Democrats. The election of the liberal Roosevelt together with the increasing importance of the African American vote meant that any bill's chances of success were better than ever. Conversely, Robert Zangrando asserts that any optimism was tempered by the continued strength of the Democrats' southern wing and a recognition of how low African Americans were on the party's list of priorities. He concludes that even at the beginning of the Roosevelt administration the prospects for progress for African Americans were fairly slim.⁶

The Association hoped to garner cross-party support but the reality was that it was Democratic, not Republican, backing which was vital. The Democrats would dominate political life in America throughout the 1930s and in the North the party had finally begun to acknowledge the potential of the

party's platform in 1932.

African American vote. It comes as no real surprise, therefore, that, with the exception of 1940, it was the Democrats who championed anti-lynching legislation.

The NAACP's decision to embark on a campaign for anti-lynching legislation was not entirely altruistic. Publicity generated by the campaign would help to reduce the number of lynchings, as southerners wanted to avoid federal legislation, but it would also generate much needed funds for the Association.⁷ There can be no doubt, as Nancy Weiss concludes, that "the battle for anti-lynching legislation came to symbolise the cause of racial advancement in the 1930s. It stood out as the most visible and dramatic manifestation of the continuing struggle for racial justice."⁸

Not only did the Republicans seem ambivalent towards anti-lynching legislation but the most vocal opponent of the bills from outside the South was, again, William Borah. Borah argued, as he had during the 1920s, that a federal anti-lynching law would be an unwarranted intrusion into the affairs of the

⁶ Zangrando, *Crusade*, p102.

⁷ It should be noted that the number of lynchings always fell during campaigns for anti-lynching legislation.

⁸ Weiss, *Farewell*, p96.

states and would, therefore, be unconstitutional.⁹ Borah's stance was particularly damaging as he wanted the Republican presidential nomination in 1936. The NAACP was, as noted, determined to stop him. For the most part, other Republicans, whatever their feelings on the need for, or the constitutionality of, the measure, remained largely silent. This inaction can be either attributed to apathy or be seen as a reflection of the party's weakness in Congress. What is certain, however, is that it was in Republican interests to see conflict among the Democrats by allowing them to fight among themselves (a tactic used again in 1937 when Roosevelt attempted to reform the Supreme Court).¹⁰ Whatever the reasoning behind it, this tactic resulted in the Republicans appearing ambivalent about lynching and this, in turn, even called into question their support of similar legislation in the 1920s.

The NAACP, like the Republican party, realised that the anti-lynching battle had the potential to embarrass the Democrats. The dilemma for the

⁹ Ironically, Borah was not alone in querying the constitutionality of the Dyer bill: the NAACP privately doubted that the bill was constitutional. Furthermore, Dyer's ability to successfully guide the bill and his sincerity in sponsoring it were even called into question. For a detailed discussion of the Dyer bill see, Zangrando, p51-72.

¹⁰ At the start of the court packing crisis McNary told Vandenberg and Borah: "let the boys across the aisle do the talking. We'll do the voting." James Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939, University of Kentucky Press, 1967, p107.

Democrats was that northern liberals found themselves at odds with party colleagues in the South. Supporting anti-lynching legislation was one way to court African American voters but it could potentially split the party: strengthening the party in the North could be offset by enhancing Republican chances of breaking the Democratic hold on the southern white vote. This would be especially likely if there was a suspicion that the Democrats were liberalising their stance on the race question.

Roosevelt faced the prospect of having to reconcile the two divergent wings of his party, knowing that to take the side of one would be to alienate the other. Like Harding in the 1920s, he was not prepared to sacrifice his entire legislative programme on the altar of an anti-lynching bill; moreover, Roosevelt, unlike Harding, had the added problem of placating a southern bloc that was irredeemably hostile to the legislation. Despite entreaties from the NAACP, Roosevelt would not publicly commit himself to anti-lynching legislation.¹¹ The president's silence appeased the South; the public support of

¹¹ When Roosevelt finally met White in January 1936 he told him that there was no chance of passing Costigan-Wagner. Thomas Corcoran, a Roosevelt advisor, said of the president: "he does his best with it [anti-lynching legislation], but he ain't gonna lose his votes for it." Weiss, p119. Eleanor Roosevelt would later tell White: "the president feels that lynching is a question of education in the states; rallying good citizens and creating public opposition so that the

anti-lynching bills by his wife Eleanor and various members of the “Black Cabinet” appeased African Americans and northern liberal Democrats.

ii. “The ablest men in the Senate.”

The renewed effort to pass anti-lynching legislation began in early January 1934 when the Costigan-Wagner bill was presented to the Senate. Sponsored by Democrats Edward Costigan of Colorado and Robert Wagner of New York, this bill, framed by the NAACP the previous November, was a response to 28 known lynchings in 1933.¹² The main provisions of the bill included fining a county \$5,000 if a lynching took place within its boundaries or a five-year prison sentence for any official involved in a lynching.¹³

Eleanor Roosevelt shared a frequent correspondence with White throughout the 1930s. The two developed a genuine rapport but, more

localities themselves will wipe it out.” Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White, 19 March 1936. ER, 19, 0241. Also cited in Weiss, p118.

¹² *NYT*, 2 January 1934, p8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5 January 1934, p17. White, appearing before the Senate Judiciary subcommittee in February, presented statistics on lynching. He noted that of 5,053 reported lynchings since 1882, 3,513 of the victims were African American and in only one sixth of cases was rape even the alleged justification. It should also be noted that 94 of the victims were women, although the race of female victims was not disclosed. There had been 277 lynchings in the last twelve years, illustrating that southern states were not dealing with the problem. White reiterated that the lack of action on lynching made African Americans susceptible to communism. Robert Zangrando, “The NAACP and a Federal Anti-lynching Bill, 1934-1940,” *Journal of Negro History*, 50,

importantly, she provided the NAACP with the ear of the president. Writing to Eleanor in April 1934, but clearly wanting to influence her husband, White argued that there had never been a better opportunity to pass anti-lynching legislation. Appealing to Democratic self-interest, he told her of “the great strategic value of an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress passing such legislation.” This would provide “a valuable weapon” in the forthcoming midterm elections. “This,” he concluded, “will be especially true in the large number of northern and border states in which the Negro vote holds the balance of power.”¹⁴ Roosevelt refused to become publicly involved in the debate but he did meet White at the White House on 6 May. In July, the NAACP reiterated its call to Roosevelt for the law to be passed as there had already been ten lynchings in 1934.¹⁵

The lynching of Claude Neal, an African American from Florida, in October 1934 re-invigorated the NAACP’s campaign as Neal had been taken

April 1965, p107. Costigan was actually born in Virginia. The NAACP had originally hoped to have the bill sponsored by southern representatives.

¹⁴ Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, 20 April 1934, ER, 18, 0933.

¹⁵ *NYT*, 22 July 1934, p19.

from custody and his lynching was advertised.¹⁶ After this lynching, Costigan and Wagner decided to reintroduce their bill.¹⁷ Democratic gains in November 1934 meant that the bill could, in theory, be passed in both Houses without any southern votes and would be successful if Roosevelt made it a priority piece of legislation.¹⁸

The bill was reintroduced into Congress and was eventually approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee on 12 March 1935.¹⁹ When Costigan announced his intention to re-submit the anti-lynching bill to the Senate in April, Arthur Krock commented that it “hangs over... the President’s program like a poised avalanche, with destruction its promise.”²⁰ He believed that although Costigan would have the stomach for the fight, Wagner might not as he “has bigger irons in the fire.”²¹

¹⁶ Zangrando, *JNH*, 50, p110. Zangrando cites an eight-page pamphlet entitled “The Lynching of Claude Neal.”

¹⁷ Lynchings fell from 28 in 1933 to 16 in 1934 and White attributed this to the threat of anti-lynching legislation. He noted that there had been two lynchings in January and then none until Congress adjourned without passing Costigan-Wagner. *Ibid.*, 1 January 1935, p14.

¹⁸ Walter White, “The Costigan-Wagner Bill,” *Crisis*, 42, January 1935. p10-11 and p29. White listed the various organisations that had endorsed anti-lynching legislation and asserted that they had a combined membership of 42 million. *ibid.* White had earlier made a similar claim. *NYT*, 22 July 1934, p19

¹⁹ *NYT*, 12 March 1935, p11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1935, p22. In an effort to allay southern fears that the anti-lynching bill was aimed directly at them, Costigan maintained that the bill was being reintroduced due to the lynching of two white youths in San Jose, California. Edward P. Costigan, “Open and Boastful Anarchy,” *Crisis*, 42, March 1935, p77-78.

²¹ *NYT*, 17 April 1935, p22. Krock believed that a filibuster was inevitable and would be conducted by the “ablest men in the Senate.” White objected to Krock’s conclusions, noting that

The *Crisis* provided a list of the bill's supporters, but some were much more enthusiastic than others. A number of the twenty-five remaining Republican senators came out in support of the bill. These included: Norris (Nebraska), Capper (Kansas), Vandenberg (Michigan), McNary (Oregon), Cutting (New Mexico), Johnson (California), Couzens (Michigan), La Follette (Wisconsin), Barbour (New Jersey), Hastings (Delaware) and Nye (North Dakota). Of these, only Capper, Barbour Vandenberg, McNary and Nye had any long-term future in Republican politics. Couzens failed to be renominated, Hastings and Barbour were defeated in 1936 (although Barbour would be re-elected in 1938), Johnson was elderly and Cutting would die later in the year. Norris and La Follette, increasingly exasperated by the conservative course of the party, would become an Independent and a Progressive respectively in 1937 (undoubtedly extending their careers in the process).²² Not all of those listed in

many senators supported the passage of the bill, and took particular exception to the accusation that Wagner believed the bill to be of minor importance. *Ibid.*, 19 April 1935, p20. Krock's defence of his comments was bullish to the point of condescension: "Mr White, being a special pleader, is entitled to make me out as 'standing squarely behind' anybody he chooses... I would not attempt to dispossess him of his mental capacity." *Ibid.*

²² See Walter White, "The Costigan-Wagner Bill," *Crisis*, 42, January 1935, p10-11 and p29 and *Crisis*, volume 42, February 1935, p42-43 and p61. The Democrats who supported the bill were predominantly from northern states but also included both senators from West Virginia, Neely and Holt. In the House, members from Minnesota, Illinois, Tennessee, Missouri, New York, Massachusetts, California, and Indiana offered support for the bill. *Ibid.*

the *Crisis* actually supported the measure; many merely said that they would consider it carefully.

The Republicans had at least finally begun to show some interest. "Senator McNary has," White told Eleanor Roosevelt, "pledged his unqualified support and both he and Senator Hastings have stated that we can safely count on all the Republicans voting for the bill."²³ This, of course, could have been a veiled threat to Franklin Roosevelt. The implication was that the Republicans, with one eye on the presidential election of 1936, were taking the bill seriously in an attempt to regain the African American vote. This was certainly the view of Krock when he again questioned the motivation of those promoting anti-lynching legislation. He argued that there were those "partisan Republicans" who used the bill to emphasise to African Americans that southern Democrats were opposed to the prevention of lynching. At the same time, senators from

In February 1935, the *Crisis* listed another thirty or so senators and Representatives who had replied to the NAACP's request for comments on the anti-lynching bill. *Ibid.*, February 1935, p42-43 and p61.

²³ Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, 20 April 1935. ER, 19, 008. Charles McNary was the Senate minority leader.

border states could claim to have done all they could to pass the bill. He concluded by once again questioning Wagner's commitment to the bill.²⁴

The Costigan-Wagner bill did eventually reach the Senate but, by early May, it was dropped to enable the passage of more pressing matters. Wagner insisted that the issue would be raised again.²⁵ Borah had not intended to become embroiled in the debate but was goaded into participating by comments from Costigan. Borah maintained that, as with the earlier Dyer measure, the Costigan-Wagner bill was unconstitutional.²⁶ Borah insisted that to pass the anti-lynching bill and have it sustained by the Supreme Court meant that state sovereignty would be "utterly annihilated."²⁷ He also claimed that the Costigan-Wagner bill would not stop lynching and that this could only be done by education and influencing public opinion.²⁸

²⁴ *NYT*, 2 May 1935, p20.

²⁵ Southerners actually began their filibuster even before the anti-lynching bill had been submitted by delaying the passage of the Bankhead Farm Tenancy Bill. *Ibid.*, 24 April 1935, p2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1935, p22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1935, p15. Krock seemed to agree, but noted that many within the Senate had been inconsistent on how they viewed states' rights, including both Borah and Wagner over prohibition. *Ibid.*, p20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1935, p15.

White believed that the Costigan-Wagner bill of 1935 enjoyed greater public support than the Dyer bill of 1922.²⁹ The *Crisis* declared that one of the most significant aspects of the fight was the southern support it received, but noted that “many so-called friends of the Negro and haters of lynching *from the North and West* did not support the bill with their votes and did nothing to break the filibuster.”³⁰ Many of these senators, including Norris and Couzens, abandoned the bill in order to pursue more “important” legislation and were, in the eyes of the *Crisis*, more culpable than senators from Tennessee and Kentucky who wavered before voting for an adjournment. Particular ire was, as always, reserved for Borah.³¹

iii. “A blot on our American civilisation.”

By the start of 1937, Roosevelt’s position was seemingly impregnable. His majority in the presidential election of 1936 meant that, theoretically, he

²⁹ Organisations backing the NAACP’s campaign now, apparently, had an aggregate of between 50 and 53 million members. *Ibid.*, 19 April 1935, p20. White praised four southern senators who spoke out in favour of the bill. “The Fight Has Just Begun,” *Crisis*, 42, June 1935, p175 and 183.

³⁰ “The Fight Has Just Begun,” *Crisis*, 42, June 1935, p177. Italics in original.

³¹ *Ibid.* For a list of those senators who voted for adjournment see *ibid.*, p184. As well as Couzens, Norris and, of course, Borah. Notable Democrats also voted for adjournment including: Bachman (Tennessee), Barkley, (Kentucky), Black (Alabama), Dieterich (Illinois), McKellar (Tennessee), Robinson (Indiana), Truman (Missouri), and Wheeler (Montana).

could have been elected without a single southern vote. In January Wagner and Joseph A. Gavagan reintroduced the anti-lynching bill in both houses of Congress.³² The *New York World Telegram* reported that the Republicans would back anti-lynching legislation either to recapture the African American vote or thwart the New Deal.³³ White cautioned against over-optimism but believed that “the new mobility of the Negro vote” had made lynching a national issue which northern and border representatives ignored at their peril.³⁴ It is noteworthy that White argued that Roosevelt had nothing to lose by supporting the bill as he would not be seeking re-election. White reminded readers that southern Democrats in Congress were outnumbered 193 to 141. The 89 Republican congressmen who had survived the Democratic onslaught had a vested interest in backing the bill if they genuinely wanted to recapture the African American vote. The addition of these Republicans ensured that the bill passed the House with little difficulty.

³² Gavagan was a congressman from New York whose constituency included Harlem. Costigan had resigned due to ill-health. White told the readers of the *Crisis* that 251 congressmen had either signed a pledge to support the bill or would endorse the bill when it came to the floor of the House. Walter White, “The Anti-lynching Bill and the New Congress,” *ibid.*, January 1937, p15. For a list of many of those who had pledged to support this renewed effort to pass an anti-lynching bill see: *Plaindealer*, 20 November 1936, p2.

³³ *New York World Telegram*, cited in Zangrando, *Crusade*, p140.

The Gavagan bill, passed in the House on 15 April by 277 votes to 119, went to the Senate as the slightly different Wagner-Van Nuys bill.³⁵ White privately commented on “how grand a job several of the Republicans did.”³⁶ The danger, as always, was not securing enough votes for a bill to pass in the Senate (the NAACP was confident that this could be achieved) but to enable a vote to actually take place by overcoming the inevitable filibuster. There was the added danger that Roosevelt’s decision to increase the size of the Supreme Court, a controversy that had divided the Democrats, would delay the bill.³⁷

Southern Democrats successfully, although less vociferously, filibustered and the Gavagan-Wagner-Van Nuys bill was not passed. Historian James T. Patterson argues that Senate Minority Leader McNary facilitated the filibuster

³⁴ Walter White, “The Anti-lynching Bill and the New Congress,” *Crisis*, 44, January 1937, p15. Also in January 1937 the NAACP issued a leaflet entitled “Stop Lynching,” which gave updated statistics about the crime. ER, 19, 0347.

³⁵ Hatton Sumners, the Texan chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, decided to stall the progress of the legislation by putting forward Arthur W. Mitchell’s much weaker bill. Sumners wrongly believed that the NAACP would not oppose a bill proposed by the only African American congressman but the Association succeeded in preventing the Mitchell bill reaching the floor. This caused a rift between the Association and Mitchell. Mitchell took the conservative view that education was the way to stop lynching and was severely criticised in the pages of the *Crisis*.

Ironically, Wagner introduced the bill the day after a Democratic Senatorial “harmony dinner.” Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism*, p156.

Frederick Van Nuys was a Democratic senator from Indiana. The Gavagan-Wagner-Van Nuys bill now covered all instances of mob violence and not just those where the victim had been seized from custody. It also sought to impose much harsher penalties. See Zangrando, p141-142, also cited in Weiss, *Farewell*, p242.

³⁶ Walter White to Lewis Strauss, 22 April 1937. Lewis Strauss Papers, box 86. Unfortunately, White did not name those Republicans involved. Strauss was a former aide to Hoover and, it would seem, a contributor to the NAACP.

by preventing Vice-President Garner and majority leader Barkley from side-stepping the bill. The Democrats hoped to dispense with the bill as painlessly as possible but McNary, according to Patterson, “shrewdly fore[saw] another Democratic rift” and sought to exploit it.³⁸ This gives credence to the view that the Republicans were using anti-lynching to divide the Democrats. It also suggests that many Democrats wanted to heal the divisions the bill had caused by quietly dropping it. Patterson also argues that the southern Democrats were less outspoken in their opposition because they believed that the bill was an “insincere gambit” by their northern colleagues to win African American votes and that its passage would be detrimental to liberal southerners.³⁹ By ignoring the bill Roosevelt would alienate neither southerners nor African Americans. The bill, regarded as unfinished business, was to be reconsidered at the next session in January 1938. Its supporters viewed this as a victory.⁴⁰

³⁷ “Anti-lynching Bill goes to Senate,” *Crisis*, 44, May 1937.

³⁸ Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, p157.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ White remained outwardly positive: “the action of the Senate in voting to make a special order of the anti-lynching bill marks one of the greatest victories in the fight for the bill.” *Crisis*, 44, September 1937, p279. For the comments of those senators supporting the bill, including Wagner, Van Nuys and Capper, see *ibid.*

There were “only” eight lynchings in 1937 but all of the victims had been seized from custody.⁴¹ In early 1938 74 senators from both parties pledged their support for the Gavagan-Wagner-Van Nuys bill if it reached the Senate floor, but an extended southern filibuster dampened their enthusiasm.⁴² Borah was once more at the forefront of the opposition, telling the Senate that the South was doing very well in combating lynching. It appeared to the *Crisis* that the senator was only interested in protecting states’ rights where African Americans might benefit from any change. Furthermore, it was abundantly clear, according to the *Crisis* that the goal of his southern allies was to keep African Americans in their place.⁴³

McNary told the NAACP that he was in favour of the bill but did not want the Senate to give up its right to unlimited debate. The Republicans, could not, therefore, vote for cloture.⁴⁴ McNary’s commitment was called into question, however, when the NAACP learned that he had actually voted in favour of cloture in nine out of eleven occasions since 1917 and had signed cloture

⁴¹ “They Are Silent On The Main Point,” *ibid.*, 45, February 1938, p49.

⁴² Jack, *History of the NAACP*, p41. Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi told the Senate that if a secret vote was taken on the bill it would have trouble finding ten supporters. *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Crisis*, 45, February 1938, p49.

⁴⁴ “Cloture” was a Senate mechanism to limit debate.

petitions five times.⁴⁵ It was becoming apparent, according to Robert L. Jack, that even those senators who were sponsoring the bill had no real desire to see it become law, a contention supported by Zangrando.

The Gavagan-Wagner-Van Nuys bill was laid aside on 21 February after a six-week filibuster. Efforts by the two senators to force cloture twice failed and on the second occasion no Republicans voted in favour.⁴⁶ The bill was eventually shelved by a vote of 58 to 22 to make way for Roosevelt's \$250,000,000 emergency relief bill. Wagner expressed regret that Republican members of the Senate had refused to vote for cloture. McNary countered by stating that while the GOP was in favour of the bill (the only Republicans against were Hale of Maine and, inevitably, Borah) it was up to the Democrats, with their large majority, to invoke cloture and he believed that they had demonstrated little genuine enthusiasm for this. Barkley's response was to

⁴⁵ Jack, p44.

⁴⁶ In late January only 37 senators voted for cloture and 51 were against, in mid-February they met with slightly more success (42 for and 46 against) but it was clear that the bill was not going to pass. According to Taylor Merrill of the *Christian Century*, Arthur Capper was the only Republican to vote in favour of cloture but he does not specify whether this was on the first or second occasion on which it was proposed. Taylor Merrill, "Lynching the Anti-Lynching Bill," *Christian Century*, 23 February, 1938, p238-240.

remind the Republicans that while they may have given the bill their tacit approval, no GOP senator had actually spoken out in favour of it.⁴⁷

White was livid. "I want to tell you," he wrote Lewis Strauss, "something of the inside story and particularly of the awfully stupid politics McNary and some of the other Republicans, as well as some of the Democrats, are playing."⁴⁸ Arthur Vandenberg was one senator who opposed cloture on general principle. Not unsympathetic to the aspirations of African Americans, he later took the time to write to the NAACP explaining that he only ever envisaged voting for cloture on questions of national defence.⁴⁹

In June, Senator John Connally of Texas was reported as saying that a proposed filibuster against the wages and hours bill would fail because it would not have Republican support. The *Crisis* believed that this called into question the Republicans' whole commitment to anti-lynching legislation. This would not have come as a surprise to many African Americans and, if true, would validate White's criticism of the GOP in the aftermath of Gavagan-Wagner-Van

⁴⁷ "Both Parties watch for reaction to vote on Anti-lynching bill," NAACP Press Release, undated but likely to be February or March 1938. ER, 19, 0402.

⁴⁸ Walter White to Lewis Strauss, 7 March 1938. Lewis Strauss Papers, box 86. (Hoover Library).

⁴⁹ "Lynch Bill Has Good Chance In New Congress," *Crisis*, 45, December 1938, p398.

Nuys.⁵⁰ The supporters of anti-lynching legislation had little choice other than to give up the bill; they would have lost hard won sympathy had they persevered. White compared the bills believing that both “were aimed at the alleviation of human suffering.”⁵¹

The anti-lynching crusade was certainly creating political repercussions. The whole process strained relations between the NAACP and the Republicans. When White publicly criticised McNary over the failure of cloture, the Senate Minority leader vowed not to support any future measure backed by White. John D. Hamilton, the Republican party chairman, pointed out to White that there were only sixteen Republican senators against 76 Democrats and that any criticism should be directed at the White House. Hamilton had a point; the Republicans, even if they had wanted to, were really in no position to dictate legislation. Nonetheless, it can be argued that by 1938 that there was little chance of a rapprochement between the GOP and the NAACP.

The breakdown of relations between White and senior Republicans did not necessarily mean that the African American vote would be securely and

⁵⁰ “Connally Says Republicans Needed for Filibuster,” *ibid.*, June 1938, p181.

overwhelmingly in the Democratic column. Many Democrats were concerned about the effect that yet another defeat for an anti-lynching law would have on the African American community. The problem was serious enough for Roosevelt to meet an African American delegation at the White House. As usual, nothing tangible resulted from the meeting, but it reaffirmed to White that the African American vote was becoming too important to be taken for granted.

The NAACP hoped to reintroduce an anti-lynching bill after the mid-term elections of 1938. These elections saw Democratic reverses, plus a failed purge of conservatives, and this meant that party liberals were in no position to fight strenuously for another anti-lynching bill. As usual, plenty of congressmen were willing to back the bill but it would be 1940 before another serious attempt was made. Anti-lynching legislation could have provided the Republicans with the ideal opportunity to drive home this rare political advantage and accentuate Democratic divisions in the process. The GOP decided, however, that an alliance with southern or conservative rather than northern or liberal Democrats was much more useful. Neither conservatives nor liberals had emerged

⁵¹ "Anti-lynching bill Laid Aside by 58-22 Vote," *ibid.*, March 1938, p84. This quotation also

triumphant from the ideological battle within the GOP but the party now felt confident enough to challenge effectively the New Deal. To do this they needed the assistance of southern Democrats. The Republicans felt that if they were to be electable in 1940 then they had to offer a conservative rather than a liberal alternative to the New Deal and this would not be achieved by joining forces with northern Democrats to champion anti-lynching legislation. Once again congressional Republicans' half-hearted commitment to anti-lynching legislation in particular, and African Americans generally, was exposed as an insincere ploy; once again African American interests were supplanted by a wider political agenda.

iv. "Trying to buy back the Colored vote?"

Even those senators who were genuinely sympathetic to the cause knew that it had little chance of success, but 1940 saw yet another drive to pass an anti-lynching bill. Despite its eventual failure, this attempt is notable because it was sponsored actively by a Republican. Hamilton Fish, a congressman from

appears in an NAACP Press Release, undated but likely to be February or March 1938. ER, 19,

New York, was the first Republican since the 1920s to be so publicly associated with an anti-lynching bill, but his support appeared curious given his involvement in Borah's abortive campaign for the presidency in 1936.

Borah's campaign among African Americans floundered, of course, because he claimed that anti-lynching legislation would be unconstitutional. Fish exhibited an inconsistent approach to the constitutionality of anti-lynching bills and his defence of Borah in 1936 was in marked contrast to his own record on the issue. In 1935 he had introduced a bill identical to Costigan-Wagner and had been a passionate supporter of the 1924 Dyer bill. White recognised Fish's "long record of sincere service to the Negro" but was uneasy about his support for Borah in 1936. He was worried that Fish's introduction of an anti-lynching bill in 1935 had been merely "a political gesture," a tactic to win African American votes.⁵² There was clearly some kind of reconciliation between White and Fish by 1940, together with a divergence between Fish and Borah prior to

0403.

⁵² White to Fish, 5 March 1936. Lewis Strauss Papers, box 51E, Hoover Library. White also referred to "that great 'liberal' Hamilton Fish" during the campaign. Walter White to Lewis Strauss, 6 March 1936. *ibid.*

the latter's death in January 1940.⁵³ Defending his 1940 bill Fish declared that "I am absolutely convinced and I have been for 20 years of the constitutionality of this type of legislation, the need for it and the right of the Negro to have it."⁵⁴

Perhaps the inconsistencies of Fish should have been a cause for concern to the NAACP, but the Association was grateful of allies wherever it could find them. Fish's support for an anti-lynching bill is perhaps not particularly surprising as he had been an officer in an African American regiment during the First World War.

The Gavagan-Fish bill passed the House in early 1940 by 252 to 131, with 140 Republicans and 109 Democrats supporting the bill and 123 Democrats and 8 Republicans against. The Republicans were keen to take credit for this, refuting accusations that they were, in the words of Arthur Mitchell, "trying to buy back the Colored vote."⁵⁵ A Republican National Committee press release challenged Mitchell and demanded to know whether the

⁵³ Borah died on 19 January 1940. Fish's decision to embark upon an anti-lynching bill would have been taken prior to Borah's death.

⁵⁴ Emmett J. Scott, "Heavy Republican Support Passes Anti-lynching Bill," Republican National Committee press release, 18 January 1940. ER, 19, 0613.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, frame 0611.

motivation of the Democrats and the NAACP (“an organisation most favorable to the New Deal”) was equally questionable.⁵⁶

The most senior Republican to pledge support was Vandenberg but he again opposed cloture: “I am definitely and specifically in favor of the federal anti-lynching bill and I shall vote in favor of it. You ask me whether I will endorse a bill making it a crime to filibuster against any bill that has been carried by a majority vote. The answer is, I will not.” He explained that he was against “deliver[ing] the complete control of the United States to any transient majority that comes along.”⁵⁷ Fish demanded to know where Roosevelt stood on the bill, arguing that the president seemed more interested in foreign rather than domestic policy. He insisted that “one word from the White House and that bill would come flying through the Senate and be enacted into law.”⁵⁸

By late 1940 the political climate was dominated by the war in Europe. Against this backdrop, McNary and Barkley polled their colleagues in October and found little enthusiasm for a renewed effort on anti-lynching. Barkley stated that he was “willing to take the responsibility of saying that in the midst of our

⁵⁶ Ibid., frame 0612.

international situation, [and] our defense program... it is impractical at this time to make a futile effort to obtain a vote on the bill.”⁵⁹ In dropping the bill, Barkley protested that the NAACP had made “insistent and sometimes peremptory demands that, regardless of anything else, the anti-lynching bill should be brought forward for consideration in the Senate.”⁶⁰ Despite this he still claimed to hope that the bill could be considered at a later date. Vandenberg questioned the sincerity of those who fought for anti-lynching bills in the Senate by noting that they never tried to break the filibuster “with round-the-clock sessions with a quorum intact.”⁶¹ The implication was that those who supported anti-lynching measures did so because they were more concerned about African American votes than African American lives.

Both parties had good reason to avoid controversy. The Democrats did not want to risk fragile party unity in an election year, while the Republicans seemed more concerned about maintaining their alliance with conservative and southern Democrats against any liberal legislative programme. It is also possible that the

⁵⁷ *Plaindealer*, 8 March 1940, p2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29 March 1940, p6.

⁵⁹ *Plaindealer*, 18 October 1940, p2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Zangrando, *Crusade*, p164.

passing of an anti-lynching bill may have been slipping down the NAACP's list of priorities. When the Gavagan-Fish bill was dropped the *Crisis* commented that "next to jobs, security and fair treatment in the Army and Navy, the thing these voters [African Americans] want most is for the federal government to outlaw mob violence and lynching."⁶² This could perhaps be viewed as a recognition by the NAACP that, for all the symbolic importance of anti-lynching legislation, and regardless of the need for it, there were more practical matters which demanded attention. Anti-lynching remained a priority for the NAACP throughout the 1940s but as part of a wider agenda that included fair employment and anti-poll tax legislation. The campaign successfully kept lynching in the public eye: a Gallup poll in 1937 suggested that 70% of Americans supported anti-lynching legislation, and even 65% of southerners were in favour.⁶³ Zangrando would argue, however, that even by 1940 anti-lynching legislation "was an idea whose time had gone."⁶⁴

⁶² *Crisis*, 47, September 1940, p279.

⁶³ *Washington Post*, 31 January 1937. ER, 19, 0355. Also cited in Zangrando, *INH*, p115. In March 1937, the *Crisis* reported the findings of the American Institute of Public Opinion on lynching which found that 70% of the nation was in favour of an anti-lynching bill. "Sentiment for Anti-lynching Bill," *Crisis*, 44, March 1937, p81.

v. "He ain't gonna lose his votes for it."

It was apparent, and perhaps understandable, that Roosevelt was neither willing to risk his legislative programme to pass an anti-lynching bill nor to speak out in favour of legislation. He believed that states had a responsibility to combat lynching but concluded that it would be antagonistic of the North to impose an anti-lynching bill on the South.⁶⁵ This reflected an increasing concern within the South that the lack of even a token effort on lynching would lead to federal intervention.⁶⁶ White believed that FDR's silence was "the single greatest handicap" preventing legislation from being passed. Zangrando concurs: "by any reasonable standard, administration co-operation proved meagre, indirect, hesitant and totally insufficient."⁶⁷ White's resignation from the Advisory Council to the Government of the Virgin Islands in June 1935 illustrated not only dissatisfaction with the lack of progress on the legislative front but also the limitations of the NAACP strategy.⁶⁸ As Zangrando concedes, the NAACP had nowhere else to go: the Democrats were too entrenched in

⁶⁴ Zangrando, p165.

⁶⁵ Ross, *Spingarn*, p157.

⁶⁶ "Can the States Stop Lynching?" *Crisis*, 45, January 1938, p12-13.

⁶⁷ Zangrando, p128.

Congress; the Republicans, dominated by conservatives such as Borah, Hamilton and McNary, offered no real alternative.

Anti-lynching bills always commanded more support in the House than in the Senate. Throughout the 1930s anti-lynching bills would pass through the House with relative ease; it was the Senate where difficulties always arose:

whatever advantages black voters possessed in northern and Mid-western metropolitan centers when lobbying in the House were effectively cancelled by the more traditional state-wide constituencies with whom senators had to deal. Afro-American political leverage was an emerging but still limited force.⁶⁹

Few politicians were prepared either to take risks for the African American community or stand up to the South. Southern senators had a dual agenda in thwarting anti-lynching legislation; racism was a factor but filibustering anti-lynching bills helped to delay relief measures and other undesirable liberal legislation. They could do this without political cost as there was a perception that most relief went to northern industrial areas.

⁶⁸ In his resignation letter, White told the president: "I cannot continue to remain even a small part of your official family" due to the failure to pass anti-lynching legislation. "The Fight Has Just Begun," *Crisis*, 42, June 1935, p175 and 183. Quotation from Zangrando, p129.

⁶⁹ Zangrando, p146.

Despite the progress it had made, the NAACP was not, ultimately, in a position to bring about major change. As Zangrando asserts, the Association had justice and contacts on its side but it did not have influence or power.⁷⁰ Encountering these problems during a liberal presidency was particularly distressing for White. Politically the NAACP had other problems. The organisation was now part, albeit a minor part, of the New Deal coalition and, as such, was captive to it. That White seemed intent on burning his bridges with the Republican party "heightened the black community's vulnerability, especially since it lacked reasonable political alternatives outside the Roosevelt coalition."⁷¹ The situation was not improved by the failure of the Democrats to purge the conservative wing of the party in 1938.

It is difficult not to conclude that those who supported anti-lynching legislation wanted to appease rather than protect African Americans. Notwithstanding this, the main sponsors of the bills should not be judged too harshly. Wagner had a long record of support for liberal causes and, although the labour relations act which bore his name was of limited use to African

⁷⁰ Ibid., p159.

Americans, it would be uncharitable to question his sincerity on anti-lynching. Costigan, a nominal southerner representing a south-western state, had little to gain but nothing to lose electorally by championing anti-lynching. Van Nuys was from Indiana, a state with a substantial African American population, and had chaired the sub-committee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which had previously endorsed Costigan-Wagner.⁷² Gavagan was Harlem's congressman and would have recognised the growing political power of African Americans. Gavagan, according to Weiss, "assumed a central role in the anti-lynching fight out of political advantage as much as personal conviction."⁷³

The motivation of Fish, another New Yorker, is more difficult to determine. It is conceivable that he was only interested in bolstering his own position or that of his party, but this tactic was certainly no worse than those employed by the Democrats over the previous eight years. It must always be remembered that the Democrats strategically targeted relief and engaged in very obvious tokenism prior to elections. Given the lack of leadership from the GOP in previous attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation, his association with Borah

⁷¹ Ibid.

and the proximity of the election, Fish's efforts to appeal to African American voters do appear quite cynical.⁷⁴

The forthcoming election and the fact that the African American vote had been ebbing away from the GOP for years can best explain the Republicans' sudden interest in anti-lynching legislation in 1940. It was apparent from the experience of 1936 that words alone were no longer sufficient to secure African American support; politicians had to be seen to be doing something. The ties of African Americans to the Republican party had not been totally broken and 1940 provided the GOP with an opportunity to regain their votes. The Republican strategy should, therefore, have been founded on two basic premises: firstly, the overwhelming vote for the Democrats in 1936 was an aberration; and secondly, African American loyalty was to Roosevelt and not his party. This latter point is especially important: at the beginning of 1940 Roosevelt had not announced his intention to break with tradition by running for

⁷² Weiss, Farewell, p241.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ One could perhaps speculate on another reason for Fish's support for an anti-lynching bill. He was from the isolationist wing of the Republican party and would become involved with the "America First" movement prior to the United States' entry into World War Two. (There were also suspicions that he was an anti-Semite and a fascist). At a time when America was re-arming, many suspected that Roosevelt was determined to drag the country into the war. It could be argued, therefore, that an anti-lynching bill and the filibuster it would attract could delay the

a third term and a possible successor was Vice-President Garner. Nationally African Americans had voted for Roosevelt, but locally the individual candidate, as White predicted, was becoming more important than the party. If a congressman was identified with anti-lynching legislation then, regardless of how sincere or vigorous, his support could be a potential vote winner in African American communities.

Questions must be raised about the NAACP's strategy in promoting anti-lynching above everything else. Anti-lynching bills offered politicians a symbolic way to tap African American support, safe in the knowledge that they would be filibustered to death by southerners. By promoting anti-lynching legislation the NAACP could have actually been encouraging the tokenism in national politics that it had always attacked. The ultimate responsibility for this must rest with White.⁷⁵ Like many African Americans, he retained a genuine faith in the American political system, but his passion to end the crime of

defence programme. This could be a grave injustice to Fish, but to determine whether or not this theory has any credence it would be important to know what Fish's true motivation was.

⁷⁵ Charles Houston warned White "that [to] fight for anti-lynching legislation without just as vigorous a battle for economic independence is to fight the manifestation of the evil and ignore its cause." Houston to White, 9 February 1935 and 23 February 1935, NAACP papers, cited in Wolters, Negroes and the Great Depression, p340. Houston also argued: "you give nine million Negroes the ballot and they will settle the question of lynching." Charles Houston to Executive Staff, "Memorandum re: Further Steps in Anti-lynching Campaign, 2 March 1938." Cited in

lynching and his overestimation of the importance of the African American vote served to alienate many of those people who were vital to his success.

To be sure, anti-lynching legislation could have been passed, albeit with great difficulty, had there been any determination in either the White House or the Congress to see it succeed. There were pragmatic reasons why the administration and, indeed, the Republican party, did not promote anti-lynching legislation. The administration recognised that conservative elements within Congress would seize upon any pretext to thwart the New Deal. Regardless of their sincerity, the Republicans' weakness in Congress throughout the 1930s precluded any attempt to take the lead in promoting anti-lynching legislation. The party maintained, however, a notional commitment to anti-lynching by advocating the passage of a bill in their platforms of 1940, 1944 and 1948 but this had little impact upon their support among African Americans.

The failure of these bills is perhaps less critical than what they represented. On one level anti-lynching bills embodied the increasing confidence of the NAACP and the growing importance of the African American

vote. Conversely, failure of so many anti-lynching bills and the reasons for this demonstrated just how limited African American political influence remained. Significant also was how the anti-lynching campaign reflected the evolving allegiance of African Americans. Usurped, the Republicans remained very much in the background.

The Republicans' reluctance to become deeply involved in the anti-lynching campaign made poor sense politically. Had the Republicans actively endorsed anti-lynching legislation then they might have slowed or even halted African American defections to the Democratic party. Republican support for the various bills put forward from 1934 to 1940 was consistent but unenthusiastic. The truth is that the GOP, and arguably the Democrats, took a minimalist approach to anti-lynching legislation and African American aspirations generally.

CHAPTER FOUR. The Darkest Horse.

i. "To hell with any more elections, we're gonna make him king."

Several months after the 1936 election, D.W. Brogan, writing in the Political Review, argued that the Republican party had to adjust to "an age which has at last forgotten Lincoln." Assessing the difficulties of the GOP, he declared: "the problem of Republican survival hangs on the ability of the party to realize that the old dog needs new tricks and on the ability of the old dog to perform new tricks."¹ The problems of the party were particularly acute as "the Democrats in the north [sic] were able, *without producing any serious hostile reaction in the south* [sic], to win an overall majority of the Negro vote."² Provided it learnt its lessons, Brogan was fairly confident that the GOP would not cease to exist although he warned that "if the party cannot raise money now or win seats in Congress in two years hence, it is indeed doomed."³ Before the

¹ D.W Brogan, "The Future of the Republican Party," Political Quarterly, 8, April-June 1937, p186.

² Ibid., Italics in original.

³ Ibid., p193.

Republicans took their message to the people in 1938, there was some evidence that the “old dog” was prepared to learn at least a few new tricks.

The Republicans were thrown a lifeline in early 1937 when Roosevelt, in an effort to ensure passage of New Deal legislation, attempted to reform the Supreme Court. Republicans had long suspected, of course, that Roosevelt was trying to subvert the Constitution and now they seemed to have evidence that this was indeed his intention. Landon’s attitude, for example, illustrates the very real fear many Americans had about the power that was concentrated in the hands of Roosevelt: “he claims the greatest power any President has ever had, yet he will probably try to lay the blame for this depression [in 1937] on the fact that he doesn’t have still greater powers.”⁴ The Republican response to the court plan was perhaps surprising: for the most part, party representatives said nothing. This tactic actually made good political sense; not only did it heighten tensions within the Democratic party but, as Mayer points out, a policy of silence meant that Roosevelt could not claim that only reactionaries opposed

⁴ Landon to Frank Altschul, September 7, 1937. Cited in McCoy, Landon, p361.

him. Landon went along with this policy, but Hoover and GOP chairman John Hamilton and many in the party, at least outside Congress, were critical of it.

Interestingly, this tactic had the support of those Democrats who were also concerned about the direction of the New Deal. Landon, for instance, met Democratic Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana to offer support to those Democrats resisting the New Deal provided they ran as independents.⁵ There was a fear among Democrats who were against the court plan that Republican opposition would unite the party behind Roosevelt. Congressional Republicans remained dutifully silent on the issue, despite the obvious temptation to speak out.

In late July efforts to reform the Supreme Court were abandoned and it was only at this point that the Republicans began to attack the plans. The eventual defeat of the court plan “shattered the myth of invincibility” surrounding Roosevelt and had long-term ramifications within the Democratic party.⁶ Milton Plesur, for example, suggests that the Democratic victory in 1936 “was ironic in that it also signalled the final end of Democratic unity. In

⁵ McCoy, Landon, p356.

retrospect, the masterful Roosevelt made the greatest political errors of his entire career during the first two years of his second administration.”⁷ While the Republicans could not publicly claim much credit for the court defeat, it did represent a rare setback for Roosevelt. Nevertheless, this did not necessarily enhance the prospect of a renewed and united Republican party: “it was just as well that the Republicans concentrated on fighting the court bill,” asserts Mayer, “because they could agree on little else.”⁸ After the Court fight many Republicans began to consider again the possibility of a political realignment against the New Deal, and there were at least some Democrats who were receptive to the idea.⁹ Knox even suggested that the GOP rename itself the “Constitutional party” to broaden its appeal. As the election of 1938 loomed into view many Republicans remained opposed to the idea of a formal realignment, as there was now increasing criticism of Roosevelt and a feeling that their cause would be better served if they acted independently.

⁶ Mayer, Republican Party, p447. Brogan, writing in early 1937 felt that there was a very real possibility of a Democratic split. Brogan, PQ, 8, p188.

⁷ Milton Plesur, “The Republican Congressional Comeback of 1938,” Review of Politics, 24, 1962, p537.

⁸ Mayer, p448.

⁹ McCoy, Landon, p357. Vandenberg was open-minded about political realignment and potentially abandoning the Republican name, particularly if the Republicans lost again in 1940. Tompkins, Vandenberg, p152.

ii. “The party has made no significant progress toward the realisation of the fundamental political objectives of the Race.”

After the 1936 election there was a battle for the soul of the Republican party between Landon and Hoover. Hoover, the only leading Republican to speak out during the court fight, still had the support of many “Old Guard” Republicans in 1937. He felt that the disastrous defeat in 1936 meant that Landon had no claim to the party’s leadership and he sought to regain it himself by trying to organise a mid-term convention. Friction was also generated between the two by the perception that Landon had failed to defend the record of the Hoover administration in 1936. Landon, in turn, felt that Hoover was a perpetual candidate for the presidency and continually seeking absolution for his defeat in 1932. Landon was not alone in feeling that any rehabilitation of Hoover would be disastrous for the GOP, but the ex-president persisted in trying to bring the party back to his way of thinking. In August 1937, Hoover announced that he wanted a special Republican convention to meet to discuss the party’s plans for the 1938 elections.

Landon feared that the party's Old Guard would dominate such a convention.¹⁰ He also felt that it would serve to expose the continuing splits within the party, and this made particularly poor political sense at a time when the Democrats were having problems of their own. Capper, McNary, Borah, Martin, Vandenberg and Knox were also opposed, as were most Republicans in Congress. Convinced that Hoover was trying to win the 1940 nomination, Landon successfully blocked the convention, and prevented further public division in the process. As a compromise a "program committee" under the chairmanship of Glenn Frank, former President of the University of Wisconsin and "a reputed liberal," was set up to examine the future direction of the party.¹¹ This 200-member committee was to "ascertain as fully as possible the various views held by the rank and file of the Republican party."¹² "The Republicans thus succeeded," concludes Clyde Weed, "in maintaining an outward display of party harmony."¹³ According to Mayer, the failure of the party to hold a mid-

¹⁰ McCoy, Landon, p366.

¹¹ Plesur, RP, 24, p533.

¹² McCoy, Landon, p373.

¹³ Weed, Nemesis, p192. For information on the structure of the Program Committee see Cotter and Hennessey, Politics Without Power, p194.

term convention “ended Hoover’s six-year effort to dominate the Republican minority.”¹⁴

From the outset then, the Frank Committee was at best an exercise in damage limitation. The committee had a broad remit but no power; there was no guarantee that any of its conclusions would find their way into the Republican platform of 1940. The committee, however, took the remarkably progressive step of asking Ralph Bunche, the eminent African American political scientist, to write a report on the problems of African Americans. The appointment of Bunche may have suggested to African Americans that the GOP was genuinely trying to reassess its historic relationship with them. Bunche was certainly an excellent choice for the role but he was also a strange one; after all, the party might not like what he had to say. The GOP could have taken the safer option and appointed a party hack to merely condemn the New Deal, but this would have fooled no-one. It may well be that Frank recognised the desertion of the GOP by African Americans in 1936 and sincerely wanted to address the

¹⁴ Mayer, “Alf M. Landon, as Leader of the Republican Opposition, 1937-1940.” Kansas Historical Quarterly, 32, 1965, p331. Mayer is very sympathetic to the efforts of Landon to keep the Republican party together in the years after 1936. He believes that there was a stark contrast between the responses of Hoover and Landon to presidential defeat.

problem.¹⁵ There are two possible explanations why Bunche was selected: firstly, it could be that Frank truly thought that his committee could make a difference; less charitably, it could be argued that the GOP wanted Bunche's name rather than his ideas.

The Republicans knew that not only was Bunche, in the words of Benjamin Rivlin, "one of the keenest students of race relations" in the country but also that he was a liberal.¹⁶ Still, Bunche set about his task with the best of intentions. He told Frank that he would contribute to the report as "a member of a disadvantaged minority group" who was "actively interested in any measures or policies leading toward the amelioration of the problems of my group."¹⁷ He believed that the committee was "constructive and honestly designed to be of aid to the Negro people."¹⁸

A Republican student at Harvard who believed that Bunche was an "ultra-liberal" endorsed his appointment regardless: "any survey he made would be

¹⁵ Weiss comments that Republican sources are "silent" on this issue indeed, most literature pertaining to the Republican party pays little attention to the Frank Committee. Until an opportunity arises to look at this issue in more detail one can only speculate on Frank's motivation.

¹⁶ Benjamin Rivlin, Ralph Bunche: The Man and His Times, Holmes and Meier, New York and London, 1990. p8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

scholarly and objective and un-influenced by his own political views.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, the Republicans were shocked when Bunche submitted his 130-page report. He declared:

Despite extended periods of power enjoyed by the GOP and the long-standing loyalty of the Race, the party has made no significant progress toward the realisation of the fundamental political objectives of the Race; namely, enfranchisement in the South, protection of civil liberties, anti-lynching legislation, and the appointment of members of the Race to policy-forming and other responsible positions.²⁰

The African American needed “everything that a constructive, humane, American political program can give him, employment, land, housing, relief, health protection, unemployment and old-age insurance, enjoyment of civil rights, all that a twentieth century American citizen is entitled to.”²¹ He argued that the New Deal had improved the situation but it still fell a long way short of the “minimal needs” of African Americans.²²

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ralph J. Bunche, “Report on the Needs of the Negro (for the Republican National Committee),” 1 July 1939, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Cited in Weiss, Farewell, p269.

²² Ibid.

Bunche concluded that the African American vote for the Democrats in 1932 and 1936 was a “bread and butter” vote; in other words, they voted for the economic benefits of the New Deal and not for the Democratic party. Republican efforts to win southern lily-white support and their continued use of “socially unintelligent, inept and self-seeking” African American leaders had alienated many African American voters.²³ If this was to change then new African American leadership was needed to replace “the old slogans, the shop-worn dogmas and appeals used so effectively in the past” with “concrete evidence... of a determination to fully integrate [sic] the Negro in American life.”²⁴

The Republican Program Committee felt that Bunche’s recommendations were too “impractical,” “revolutionary” and, crucially, too similar to the prevailing ethos of the New Deal. Bunche’s proposals were ignored and the Committee’s 115-page report, eventually published in February 1940, contained precisely five paragraphs on the problems of African Americans. These echoed Landon’s 1936 indictment of the New Deal and warned against “a progressive

²³ Ibid.

shunting of Negroes out of the normal productive enterprise into a kind of separate relief economy, leaving them, as it were, on permanent 'reservations' of public relief."²⁵

Francis Rivers wrote to Walter White to explain aspects of the report.²⁶ If Rivers was looking for White's endorsement, it was not forthcoming. White asked Bunche for his opinion on Rivers' explanation "which doesn't seem to me to explain very much;" he was also concerned about "the margin between what is in the report and what you among others recommended."²⁷ Bunche's reply illustrated just how disillusioned he had become with the whole process. First of all, he chastised White for suggesting that he had become a Republican: "I am not a Republican and never have been, and on the basis of what I've seen lately, never likely to be."²⁸ As far as the substance of the report was concerned, Bunche declared: "from what I have seen this report was written without any reference to the materials contained in my own report on the needs of the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "A Program for a Dynamic America: A Statement of Republican Principles." Report of Republican Program Committee submitted to Republican National Committee, 16 February 1940, p91-92. Cited in Weiss, p270. This passage is also quoted in a letter from Francis Rivers to Walter White. Rivers to White, 21 February 1940, NAACP, pt18, C, 129, 27-29.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ White to Bunche, 27 February 1940. Ibid., frame 32.

Negro.”²⁹ It appeared to Bunche that Rivers had condensed and turned the original report into an “extremely partisan report” which was “pretty gosh-awful.”³⁰ The Frank report, Bunche concluded, was “innocuous” as far as African Americans were concerned.³¹

The Frank Committee report did little to rehabilitate the GOP in the eyes of African Americans; in fact, it probably exacerbated African American alienation, as it was public knowledge that Bunche’s findings had been virtually ignored. Criticism of the report is undoubtedly justified, but it does not take into consideration the circumstances under which the Frank Committee was formed in the first place. The committee itself was an exercise in window-dressing and its purpose was merely to create the illusion of unity at a time when the party seemed to have a chance to exploit rare problems for Roosevelt. Donald Bruce Johnson, who believes that the report was “couched in cautious, qualifying phrases on many issues,” confirms this.³² The report, he believes, was “a liberal

²⁸ Bunche to White, 28 February 1940. Ibid., frame 34. Bunche reminded White that he had been employed as a non-partisan expert by the Republican party. White later told Bunche that he had described him as a Republican in jest, but apologised nevertheless.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Donald Bruce Johnson, The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie, University of Illinois Press, 1960, p42.

document with some good advice for Republican platform-makers” but it was equivocal as to how it would implement its recommendations.³³ Plesur agrees: “in creating the [Frank] committee, the Party recognised its traditional weaknesses and the results showed that the weaknesses persisted.”³⁴ The *New York Times* commented: “the caution of the present report, once the generalities are left behind, tends to draw attention to the strong differences of opinion which actually exist in the party.”³⁵ Both Landon and Hamilton endorsed the report despite it illustrating that the GOP was starting to drift ever closer to the New Deal. “Mr Hoover may still belong to the Republican Party,” smirked the pro-Democrat *Nation*, “but the Republican Party no longer belongs to Mr Hoover.”³⁶

The fact was that the report did not represent the party, particularly in Congress “where GOP congressmen were uniting to sabotage some of the New Deal projects which the report implicitly endorsed.”³⁷ The report was also a manifesto without a candidate, made no reference to foreign policy and was

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Plesur, *RP*, 24, p534.

³⁵ *NYT*, 20 February 1940, p20. Cited in Johnson *Republican Party and Wendell Willkie*, p42.

³⁶ *The Nation*, 9 March 1940, p325. Cited in Johnson, p43.

³⁷ Ibid.

virtually ignored by the party convention in 1940. The Program Committee was conceived, certainly by Landon, as a way of preventing further internal strife in the party; when it became clear that even this limited purpose was too ambitious it was quietly forgotten. The report suggested that some Republicans were concerned enough about African American votes to ask a noted liberal his opinion. Yet because African Americans knew that the report had rejected something much more radical, it served to reinforce the view that the GOP was either unable or unwilling to address, even rhetorically, the problems of African Americans.

iii. "No place to go but up."

Some Republicans were encouraged by Roosevelt's problems in 1937, despite the precarious position of their own party. "Perhaps," speculates Plesur, "part of the GOP's optimism stemmed from the fact that they had no place to go but up."³⁸ Landon felt that unity was essential and that the party had to liberalise, give westerners more say in its affairs and, according to McCoy,

³⁸ Plesur, p542.

regain the African American vote. Importantly, Landon was concerned about the continued influence of the party "Old Guard" in the East.

The Republicans, unlike the Democrats, were able to go into the 1938 elections at least publicly united. After the election of 1936, western Republicans became less likely to offer even qualified support to the New Deal. They began to question the increasing tendency of the New Deal to centralise power. A possible explanation for this is that liberal Republicans often simply joined the Democrats. The result, however, was that western Republicans became more conservative at a time when easterners were beginning to tentatively embrace aspects of the New Deal.

Republican fortunes began to revive at the beginning of 1938 with polls showing the administration to be increasingly unpopular. Despite this upturn, divisions within the party remained. There was now, crucially, a realisation of the significance of the urban vote, and this finally convinced eastern Republicans of the need to modify the party's appeals. In other words, the party had to become less conservative in the East and offer a tangible alternative to

the New Deal. To this end the GOP elected more liberal leadership in some north-eastern states.

The possibility of a realignment in American politics along liberal-conservative lines had receded by 1938. The Republicans were less keen on a formal coalition now that their fortunes were reviving independently; conservative Democrats suspected that the GOP was more interested in political gain than political principle. A new party would also have to contend with “existing party structures [which] were reinforced by primary laws, ballot laws, concerns over political patronage and the interests Democratic incumbents had in maintaining seniority within Congress’s committee structure.”³⁹ An informal conservative coalition, therefore, still made the best sense.

In 1938 the Republicans gained eight senators, including the re-election of Warren Barbour in New Jersey and the election of Robert Taft in Ohio. In the House, Republican numbers rose from 89 to 169 without the loss of a single incumbent.⁴⁰ Significantly, many Republican victories were against liberal Democrats, including six liberal senators; furthermore, many defeated

³⁹ Weed, Nemesis, p200.

Democrats had been elected in 1932, 1934 and 1936. Forty-five of the Republican House victories came in the Mid-west with a further 27 in the North-east; in fact, nearly a third of all Republican gains in 1938 came in Pennsylvania (where the Democratic party was deeply split) and Ohio.⁴¹ Southern Democrats, unsurprisingly, were unaffected by the national shift to the Republicans. The GOP also won 18 of 27 gubernatorial contests scoring significant victories in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan.⁴² The narrow defeat of renowned gang-buster Thomas Dewey in the New York gubernatorial race was a good reflection of the modification of the Republicans' electoral appeal. As Weed notes, "Dewey ran a forceful, liberal race. Instead of directly attacking the New Deal, Dewey stressed state issues and the importance of efficient administration of existing relief programs."⁴³ Similar appeals were made elsewhere in the North-east. It is

⁴⁰ Plesur, p543.

⁴¹ Plesur, p544.

⁴² For a much more detailed appraisal of the 1938 election from a Republican point of view see: "Summary of Salient Facts of the 1938 Election," Papers of the Republican Party (henceforth PRP), Part II, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, reel 1, 0002-0010. The conclusion drawn here was that states with 221 electoral votes could be considered "safely Republican" while New York, Illinois, Montana and Idaho with a total of 84 electoral votes were too close to call. The Republicans could, therefore, look forward to the election of 1940 with some optimism. Ibid., frame 0006.

⁴³ Weed, p192. Democrat Herbert Lehman only won in New York with the votes of the American Labor Party. Plesur, p546. Some Republican victories were due to the taking of a

also noteworthy that many of those Democrats who won re-election in 1938 did so as opponents of the New Deal. The most significant consequence of the election, therefore, was that Republicans and conservative Democrats could now prevent any further move to the left by Roosevelt. Interestingly, the *Crisis* reported that African American voters had moved away from the Democrats in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania.⁴⁴

By 1938, Weed argues, there was no longer the same sense of emergency as there had been earlier in the New Deal. Moreover, the Republicans, as noted, finally began to recognise the importance of the urban liberal vote and modified their appeals accordingly. The self-inflicted problems of the Democrats provided the Republicans with an opportunity, and the GOP subsequently became a much more coherent force in Congress. Circumstances would change, but for a period after 1938 the Republicans could look forward to the 1940 election with some optimism: the party's fortunes were improving while

more liberal stance but in others it was entirely down to local factors. Not everyone agrees that Dewey ran a liberal campaign. Warren Moscow of the *New York Times* commented after the 1938 election that Dewey had "paid no attention to actual specific issues. It was a campaign of half-truths and appeals to prejudice." Lehman accused Dewey of trying "to achieve through vilification, disrespect and false innuendo what he knew he could not achieve through legitimate means." Mary M. Stolberg, Fighting Organised Crime: Politics, Justice and the Legacy of Thomas E. Dewey, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1995, p224. Allegations of this kind would be levelled at Dewey again in 1944. Moreover, Dewey was further handicapped in the 1938 campaign by the perceived anti-Semitism of his running mate Frederick Bontecou.

Roosevelt, the scourge of the party for so long, would not, in theory, be running for re-election.

iv. "It's all right if the town whose joins the church, but they don't let her lead the choir on the first night."

The election of 1940 was in many ways extraordinary. It was fought against the backdrop of real battles in Europe as one by one western democracies fell to the blitzkrieg. A president was seeking an unprecedented, and to many a deeply disturbing, third term. More extraordinary still, a crumpled amateur and former Democrat stormed to the top of the Republican ticket in one of the most memorable conventions in American history. Utilities magnet Wendell Willkie had not run in the Republican primaries, but with carefully engineered publicity he was able to win the nomination at the national convention with no states backing him, no campaign headquarters and little enthusiasm among the party's leaders. Indeed, shelled-shocked Old Guard Republican leaders could only watch aghast as the "Miracle in Philadelphia"

⁴⁴ "Lesson for 1940," *Crisis*, 45, December 1938, p393.

unfolded. The combination of a divided, largely isolationist Republican party, a war in Europe and catastrophic defeats in the previous two presidential elections facilitated the rise of Willkie. Willkie, described by historian Conrad Joyner as “a novelty, a sparkling prism and a thrilling entertainment,” could not have emerged onto the political landscape, or risen so quickly, at any other time.⁴⁵

To many African Americans, the impending demise of democracy in Europe was much less significant than the continued absence of democracy at

⁴⁵ Joyner, Republican Dilemma, p51. Willkie’s biographers are, by and large, extremely positive about his impact on the American political scene. One of the earliest works is Joseph Barnes’s Willkie published by Simon and Schuster, New York, in 1952. Barnes was a journalist who accompanied Willkie on his famous “One World” trip in 1942 and, not surprisingly, this is a very sympathetic account of Willkie’s life and career. The main exceptions are Mary Earhart Dillon’s Wendell Willkie, 1892-1944 [J.B. Lippincott and Company, Philadelphia and New York] and Henry Evjen’s Journal of Politics article “The Willkie Campaign: An Unfortunate Chapter in Republican Leadership” [Journal of Politics, 14] which were both published in 1952. Evjen, for instance, argues that Willkie’s presidential campaign destroyed the morale and unity of the GOP. Other works of note on Willkie include Donald Bruce Johnson’s The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie (1960), Ellsworth Barnard’s Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom (Northern Michigan University Press, Marquette, Michigan, 1966) and Warren Moscow’s Roosevelt and Willkie (Prentice Hall, Inc., Engle wood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968). As with Barnes, these are sympathetic to Willkie’s political philosophy and career. More recent works include Steve Neal’s Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie (Doubleday and Company, Inc., New York, 1984). This is a positive and exhaustive study but it does not sufficiently analyse the impact of Willkie. The James Madison edited collection Wendell Willkie: Hoosier Internationalist (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis) was published to mark the centenary of Willkie’s birth in 1992 and is a celebration of his political career. Of particular interest in the collection is Harvard Sitkoff’s “Willkie as Liberal: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights,” a brief account of Willkie’s attitude towards African Americans. With the possible exception of Dillon, all agree that Willkie was a genuine advocate of civil rights and this thesis sees nothing in his actions, either public or private, to contradict this. Some of the more general literature on the Republican party is less kind about Willkie. Conrad Joyner, for example, describes Willkie as “politically inept.” Joyner, Republican Dilemma, p68. Milton Viorst, in Fall From Grace, sees Willkie as an unwelcome interloper within the GOP. George Mayer, while recognising his talents and appeal, faults Willkie’s inexperience and unwillingness to accept the advice of GOP regulars in 1940.

home. To most, the third term was simply not an issue.⁴⁶ Roosevelt, losing ground with some of the Democratic party's core supporters, remained stubbornly popular among African Americans, despite the lack of real progress on racial matters. In fact, elements within the NAACP were concerned that the Democrats were beginning to treat the African American vote with the same contempt the Republicans had shown until 1932. Conversely, during the campaign the embers of Lincoln's legacy flickered briefly. The Republican standard bearer spoke to African American voters in a way that no other presidential candidate had ever dared. When Willkie talked of democracy, equality and an end to discrimination it was not mere campaign rhetoric. During the remainder of Willkie's tragically brief political career, through word and deed, he stayed true to his principles, campaigned on the basis of them and ultimately sacrificed his political ambitions to them. Willkie was, as one contemporary proclaimed, "the only man in America who has proved he would rather be right than be president."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ There were exceptions; Roy Wilkins was exasperated to discover that there were those middle and upper class African Americans who felt that the third term would bring dictatorship and that the New Deal was too wasteful.

⁴⁷ Remarks of radical labour leader Harry Bridges after Willkie had successfully prevented the deportation of William Schneiderman, a communist, in 1943. Neal, Dark Horse, p270.

In April 1940 a Gallup poll declared that the forthcoming election would be the closest since 1916. The Democrats were still in the lead but it was a slender one in Missouri, West Virginia, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky and New York. The Republicans, meanwhile, were slightly ahead in Illinois, New Jersey, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio. The African American vote was, of course, crucial in all of these states and a swing of less than 10% would see them shift from the Democrats to the Republicans or vice-versa.⁴⁸ The *Crisis* commented that both parties were ignoring this to avoid having “to pay a good price for the much-needed support of the black voter.”⁴⁹ African Americans, therefore, could theoretically elect the next president. If a party wanted African American support, the *Crisis* asserted, it would have to offer certain guarantees regarding the right to vote in the South, the poll tax, discrimination, federal appointments, segregation in the armed forces, relief and equal citizenship.⁵⁰

Walter White outlined the fears and aspirations of African Americans in his speech to the NAACP’s annual conference in Philadelphia in June 1940. He was concerned that the Democrats were now beginning to resemble the

⁴⁸ See figures prepared by the NAACP. NAACP pt18, C, 23, 0071.

Republicans in their attitude towards African Americans, especially as there were rumours that Senators James Byrnes of South Carolina, or John Bankhead of Alabama, were being considered as potential vice-presidential nominees.

White, echoing his comments prior to the 1936 election, stressed that African Americans had to be more vocal if they were to achieve their aims:

We have got to let America know that the Negro vote is increasingly intelligent, independent and unpurchasable [sic] either by material rewards or unctuous campaign oratory. It is imperative that we become increasingly independent politically; that we remain non-partisan; and that we give our support to men and measures and not to meaningless party labels.⁵¹

If America did not begin to give African Americans a fair deal, White warned, then democracy itself was under threat: “give us a reason to love America and be loyal to it.”⁵²

Prior to Willkie’s emergence, African Americans cannot have viewed the potential Republican candidates in 1940 with any great confidence. Robert A. Taft, the son of President William Howard Taft and a senator from Ohio, was

⁴⁹ “What is the Negro Voter Offered?” *Crisis*, 47, May 1940, p145.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Speech by Walter White to the NAACP Annual Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 23 June 1940. ER, 19, 0654.

against the New Deal and would need the “rotten” southern vote as well as the Mid-west if he was to win the nomination.⁵³ Arthur Vandenberg, the veteran senator from Michigan, had periodically spoken out on racial issues but had offended both labour and farmers and was, therefore, unlikely to win the nomination. He was seen as more liberal than Taft, but, again, opposed the New Deal. Thomas Dewey was the rising star of Republican politics and, at thirty-seven, was the youngest of the candidates. He did not appear to have any firm views on African American issues and was “in essence... a personality in search of policy as well as power.”⁵⁴

Willkie had been a Democrat as recently as 1938 and was an outspoken critic of aspects of the New Deal and Roosevelt’s leadership.⁵⁵ The two had clashed throughout the 1930s over the running of power companies and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Willkie’s stance against the New Deal and what he

⁵² Ibid., frame 0655.

⁵³ For more information on the Taft candidacy see *Herald Tribune*, 19 May 1940. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President, President’s Secretary’s Files, 1933-1945, Part 4, reel 20, frame 0274 (henceforth FDRP-PSF, pt4, 20, 0274). Perry Howard backed Taft. *Plaindealer*, 23 February 1940, p7.

⁵⁴ Schlesinger, *History of Presidential Elections*, 7, p2924.

⁵⁵ When Willkie did emerge as a potential candidate for the Republican nomination Senator Jim Watson remarked: “Well, Wendell, you know that back home in Indiana it’s all right if the town whore joins the church, but they don’t let her lead the choir on the first night.” *ibid*, p2925. For some reason Willkie’s campaign attracted comparisons with the vice industry. Another contemporary commentator described his campaign train as resembling “a whore house on a

saw as its attempts to restrict business made him a potential recruit for the Republicans and a source of hope for those the New Deal had failed. He also saw big government as a threat to the American liberal tradition, a view that further endeared him to Republicans. Willkie was very popular with the public, and hundreds of 'Willkie Clubs' had sprung up all over the country. These in turn built up Republican grass roots support, which pressurised convention delegates to eventually select Willkie on the sixth ballot.⁵⁶ Landon spoke for many when he wrote to Willkie declaring, "there is no doubt that you have caught the imagination of the American people."⁵⁷ Willkie became, according to his biographer Joseph Barnes, "a crusader for the common welfare with a few dangerously liberal ideas."⁵⁸ Furthermore, as David Burke notes, he was the only Republican with "a clear, consistent anti-isolationist position on foreign policy."⁵⁹

Saturday night when the madam is out." Moos, Republicans, p415. Also cited in David W. Reinhard, The Republican Right Since 1945, University Press of Kentucky, 1983, p7.

⁵⁶ For a brief account of the convention see Mayer, Republican Party, p456-457.

⁵⁷ Landon to Willkie, 9 July 1940. Willkie MSS, Correspondence. [Courtesy, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.] After his defeat, Willkie thanked Landon: "you were great during the whole campaign. You did everything you could for me and I am indebted to you." Willkie to Landon, 20 November 1940, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ Barnes, Willkie, p149.

⁵⁹ Schlesinger, History of Presidential Elections, 7, p2926. In fact, Willkie had been identified by Arthur Krock of the *NYT* as "the Darkest Horse" in the forthcoming election campaign as early as August 1939. *Ibid*.

Superficially, there was little to recommend Willkie to African Americans, but he did have quite an impressive record of liberalism. Throughout the 1920s, he had been a liberal on social issues and this was particularly true at the Democratic national convention in 1924, which he attended as a delegate from Akron, Ohio. His mission was to have the convention challenge the Ku Klux Klan within the party and to urge support for the League of Nations. He said of the convention: "the fight against intolerance we won. I consider that there was an absolute repudiation of the Klan by this convention."⁶⁰ His brother later commented that "he practically dropped his law practice for a year to make speeches against them [the Klan] whenever and wherever he could get an audience."⁶¹ The main result of this conflict was to split the Democratic party down the middle and ensure that the Republicans won the presidential election of that year.

Willkie was, therefore, a true believer in civil liberties for all Americans, even those on the left, who could be perceived as being un-American. In 1939 he had condemned the Dies House Un-American Activities Committee; in

⁶⁰ Barnes, p37-8. The resolution to condemn the Klan failed by the smallest margin in

March 1940 in an article entitled "Fair Trial," he outlined his position on civil liberties:

Equal treatment under the law means exactly what it says, whether the man before the tribunal is a crook, a Democrat, a Republican, a communist or a businessman; whether he is rich or poor, white or black, good or bad. You cannot have a democracy on any other basis. You cannot preserve human liberties on any other theory.⁶²

A presidential candidate holding these views should have given some hope to African Americans.

In addition, unlike many Republicans, Willkie had openly endorsed much of the New Deal. In 1938, during the utilities' battle with Roosevelt, he commented that "the New Deal has realised that the conditions of poverty and insecurity beyond the powers of the state to handle have created the need for social legislation in Washington."⁶³ He would not, therefore, necessarily be restricted by the concepts of states' rights or a decentralised federal government

convention history.

⁶¹ Barnard, Wendell Willkie, interview with Robert T. Willkie, p66.

⁶² Wendell Willkie, "Fair Trial," *New Republic*, 18 March 1940, 102, no. 12, p371. The *New Republic* later claimed that the Brooklyn KKK was supporting Willkie. "Klansmen for Willkie," *ibid.*, 103, no 16, 14 October 1940.

⁶³ Comments to the *New York Herald and Tribune* forum in October 1938, cited in Barnes, p155.

when determining his policies. This kind of conservatism had, conceivably, cost the Republican party African Americans votes.

At the Republican convention Willkie told African American delegates about his campaign against the Klan in Akron in 1924 and assured them that his company, the southern and Commonwealth, had many African American employees, although "I don't know how many... or in what categories but it's a hell of a lot of them."⁶⁴ After his nomination he told the African American press that "I want your support. I need it. But irrespective of whether Negroes go down the line with me or not, they can expect every consideration. They will get their fair share of appointments, their fair representation on policy-making bodies. They'll get the same consideration as other citizens."⁶⁵ The party also unveiled its strongest ever 'Negro' plank, promising an economic and political "square deal," pledging to end discrimination in the civil service, federal government and military. It also demanded that suffrage "be made effective for the Negro

⁶⁴ Barnes, p180. In fact, 1,086 out of 12,658 (about 9%) of Willkie's southern employees were African American according to the Republican pamphlet "An Appeal To The Common Sense Of The Colored Citizens." Francis Rivers, "An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens," distributed by the Republican National Committee, p26. NAACP, 18, C, 29, 90.

⁶⁵ Henry Lee Moon, Balance of Power: How The Negro Voted, Greenwood Press Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, 1948, p32. Willkie also told African Americans at the convention: "I am deeply appreciative of your support, but my views on civil liberties and citizenship would not be changed even if you voted against me. You will know this if you ever study my record." *Plaindealer*, 5 July 1940, p1.

citizen” and a law to combat mob violence.⁶⁶ Barnes credits Willkie with this more blunt approach to civil rights, while contending that “much of what he said on human rights and civil liberties made unpleasant reading for some Republicans.”⁶⁷ The Democrats, nervous about the African American vote, included, for the first time, a ‘Negro’ plank in their platform. This plank praised the achievements of the New Deal and dealt in generalities about striving “for complete legislative safeguards against discrimination” in government and the armed forces and promised equal protection under the law for all citizens.⁶⁸

The *Crisis* had “little fault to find” with Willkie’s acceptance speech in his home town of Elwood, Indiana, when he declared that he wanted an “America free of hate and bitterness, of racial and class distinction.”⁶⁹ It did, however, query whether or not Willkie or the Republicans actually meant what they said or would be willing to take the necessary action needed to address the problems of African Americans. “There is little,” the *Crisis* continued, “in the record of either Mr. Willkie or the Republican party which indicates clearly that this is

⁶⁶ Johnson and Porter, National Party Platforms, p393.

⁶⁷ Barnes, p228.

⁶⁸ Johnson and Porter, p387.

⁶⁹ “Willkie Speaks,” *Crisis*, 47, September 1940, p279.

the kind of America he or it wants.”⁷⁰ The *Crisis* also commented on a sign in Willkie’s hometown warning African Americans to stay out: “this is the atmosphere from which Mr. Willkie springs. He may have outgrown it. But for us it is much more important than why his ancestors came to Indiana.”⁷¹

Having won the nomination, Willkie made a genuine attempt to win African American support, motivated not simply by votes but because he felt he had a duty to all Americans. He claimed to have no “special plan” to win the African American vote but pledged to enact the Republican platform as far as he could.⁷² The omens were not good, however. He was, as noted, an unknown quantity to African Americans and was running against the still popular New Deal. He was also hampered by the record of the GOP in Congress; it was true that the Republican platform’s ‘Negro’ plank was the strongest in generations, but the party had shown itself, in Congress anyway, unreceptive to the needs of African Americans. Accordingly, anything said by a senior Republican was likely to be regarded with scepticism.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. Willkie’s acceptance speech dealt with his family fleeing political repression in Germany during the 19th century.

⁷² *Plaindealer*, 23 August 1940, p6.

It was to Willkie's credit, therefore, that he still endeavoured to reach out to African Americans by speaking in Chicago and Harlem. He perhaps recognised that the South was already lost and simply had nothing to lose by speaking to African American audiences. Nevertheless, although not recognised at the time, Willkie was, without doubt, the most racially progressive presidential candidate in American history. Subsequent events would show that his philosophy, at least partly outlined in the Chicago speech, was born not of expedience but of genuinely held conviction.

On one level, the Chicago speech of September 1940 contained what one would expect of a candidate speaking before an African American audience, touching as it did on the themes of equality, relief discrimination, lynching and Jim Crow. Yet Willkie went much further in an effort to address the problems of African Americans. "It is not right," he declared, "that America should continue a practice in which the Negro is the last to be hired and the first to be fired. The Negro has little hope if he must wait until the Whites have all been

employed.”⁷³ Willkie also promised to end discrimination in the federal government: “I say to you that under my administration there shall be no discrimination between people because of race, creed or color in the appointments to federal positions. That man who serves as my subordinate who makes any such discrimination shall be fired on the spot.”⁷⁴

The *Crisis* took some comfort from Willkie’s Chicago speech but viewed much of it with scepticism: “[it] was not the historic document his followers would have us believe, [but] it did contain utterances of the greatest interest to the colored people.”⁷⁵ Willkie’s claim to “abhor” lynching was compared to similar statements from other Republican candidates down through the years, all of which meant nothing without the political will to do anything tangible about the crime. Willkie was praised for wanting to move African Americans from relief rolls to proper employment, but this was tempered by the knowledge

⁷³ “‘Wendell Willkie Speaks to Negroes,’ Address at Rally of Colored Republicans, Chicago, Illinois September 13, 1940. Distributed by the Republican National Committee”, p3. Willkie MSS, Speeches, 1940. Also cited in “An Appeal To The Common Sense Of The Colored Citizens,” p27, NAACP, 18, C, 29, 93.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p4. Also cited in “An Appeal To The Common Sense Of The Colored Citizens,” p27, NAACP pt 18, C, 29, 93. Mary Earhart Dillon claims that there were 8,000 African Americans inside the American Giants’ baseball park and they greeted this speech with little enthusiasm. Dillon, Wendell Willkie. Johnson suggests that there were 15,000 at the rally. Johnson, Republican Party and Wendell Willkie, p135. This was one of ten speeches Willkie made in Chicago that day.

⁷⁵ “The Willkie Speeches,” *Crisis*, 47, October 1940, p311. The *Crisis* reprinted the speech as released by the Republican National Committee. “The Willkie Chicago Speech,” *ibid*, p321.

that the GOP was backed by the very industries which refused to employ African Americans: "it may be, of course, that if Mr. Willkie was elected President he could do something about this. Just how he might do it is not clear, but he deserves credit for recognizing it as a problem facing Negroes."⁷⁶

Willkie's attacks on discrimination in the federal government were described as "bold" by the *Crisis* and his promise to dismiss those guilty of discrimination was similarly praised as "straight talk." Willkie's problem, according to the *Crisis*, was that African Americans had been let down too many times by the Republicans. There was also concern about Willkie's purported sympathy for southern whites having to vote for the Democrats out of "necessity."⁷⁷

v. "Many of us have ceased to expect the NAACP to be consistent."

The issue of NAACP members participating in politics resurfaced in September 1940. This time it was William Pickens, the Director of Branches, who caused controversy after creating and agreeing to serve on the "Non-Partisan Colored Citizens Committee for Wendell Willkie." William Hastie, a

⁷⁶ "The Willkie Speeches," *ibid.*, p311.

senior member of the Association, expressed his disquiet about this to Arthur Spingarn, brother of Joel (who had died in 1939). Hastie, who would soon be appointed as a civilian aide to the War Department, noted that when Pickens was referred to in African American newspapers his "connection with the NAACP was featured."⁷⁸ Hastie was particularly concerned as Pickens was a "full-time salaried officer" of the Association and this could make it seem as if the NAACP was supporting the Republican party. It needed to be made clear, he argued, as to whether Pickens worked for Willkie or the NAACP.

By the end of the month Pickens' dalliance with the Willkie campaign was over. White then circulated a memorandum reminding members of the Board of Directors' vote in 1937.⁷⁹ He explained that the public would have difficulty in distinguishing between someone acting for the Association or a political party. Pickens resigned from the Willkie campaign as soon as the Board clarified its position on political participation. Noting the 1937 resolution, he explained that "I am not a member of the Republican party, was

⁷⁷ Ibid. Willkie is also reported to have been fond of saying "you can't do this to me- I'm a white man," when under pressure. Johnson, Republican Party and Wendell Willkie, p148.

⁷⁸ William Hastie to Arthur Spingarn, 23 September 1940. NAACP pt18, C, 15, 0666-0667.

⁷⁹ Memorandum from Walter White, 24 September 1940. Ibid., frame 0669. This had forbidden "full time salaried officers" from participating in political campaigns.

not joining any of the committees, but was asking people like myself, to join me in a vote for Willkie.”⁸⁰ There was, however, a suggestion that it was Pickens’s support of the Republicans rather than the threat to the principle of non-partisanship that was controversial. This was certainly the suspicion of Pickens. Writing to Willkie in 1942, he effectively accused the Association of political bias, claiming that he resigned because White “got the Board to pass an ex-post facto resolution that I could not serve on the committee. Mr White had quite other political plans then.”⁸¹ It is clear that the NAACP, although publicly and officially neutral, saw the continuation of Roosevelt’s administration and the New Deal as being in the best interests of African Americans.

The Republican National Committee accused the NAACP of inconsistency, claiming that Assistant Secretary Roy Wilkins was supporting Roosevelt for a third term. A Republican press release commented that “many of us have ceased to expect the NAACP to be consistent.”⁸² The GOP

⁸⁰ William Pickens to Pearl Mitchell, 30 September 1940. Ibid., frame 0681. Pearl Mitchell to Walter White and Roy Wilkins, 11 October 1940. Ibid., frame 0696.

⁸¹ William Pickens to Willkie, 8 August 1942. Willkie MSS, Correspondence: Pickens, William. By this stage Pickens was working for the Treasury Department on the Defense Savings staff as Chief of Negro Organisations. Pickens was later accused of being a communist by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Underlining in original.

⁸² “Mrs Speaks charges NAACP tried to smear William Pickens for his support of Willkie,” *Washington Tribune*, 5 October 1940. NAACP pt18, C, 15, 0690.

questioned how the Association could possibly support Roosevelt, given his record on anti-lynching, and demanded Wilkins' resignation, concluding "that his views have the endorsement of the board of the organisation he represents."⁸³ Wilkins refuted Republican allegations by asserting that the NAACP remained non-partisan. He illustrated this by pointing out that in a congressional race in Harlem the Association had not endorsed Democrat Joseph Gavagan, a prominent sponsor of anti-lynching measures in Congress, or his Republican rival, an African American minister.⁸⁴

White declined the opportunity to serve on the Citizens' Campaign for Roosevelt or attend a rally of the National Committee of Independent Voters for Roosevelt and Wallace.⁸⁵ White was also approached by Anthony Neary to become a local chairman of "Rally Round Roosevelt!" White replied that "I personally share the sentiments expressed in your letter... but the NAACP is

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Wilkins to Sara Pelham Speaks of the RNC, 8 October 1940. Ibid., 0688.

⁸⁵ Helen Hall, chairperson, "National Committee of Independent Voters for Roosevelt and Wallace", to Walter White, 25 October 1940. White to Hall, 29 October 1940. Ibid., pt18, C, 23, 0099-0101.

strictly non-partisan politically.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, White would be voting for Roosevelt, as he had done in 1936.⁸⁷

vi. “The longer it is put off the more obvious it becomes.”

Willkie’s pronouncements on the race question certainly stirred the Democrats into action. Sitkoff agrees that the various concessions and efforts made by Roosevelt to reassure African Americans were a direct result of the threat posed by Willkie.⁸⁸ Roosevelt met African American leaders six times during 1940, but was only prepared to make token concessions including the issuing of two commemorative stamps, one featuring Booker T. Washington and the other marking the 75th anniversary of the 13th Amendment (albeit two months early).

Furthermore, Roosevelt chose this moment to create the country’s first ever African American general. In October 1940, presidential secretary James Rowe advised Roosevelt to promote Colonel Benjamin O. Davis to the rank of

⁸⁶ Anthony G. Neary to Walter White, 6 June 1940; White to Neary, 11 June 1940. Ibid., frame 0058-0059.

⁸⁷ *The Saturday Review of Literature* polled writers in 1940; White replied that he had voted for Roosevelt in 1936 and intended doing so again. He asked the *Review* not to use his name. Ibid., frame 0095-0096.

Brigadier General, using the promotion of eight other colonels as a pretext.

Rowe, recognising the political benefits of such a move, argued that “the longer it is put off the more obvious it becomes.”⁸⁹ Davis, it should be noted, was six months from retirement and had been by-passed for promotion previously.⁹⁰

Opportunity contended that the rationale for the promotion was much less important than what it represented: “whether or not this was prompted by the nearness of the election and the power of the so-called Negro vote, it is a salutary and praiseworthy act.”⁹¹

Selective service was also a potential headache for the president, according to Rowe, as it “raises the problem of segregation one week before the election.”⁹² Rowe suggested that the first selective service call be made without reference to race. He further advised that “notable African American appointments to the preparedness effort should be made, including that of Judge

⁸⁸ Harvard Sitkoff, “Willkie as Liberal,” in Madison (ed.) *Hoosier Internationalist*, p74-5.

⁸⁹ James Rowe, Jr., “Memorandum For The President: Negroes,” 22 October 1940. FDRP-PSF, pt3, 5, 0269-0270. Rowe would later write the famous “Politics of 1948” memorandum for Harry Truman urging him, among other things, to seek actively the African American vote.

⁹⁰ Robert R. Moton of the Tuskegee Institute had written to Roosevelt in September 1936 urging the promotion of Colonel Davis arguing that “such action, I am sure would please the colored people” without costing the War Department too much money as Davis was keen to retire. Moton to Roosevelt, 16 September 1936. FDRP-PSF, pt4, 45, 0679. Davis was professor of Military Science and Tactics at Tuskegee.

⁹¹ *Opportunity*, 18, November 1940, p323.

⁹² James Rowe, Jr., “Memorandum For The President: Negro Problem,” 23 October 1940. FDRP-PSF, pt3, 31, 0846-0848. This quotation was underlined in the original. Rowe listed eight

William Hastie, who had “national status” and was “non-political,” as assistant to Secretary of War Henry Stimson. “Stimson,” Rowe continued, “should make the announcement rather than the White House, so as not to make it too obvious.”⁹³ Roosevelt was advised to meet the editor of the “largest Negro newspaper in Chicago,” (presumably the *Chicago Defender*) which was pro-New Deal and keen to “prepare a series of articles showing what the President has done for the Negro over the last seven years.”⁹⁴ Rowe also urged Roosevelt to direct the Civil Service Commission to use fingerprints instead of photographs on application forms and attempt to calm the furore generated when the White House suggested that Walter White had endorsed segregation in the armed forces. The Democrats clearly felt that they had a fight on their hands if they were to maintain the African American vote.⁹⁵

Despite being more committed to the cause of civil rights than any previous presidential candidate in the 20th century, Willkie discovered that this

things that the president should do to placate African Americans. For the announcement of Colonel Davis’s promotion see: “Announces Appointment of Col. Davis,” *Plaindealer*, 1 November 1940, p1.

⁹³ Rowe, “Memorandum For The President: Negro Problem,” 23 October 1940. FDRP-PSF, pt3, 31, 0846-0848. Stimson was a Republican who had been appointed, along with Frank Knox, to Roosevelt’s cabinet immediately prior to the Republican convention in 1940.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Roosevelt was still personally very popular with African Americans, one commented: “to hell with any more elections, we’re gonna make him king.” Weiss, *Farewell*, p267.

did not necessarily endear him to African Americans. Walter White, for example, refused to meet him before the election.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Willkie found himself dealing with “some of the most aggressive black leaders in the country” and under attack from African American Democrats.⁹⁷ In October 1940, the colored division of the Democratic National Committee linked Willkie’s parents and his wife’s parents to the Nazis and claimed that his sister was married to a German naval officer. This was all, of course, untrue (his sister was in fact married to an American Naval Attaché in Berlin) and strenuously denied by Willkie, but he was personally affected by the charges.⁹⁸

Attacks on Willkie’s attitude toward African Americans continued throughout the campaign. Julian Rainey, the eastern head of the Democrats’ colored division, believed that Willkie’s attitude towards African Americans was born of expedience as he “was unheard of by Negroes until two or three

⁹⁶ White was asked to meet Willkie in October 1940; he sought the advice of senior members of the Association, including, perhaps ironically, William Pickens. No record of their deliberations is available. Memorandum from White to Roy Wilkins, Thurgood Marshall, E. Frederic Morrow, George Murphy and William Pickens. NAACP pt18, C, 15, 0691. Willkie and White would, however, become firm friends after the election.

⁹⁷ Barnes, *Willkie*, p191.

⁹⁸ Similar charges were, of course, made against Landon in 1936. Some Democratic strategists believed that this slur against Willkie cost them a number of Mid-western states. Roosevelt was informed that the “asinine negative attack on Willkie’s German ancestry... will probably result in defeat in Iowa and Minnesota, and may wipe out all Democratic representation in those two states.” “Fire Alarm,” 11 July 1940, cited in FDRP-PSF, pt4, 9, 0557. Lowell Mellett, an administrative assistant, reported to Roosevelt that he had seen two “painstaking statistical

months ago” and had “no public record” on racial issues.⁹⁹ Rainey believed that proof of Willkie’s true feelings towards African Americans was to be found in his hometown of Elwood, Indiana, which “for many years” had a sign warning: “Nigger, don’t let the sun go down on you.”¹⁰⁰ Rainey also pointed out that Willkie had many business interests in the South.

Emmett Scott was in charge of the overall Republican effort to win African American votes while Francis Rivers of New York and Sidney R. Redmond, of St. Louis, led the campaign in the East and West respectively.¹⁰¹ African American Republicans followed many of the same tactics they had employed without conspicuous success in the election of 1936. Nevertheless, Rivers and Scott went about their task with vigour. Rivers assailed the New Deal, declaring that African Americans currently suffered more discrimination than at any time since emancipation. He accused the New Deal, with its “Negro hating” southerners and labour leaders, of trying “to put Negroes on relief and

studies” of the 1940 election one of which “prove[d] that the German vote gave Willkie his large block of middle western states.” Memorandum from Mellett to Roosevelt, *ibid.*, frame 0508.

⁹⁹ *Plaindealer*, 13 September 1940, p8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Bishop R.R. Wright of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and member of the Democratic National Committee took a similar line of attack. *Ibid.*, 25 October 1940, p6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1940, p2. Redmond was the son of S.D. Redmond a prominent Mississippi Republican.

get them out of jobs in private industry.”¹⁰² The New Deal discriminated against and segregated African Americans at every level.¹⁰³ Scott also articulated the Republican argument that the New Deal was creating relief reservations for African Americans. Citing the party’s platform in 1936 and the recent Frank report, Scott declared that the GOP would oppose “attempts to set up relief programs for Colored citizens as a permanent substitute for employment. Without a secure place in the private productive industry... Colored citizens are doomed.”¹⁰⁴

In October 1940 the Republican National Committee issued a pamphlet written by Rivers entitled “An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens.” This pamphlet represents perhaps the most strident and articulate contemporary indictment of the New Deal and its attitude toward African Americans. According to Rivers, the New Deal had done little for African Americans and had, in many instances, actually made conditions much worse. The pamphlet is, of course, highly partisan and there is no way to accurately substantiate many of the claims made. Nevertheless, an indication of its

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2 February 1940, p1.

importance comes from Walter White, he could find little to fault with the document; his only complaint was that it characterised all southern whites as racist.¹⁰⁵ Needless to say, Rivers studiously avoided any mention of the years prior to 1932.

Rivers argued that the New Deal had, for instance, separate “Jim Crow” departments for African Americans which were designed to actually hinder the careers of African Americans and appease the South. Furthermore, African Americans were limited to advisory roles and this had eliminated them as skilled workers in federal service.¹⁰⁶ In fact, federal agencies only employed 3.4% African Americans compared to 7.8% prior to Roosevelt’s election.¹⁰⁷

Rivers accused the New Deal of discriminating against African American workers or displacing them in favour of white labour. The best example of this was the case of cotton gin workers who were re-categorised as agricultural workers and therefore did not benefit from the provisions of the National

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8 March 1940, p6.

¹⁰⁵ White to Rivers, 22 October 1940. NAACP pt18, C, 29, 60.

¹⁰⁶ Francis Rivers, “An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens,” distributed by the Republican National Committee, p4. Ibid., frame 68.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p6, frame 70.

Recovery Administration (NRA).¹⁰⁸ In addition, the Wages and Hours and Social Security laws did not cover agricultural or domestic workers and excluded some 70% of African American workers as a result.¹⁰⁹ Out of 115,000 field agents in the AAA, only four were African American.¹¹⁰ The Public Works Administration (PWA) put African Americans in the lowest paying and least skilled jobs regardless of their qualifications.¹¹¹

Perhaps the most damning statistics generated by Rivers concerned relief. Despite seven years of the New Deal, there were actually more African Americans on relief than ever and African Americans constituted an even smaller proportion of the workforce than they had in 1930. According to Rivers' figures, in 1933 there were 2,117,644 African Americans on relief; in 1940 this had risen to 2,500,000. In 1930, African Americans made up 11.7% of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p9, frame 73. Sitkoff and Weiss both put the figure at about two thirds. Sitkoff, New Deal for Blacks, p55, Weiss, Farewell, p166.

¹¹⁰ "An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens," p7, frame 71. Wolters names three of these officials. Wolters, Negroes and the Great Depression, p43. For more detail on discrimination against African Americans by the AAA see *ibid.*, chapter 1 and Sitkoff, p54-56 and Weiss, p55-56.

¹¹¹ "An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens," p10, frame 74. African Americans received about 31% of the PWA's payroll in 1936. Of these, about 16% were skilled and 64% unskilled. Sitkoff, p68. For an appraisal of the PWA and African Americans see Wolters, p196-203. The main benefits of the PWA for African Americans came with the construction of new homes and schools. Harold Ickes, the head of the PWA endeavoured, with mixed results, to improve conditions and wages for African Americans. Wolters, p196-203. See also Weiss, p51-53.

workforce; in 1937 they made up only 6.6%.¹¹² To make matters worse, the number of African Americans on work relief was actually dropping: in 1935, the figure stood at 906,356, in 1938 it was 275,000 and by 1940 it had dropped to 225,000. All of this was while African American unemployment was rising.¹¹³

Southerners held a disproportionate amount of influence in the New Deal, argued Rivers, and used this to discriminate against African Americans and to block anti-lynching legislation in Congress.¹¹⁴ Rivers also claimed, with some justification, that Roosevelt was frightened of standing up to the South and only condemned lynching when whites were the victims. He noted that segregation in government could be halted by executive orders, but this was unlikely to happen under Roosevelt as he had actually segregated government employees as

¹¹² "An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens," p11, frame 75.

¹¹³ Ibid. In 1937, using federal government statistics, the National Urban League estimated that the number of African Americans on relief had risen from 2,118,000 (or 18%) in 1933 to 3,030,000 (or 39.5%) in 1937. This is, of course, a good deal higher than Rivers's estimate but could suggest that the number of African Americans on relief peaked in 1937 and was dropping by 1940. It does, however, give some credence to Rivers's findings. "The Negro Working Population and National Recovery," National Urban League memorandum, cited in Guichard Parris and Lester Brooks, Blacks in the City: A History of the National Urban League, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, Toronto, 1971, p239. John P. Davis, writing in the *Crisis* confirms that in October 1933, 2,117,000 (17.8%) African Americans were on relief. By January 1935, two years into the New Deal, 3,500,000 (29%) were on relief and this was largely due to discrimination both in the North and the South. John P. Davis, "A Black Inventory of the New Deal," *Crisis*, 44, May 1935, p141-142 and 154-155. The 1940 figure quoted by Rivers represents a substantial drop from 1935. Weiss provides figures suggesting a major fall in African American unemployment between 1931 and 1940 in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Detroit. Weiss, p300.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1916.¹¹⁵ Unless there was dramatic reform to help African Americans, asserted Rivers, then “the colored citizen has no chance to attain any of his major objectives under four more years of President Roosevelt and the New Deal.”¹¹⁶ Roosevelt, he claimed, did not have the political will to end segregation and discrimination, as he did not want to offend the South; and the South dominated the New Deal.

Under Willkie and the Republicans, Rivers stressed, African Americans would have fair treatment in agriculture and industry, equal treatment in federal service, relief without discrimination, abolition of segregation in the military, an anti-lynching bill and would take their place as full members of America’s democracy. Rivers concluded that continuance of the New Deal meant “frustration and [a] segregated existence.” By contrast, if Willkie won there would be “a justifiable hope for attaining all the major goals for which he has fought throughout the years.”¹¹⁷ Rivers predictably concentrated on the negative

¹¹⁴ “An Appeal to the Common Sense of Colored Citizens,” p13-16. NAACP, pt18, C, reel 29, 77-80.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p16, frame 80.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p20, frame 84.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p32, frame 96. Republican attacks of this nature on the New Deal could be dismissed as predictable diatribes but it is important to note that there were those on the left who had come to similar conclusions. See, for example, John P. Davis, “A Black Inventory of the New Deal,” *Crisis*, 42, May 1935, p141-142 and p154-155. Ralph Bunche was also critical of the New Deal.

aspects of the New Deal for African Americans and some of his assertions can be challenged, but much of his criticism was valid.

As the election neared and it became increasingly likely that Willkie would lose, Republican appeals to African Americans became more desperate. In his last release to the African American press prior to the election Scott declared that “when Republicans are punished and lose, WE LOSE. When Republicans WIN, at least we keep what we have.”¹¹⁸ It was difficult to see where his optimism sprang from when he stated that “it is now apparent that Willkie and McNary will receive an overwhelming majority of the Negro votes on Election Day,” but he may well have had a point when he argued that “Franklin Roosevelt has failed to give Colored people anything but honeyed words.”¹¹⁹ He also contended that a vote for Roosevelt and a third term would further strengthen the position of the South in the Democratic party and lead to a dictatorship noting “minorities suffer most under dictatorship.”¹²⁰ This desperate plea was much too little, much too late for the Republicans.

¹¹⁸ *Plaindealer*, 1 November 1940, p6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Roosevelt won the election, but with a greatly reduced popular majority, winning 27,243,466 popular votes and 449 in the Electoral College to Willkie's 22,304,755 and 82 respectively. Willkie won more votes than any previous Republican candidate; he also restricted Roosevelt to the smallest winning margin by any president since 1916. While Roosevelt's share of the African American vote either remained constant or rose, in every state where it was deemed to be important the Republicans made gains, including victories in Michigan and Indiana. In Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and West Virginia the African American vote was perhaps the deciding factor, but Roosevelt could have lost all these states and still had a majority of 45 in the Electoral College.¹²¹ It is clear, therefore, that the African American vote, while important, was not actually crucial to the victory itself.

Willkie's entreaties to African Americans had failed. This was probably due, in part, to the fact that many African Americans still did not trust the Republicans and that Willkie, despite his pronouncements, was not viewed with any great confidence. The former point is taken up by Mayer, who notes that

¹²¹ The *Plaindealer* suggested that Roosevelt's victory could be attributed to the African

“neither party had paid much attention to the African Americans, but the indifference to their needs by the GOP had finally destroyed the Republican party in the black ghettos of Chicago.”¹²² It must be stressed, however, that the African American vote was won by Roosevelt and not lost by Willkie. The President’s conciliatory gestures in the run up to the election and, more importantly, the tangible benefits African Americans had seen since he took power proved persuasive. What must also be remembered is that racial issues were peripheral in the election: the Depression was still the main concern of most Americans, the Second World War (which America would enter in a year’s time) was also important, as was Roosevelt’s decision to run for an unprecedented third term.

vii. “Imperialisms at Home.”

After his defeat Willkie became even more vocal in his defence of civil liberties and minorities, attacking those who were racist, anti-Semitic or

American vote in crucial states. *Ibid.*, 15 November 1940, p2.

¹²² Mayer, “The Republican Party, 1932-1952,” in Schlesinger, History of United States’ Political Parties, 3, p2280.

intolerant of political minorities.¹²³ This became a crusade when America entered World War Two. "It seems to have been the war that awakened him fully to the evils of racial discrimination," argues Barnard. Willkie "saw that racial hatred was one cause of the war... and that racial discrimination in the United States was both an obstacle to victory and an absolute wrong."¹²⁴ Willkie's espousal of African American rights was multi-faceted and proved beyond any doubt the sincerity of his pronouncements during the election campaign. He was particularly disturbed by discrimination in the armed forces.¹²⁵ Willkie also was critical of those who felt that "social experiments" should be postponed until the war ended, telling the Republican National Committee in April 1942 that guaranteeing the rights of African Americans

¹²³ In December 1942, Willkie warned the National Conference of Christians and Jews about intolerance, but pledged "to fight to the fullest extent against such intolerance. In the courtroom and from the public rostrum, I will fight for the preservation of civil liberties, no matter how unpopular the cause may be in any given instance." Barnes, *Willkie*, p228. Shortly before America entered the war, he was persuaded to represent William Schneiderman a communist who was facing deportation. He took the case at his own expense and, in spite of the potential political risk, felt that there was more at stake than the future of one man: "I am sure I am right in representing Schneiderman, of all the times when civil liberties should be defended it is now." *ibid.*, p322. The case was eventually decided by the Supreme Court in Schneiderman's favour in June 1943.

¹²⁴ Barnard, *Fighter For Freedom*, p337.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p339-40.

under the Constitution and ending discrimination was “not in the realm of social experiment.”¹²⁶

Willkie spoke before the NAACP annual conference in Los Angeles in 1942, cementing his position as the foremost white champion of African American rights in the process. He argued that the war was not about race or colour but freedom and tyranny. He criticised what he saw as “race imperialism” within America, something characterised by “a smug racial superiority, a willingness to exploit an unprotected people.” Things were, however, changing as many Americans realised that “we cannot fight the forces and ideas of imperialism abroad and maintain a form of imperialism at home.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, he felt that the war was effecting a change in attitudes because “the defense of democracy against the forces that threaten it from without has made some of its failures to function at home glaringly apparent.”¹²⁸ He continued: “when we talk of freedom and opportunity for all nations, the mocking paradoxes in our own society become so clear they can no longer be

¹²⁶ Confidential NAACP memorandum, 18 April 1942. Willkie MSS, NAACP file, 1940-1942.

¹²⁷ Text of the address of Wendell Willkie to the NAACP annual conference in Los Angeles, 19 July 1942. Released 20 July 1942. Willkie MSS, Speeches, 1942. (Extracts from this speech are also to be found in: Willkie, One World, p138; Barnes, Willkie, p327; Neal, Dark Horse, p273.)

ignored.”¹²⁹ After the conference, White told Willkie that “it is no exaggeration whatever for me to say that your going out there and making the speech you did has done more to lift the morale of Negroes than any other thing within the past year. They now see hope where before there was only despair.”¹³⁰ Since the election White and Willkie had struck up a strong friendship.¹³¹

At last it seemed that African Americans had a genuine ally in the Republican party, or perhaps more accurately, they had a genuine ally *despite* his membership of the Republican party. Willkie was a supporter of the National Urban League, a trustee of the Hampton Institute (one of the largest African American schools in America) and helped in a campaign to force the Navy, Coastguard and Marines to accept African American volunteers.¹³² He

¹²⁸ Text of the address of Wendell Willkie to the NAACP annual conference in Los Angeles, 19 July 1942. Released 20 July 1942. Willkie MSS, Speeches, 1942.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ White to Willkie, 28 July 1942. Willkie MSS, NAACP 1942, July-December. Willkie felt that his audience in Los Angeles was “one of the warmest I ever had the pleasure of speaking before.” Willkie to White, 30 July 1942, *ibid.* White’s letter also cited in Barnard, p341.

¹³¹ White wrote to Willkie in mid-1941 suggesting that the two get to know each other better. White to Willkie, 14 July 1941. Willkie MSS, NAACP correspondence, 1940-1942. In 1944 the two were approached by the Viking Press about collaborating on a book about civil rights. Willkie was keen to do the book but could not see where he would find the time. See Robert Ballou, *The Viking Press*, to Walter White, 15 August 1944, *ibid.* Willkie to White, 23 August 1944, *ibid.* For more detail on the Willkie-White friendship, see White, *A Man Called White*, p198-205.

¹³² Willkie to White, 9 April 1942. Willkie MSS, NAACP correspondence, 1940-1942.

was a supporter of the March on Washington Movement and served on the National Council for a Fair Employment Practice Commission.¹³³

Willkie came out against the poll tax arguing that “nothing undermines faith in a governmental system so quickly as the perversion of its use.” The spectacle of the anti-poll tax bill being held up by a few senators damaged America’s position as the leader of the free world.¹³⁴ Willkie later asserted that all Americans should oppose the poll tax and the Democratic “white primary” because “any measure which deprives any group of citizens in our country from exercising the inherent rights as set forth in the Constitution is inimical to the interests of all citizens.”¹³⁵ Willkie was also appointed special council to the NAACP to fight stereotyping in the film industry.¹³⁶

¹³³ Randolph approached Willkie to speak at an MOWM mass meeting in 1942. Willkie was unable to attend but would have liked to. Randolph to Willkie, 4 April 1942 and Willkie to Randolph 8 May 1942. See also MOWM pamphlet “The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform.” Willkie to Randolph, 22 October 1943. Willkie accepted Randolph’s invitation to serve as honorary chairman of the National Council for a permanent FEPC. Randolph to Willkie, 28 September 1943 and Willkie to Randolph, 22 October 1943. Willkie MSS, correspondence, Randolph, A. Philip.

¹³⁴ Statement by Willkie at a meeting of the Newspaper Guild of New York, 19 November 1942. Willkie MSS, Speeches, 1942.

¹³⁵ Willkie to Katherine Shryver of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, 8 December 1943. Willkie MSS, General.

¹³⁶ Willkie to White, 25 November 1941. Willkie MSS, NAACP file, 1940-June 1942. For correspondence between White and Willkie on this issue see White to Willkie, 25 November 1941, *ibid.* White to Willkie, 30 December 1941, 21 January 1942; “Film Executives pledge to give Negroes better movie roles,” NAACP press release, 21 August 1942, *ibid.* For more details on this matter see White, *A Man Called White*, p198-205 and Barnes, *Willkie*, p328. Willkie and White travelled to Hollywood several times and they did receive some vague promises, but White later wrote, “a few of the pledges were kept, but Willkie’s tragic death damped and almost extinguished the reforms he stimulated.” The stereotyping thus continued.

The most serious threat to race relations during World War Two was the Detroit riot of June 1943 in which thirty-four people, mainly African Americans, died.¹³⁷ While most politicians condemned it, or in Roosevelt's case remained silent, Willkie, in a coast-to-coast radio speech in the aftermath of the riot entitled "An Open Letter to the American People," tried to address the root causes of the problem.¹³⁸ He argued that African Americans remained alienated and on the periphery of American society and that both parties were guilty of failing to examine their basic needs: "one party cannot go on feeling that it has no further obligation to the Negro citizen because Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. And the other is not entitled to power if it sanctions and practices one set of principles in Atlanta and another in Harlem."¹³⁹ He believed that the rights of African Americans had to be guaranteed by legal equality, equal opportunities in education, healthcare and the armed forces. He warned that the Detroit riot could be repeated in many American cities and that such incidents reflected

¹³⁷ For a monograph length study of the riot see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., and Martha Wilkerson, Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943, University of Mississippi Press, Jackson and London, 1991. For contemporary comment see "The Riots," *Crisis*, 49, July 1943, p199 and Chester B. Himes, "Zoot Suit Riots Are Race Riots," *ibid.*, p200. For more detail on the Detroit riot see Wynn, The Afro-American and the Second World War, p68-71.

¹³⁸ *NYT*, 25 July 1943, p25.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p25. Also cited in Barnard, Fighter For Freedom, p408 and Neal, Dark Horse, p275.

badly on America as “two-thirds of the people who are our allies do not have white skin.”¹⁴⁰

Speaking later that summer, Willkie believed that the Republicans could regain the African American vote by, at the very least, promising to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans. In a 1943 interview, he said that if he was elected president he would appoint an African American either to his cabinet or to the Supreme Court and added: “if I am elected, and if I do not do this, I want you to write a piece saying that... Wendell Willkie made such and such a statement to you, and that Wendell Willkie is a liar.”¹⁴¹ Barnard sums up Willkie’s crusade succinctly: “his record from the end of 1940 until his death was one of absolute integrity.”¹⁴²

Willkie’s last published work was entitled “Our Citizens of Negro Blood” and appeared in *Collier’s* in October 1944. He once more outlined the inequities suffered by African Americans in housing, education, employment, and in the

¹⁴⁰ *NYT*, 25 July 1943, p25. Also cited in Neal, p274. For another sympathetic appraisal of the African American plight see Arthur Krock, “The President and Mrs Roosevelt Can Help,” *ibid.*, 3 August 1943, p18. Turner Catledge, “Behind Our Menacing Race Problem,” *New York Times Magazine*, 8 August 1943, p7 and p16. For the NAACP’s view of the riots see the *Crisis* throughout 1943, in particular, “The Riots,” editorial, July 1943, p199; Chester B. Himes, “Zoot Suit Riots Are Race Riots,” July 1943, p200-201 and p222; Thurgood Marshall, “The Gestapo in Detroit,” August 1943, p232-233 and p246; “Riot Report Blames Negroes,” September 1943, p280; Louis E. Martin, “Detroit- Still Dynamite,” January 1944, p8-10.

¹⁴¹ Barnard, p497.

justice system which represented “America’s greatest and most conspicuous scandal.”¹⁴³ He again stressed that what America did at home had an impact abroad: “can we expect men of all other races and colors to credit our good faith... if we continue to practice an ugly discrimination at home against our own minorities[?]”¹⁴⁴ America had to address the problems of African Americans, and he agreed that there were many, not least of which was discrimination in the armed forces. “Of all the indignities Negro men and women suffer today,” Willkie asserted, “the most bitter and ironic is the discrimination and mistreatment they have received in the armed forces of their country.”¹⁴⁵ He believed that African Americans would view the Republican “Negro” plank “as a device to delay, rather than to take effective action.”¹⁴⁶

Willkie then turned his attention to the Republican and Democratic platforms for the 1944 presidential election. Both were “tragically inadequate” but the Democrats’ platform was particularly evasive. The Republican platform carried pledges on segregation in the armed forces, lynching, the poll tax and a

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Draft of “Our Citizens of Negro Blood” article for *Colliers*, 114, 7 October 1944. Willkie MSS, Speeches, 1944. Also cited in Barnard, p496.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Fair Employment Practices Commission. Of these, Willkie regarded the FEPC as the most important but was concerned by the actions of Dewey in blocking a state FEPC in New York: “justly or not, Negro leaders were quick to point out that the Governor’s action coincided with several Republican state conventions where a forthright position on the race issue might have harmed his candidacy.”¹⁴⁷ Regardless of the truth of this claim, Dewey’s support of similar legislation if elected president was already tainted. Willkie condemned the Democrats for pandering to southern racists and believed that the Republicans were only marginally better. He demanded laws against the poll tax and lynching and an executive order to end segregation and discrimination in the armed forces.

Was Willkie the man to return the African American vote to the GOP in 1944? Walter White certainly felt that he had great potential. In April 1943 he declared that African Americans still chose Roosevelt as their preferred presidential candidate in 1944, but that their second choice was the increasingly popular Willkie. The African American vote was now “in the balance,”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

according to White, due to the influence of southerners in the Democratic party.¹⁴⁸ He told George Gallup: “if the candidates are Roosevelt and Dewey, 75 to 95% [of African Americans] would vote for Roosevelt. If the candidates are Roosevelt and Willkie, the percentage would be just the opposite.”¹⁴⁹ A *Pittsburgh Courier* poll of 10,000 African Americans in the fall of 1943 found that 84.2% wanted Wendell Willkie as the Republican candidate for the presidency in 1944. Interestingly, respondents were not offered a choice of Democratic or Republican nominees, they were merely asked the question: “do you favor Wendell Willkie as the Republican presidential candidate for 1944?”¹⁵⁰ White was probably exaggerating Willkie’s popularity, but a second candidacy for the man dubbed “The Nation’s Number One Patriot,” and America’s “foremost champion,” by the African American press after his death¹⁵¹ would surely have been good news for African Americans. There was, however, a danger that Willkie’s outspokenness on the race question would

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Vote of Negro is ‘44 Factor,” *Newark Evening News*, 2 April 1943. Willkie MSS, NAACP file, 1943.

¹⁴⁹ Walter White to George Gallup, 29 May 1944, cited in Neal, *Dark Horse*, p276.

¹⁵⁰ *NYT*, 29 October 1943, p12. This poll, although not the question it asked, is also cited in Sitkoff, “Willkie as Liberal,” in Madison, *Hoosier Internationalist*, p83.

¹⁵¹ *Chicago Defender*, 14 October, 1944 and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 14, 1944, cited in Madison, *Hoosier Internationalist*, p86

alienate white Americans. Pollster Elmo Roper warned that if there was a perception that Willkie “advocated an aggressive policy which might be regarded as truculent, I think he would most certainly be defeated at the polls.”¹⁵²

More than any other Republican, Willkie had a genuine empathy for African Americans, an empathy not tainted with expediency. He knew where the party had gone wrong. In an article on African Americans, written for seven Republican newspapers prior to the GOP convention in 1944, Willkie chided Republicans for embracing states’ rights arguments and urged federal laws to eliminate the poll tax and lynching.¹⁵³ His views, however, were out of touch with the mainstream of the party on this and, indeed, many other issues. Perhaps he remained a liberal Democrat at heart, but what is certain is that when he died of a heart attack on 8 October 1944, the Republican party’s historic championing of African American rights also, finally, died.

¹⁵² Elmo Roper to Russell Davenport, 26 July 1943, cited in Neal, p276

¹⁵³ This article was reprinted in the *New York Times*, 13 June 1944, p36. This formed the basis of a draft platform which Willkie submitted to the Republican platform committee. Willkie’s platform, which was ignored, was published in the *New York Times* in July 1944. *Ibid.*, 11 July 1944, p10.

Willkie was a product of 1940; he simply could not have emerged as the leader of the Republican party at any other time. During World War Two the only American civilian to have a higher public profile than Willkie was Roosevelt. But as Willkie's status among the American people grew, his position within the Republican party itself, never particularly solid, became ever more tenuous. Willkie's liberalism, as outlined in One World, on both foreign and domestic policy, was alien to the mainstream of the GOP.¹⁵⁴ "In the final reckoning," maintains Milton Viorst, "Wendell Willkie was a maverick, a solitary figure, unwanted by his party, unmourned, and, as a political reformer, unsuccessful."¹⁵⁵ Conrad Joyner agrees: "the Republicans accepted Willkie because they did not know him and as they got to know him they dropped him."¹⁵⁶ By 1944, therefore, Willkie did not have a party.

It would be wrong to dismiss Willkie as a mere historical footnote: few defeated presidential candidates have generated so much and such positive interest. Furthermore, Willkie's vision of a new world in the wake of the

¹⁵⁴ One World detailed Willkie's trip around the world in 1942 when he met many allied leaders including Stalin and Churchill. One World would go on to be one of the best selling books of the war.

¹⁵⁵ Viorst, Fall From Grace, p176.

¹⁵⁶ Joyner, Republican Dilemma, p68.

Second World War was in marked contrast to the course embarked upon by the United States and, in particular, the Republican party. Moreover, in civil rights, it is no exaggeration to say that he was twenty years ahead of his time.

Willkie was, however, an anomaly in Republican politics. A nominal Democrat until 1938, he had the air of someone looking in on the Republican party from the outside; for example, on his nomination he exhorted “you Republicans” to follow him. His attitude toward African Americans, foreign policy and domestic policy, including much of the New Deal, was at odds with the mainstream of the party. It is entirely possible that the Republican party merely provided him with a platform. He is said to have suggested to Roosevelt, to whom he was actually quite close politically, that they should seek to realign American politics by forming a new party that would abandon southern Democrats and reactionary Republicans to their fate. The notion did receive an audience, but was never given serious consideration.¹⁵⁷ Even with Willkie nominally at the helm of the GOP, the African American vote still remained the

¹⁵⁷ There was even some speculation about Willkie becoming Roosevelt’s vice-president in 1944.

preserve of the Democrats, and this did not seem to particularly bother most
Republicans.

CHAPTER FIVE. The Bridegroom on a Wedding Cake.

i. "The harmony was so thick it ran down my cheeks."

In 1940, stung by yet another defeat, the GOP had to decide on its future course. International affairs were now extremely important and it was apparent that the Republicans would need to decide where they stood. Willkie's position was clear: America had to do all it could to help the allies, or more accurately, Britain, in the fight against Hitler. He also urged the Republicans to engage in "loyal opposition" after their defeat. This made many Republicans uncomfortable. Indeed, had the extent of Willkie's liberal internationalist sympathies been better known in the spring of 1940 it is unlikely that he would have been nominated. By as early as February 1941 congressional leaders were disavowing Willkie's statements, insisting that he spoke for himself and not the party. Until the eve of Pearl Harbor many Republicans, and undeniably many Americans, believed that America could avoid entanglement in the war and that the Axis powers did not directly threaten America's security.

Everything changed on 7 December 1941. Isolationism, the mainstay of Republican foreign policy for so long, was immediately discredited and the Republicans had to find a patriotic alternative quickly. Arthur Vandenberg, so long in the vanguard of the isolationist wing of the GOP, recalled that Pearl Harbor “ended isolationism for any realist.”¹ Some Democrats advocated the suspension of elections for the duration of the war, but Republicans were universally against this; party Chairman Joseph Martin expected the 1942 elections to go ahead as planned and he announced that the Republican party would be aiming to make gains.

Attempts to move away from overt partisanship during the war failed. There was a suspicion among some Republicans that Roosevelt would use the war to increase his own power and in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the GOP had to decide how critical it could be of the administration during wartime. Taft believed that “the New Dealers are determined to make the country over under the cover of war if they can.”² According to historian Richard Polenberg,

¹ Richard E. Darilek, A Loyal Opposition in Time of War: The Republican Party and the Politics of Foreign Policy from Pearl Harbor to Yalta, Contributions in American History, Number 49, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1972, p18.

² Taft to Richard Scandrett, 26 January, 1942. Cited in Richard Polenberg, War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1972, p185.

“Republicans, therefore, became adept at clothing partisanship in the garb of patriotism.”³ The war, Polenberg argues, actually increased partisan feeling: “the life-and-death character of the war often gave a raw edge to partisan debate.”⁴ The 1942 midterms would, therefore, see “politics as usual” in America.⁵

The main division within the Republican party was between Willkie and Taft. Willkie wanted the GOP to totally disavow itself of pre-war isolationism; Taft was a critic of lend-lease and anything he saw as drawing America into an unacceptable post-war international organisation. Once again the Republican party was faced with an extraordinarily divisive issue. The Republican solution, as in 1937-38, was to appoint a committee. This committee would examine the question of the party’s foreign policy, thereby bypassing any embarrassing public debate that could be detrimental at the polls. Martin appointed a seven-man sub-committee to avoid the divisive positions of Willkie and Taft and, in the words of Richard Darilek, “preserve the image of party unity... by driving

³ Ibid., p185.

⁴ Ibid., p186.

⁵ Darilek, p42.

the dispute underground.”⁶ This sub-committee presented a sufficiently uncontroversial 800-word resolution in April 1942 that was just about acceptable to all sides. Willkie saw it as an abandonment of isolationism but pre-war isolationists knew that this was not the case.⁷

In October 1942 the GOP issued a ten-point manifesto, which was approved by 115 Republican representatives.⁸ As expected, the manifesto accused Roosevelt of being more interested in political gains for himself than the successful prosecution of the conflict. The Republicans, importantly, recorded their opposition to a negotiated peace and pledged to fight vigorously until “complete decisive victory was won.”⁹ The manifesto also stressed the importance of preserving the two party system. Alluding to a post-war international organisation, the manifesto asserted that America had “an obligation and responsibility” to promote “world understanding and [a] co-operative spirit” to maintain world peace.¹⁰ Many Republicans felt that the statement was too strong, particularly on post-war arrangements, and withheld

⁶ Ibid., p44.

⁷ Ibid., p44-45.

⁸ Ibid., p52.

⁹ Ibid., p53.

¹⁰ Ibid.

their endorsement. As Darilek notes, however, “the entire document... was admittedly only a general expression of party policy, issued solely for the purposes of the campaign; it hardly committed the party or even the signers themselves to anything specific.”¹¹ As with other statements of Republican intent, the ten-point manifesto was designed to preserve party unity as much as define party policy.

Walter White believed that the Republicans had made an error in omitting African Americans from their ten-point declaration of policy and principle. “Here was a golden opportunity,” he complained, “for the Republican party to live up to the traditions and pronouncements of the early days.” Martin replied that “it was an oversight rather than an intention. We will try to correct it sometime.”¹² White was not convinced of Martin’s good intentions: “Joe has always been most friendly but, unhappily, he and other political leaders are too frequently given to overlooking the Negro and they need to be reminded so that they don’t forget next time.”¹³ White sent Martin’s letter, confidentially, to the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² White to Martin, 24 September 1942, and Martin to White, 30 September 1942. NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0110 and 0107. White did, however, praise the party’s commitment to victory without a negotiated peace.

¹³ White to Ira Lewis, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 October 1942. Ibid., frame 0119.

editors of five African American newspapers and asked them to comment editorially on the Republican declaration.¹⁴ The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* obliged, commenting that the “Republicans missed an opportunity to strike a blow for democracy.”¹⁵

In the 1942 mid-term elections the Republicans won 44 more seats in the House, giving them a total of 209 compared to the Democrats’ 222, 120 of whom were southerners. In addition, the Republicans now had nine more senators; 29 of the 57 Democratic senators were southerners. The GOP also won gubernatorial contests in New York, Michigan and California. Some Democratic liberals were defeated while some isolationist Republicans, especially strong in the Mid-west, were re-elected. The perceived isolationism of Republican incumbents did not prevent the vast majority of them (110 out of 115) being re-elected.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid. The other editors were: P.B. Young (*Norfolk Journal and Guide*), McNeal and Lechard (*Chicago Defender*), Carl Murphy (*Baltimore Afro-American*) and A.C. Powell (*New York People’s Voice*). See letters from White to the above, *ibid.*, frames 0126-0130.

¹⁵ *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 7 November 1942. *Ibid.*, frame 0136.

¹⁶ Darilek, p55. For the Republican assessment of the election see: PRP, Part II, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, “The 1942 Election,” reel 1, frames 0269-0300 (henceforth “The 1942 Election”). This dealt with regions rather than particular groups of voters; therefore, there is no mention of African Americans.

Yet isolationism versus internationalism was not the only issue in the election. The *raison-d'être* of the New Deal, the fight against economic hardship, was increasingly challenged as the war and the new hardships accompanying it concentrated the minds of Americans. What hampered the Democrats most in 1942 was, however, the extremely poor turnout; only 28 million Americans voted compared to some 50 million in 1940. Turnout, of course, always drops in off-year elections, in 1938, for example, 36 million Americans went to the polls. The war was a factor in this as war workers had moved to new states and may not have registered, while soldiers did not use their absentee ballots. Where war workers were concerned, 37 states required at least a year's residency to permit voting. Furthermore, many workers did not want to give up a day's pay in order to vote. This had a disproportionate effect on the Democrats as many of their core voters, the young and the working class, simply stayed at home.¹⁷ Thomas Dewey, for example, won the New York gubernatorial election with a noticeably reduced turnout compared to 1938. Republican analysis of the returns recognised the low turnout but concluded that

¹⁷ Darilek, p53. The GOP's own analysis confirms this. PRP, Research Division, "The 1942

“the figures do not indicate any relation between Republican strength or weakness and the size of the vote cast.”¹⁸ Regardless of the underlying reasons for their success, the Republicans finally believed that they had an opportunity to rein back the hated New Deal. *Fortune* commented that many of the victorious candidates “think they have a mandate to repeal all New Deal reforms.”¹⁹ Significantly, some commentators reckoned that a majority of African Americans had backed the GOP for the first time since 1932.²⁰ The results may have been different if the allied invasion of North Africa had taken place the week before the election rather than the week after.

The Democrats learnt a number of lessons from the experience of 1942: isolationism was not dead, America’s war aims needed to be better defined and the American public required allied victories. Without all of this there was a

Election,” reel 1, frames 0269-0300.

¹⁸ PRP, Research Division, “The 1942 Election,” reel 1, frames 0269-0300.

¹⁹ Undated. Cited in John Morton Blum, V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II, A Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London, 1976, p232.

²⁰ Earl Brown, “Negro Vote,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 189, July 1944, p152. Cited in Albert Butler, “The Political Significance of Negro Migration from the South, 1940-1962,” Harry J. Vander III, The Political and Economic Progress of the American Negro, 1943-1963, William C. Brown Book Company, Dubuque, Iowa, 1968, p9. Brown stated that a majority of African Americans in New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, West Virginia, New York, and Kentucky had registered as Republicans. In a recent conference paper Timothy Thurber also suggested that a majority of African Americans had voted for the GOP in 1942. Thurber, “Seeds of the Southern Strategy: The Republican Party and African Americans, 1940-1952,” unpublished conference paper, BAAS, April 2001, p5.

very real concern that the party could lose in 1944.²¹ Republican strategists tended to agree with this synopsis, but believed that their attacks on inefficiency in war output and questions about the high command were also factors.²² The midterms also drove the GOP towards the centre of the debate on internationalism and away from the extremes of Willkie and Taft. Darilek declares that the public could forgive pre-war isolationism provided politicians supported “vigorous prosecution of the war.”²³ Nonetheless, victory again postponed party reform and prevented rationale debate about foreign policy.

The 1942 midterms also served to engender rare unity in Republican ranks; when the party met to discuss the new session of Congress on 8 January 1943, McNary commented, “the harmony was so thick it ran down my cheeks.”²⁴ This threatened to be extremely short-lived unless the vexed question of foreign policy could be successfully resolved. “The elections had,” Darilek contends, “left behind within the party a sea of bitterness which threatened to

²¹ Darilek, p54. The Republicans concurred, arguing that if they could maintain their fortunes then they would win the presidency and both Houses of Congress in 1944. PRP, Research Division, “The 1942 Election,” reel 1, frames 0269-0300.

²² PRP, Research Division, “The 1942 Election,” reel 1, frames 0269-0300.

²³ Darilek, p56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p63.

drown its new-found political hopes.”²⁵ Old Guard pre-war isolationists still vehemently opposed Willkie’s internationalism, and the results of the 1942 elections provided a new generation of potential Republican leaders, most notably Dewey, who could deny Willkie the Republican nomination in 1944.

Indicative of the stalemate over foreign policy was the replacement of Joseph Martin by Harrison Spangler as party chairman. Spangler, a Republican committeeman from Iowa, was a compromise, as the election of either an isolationist or an internationalist would have split the GOP.²⁶ To further complicate matters, Willkie’s internationalist treatise One World appeared in April 1943. Selling over a million copies, it quickly became, as Darilek notes, “a rallying point for the increasing public sentiment... for commitment to some form of post-war world organization.”²⁷

It was absolutely essential that foreign policy be dealt with and removed as a possible source of division well ahead of the 1944 presidential election. Vandenberg took the lead in this endeavour and eventually managed, through a meeting at Mackinac Island in his home state of Michigan, to thrash out a deal

²⁵ Ibid., p88.

that was acceptable to all factions of the GOP. What became the Mackinac statement began life at the end of May 1943 when Spangler set up a 49 strong Post War Advisory Council. It included senators, congressmen, members of the RNC and all Republican governors. Pointedly, there were no invitations for Hoover, Landon or Willkie. Spangler privately conceded that the presence of Willkie, or indeed his refusal to attend, would have proved divisive.²⁸

In September 1943, under the shrewd stewardship of Vandenberg, the Republicans agreed in principle to a post-war international organisation.²⁹ Although many remained wary, the Mackinac agreement removed foreign policy as an issue in the next presidential election. Mackinac, a compromise between isolationist and internationalist Republicans, satisfied most in the party, including Willkie.³⁰ The agreement was a major accomplishment, not because it

²⁶ Ibid., p91.

²⁷ Ibid., p94.

²⁸ Ibid., p99-100.

²⁹ For more detail on Vandenberg's role see Hank Meijer, "Hunting For The Middle Ground: Arthur Vandenberg and The Mackinac Charter, 1943," *Michigan Historical Review*, 19, no. 2, Fall 1993. For further comment, including criticism of the Mackinac Charter, see Stephen Tompkins, *Vandenberg*, p210-213. Tompkins sees Mackinac as helping to facilitate eventual Republican support for the United Nations. Ibid., p213. Vandenberg was widely praised by Republicans for his handling of the Mackinac meeting. Darilek, p117.

³⁰ Willkie's support suggests that Mackinac was acceptable to the internationalists within the party, but Mayer believes it was "primarily designed to outflank Willkie and to placate public opinion." Mayer, *Republican Party*, p462. Nevertheless, Willkie remained the major threat to party unity as the election of 1944 approached. A journalist attending the Mackinac meeting paid a bell-boy to page Willkie apparently causing Old Guard Republicans to "rush into huddles of fear." Democratic report of Dewey's political plans, 7 September 1943. FDRP-PSF, pt4, 9, 0913.

committed the Republicans to post-war co-operation, but because it preserved a veneer of harmony on the issue.³¹ It also helped to unite prominent figures within the GOP towards the goal of winning the 1944 election. The significance of Mackinac was, notes Darilek, that it helped “to achieve the semblance of political unity on foreign policy,” although Vandenberg denied that this was the intention of the statement.³² *Newsweek* described the Mackinac meeting as “the most important Republican deliberative assembly since the national convention of 1940.”³³ Mackinac became the basis for the Republican foreign policy plank in 1944.³⁴

ii. “The Japs done declared war on you white folks.”

Unlike World War One, when even W.E.B. Du Bois urged African Americans to set aside their grievances until the conflict was over, African Americans were much more circumspect about their country’s participation in

³¹ Robert A. Divine, Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During World War II, Atheneum, New York, 1971, p131.

³² Ibid.

³³ Blum, V Was for Victory, p275.

³⁴ Darilek, p159.

World War Two.³⁵ Given the disappointments and violence suffered during and after the last conflict, there was no prospect of African Americans remaining silent or postponing progress this time. "The war demonstrated," argues Polenberg, "in a particularly cruel way that Negroes were in, but not of, American society."³⁶ Some even questioned whether it was their war at all; "I hear the Japs done declared war on you white folks" remarked one African American sharecropper after Pearl Harbor.³⁷ Indeed, while African Americans recognised that their lot would be immeasurably worse under Axis powers, little enthusiasm was generated for any war that perpetuated British colonialism. Furthermore, there was acute resentment about the treatment of African Americans within the armed forces and the persistence of African American

³⁵ The main works on African Americans during World War Two include Neil Wynn's detailed study The African-American and the Second World War, (1976) and Richard Dalfiume's excellent article "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution" (Journal of American History, 55, 1968-1969). Dalfiume suggests that African American protest was actually circumscribed by the war. This view is supported by Lee Finkle's "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," (JAH, 60, 1973). Also interesting is Modell, Goulden and Magnusson's "World War II in the Lives of Black Americans: Some Findings and an Interpretation," (JAH 76, 1989) which examines the impact of the war on the future civil rights struggle. For a brief discussion of African Americans during the war see Stephen F. Lawson, Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941, McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., New York and London, 1997, p1-29.

³⁶ Polenberg, War and Society, p101.

³⁷ Dalfiume, JAH, 55, p95.

unemployment at a time when industrial output was increasing dramatically to meet the needs of the preparedness programme.³⁸

The African American response to the Second World War took a number of forms; prior to America's entry, the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) threatened mass protest unless steps were taken to ameliorate conditions for African Americans. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, articulating the conditional loyalty of African Americans, launched its "Double V" campaign demanding "victory over our enemies at home and victory over our enemies on the battlefields abroad."³⁹ The war was also punctuated by race riots, which ultimately cooled the militancy of many African Americans.

The March on Washington Movement was the brainchild of A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and America's best known African American trade unionist. In the summer of 1941 he made public his plans to use a mass protest by African Americans in the nation's capital to wring concessions from the federal government. He announced: "the

³⁸ The demand for labour in 1940 and 1941 had little impact upon African American unemployment, however from 1941 to 1944 the number of African Americans employed by the federal government tripled. Blum, p183-184.

³⁹ Blum, p208. Interestingly, Randolph viewed the *Courier* as the despicable "spokesman for the petty black bourgeoisie." Ibid.

Administration leaders in Washington will never give the Negro justice until they see masses- ten, twenty, fifty thousand Negroes on the White House lawn.”⁴⁰ The MOWM, perhaps the apex of African American militancy during the period, differed from other African American campaigns for a number of important reasons. It attempted to mobilise ordinary African Americans, not the middle classes; it used direct action and publicity rather than the lobbying and litigation of the NAACP; and it campaigned for reforms that would help both northern and southern African Americans. The most radical difference was that, in an effort to promote racial solidarity and anticipating the “Black Power” protests of the 1960s, it consciously excluded white Americans. Nevertheless, although the MOWM had “a separatist organizational structure,” its goal was full integration.⁴¹

Randolph demanded executive orders to deny defence contracts to employers who discriminated and enable the seizure of those plants that did not comply; he also demanded the abolition of segregation and discrimination in the

⁴⁰ Polenberg, p102.

⁴¹ Ibid., p103.

military.⁴² Most white liberals, including Eleanor Roosevelt, implored Randolph to cancel the march amid concerns that it could descend into violence. Randolph refused to budge. On 25 June 1941 Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which outlawed discrimination in the hiring of workers to do government contracts and set up a Fair Employment Practices Committee. Despite failing to secure the desegregation of the military, Randolph cancelled the march, partly because he was unsure he could muster between 50-100,000 African Americans willing to participate and also because he doubted whether it would secure any further concessions.⁴³

The 1940s were the most significant decade yet in the NAACP's history.

The organisation became a mass movement during the Second World War: in 1940 the Association had 50,000 members in 355 branches, by 1946 it had 450,000 members in 1,073 branches.⁴⁴ The Association endorsed both the MOWM and the "Double V" campaign and agitated tirelessly for equal

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p105. For more detail on the March on Washington Movement see Wynn, p43-48. Wynn suggests that the priority of the movement was to ensure employment for African Americans in the war industries rather than desegregation of the military.

⁴⁴ Dalfiume, *JAH*, 55, p99-100. The Detroit, Michigan, branch, for instance, was aiming to have 20,000 members by the end of 1943. *Crisis*, 50, May 1943, p140. In 1946 the NAACP had 535,000 members. NAACP press release, "NAACP urges Republicans to consider needed legislation," 15 November 1946, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0201-0202.

treatment for African Americans in the military. Moreover, it refused to be diverted from its domestic programme. Throughout the war calls for legislation on the poll tax, lynching and fair employment continued unabated. The Association, its already limited faith in Roosevelt wavering, also reassessed its own political outlook during the war.

By the early 1940s there was, as noted, a fear among African American leaders that the Democrats were becoming as complacent as the Republicans about the African American vote. In November 1943, 27 prominent African American leaders from 20 organisations, led by the NAACP, issued a “Declaration by Negro Voters.” It was highly critical of both parties in Congress and their vacillation over civil rights issues, notably legislation to outlaw both lynching and the poll tax. It warned that African Americans would not be swayed by “meaningless generalities” which were “promptly forgotten on election day.”⁴⁵ Instead, African Americans, potentially holding the balance of power in 17 states with a combined electoral vote of over 280, would vote for the party that guaranteed their rights. There was a feeling that the African

American vote was becoming more fluid and would not be the exclusive preserve of the Democratic party: “[this] vote cannot be purchased by distributing money to and through party hacks.”⁴⁶

The Declaration recognised that the successful prosecution of the war remained the primary concern of African Americans, but discrimination in the armed forces caused particular disgust and had to be addressed. The Declaration accused both parties of trying to “delude” African Americans with half-hearted support of legislation on lynching and poll tax. African American voters would no longer put up with excuses: voting against cloture would be regarded as opposition to the aspirations of African Americans and other minorities. They demanded that the FEPC be continued and expanded during the remainder of the war and then in peacetime; any candidate wanting the African American vote had to support actively FEPC legislation. Signatories of the Declaration

⁴⁵ “A Declaration by Negro Voters,” *Crisis*, 51, January 1944, p16-17. (The Declaration can also be found in Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, eds, Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis, New York and Kansas City, 1965, p238-243.)

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

included Bethune, Hastie, Marshall, White, Randolph, Tobias, and Adam Clayton Powell.⁴⁷

By 1944 concern about the shortcomings of both the Democrats and the Republicans was increasingly evident within the NAACP.⁴⁸ In July a special meeting of the Board of Directors was called to discuss the Republican and Democrat platforms. The Association felt that neither party had gone nearly far enough toward a commitment to civil rights and that a response was needed. Hastie urged the Association not to sacrifice its non-partisanship but instead stress that African American voters remained undecided. Arthur Spingarn was much more forthright. New Deal liberalism, he stressed, was extremely important to African Americans: "if," he said, "we in any way attack President Roosevelt (we have got to be realistic) we are helping to elect Dewey and so are

⁴⁷ Ibid. Those signing the Declaration represented organisations with 6,000,000 members. Spangler, commenting on the "Declaration by Negro Voters," claimed to be interested in the plight of African Americans as the New Deal "has sought to use all minority groups as pawns in its games of power politics." The Republicans, on the other hand, would "work to the betterment" of African Americans and all other minorities. White wanted to know if the GOP was going to address the plight of African Americans, he was not, however, hopeful, because "certain elements" of the party seemed to be more keen to cultivate their alliance with southern Democrats, particularly over opposition to the soldier vote bill and cloture. "The Republican party," warned White, "has a very great task ahead of it to overcome the mistakes of distant and recent years." Spangler to White, 6 December 1943, and White to Spangler, 11 December 1943, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0161-0164.

⁴⁸ Times had changed since the 1930s. In the 1930s African American support for the New Deal was almost total. Now, however, there were discordant voices within the African American community, and not just Republicans, questioning the benefits brought by the New Deal. Randolph, for example, was deeply concerned that the New Deal "fostered excessive Afro-American dependence on the Democrats." Pfeffer, Randolph, p119.

cutting ourselves off from all association with liberal forces.” What advances had been made, he argued, were due to Roosevelt: “imagine the crowd we would have had if Hoover had continued to be President; or the crowd we will have if Dewey succeeds President Roosevelt.” A Democratic victory would see the Republicans turn to more liberal figures such as Willkie. He concluded that the Association “should not advocate the election of anyone” but should do nothing that could lead to the defeat of Roosevelt. He contended that candidates be judged solely by what they said.⁴⁹

Wilkins made the surprising assertion that the Association should not predict what African American voters would do because “we know we are not organised to influence that vote to any great degree.” He believed that the NAACP should concentrate on independent African American voters rather than those who were traditionally Republican or Democrat.⁵⁰ Hastie, who had resigned from the War Department in February 1943 over the treatment of African American servicemen and the lack of progress on desegregation, was concerned that the Democrats believed that as long as they did nothing overtly

⁴⁹ Special meeting of the NAACP Board of Directors, 31 July 1944. NAACP, pt18, C, 15, 0805.

racist they would maintain the African American vote. "My grave fear," he warned, "is that the Democratic leadership psychologically is in the same position as the Republican leadership was in 1930."⁵¹ He felt that the independent African American voter could not risk deserting Roosevelt. The key was to put pressure on congressmen and in doing so frighten both parties.⁵² White believed that "the president has allowed himself to be bluffed time and time again by the reactionary southerners" and that "the only thing for us to do is to be tough with the Democrats and the president if we are to get anywhere."⁵³

This debate clearly indicates that African American influence on national politics was still frustratingly limited. The only wartime concession from Roosevelt remained the Executive Order setting up an FEPC in 1941 and this was largely ineffective and issued to placate the March on Washington Movement.⁵⁴ It was apparent that African American aspirations would be low on the administration's list of priorities until at least the end of the war.

⁵⁰ Ibid., frame 0806.

⁵¹ Ibid., frame 0807.

⁵² Ibid., frame 0808.

⁵³ Ibid.

Furthermore, the rising expectations of African Americans were not greeted with particular sympathy from the majority of whites, and racial tensions generated by the war finally culminated in riots in Detroit and Harlem in 1943.

It has been argued that these riots stifled mass action as African Americans, notably the NAACP, moderated their demands, seeking the co-operation of liberal whites instead. This would certainly explain the limited options of the Board of Directors and the limited ambitions of the Declaration by Negro Voters.

iii. "Bunk, Bull and Vacuous Oratory."

Morale among African American Republicans was no better. Throughout 1944, African American Republicans publicly voiced their concern at the direction that their party was heading. In February 1944 African American Republicans from 36 states, led by Robert Church, met in Chicago at their own expense to discuss the forthcoming Republican convention and the nature of the party's appeal to African Americans. They issued a "Declaration by Negro

⁵⁴ For more detail on the FEPC's effectiveness, or lack of it, see Wynn, African American and

Republican Workers.” This reminded the GOP that it had not won a national election since it lost the African American vote and warned that unless it was “courageous enough to rededicate itself to the principles upon which it was founded” it would not regain this vote.⁵⁵ They demanded an end to military segregation, a say in the post-war settlement and wanted African Americans in policy forming, rather than advisory, roles within the GOP and any future Republican government. They also demanded legislation to prevent discrimination in employment, a commitment to full employment after the war, and federal housing. Other demands included the enactment of legislation on lynching, education, the 14th and 15th Amendments, the poll tax, segregation on inter-state travel, and they wanted the Atlantic Charter to be extended to apply to Africans and other exploited people. The Republican-southern Democrat alliance was condemned as “unholy and vicious” especially in relation to the federal education bill and the soldier vote bill.⁵⁶ The concept of states’ rights was denounced, as were presumptions about the constitutionality of bills by members of the Congress. “[A]ll venal, parasitic, vacillating and

reactionary politicians” were repudiated and full citizenship for African Americans was demanded.⁵⁷

They stressed that the GOP’s position was not irredeemable provided a Republican president and Congress fought the “malignant foes of democracy.”⁵⁸

There was no formal endorsement of a candidate but the preference seemed to be for Dewey, particularly as Willkie had now withdrawn from the campaign.⁵⁹

Church challenged African American Democrats to follow the lead of their Republican counterparts and issue a forthright statement about what they wanted from their party. If they did not, asserted Church, then African American voters would know that they were “only looking for loaves and fishes.” Church noted that William L. Houston, the National Director of Negro Democrats, had remained silent about Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi,

⁵⁵ “Declaration by Negro Republican workers in Chicago, February 11-12, 1944. NAACP, pt18, C, 15, 0736-0738. See also *Plaindealer*, 18 February 1944, p4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Joseph V. Baker, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 May 1944. TED, Series 4, Box 11, File 8. (Henceforth TED, S4, B11, F8).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* According to the *Plaindealer* the Chicago convention was wracked by disputes and was often bad-tempered. *Plaindealer*, 18 February 1944, p1. Eastern African American Republicans later met in Philadelphia to urge the Republican National Convention in June to take action to end the discriminatory practices “which have developed under the New Deal.” Seventy-five delegates from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia attended. This seems to have been an exercise in endorsing Republican policy and an excuse to condemn the New Deal. *Plaindealer*, 19 May 1944, p1.

the notorious racist.⁶⁰ The *Crisis* believed that these demands would make uncomfortable reading for many Republicans, particularly Taft. It proved to the *Crisis* that all African Americans, regardless of their political outlook, shared the same core objectives and linked the statement by African American Republicans to a statement made by African American editors to Roosevelt and also the "Declaration by Negro Voters."⁶¹

African American Democrats did meet to discuss the political situation. They demanded decent wages, homes, education, equality and social security. There was, as ever, praise for Roosevelt. Segregation and discrimination were condemned and demands were made for an anti-poll tax law, a federal soldier voting law, FEPC, an end to discrimination in Washington D.C., federal aid to education, low rent public housing and policy forming roles for African Americans. They also attacked the Republican-southern Democratic alliance that had abolished the WPA, passed anti-union legislation and thwarted the federal soldier vote bill. They concluded by praising Vice President Henry

⁶⁰ Ibid., 25 February 1944, p1. Bilbo was, of course, a notorious racist.

⁶¹ "Negro Republicans speak," *Crisis*, 51, March 1944, p73.

Wallace and endorsing Roosevelt for re-election.⁶² The *Plaindealer* reported that this was the first time that African American Republicans or Democrats had met publicly to discuss policy. “At least the smart political leaders of both major parties,” commented the *Plaindealer*, “should know by now that it is going to take more than a lot of bunk, bull and high sounding vacuous oratory” to win African American votes.⁶³

At best the Declaration by Negro Voters represented a unity of purpose among African Americans, a unity reinforced by similar demands from African American Republicans and Democrats alike.⁶⁴ The Declaration was a manifesto outlining the demands, aspirations and grievances of African Americans, but behind its militant rhetoric was the painful recognition that little had changed or was about to change because of the war. The war momentarily galvanised many African Americans but the streak of militancy evident in the MOWM had been diluted by the riots of 1943; African Americans were not in a position to make

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ James A. Hamlett, Jr., “Weekend Chats,” *Plaindealer*, 10 March 1944, p1. The *Plaindealer* also believed that African Americans would vote for “friend or foe” rather than a particular party.

⁶⁴ Although given the clashes between African Americans from the two parties and between White and various African American Republicans, genuine co-operation was a distant prospect. A good indication that African Americans from all shades of the political spectrum shared certain core goals is to be found in Rayford Logan’s What the Negro Wants (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1944). What the Negro Wants featured contributions from

demands. Randolph signed the Declaration, but the radicalism of his MOWM was absent; a more radical document would have urged mass demonstrations, a refusal of the draft and a withdrawal of support for the war effort.⁶⁵ African Americans were restless to be sure, but their options were severely restricted; the ballot was now their only weapon.

By 1944 the NAACP suspected that its closeness to the Democrats, recognised by African Americans, Republicans and Democrats alike, threatened to jeopardise its hard won, although still limited, political influence. Not only had the war pushed African Americans even further down Roosevelt's list of priorities, but also the gains made under the New Deal were imperilled. Democrat and, particularly, Republican African Americans were also disheartened by the lack of tangible progress but all shades of African American opinion clung to the belief that the African American vote in pivotal states could be their salvation.

many of the leading African American figures of the day including Bethune, Du Bois, Randolph, Wilkins, Langston Hughes and Gordon B. Hancock.

⁶⁵ According to Wynn only 2,208 African Americans refused induction into the military between 1941-46. Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, p103. Jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie told his draft board that having never seen a German he would not know who to

iv. "A self-made man who worshipped his creator."

If Wendell Willkie was "the man who would rather be right than be president" then there were many who believed that Thomas Dewey was "the man who would rather be president than be right." Dewey's slight stature and ample self-belief provided an endless source of amusement for journalists, commentators and cartoonists during his presidential campaigns of 1944 and 1948, generating some memorable quips of which the "bridegroom on a wedding cake" was one of the kinder. He was variously described as being able to "strut sitting down," having the handshake of a "frozen chocolate éclair" and also as "a self-made man who worshipped his creator."⁶⁶ Moreover, Dewey was not just a figure of fun. To many, not least African Americans, there were aspects of his character that caused serious concern. There was a feeling that he lacked any real political principles; he assiduously followed public opinion and then acted accordingly. In 1944 Richard Scandett, a former Dewey supporter and a Republican for twenty years declared: "the wind blows first, then Mr Dewey points in its direction.... Sometimes it almost amounts to contortionism

shoot. Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam and later Malcolm X's mentor, was

in the attempt to have both ears to the ground at once.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, “by 1942,” notes Barry K. Beyer, “Dewey had developed a considerable, if somewhat naïve, faith in public opinion polling.”⁶⁸ In 1940 he declared: “never argue with the Gallup Poll. It has never been wrong and I very much doubt that it ever will be, so long as George Gallup runs it.”⁶⁹

The historiography on Dewey is not overly concerned with his attitude towards civil rights. The most authoritative work is Richard Norton Smith’s thoughtful and immensely detailed Thomas E. Dewey and His Times (1982). Smith sees Dewey as a sincere advocate of civil rights, but emphasises his understated approach to the subject. Smith argues that Dewey wanted to tackle the problem of discrimination in employment through co-operation and negotiation rather than resorting to legal threats. This strategy was quietly effective and, believes Smith, gives a good indication of what could have been

imprisoned for three years during the war. Plummer, Rising Wind, p74-75.

⁶⁶ Moos, The Republicans, p425. Sterling Morton to Alfred Landon, 3 January 1947, Reinhard, Republican Right, p40.

⁶⁷ *PM*, 5 October 1944, NAACP, pt18, C, 21, 0194.

⁶⁸ Barry K. Beyer, Thomas E. Dewey, 1937-1947: A Study in Political Leadership, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York and London, 1979, p72.

⁶⁹ Dewey to Landon, 6 June 1944, cited in *ibid.*, p73. Also cited in Polenberg, War and Society, p210.

expected from a Dewey presidency.⁷⁰ Jules Abels' Out of the Jaws of Victory (1959) attempts to explain why Dewey lost in 1948. This is an excellent examination of the mistakes made by the Republicans in 1948 but Abels, while recognising their importance to Truman's victory, spends even less time on African Americans than Smith does.⁷¹ Barry K. Beyer's Thomas E. Dewey, 1937-1947: A Study in Political Leadership (1979) is another balanced approach to Dewey's career. Beyer, opting against a discussion of the 1948 campaign, portrays Dewey as a good organiser but someone who did not "think or act too far ahead of public opinion."⁷² Although referring to New York's State Anti-Discrimination Commission, created with Dewey's support in 1945, Beyer attempts no analysis of Dewey's relationship with African Americans or his attitude towards civil rights.⁷³ There remains then, no detailed appraisal of Dewey and civil rights.

⁷⁰ Richard Norton Smith, Thomas E. Dewey and his Times, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982, p443-448.

⁷¹ Abels, writing from a safe distance in 1959, admits that he was one of those confidently predicting a Dewey victory. Jules Abels, Out of the Jaws of Victory, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1959.

⁷² Beyer, p289.

⁷³ Other works on Dewey include Mary Stolberg's Fighting Organised Crime: Politics, Justice and the Legacy of Thomas E. Dewey. This deals with Dewey's days as a "gangbuster" and his early political career. Stanley Walker's Dewey: An American of this Century, (Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York and London, 1944) was written for Dewey's 1944 presidential bid.

Having failed to secure the Republican nomination in 1940, Dewey again focused his attention on becoming the governor of New York. In early 1942 he began trying to garner support among African Americans by endorsing the *Pittsburgh Courier's* "Double V" campaign. In a statement to the *Courier* he contended that America's enemies at home were "intolerance, injustice and the tyranny of ignorance." Citing the "sacred memory" of Lincoln, he concluded that "only by guarding our hard-won rights as a free people can we hope to enjoy the blessings of peace when victory is finally won."⁷⁴

The Republican party's platform in the New York gubernatorial election of that year advocated equal opportunity regardless of race and stated that discrimination made a "mockery of democracy."⁷⁵ During the campaign Dewey made several speeches condemning discrimination in industry and promised to enforce the state's civil rights law.⁷⁶ Furthermore, he maintained that he would not attempt to roll back the state welfare programme if elected. He also made

⁷⁴ "Statement made by Thomas Dewey for the Pittsburgh Courier," 12 February 1942. TED, S12, B2, F42.

⁷⁵ Republican manifesto for the 1942 New York gubernatorial election, 29 August 1942, cited in NAACP Papers, part 18, series B, reel 11, frame 0296.

⁷⁶ Thomas Dewey, campaign speeches dated 19 October, 1942 and 26 October, 1942, cited in *ibid.*, frame 0291-0292.

some comments that would have been familiar to anyone who had been listening to Willkie's recent pronouncements.

In an interview with the *Amsterdam Star-News*, Dewey again vowed to fight discrimination, claiming that existing anti-discrimination laws had not been effective and promising to make them so.⁷⁷ Dewey told the *Star* that attacking discrimination abroad while maintaining it at home was "absurd" and argued that African Americans should not suspend their protests for civil rights because of the war. Dewey asserted that the African American's commitment to the war effort was "just as great as that of any other American."⁷⁸ He argued that firms who refused to employ African Americans were damaging the war effort, and he cited the record of his own office where African Americans and white Americans worked together harmoniously. Dewey's response to someone in his administration discriminating against African Americans was simple: "I would fire him on the spot."⁷⁹ As governor, Dewey declared that he "would

⁷⁷ Thomas Dewey, interview with Carl Lawrence, *Amsterdam Star-News*, 29 August 1942, *ibid.*, frame 0296-0297. This was not the most rigorous of interrogations.

⁷⁸ "Interview with Mr Dewey for *Amsterdam Star-News*," 26 October 1942. TED, S9, B10, F11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* This again echoed the statements of Willkie.

tolerate no caste system. I believe that no job is too big or too good for a qualified Negro to fill.”⁸⁰

Dewey made two speeches to African American audiences during the latter stages of the campaign. In the first at Union Baptist Church, he told his audience that America’s diversity gave it strength, particularly in a time of crisis. He again recognised African American dedication to the war effort, and maintained that one of America’s war aims was to destroy “international discrimination.” Dewey insisted that “it is absurd to talk about eradicating evils in other countries when we still have not wiped out those evils at home.”⁸¹ He also criticised the token hiring of African Americans in war industries, especially at a time when America needed manpower. In addition, he recognised that African Americans did not want special treatment, merely the rights they were entitled to as American citizens: “he seeks an end to discrimination and prejudice. He seeks the right to a job, and equality in the service of his country and flag. These things he must be given.”⁸² Prejudice, he affirmed, was a “blot on the American record” which he wanted “wiped out” and he believed that

⁸⁰ Ibid.

America had taken steps to achieve this.⁸³ This is, of course, precisely what Willkie had been saying since 1940.⁸⁴

Dewey's second speech to an African American audience was in Harlem. He touched upon similar themes but this time he also assailed the current Democratic administration in New York. He attacked what he saw as a "poll tax" imposed by the Democratic party in Albany, citing the example of an African American whose tax assessment almost doubled when he registered as a Republican in 1940. Furthermore, in Albany, African Americans and whites did the same jobs for different pay. Dewey vowed to rectify this. He would start this process by making the various laws that already existed to combat discrimination effective, because discrimination was "a betrayal of our war effort."⁸⁵ He concluded:

We cannot ask people to put their trust in a democracy that does not exist for them. We cannot ask them to work and fight and die- to give their blood,

⁸¹ "Address by Thomas E. Dewey at Union Baptist Church, New York City, October 19, 1942." Ibid., S9, B10, F2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. Omitted from the final draft was the following passage: "it wasn't long ago that we read in the newspapers of a factory producing army trucks in Detroit that was closed down because hundreds of white employees refused to work with a handful of colored workers."

⁸⁴ This speech was made several months after Willkie's "Imperialisms at Home" speech to the NAACP convention.

sweat, toil and tears- for an ideal that is unreal to them. We must bring an end to discrimination. We must bring an end to the poll tax. We must win the struggle for freedom at home as we win it throughout the world.⁸⁶

These were forthright words, particularly coming from the mouth of a leading Republican, yet Dewey rarely spoke to or about African Americans again.

Dewey duly became the first Republican governor of New York in twenty years, and among the wards in which he was victorious was Harlem.⁸⁷ His victory was, however, greatly assisted by divisions among the state's Democrats.⁸⁸ This, in turn, almost guaranteed a Dewey victory and increased the likelihood that he would be nominated by the Republicans in 1944. Roosevelt could, therefore, have created his own nemesis.

Upon assuming office Dewey's record never quite matched his campaign rhetoric.⁸⁹ Perhaps the brightest aspect in his first administration was the

⁸⁵ "Address by Thomas E. Dewey, Republican candidate for governor, at a rally in public school 136, Edgecomb Avenue and 135th Street, Monday evening, Oct. 26, 1942." TED, S9, B10, F11. (This speech is also available in the NAACP papers. NAACP, P18, B, 11, 0516-0519.)

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Herbert Brownell, who would later be Eisenhower's Attorney General, was involved in many of Dewey's political campaigns commented, inaccurately as events would demonstrate, that Dewey's "strong pro-civil rights stance led to lasting support in his subsequent presidential and gubernatorial campaigns." Herbert Brownell with John Burke, Advising Ike: The memoirs of Herbert Brownell, University Press of Kansas, 1983, p44.

⁸⁸ For details on Democratic splits in New York see, Darilek, Loyal Opposition, p52.

⁸⁹ Julia Baxter of the NAACP analysed Dewey's speeches during his first few months as governor. Reporting to White, she concluded: "I have examined them but have found no specific promises on Dewey's part to appoint outstanding Negroes to responsible jobs in the State government set up." Memorandum for Julia Baxter to Walter White, 4 May 1943,

appointment, in September 1943, of Francis Rivers as Justice of the City Court in New York. Rivers thus held the highest paid and highest-ranking job ever held by an African American in New York “and possibly the nation.”⁹⁰ Rivers, a lifelong Republican and Dewey’s most senior and loyal African American confidante, was initially appointed until December, but, having secured the support of the American Labor Party as well as the GOP, it seemed very likely that he would be elected to the post in November. The *Amsterdam Star-News* believed that the appointment of Rivers, together with the Democrats’ refusal to select an African American to run against him, meant that there was the possibility of the Republicans regaining African American votes.⁹¹

The appointment of Rivers generated universal praise for Dewey. The *New York Times* felt that he had been appointed on merit and that choosing him due to his race would have been a serious error.⁹² The *Amsterdam Star-News* was suitably impressed by Dewey’s efforts, describing it as “a bold stroke” by

NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0293. This turned out to be something of a Dewey trait, writing in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1944, Richard H. Rovere said of Dewey: “his speeches... say nothing in crisp rhythmical prose.” He dodged issues or hedged and relied on polls when determining policy. Richard H. Rovere, “The Man in the Blue Serge Suit,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 18, no. 1128, May 1944, *ibid.*, frame 0558-559.

⁹⁰ *NYT*, 14 September 1943, p1.

⁹¹ “Francis E. Rivers sworn in as City Court Judge,” *Amsterdam Star-News*, 25 September 1943. TED, S7, B62, F43. For biographical detail on Rivers and further comment on his appointment see the *New York Age*, 25 September 1943. *Ibid.*, S7, B62, F43.

“a fearless and courageous public official.”⁹³ Rivers was duly elected in November securing the votes of both African Americans and whites. Channing Tobias told Dewey of his delight at Rivers’ election, stating that “your courage, forthrightness and loyal support will not go unnoticed. They will be rewarded more generously in the future than they have been in the past.”⁹⁴

v. “Governor Dewey is not interested in eliminating racial and religious prejudice.”

Within months of Rivers’s victory, however, Dewey’s relationship with African Americans was very seriously damaged. In March 1944 the New York state legislature killed an anti-discrimination bill and replaced it with a new committee, the third in seven years.⁹⁵ Dewey was blamed for the failure of the bill and was criticised for not supporting the proposals of a committee he had appointed in the first place. Six members of the original committee, including

⁹² *NYT*, 18 September 1943, p16.

⁹³ *Amsterdam Star-News*, 25 September 1943. TED, S7, B62, F43.

⁹⁴ Tobias to Dewey, 4 November 1943. TED, S4, B185, F18.

⁹⁵ *NYT*, 19 March 1944, p32. Beyer believes that the findings of the first committee were “conflicting and overly partisan.” Beyer, *Dewey, 1937-1947*, p158.

Lester Grainger of the National Urban League and Channing Tobias, resigned.⁹⁶

Members of the committee asserted in their collective resignation letter that “the urgency and gravity of the problems with which the committee has concerned itself is so great that a year’s further delay in seeking a remedy is, in the opinion of the undersigned, wholly unjustified... [we are] unwilling... to share with you the responsibility for the postponement of action.”⁹⁷ The new committee would report its findings to the 1945 legislature.⁹⁸ Ironically, in the interview Dewey gave to the *Amsterdam Star-News* prior to his election, he was asked if he would appoint another commission. Dewey replied: “I don’t like surveys where they simply serve to delay action. Certainly the Negro, more than any other group, needs action. I am a firm believer in sound investigation to get the facts. But I do not believe in investigation unless it leads to results. It is time for results.”⁹⁹ To Dewey’s critics, it seemed that results would have to wait until he had secured the presidential nomination; indeed by the time the new commission presented its findings Dewey could be in the White House.

⁹⁶ *New York Post*, 26 March, 1944, cited in NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0339. See also *Plaindealer*, 7 April 1944, p1.

⁹⁷ Sender Garlin “Is Dewey the Man?” original source unknown. TED, S2, B15, F4.

⁹⁸ *NYT*, 13 April 1944, p20.

⁹⁹ “Interview with Mr Dewey for *Amsterdam Star-News*,” 26 October 1942. TED, S9, B10, F11.

The NAACP registered its acute disapproval. Roy Wilkins wrote to Dewey's office arguing that the governor had "pulled a trick and refused to face the issue" of discrimination in employment.¹⁰⁰ "The inescapable conclusion" declared Wilkins, "is that Governor Dewey is not interested in eliminating racial and religious prejudice."¹⁰¹ He warned that, as a result, Dewey would "be viewed with suspicion by Negro voters."¹⁰² Another critic accused Dewey of "using a pliant Republican majority in the legislature [to block] the passage of virtually every anti-discrimination measure" in 1944.¹⁰³ These measures included bills on housing, Jim Crow, a state civil rights bureau and, especially, the New York State Commission on Discrimination.

Dewey justified the killing of the bill contending that "over a period of years sincere and constructive but piecemeal efforts have been made by legislation to eliminate racial and religious discrimination among our people." He also observed that "we are far short, however, of having established either a

¹⁰⁰ NAACP press release, "Wrong choice made on FEPC, Dewey is told," 23 March 1944. NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0338. Wilkins was acting Secretary of the Association at this time as Walter White was touring American military bases around the world.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. Also quoted in *Plaindealer*, 31 March 1944, p4. Dewey was also attacked by the National Negro Congress. *Plaindealer*, 7 April 1944, p4. Wilkins, writing to Joseph Gavagan who was now on the New York State Supreme court, dismissed the new commission as a "meaningless gesture." Wilkins to Gavagan, 21 March 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0333.

¹⁰³ Garlin "Is Dewey the Man?" TED, S2, B5, F4.

fundamental policy or a system of law which adequately meets the problem as a whole.”¹⁰⁴ Dewey perhaps had a point: there was little to be gained from a law that, in his view, simply would not work.¹⁰⁵ Paul Lockwood, a member of Dewey’s staff, responded angrily to the notion that the governor somehow controlled the New York legislature. He argued that the same logic could be applied to Roosevelt over anti-lynching legislation. “Yet I have heard,” he noted, “of no personal abuse or spreading of lies about the President... because he did not ‘order’ the Congress to pass that law.” Lockwood demanded to know if “the fact that there is a presidential election pending this fall justif[ied] distinguishing between Democrats in Washington DC and Republicans in Albany?”¹⁰⁶ Wilkins replied that the main difference between the situations in Washington and Albany was that the Republicans had a working majority in

¹⁰⁴ *NYT*, 18 March 1944, p1 and p10. African American Republicans were concerned about the effect the failure of the bill would have on the party’s prospects of regaining the African American vote. Church told Dewey “The passage of New York State’s Fair Employment Act by a Republican administration, would have a far reaching effect on Colored citizens throughout this country.” Telegram from Church to Dewey, 15 March 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0329.

¹⁰⁵ As far back as the gubernatorial campaign of 1938 Rivers was drafting speeches for Dewey complaining about the lack of enforcement of the laws against discrimination which already existed. So at least in this regard, Dewey was being consistent by blocking the anti-discrimination bill. Copy of speech drafted by Rivers during the 1938 campaign. Rivers to Hickman, 22 September 1942. TED, S9, B10, F11.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Lockwood to Wilkins, 17 April 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0343-344.

Albany and had passed other legislation at short notice, whereas Roosevelt had a numerical majority but not party unity.¹⁰⁷

Tobias, hitherto a Republican and Dewey ally, was incensed by the killing of the bill. He publicly accused Dewey of failing to support the bill because he did not want to alienate southern Republicans before the party convention.¹⁰⁸

Tobias further alleged that when the bills were before the state Senate, New York's lieutenant governor was in the South garnering convention votes for Dewey. Tobias declared "there was nothing complicated or highly controversial about the bills for those who are true believers in American democracy."¹⁰⁹ He emphasised that he and other members of the Committee had resigned because they believed that Dewey was "playing politics" and they refused "to continue as partners in futility."¹¹⁰ Tobias not only resigned from the commission but

¹⁰⁷ Wilkins to Lockwood, 18 April 1944, *ibid.*, frame 0341-0342.

¹⁰⁸ *Plaindealer*, 12 May 1944, p1. Tobias originally made this allegation in *Congress View* the monthly magazine of the National Negro Congress.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* See also, "Six quit Dewey Anti-Bias Board, Attack Governor for killing bill," *New York Post*, 26 March 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0339. At this stage Alvin Johnson had not decided whether he would continue on the committee.

¹¹⁰ *Plaindealer*, 12 May 1944, p1. The *Crisis* shared this suspicion. "Two Strikes on Dewey," *Crisis*, 51, April 1944, p104. The National Non-Partisan League, a pro-Roosevelt African American organisation, later alleged that on the day Dewey killed the New York State FEPC his lieutenant was in North Carolina assuring party leaders in the state that the Governor was not a "Negro lover." *Plaindealer*, 27 October 1944, p1. The *New York Post* also suggested that the blocking of the law was linked to North Carolina lily-whites who wanted to draft Dewey for president. "Discrimination and Governor Dewey," *New York Post*, 31 March 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0530. *PM*, a staunchly Democratic newspaper from New York, later alleged that when the law was eventually passed in 1945 it was dependent on commissioners and "Dewey picked cautious, conservative, slow moving commissioners." "The real story of Dewey's stand

also, as the election campaign began, he even went so far as to publicly endorse Roosevelt, "because his philosophy of government and the generally progressive course he has followed for the past twelve years have invested the common man of every race, creed and color with a dignity and inspired him with a hope that he has never known before."¹¹¹

The *New York Post* declared: "it is one of the oldest and sleaziest tricks of politics to block a program or kill a measure by calling for further study and consequent postponement of all action." It noted that Dewey could be president by the time the new committee submitted its report.¹¹² The *Philadelphia Inquirer* attempted to explain why Dewey had killed the bill. It claimed that because the law had been proposed two weeks before the adjournment of the state assembly and would have probably been ineffective, Dewey chose to abandon the bill and take responsibility for its failure. The *Inquirer* praised Dewey for his lack of opportunism:

on discrimination," *PM*, 29 October 1946, *ibid.*, frame 0497-0498. The *Crisis* shared the suspicion that Dewey abandoned the anti-discrimination bill because he wanted southern votes for the Republican nomination.

¹¹¹ National Citizens PAC, press release, 21 August 1944, NAACP, pt18, C, 21, frame 0207-0209. Sidney Hillman was chairman of the National Citizens PAC.

¹¹² "Discrimination and Governor Dewey," *New York Post*, 31 March 1944, *ibid.*, pt18, B, 11, 0530.

This man has a passion for thoroughness; and even before this measure showed its head, he had publicly sworn against loading the judicial docket with obviously unconstitutional legislation. And in that light, candidate or no candidate, wrath or no wrath, he asked for further study and a possibly better solution of a tough problem.¹¹³

Dewey biographer Richard Norton Smith agrees with this hypothesis, arguing that Dewey had not backed the bill because it was badly drafted and fundamentally flawed.

Nevertheless, African Americans were not convinced. Moreover, Dewey's standing among African Americans further deteriorated when Frank S. Columbus, of the lily-white Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen union, was then appointed to the new committee along with a number of other people the NAACP felt were inappropriate.¹¹⁴ These included Frank L. Weil of the United Services Organisation (USO), who had helped to

¹¹³ Joseph V. Baker, "Negro Leaders demand positive GOP stand," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 May 1944. TED, S4, B11, F8.

¹¹⁴ Walter White to Thomas Dewey, 8 June 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0371-2. For those appointed to the new committee see *NYT*, 1 June 1944, p21. See also NAACP press release, "Lily-white unionist on State FEPC draws NAACP fire," 6 August 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0539.

prevent the publication of a pamphlet entitled “The Races of Mankind” which attacked the myth of racial superiority.¹¹⁵

By 1944 there were over nine million Americans in the military, and some five million of them were overseas; their votes would, therefore, be vital in the forthcoming presidential election. The Green-Lucas soldier voting bill was brought before Congress in 1943. The main area of contention was whether the states or the federal government should allocate the soldier vote. Dewey and most Republicans favoured the former and Roosevelt the latter. The bill united conservative Republicans and southern Democrats in opposition, albeit for different reasons: Republicans did not want soldiers voting Democrat, while southern Democrats, as noted, did not want southern African American soldiers voting at all. Even though reactionary southern Democrats had publicly declared that their objective in opposing it was the maintenance of white supremacy, Dewey did not change his position. “In the minds of Negroes,” announced the *Crisis*, “he joined Rankin [a racist Mississippi senator]. Anyone who joins

¹¹⁵ White to Dewey, 9 June 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0371.

Rankin cannot have the Negro vote.”¹¹⁶ Roy Wilkins contended that this represented tacit support of the stance taken by southern Democrats. This was a harsh assessment, but perhaps understandable given the GOP’s predilection for alliances with southern Democrats. Many Republicans voted against the bill despite southern Democrats openly declaring the reason for their opposition. Wilkins warned that African American voters would punish “collaborators with the Rankin-Eastland bloc.”¹¹⁷

Lawrence E. Walsh, assistant counsel to Dewey, wrote to the NAACP to refute allegations that the governor had sided with racist southerners over the bill. The NAACP, unsurprisingly, was not convinced.¹¹⁸ Dewey had once more been tainted on an issue of importance to African Americans. The states rights soldier vote bill passed the Senate by a margin of 42 to 37 in December 1943; in January 1944 the House, by a vote of 224 to 168, voted against replacing the

¹¹⁶ “Two Strikes on Dewey,” *Crisis*, 51, April 1944, p104.

¹¹⁷ *Plaindealer*, 18 February 1944, p1. See also, Wilkins to Dewey, 10 February 1944, NAACP, pt18, B, 11, 0327 and NAACP press release regarding soldier vote bill, 10 February 1944, *ibid.*, frame 0523. Eastland felt that the passage of his bill would prevent any further moves for an anti-poll tax bill. Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1996, p131.

¹¹⁸ *Plaindealer*, 3 March 1944, p1.

Senate bill with a federal law. Notwithstanding the controversies surrounding the soldier vote, some four million servicemen voted in 1944.¹¹⁹

As the 1944 Republican convention approached, the African American press was largely hostile to Dewey. The “Weekly Survey of the Negro Press” reported “close to complete unanimity” in the opposition to a presidential bid by Dewey. There was a perception that Dewey had made no “clear cut decisions” on race issues and widespread disappointment about the failure of anti-discrimination legislation in New York State.¹²⁰ Even African Americans within the Republican party were hostile to Dewey: “it is inconceivable that colored Republicans will vote for Dewey in the absence of any statement from him as to why he killed the New York anti-jim-crow bills.”¹²¹

The ongoing controversy over the poll tax was also a potential headache and the NAACP was keen to make life as uncomfortable as possible for Dewey and the Republicans on this issue. Efforts to pass an anti-poll tax bill mirrored

¹¹⁹ Figures for the number of soldiers voting from PRP, Part II, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, “The Presidential Election-1944,” March 1945 reel 1, frames 0339-0342 and *ibid.*, April 1945, frames 0471-0500. Over half of these votes were cast in California, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio. *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Weekly Survey of the Negro Press,” 3 April to 9 April 1944, p1. TED, S4, B127, F6.

¹²¹ *Baltimore Afro-American*, 8 April 1944. Cited in *ibid.* Similar sentiments were expressed in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 April 1944, the *Washington Tribune*, undated and the *New York People's Voice*, 8 April 1944. *Ibid.*

the crusade to pass an anti-lynching bill throughout the 1930s; the campaigns were similar in many ways, but none more so than the frustration of those advocating the bills and the intransigence of their opponents. Filibusters, the failure of cloture, half-hearted support and the need to pass more "important" legislation plagued efforts to pass an anti-poll tax bill and create a permanent FEPC during the 1940s. This was all depressingly familiar for veterans of the anti-lynching campaign. Periodic attempts continued to be made to pass a federal anti-lynching law, but the focus of the efforts of civil rights groups, primarily the NAACP, shifted towards less abstract goals. This perhaps reflected the increasing confidence of the Association and its allies, but it did not make the prospects for success any brighter.

The anti-poll tax campaign was at least initially an indigenous southern effort. It began 1939 when the southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) launched its campaign but the NAACP and other civil rights advocates soon took up the cause. The poll tax was significant as it underpinned some of the most powerful men in Congress, men who had little mandate even within their own constituencies: in 1936 only a quarter of possible voters used their

ballots in the eight poll tax states.¹²² "It was," as Patricia Sullivan argues, "arbitrary and class-based, excluding people simply because they were poor."¹²³

In October 1939 Congressman Lee Geyer, a California Democrat, introduced the first unsuccessful anti-poll tax bill. His second effort was co-sponsored by Senator Claude Pepper, a Florida Democrat. Geyer established the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (NCAPT) in 1941 as an umbrella group for organisations opposing the law. The NAACP was prominent but the AFL, the CIO, the YWCA and the National Negro Congress also lent support.¹²⁴ In 1942 Pepper and Wayland Brookes, a Republican from Illinois, added an amendment to the soldier voting bill suspending the poll tax for soldiers for the duration of the war.¹²⁵ The anti-poll tax bill eventually escaped from the House Judiciary Committee and made it to the floor of the House for a vote. George Bender, a Republican congressman from Ohio, was persuaded to

¹²² The poll tax states were Mississippi, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee. Louisiana, North Carolina and Florida had abolished the poll tax during the 1930s and, as a result, saw dramatic increases in voting. Sullivan, p106-108. The *Crisis* reported that in the presidential election of 1940 just over 5% of the population of South Carolina voted, in Mississippi the figure was 8% while only around 10% voted in Georgia, Arkansas and Alabama. Less than 20% voted in Virginia (12.9%), Louisiana (15.7%), Texas (16.2%) and Tennessee (17.9%), about a quarter voted in North Carolina (23.3%) and Florida (25.7%) and a third in Kentucky. "Democracy (?) at the Ballot Box," *Crisis*, 48, January 1941,

p7.

¹²³ Sullivan, p118.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p114.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p116.

take the lead in promoting the bill after realising that more people voted in his congressional district than in the whole of Mississippi.

The bill passed in the House by 254 to 84 on 13 October 1942. Norris, Barkley and Pepper provided an articulate defence of the bill in the Senate arguing that the poll tax was not a reasonable qualification for voting. The federal government, they insisted, had a duty to protect the right to vote. Barkley declared: "I know of no more opportune time to try to spread democracy in our country than at a time when we are trying to spread it in other countries and throughout the world."¹²⁶ It was, Barkley believed, a question of democracy not of race. The federal government, therefore, had a right to protect the right to vote. Opponents contended that voting was a privilege and not a right, they also declared that it was the sole preserve of the states to determine voting qualifications and any attack on this would undermine states' rights. Cloture on the bill failed and Roosevelt refused to speak out in its defence but

¹²⁶ Ibid., p119.

“the war provided supporters with a powerful rationale for protecting the right to vote.”¹²⁷

In 1943 Bender, the chairman of the steering committee on the bill, told Dewey that he was “particularly gratified that the Republicans stood almost to a man for the passage of this legislation.” He felt, however, that it was important for Republican senators to vote for cloture and requested that Dewey publicly support efforts to pass the bill: “it is essential to pass such legislation in order to demonstrate [at home and abroad] our sincerity in the present war.”¹²⁸

By 1944 the bill still had not passed. White urged Dewey to make a statement supporting the bill and the move for cloture: “your present strategic position in the Republican party is such that your voice would be decisive in persuading a large number of Republican senators to vote for cloture.”¹²⁹ Dewey informed White that he had “always fought against the poll tax and every other device to deprive free people of their votes,” but White was not convinced.¹³⁰ He felt that the governor’s stance dodged the issue as it did not state whether he supported federal or local action or if he would support cloture. White

¹²⁷ Ibid., p121.

continued: "will you urge upon the 23 Republican senators who virtually hold the fate of the bill in their hands that they vote next Monday for cloture? To say one is against the poll tax but refrains from advocacy [sic] of specific steps to abolish it is not enough."¹³¹

Robert Church attacked White, who had been "playing the New Deal and Roosevelt game since 1933," for attempting to blame the defeat of cloture on the Republican party and Dewey. The real blame for failure, Church insisted, lay with Roosevelt who "never fails to speak out on legislation in which he is personally interested."¹³² Church suggested that White's "telegraphic barrage" be directed at the White House and the Democratic party and asserted that "the Negro will not be deceived despite the peregrinations of Walter White's logic."¹³³

The *Washington Post* commented that "it would obviously be a political blunder of first rate magnitude for Governor Dewey to antagonise members of

¹²⁸ George H. Bender to Dewey, 4 June 1943. TED, S4, B207, F22.

¹²⁹ Telegram from White to Dewey, 9 May 1944. Ibid.

¹³⁰ Telegram from Dewey to White, 11 May 1944. Ibid.

¹³¹ Telegram from White to Dewey, 11 May 1944. Ibid. Rivers urged Dewey to support cloture but leave the constitutional merits of the bill to the Senate. Telegram from Francis Rivers to James C. Hagerty, a Dewey aide, 12 May 1944. Ibid.

¹³² "R.R. Church, Republican head, urges Walter White to seek Roosevelt aid in poll tax fight," unattributed press release, 13 May 1944. Ibid., S4, B32, F29.

¹³³ Ibid.

the Senate by injecting himself into the anti-poll tax fight.”¹³⁴ There was a feeling that Dewey’s chances of winning southern votes would be enhanced if he remained silent on the poll tax. If Dewey was cynical enough to kill an anti-discrimination bill in his own state to assuage the feelings of the South, as his critics believed, then there was little chance of him offending the region over the poll tax.

The Republicans then decided that the best way to rid the nation of the poll tax was with a Constitutional amendment. The *Crisis* warned African Americans not to be fooled by this, as it would require the support of three-quarters of both the Senate and the House to become law. If the amendment successfully negotiated Congress, it would then have to be approved by three-quarters of state legislatures, which the *Crisis* argued could take “until Doomsday.” “The senators,” it continued, “are emulating Mr Dewey on his state FEPC bill- stalling until after the election- but like Mr Dewey, they are too, too transparent.”¹³⁵ White advised Dewey not to seek a constitutional amendment,

¹³⁴ Washington Post editorial, 13 May 1944. *Ibid.*, S4, B207, F22.

¹³⁵ “Nobody is Fooled,” *Crisis*, 51, June 1944, p185.

reminding him that a constitutional amendment abolishing child labour was passed twenty years previously but had only been approved by 28 states.¹³⁶

There was actually some logic to the Republican proposal for combating the poll tax through a Constitutional amendment. After the GOP convention, Oliver Randolph, an African American Republican from New Jersey, offered a rejoinder to White over the party's platform, alleging that White had "become a New Deal partisan first and a champion of Negro rights second." Explaining the Republican stand on the poll tax, Randolph argued:

There are 48 states in the Union. An Amendment to the federal constitution requires ratification by two-thirds of them, or 32 states. Forty states have no poll tax and it is logical to assume that they would favor the amendment....

Surely the great Walter White is not little enough to want his people saved from disenfranchisement only if he makes the plans. With only 8 poll tax states, constitutional amendment seems the short way of correcting the national suffrage scandal.¹³⁷

This argument may have carried some weight, and generated more debate, had it come from a senior Republican or the presidential candidate himself, but there

¹³⁶ Walter White to Dewey, 1 August 1944. TED, S4, B207, F22.

¹³⁷ *Plaindealer*, 21 July 1944, p4.

is little to suggest it was either widely reported or was even the official Republican rationale for advocating a Constitutional Amendment. Randolph was left with the impression that White was “hunting for excuses to condemn” the Republicans.¹³⁸ Randolph, echoing Church, concluded by noting that White’s “friend” Roosevelt had no problem passing legislation if he wanted to.¹³⁹ These were undoubtedly valid criticisms but they did not detract from the lack of satisfactory answers from the GOP to questions posed by African Americans.

Dewey’s presidential campaign had begun inauspiciously among African Americans. No poll tax bill was passed in 1944, but demands for legislation did not cease. A further attempt to enforce cloture on the bill was defeated in the Senate at the end of July 1946 by 39 votes to 33. Those against cloture included seven Republicans from New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Colorado.¹⁴⁰ By 1948, with another presidential election looming, an anti-poll tax bill was no nearer becoming law. Another bill passed the House in February but the Republicans continued to argue for a

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid. As far as the armed forces were concerned, Randolph asserted that reform would continue into peacetime: “we are not building a nation for the war emergency. Liberty, justice and equality are principles for all time, not just for war-time.” Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *NYT*, 1 August 1946, p14.

Constitutional Amendment to abolish the tax.¹⁴¹ Even Irving Ives, a Republican State Senator from New York and a Dewey ally, argued that this was an unsatisfactory way of dealing with the problem.¹⁴² A further attempt to introduce poll tax legislation was eventually made during the special session of Congress called by Truman in the summer of 1948 but it was abundantly clear that Taft had no intention of breaking the southern filibuster.¹⁴³ Taft did state that he would use every possible parliamentary mechanism to pass the anti-poll tax bill but if this endeavour failed then he would shelve the bill.¹⁴⁴ Needless to say, the bill did fail and amid the recriminations Barkley questioned the motivation of the Republicans. Writing privately to White he questioned “whether they [the Republicans] deliberately steered the Senate into the filibuster or had any semblance of good faith in trying to get action on the measure, it might be unwise for me to conjecture, but at any rate I hope that all those who are interested in this legislation will properly assess the maneuvers of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 6 February 1948, p1.

¹⁴² Ibid., 29 July 1948, p14.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 30 July 1948, p1.

the majority in regard to it.”¹⁴⁵ It would not be until the 1960s that the poll tax was finally abolished.

vi. “If you’re screwy, vote for Dewey.”

The election of 1944 was a generally low-key affair as Americans were preoccupied with the war. Few commentators thought that the Republicans had much chance of defeating Roosevelt, in spite of his health, his decision to run for an unprecedented fourth term, and the gains the Republicans had made in the 1942 mid-term elections. The cast of characters seeking the Republican nomination was much the same as in 1940, with the addition of Governor Harold Stassen of Minnesota, a liberal reformer and internationalist World War Two Navy veteran, Governor John Bricker (“an honest Harding” according to William Allen White) of Ohio and, potentially, General Douglas MacArthur, who was a conservative. Dewey, Willkie and Taft, however, were again the main hopefuls. Willkie’s highly publicised “One World” trip in autumn 1942 made him the best known and most popular Republican in the country, but this

¹⁴⁵ Alben Barkley to Walter White, 12 August 1948. NAACP, pt18, B, 9, 0208.

was not necessarily mirrored within the party itself. Many of the party's leading figures resented not only Willkie's nomination in 1940 but also, crucially, his internationalist approach to foreign policy, and it was his internationalism which cost him the 1944 nomination. Willkie felt that he had to run in isolationist Wisconsin if he was to be regarded as a serious contender. This proved to be a major tactical error, and having won no delegates he withdrew from the race, remaining on the fringes of the party until his death.

The prospect of the GOP energetically championing African American rights was no brighter in 1944 than it had been in 1940. Harrison Spangler, RNC chairman, told White that once the New Deal was defeated in the election, "the Republican party will again undertake its historic task of working for the betterment of the Negro people." White, recalling the southern Democrat-conservative Republican alliance in Congress, was not convinced.¹⁴⁶

Willkie submitted an alternative platform to the convention that included an extensive section on civil rights. He recognised that Republican legislation guaranteed African American rights after the Civil War but felt that it was

¹⁴⁶ "GOP will aid Negro(?)" *Crisis*, 51, January 1944, p21.

strange that the GOP so often retreated behind arguments about states' rights when civil rights were discussed. He argued that the poll tax had to be abolished by federal statute and a federal anti-lynching bill had to be introduced. African Americans, he asserted, did not accept "technical arguments against cloture" in the debates on anti-poll tax and anti-lynching bills.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, like all Americans, African Americans feared for their jobs and demanded the right to serve in the armed forces of the United States without discrimination arguing that "there is nothing more democratic than a bullet or a splinter of steel."¹⁴⁸ Willkie maintained that African Americans did not necessarily trust the Democratic party but they were not prepared to abandon it on the strength of "vague assurances," "pious platitudes" or a "1944 version of states' rights doctrine."¹⁴⁹ He recognised that since the beginning of the New Deal African American voters had become "a determined purposeful unit" while their leaders were "alert and educated and sophisticated" and now saw their plight as part of a worldwide struggle.¹⁵⁰ African Americans merely wanted the rights

¹⁴⁷ *NYT*, 13 June 1944, p36. Willkie's platform was published in the *New York Times* in July 1944. *NYT*, 11 July 1944, p10.

¹⁴⁸ *Plaindealer*, 16 June 1944, p1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

guaranteed to all Americans, which was “consistent with the very principles upon which the Republican party was founded.”¹⁵¹ African Americans, declared Willkie, should have full equality and their full rights as citizens. The fact that the Republican party gave African Americans their freedom “makes them more resentful that it should join in acts which prevent them from obtaining the substance of freedom.”¹⁵²

This was ignored and the 1940 candidate was not even invited to the convention let alone allowed to address it. Even in the absence of their most vocal advocate of African American rights, the Republicans still managed their most extensive plank ever on “Racial and Religious Intolerance.” It advocated a congressional inquiry into segregation and discrimination in the armed forces, vowed to create a *federal* FEPC, pledged to pass a Constitutional Amendment outlawing the poll tax and promised “sincere efforts” to end lynching.¹⁵³ Never before had a party made such wide-ranging commitments to African American Americans.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² *NYT*, 13 June 1944, p36. Also cited in Sitkoff, “Willkie as Liberal,” in Madison, Hoosier Internationalist, and also Neal, Dark Horse, p274.

¹⁵³ Johnson and Porter, National Party Platforms, p412.

¹⁵⁴ This was all the more surprising as Taft was in charge of the platform committee.

It was reported, however, that there were fewer African Americans attending the Republican convention in 1944 than in 1940.¹⁵⁵ Of pressing concern was the lack of African American delegates from many potentially pivotal states including New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, California, Oklahoma, Maryland, Tennessee and Michigan. Indeed, southern states had usually provided the bulk of African American representation at GOP conventions but southern apportionment had been reduced. Bishop James A. Bray, the retiring president of the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches warned the GOP that “no longer can venal politicians and chronic job hunters herd Negro voters into any political party.”¹⁵⁶

Walter White had at least some praise for the Republican platform, describing the section on an FEPC as “unequivocal and excellent.” The rest of the plank generated less praise: yet again, White wanted to know if the Republicans were advocating federal or state action on lynching. If the Republicans meant federal legislation, then “it was utterly futile” without the will to enforce cloture. Investigation into mistreatment of African Americans in

¹⁵⁵ *Plaindealer*, 23 June 1944, p1.

the armed forces would not be complete until the war ended. A Constitutional Amendment to abolish the poll tax was, however, the “most objectionable” aspect of the plank.¹⁵⁷

The Democratic plank, dismissed as a “splinter” by Walter White, contained precisely forty words and promised only protection under the Constitution.¹⁵⁸ The Democrats also dumped liberal vice-president Henry Wallace in favour of Harry S. Truman, a senator from Missouri, as a concession to the South. This combination, warned the *Crisis*, could “toss Mr Roosevelt out of the White House after twelve years.”¹⁵⁹ The *New Republic* was similarly concerned that the Democrats’ “evasive tactics” had done more to return the African American vote to the Republicans than the GOP’s “far-reaching platform promises.”¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the Democrats were confident that the personality of Roosevelt and the record of the New Deal could deliver the African American vote

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 June 1944, p1 and p8.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 July 1944, p2.

¹⁵⁸ Johnson and Porter, *National Party Platforms*, p404, Henry Lee Moon, *Balance of Power*, p33. *Plaindealer*, 28 July 1944, p7.

¹⁵⁹ “Soldier Killing May Lick FDR,” *Crisis*, 51, August 1944, p249.

¹⁶⁰ *The New Republic*, 28 August 1948, 1944, p241-243. Cited in Thurber, unpublished conference paper, BAAS, April 2001, p7.

The *Crisis* ultimately found little in either party platform to appeal to African Americans. The Democratic response to the Republican platform, it suggested, was to do “practically nothing.” The Democratic plank on African Americans was weak and a potential vote loser for Roosevelt among African Americans as it said nothing on the poll tax, an FEPC or discrimination in the armed forces.¹⁶¹ The Republican platform was the better of the two, but it would be wrong to underestimate the enduring appeal of the Roosevelts among African American voters. The *Crisis* hoped that the Democrats would do something to distance themselves from their “puerile” platform; if they did not then many African Americans could be voting Republican. Neither party met the demands of a committee representing 25 African American organisations and led by Walter White that appeared at the party conventions.¹⁶²

The Republican advocacy of a permanent federal FEPC, the *Crisis* believed, gave them a head start for the African American vote as “it touches upon one of the main items in the minds of Negro Americans. They want jobs.”

¹⁶¹ “The Party Platforms Say...” *Crisis*, 51, August 1944, p251.

¹⁶² For more detail on these statements see *ibid.*, *Plaindealer*, 23 June 1944, p1 and NAACP press release, “25 Organisations present platform demands to GOP,” NAACP, pt18, B, 10, 0696. A similar appeal appeared in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 July 1944, cited in Plummer, *Rising Wind*, p102.

The Democrats, on the other hand, made no commitment to continue the FEPC, even in its current temporary guise. Republican opposition to the poll tax was welcomed but a Constitutional amendment to solve the problem was condemned as unworkable. The GOP's desire for anti-lynching legislation was dismissed as meaningless. Its demand for an inquiry into discrimination in the armed forces were seen as pointless as it was clear to any observer that discrimination was rife; corrective measures were needed, not a statement of the obvious.¹⁶³ Even the *Plaindealer* remained unconvinced about the merits of the Republican platform or the sincerity of the party, suggesting that its platform "might have been achieved by the New Deal had it not been blocked by a coalition between southern Democrats and stalwart Republican reactionaries."¹⁶⁴

Evidence from polls supported the contention that the African American vote could be a crucial factor in the outcome of the election. In mid-August New York, Pennsylvania, Missouri and Michigan were solidly for Roosevelt while Kentucky, Illinois, West Virginia and Indiana were pro-Dewey; New

¹⁶³ "The Party Platforms Say..." *Crisis*, 51, August 1944, p250.

Jersey and Ohio were too close to call. In each of these states African American voters could be the difference between victory and defeat. There was even speculation from the CIO's Political Action Committee (PAC) that the African American vote in from eight to ten large northern cities could decide the election. The CIO-PAC, working in collaboration with the Democratic National Committee, refused to name these cities, but the *Plaindealer* suggested that they were: New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Baltimore, Louisville, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland, Los Angeles and Indianapolis.¹⁶⁵

Look magazine reported in September 1944 that a 4% increase in the Republican vote over 1940 in twelve states would see Dewey elected president. The states in question were: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin and Wyoming.¹⁶⁶ Polls also indicated that the Republicans were losing ground among African Americans in Chicago and that Dewey was running well behind Willkie's showing in 1940.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *Plaindealer*, 30 June 1944, p7.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 August 1944, p1.

¹⁶⁶ *Look*, 5 September 1944. TED, S2, B15, F4.

¹⁶⁷ *Plaindealer*, 20 October 1944, p2.

Despite the importance placed upon the African American vote it appeared that the Republicans were neither trying nor expecting to make significant gains among African Americans. The Republicans, argued the usually loyal *Plaindealer*, were doing very little to win this vote, whereas the Democrats “believe the Negro vote does matter in the election and they will have to win it.”¹⁶⁸

Herbert Brownell, Republican campaign manager, appointed C.B. Powell, the editor of the *Amsterdam Star-News* and a recent convert from the Democratic party, to lead the Republican campaign drive among African Americans.¹⁶⁹ Yet African Americans from the Mid-west were soon disappointed with the Powell’s efforts. They met Brownell in September to discuss re-invigorating the campaign, if necessary replacing Powell with Church. Powell was regarded as being too close to Rivers, who was, of course, very close to Dewey. Powell had been, according to the *Plaindealer*, criticised “for his failure to cope with the vigor” of the Democratic National Committee

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 22 September 1944, p1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 28 July 1944, p5.

and the CIO-PAC.¹⁷⁰ Powell was also quoted as saying that the Republicans “have done nothing for Negroes.” African American Republicans wanted \$150,000 to continue the campaign, money that could even be channelled through a non-partisan committee that was not too closely associated with the party or the campaign.¹⁷¹ Clearly, African American Republicans were deeply dissatisfied.

There was also a worrying lack of passion. Redmond contacted Brownell in October 1944 after the National Colored Republican Conference in Chicago reporting “not as much enthusiasm as I would like to have seen.” Moreover, the Republican party was not generating nearly enough support in the African American press. Redmond suggested that “we should leave off the political and sentimental aspects and go after these papers in a cold-blooded business-like way, and bring their columns to Dewey and Bricker’s interest.” Concern was also expressed that there were only limited efforts from the western arm of the campaign, based in Chicago, to win African American votes. Redmond was told that in Chicago there were only two men and a sick typist handling African

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 29 September 1944, p1.

American matters. He suggested that this was at least partly Brownell's responsibility as he had cut back the overall campaign. Consequently, not enough was being done to win African American votes.¹⁷²

vii. "No time to be ungrateful to true and tried friends."

The main issue in 1944 was the war, or rather, the peace, now that victory seemed to be at hand. Roosevelt's main priority was the successful prosecution of the war and, having "reluctantly" accepted the nomination, he vowed not to campaign strenuously. This presented Dewey and the Republicans with a number of problems; the GOP had little to campaign against in 1944: allied victories in 1944 made it "pointless, if not dangerous" to attack Roosevelt's war record, particularly given the GOP's pre-war isolationism. Moreover, attacks on the New Deal might encourage workers who had migrated to industrial centres to vote.¹⁷³

Perhaps the Republicans' frustration led to Roosevelt accusing them of appealing to intolerance. He even denounced the GOP for copying the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

propaganda tactics outlined by Hitler in Mein Kampf: “you should never use a small falsehood; always a big one, for its very nature would make it more credible, if only you keep repeating it over and over again.”¹⁷⁴ The *Crisis* blamed the Republicans for the vitriolic nature of the 1944 campaign, noting, for example, the attacks the GOP made on Sidney Hillman, a Russian born Jew and the leader of CIO’s Political Action Committee.¹⁷⁵ Notwithstanding this, the Democrats were not entirely innocent of injecting malice into the campaign; a Democratic pamphlet entitled “Win With FDR” declared that “US fascists want this man (Dewey) in the White House” and commented upon the Republican candidate’s “Hitler mustache.”¹⁷⁶ Senators Guy Gillette (Democrat, Idaho) and Warren Barbour (Republican, New Jersey) met to urge both parties to eliminate race hate from the campaign, a sentiment endorsed by Taft.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² S.D. Redmond to Herbert Brownell, 5 October 1944. TED, S4, B151, F7.

¹⁷³ Mayer, Republican Party, p464.

¹⁷⁴ Address by Roosevelt to the Teamsters Union, Washington DC, 23 September 1944, Rosenman, The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944-45 volume, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1950, p289. This was Roosevelt’s famous “Fala speech” in which he attacked the Republicans for making “libellous statements about my dog.” Republicans had suggested that Roosevelt had sent a destroyer to the Aleutian Islands to collect his dog. During the 1944 election, Beyer comments that “sarcasm and ridicule were his [Dewey’s] principle weapons- wit, humor and downright warmth he sorely lacked.” Beyer, Dewey, 1937-1947, p231.

¹⁷⁵ “Dirty Campaign,” *Crisis*, 51, November 1944, p344. Hillman was also referred to as a “foreign born” labour leader by the GOP. *Plaindealer*, 22 September 1944, p2.

¹⁷⁶ Democratic campaign pamphlet, 1944, “Win With FDR.” TED, S2, B15, F3. This pamphlet also declared: “if you’re screwy, vote for Dewey.”

¹⁷⁷ *PM*, 2 November 1944, NAACP, pt18, C, 21, 0298.

As in 1940, and indeed every election since Reconstruction, civil rights was a fairly minor issue. Dewey made several references to equality for all and an end to discrimination during the campaign: “there can be - there must be - jobs and opportunity for all, without discrimination on account of race, creed, color or national origin.”¹⁷⁸ He later reiterated this: “we need above all to renew our faith; faith in the goodwill of our fellow men regardless of race, creed or color; faith in the limitless future of our country.”¹⁷⁹

In October Roosevelt finally spoke out on an issue of importance to African Americans when he condemned the poll tax. “The right to vote,” he declared, “must be open to our citizens irrespective of race, color or creed - without tax or artificial restriction of any kind.” Roosevelt also censured Dewey and the GOP over their stance on the soldier vote bill.¹⁸⁰ Speaking later in Boston, Roosevelt condemned all forms of intolerance: “there is no room in it [America] for racial or religious intolerance.” America, he asserted, was

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Dewey, campaign speech, Philadelphia, September 7, 1944, Schlesinger, History of Presidential Elections, 8, p3074.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Dewey, campaign speech, New York, November 4, 1944, *ibid.*, p3088.

¹⁸⁰ *Plaindealer*, 13 October 1944, p1.

fighting for a world where “men and women of all races, colors and creeds can live and work and speak and worship in peace, freedom and security.”¹⁸¹

This collection of well-intentioned generalities seems to be as close as either candidate came to making a stand on minority rights. Presidential candidates had always paid lip service to these ideals, but in 1944 in the midst of the fight against Fascism they should have carried greater resonance. Each candidate was committed to the spirit of these principles, but applying them was a different matter. Willkie had perhaps shown in 1940 that taking a high-minded stand would win votes, and this, and more importantly the war, should have made the contest for the liberal centre vital in 1944.

Unfortunately, the words and actions of leading figures within the GOP were often at odds with the lofty ideals expressed in the party's platform. The NAACP viewed Taft and Vandenberg with suspicion because, among other things, they wanted to make the distribution of relief a state concern. In 1943 the conservative Republican-southern Democrat coalition thwarted a bill giving federal aid to education, the Republicans objecting to the concept of federal aid

¹⁸¹ Franklin Roosevelt, campaign speech in Boston, November 4, 1944, Schlesinger, p3089-93.

while the southern Democrats were against its non-discrimination clause. This coalition was also against the FEPC and the Works Progress Administration, which Roosevelt dissolved at the end of 1942.

Once again, the actions of the Republicans fell far short of their rhetoric.

Dewey's record as governor was at best mixed, but the record of congressional Republicans was almost universally bad.¹⁸² There were, however, exceptions. In

1940 Hamilton Fish introduced a non-discrimination clause to the selective services bill, which, while it did not end or seek to end segregation, did at least

mean that African Americans would be selected impartially. In 1944, he

petitioned Secretary of War Stimson, a former Republican, about the failure to

employ African American combat troops. Stimson replied that many African

Americans were "of lower educational classifications" and "unable to master

the techniques of modern weapons."¹⁸³ Fish made this response public in the

¹⁸² In spite of this, the Republicans claimed the support of some of the biggest African American newspapers including the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Amsterdam Star-News*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Kansas City Call*. Yet Roosevelt carried each of the cities and the states in which these papers were based. "Big weeklies fail to carry Negro votes for Dewey," *Plaindealer*, 10 November 1944, p1. Roosevelt's backers included: the *Chicago Defender*, the *Michigan Chronicle*, *St. Louis Argus*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* and *The People's Voice* (New York). See also "Courier calls on Negroes to support Dewey," *New York Herald Tribune*, 29 September 1944, NAACP, 18, B, 11, 0583.

¹⁸³ Stimson is also quoted as saying: "leadership is not embedded in the Negro race yet, and to try to make commissioned officers to lead men into battle- colored men- is only to work disaster to both." "Stimson Scored for Statement on Troops," *Crisis*, 51, April 1944, p115. Also cited in Wynn, *African-American and the Second World War*, p31 and Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front*

House on 23 February 1944. An ardent isolationist, suspected anti-Semite and no believer in social equality between whites and African Americans, Fish was not backed by either Willkie or Dewey and lost his seat in 1944.

The Republicans had again neither given African Americans reason to support them nor offered alternatives to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. The knowledge of the crucial nature of the African American vote could not raise the Republicans from their stupor; they again employed the tactics that had failed in every election since 1932 in half-hearted attempts to regain their former constituency. Even the *Plaindealer* eventually endorsed Roosevelt: “to turn away from Roosevelt now would be regarded as in-gratitude, and this is no time for Negroes of America to be ungrateful to TRUE and TRIED friends.”¹⁸⁴

There was a danger, argued Gordon Blaine Hancock for the Associated Negro Press (ANP), that Dewey would be “a rubber stamp President with a politically bankrupt party behind him” and this “would be one of the direst political calamities the nation has ever known.”¹⁸⁵

U.S.A.: America During World War II, (second edition) Harlan Davidson, Wheeling, Illinois, 2000, p66.

¹⁸⁴ *Plaindealer*, 13 October 1944, p7.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon B. Hancock, ANP, “Wendell Willkie: Moral Giant,” *ibid.*, 20 October 1944, p7. As well as writing a syndicated column for the ANP, Hancock was the Dean of Virginia Union

Both parties recognised that the African American vote could be the decisive factor in the campaign. "Both parties could see this," argued the *Plaindealer* on the eve of the election, "but Dewey and his advisors hesitated to believe what they saw while President Roosevelt not only saw and believed, he and his crowd acted upon it."¹⁸⁶ If Dewey lost the African American vote because he felt that championing states' rights was more important, then he only had himself to blame as he had been constantly warned about the pivotal nature of the African American vote. The Republicans were continually reminded that this strategy "would gain for the Republican party nothing in the South and lose the Negro vote where it would be the deciding factor."¹⁸⁷ Roosevelt, knowing that the South would remain loyal to the party if not to him, was able to appeal to African American voters in important areas of the North. The *Plaindealer* believed that "Roosevelt started out with the firm belief that he could not win without the Negro vote." Whereas "Dewey started out with the sly hope that he

University, an African American institution, and a clergyman. He was concerned with reconciling the desire for integration with the need for racial solidarity. For a detailed appraisal of Hancock's long and distinguished career see Raymond Gavins, The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership: Gordon Blaine Hancock, 1884-1970, Duke University Press, 1977.

¹⁸⁶ *Plaindealer*, 3 November 1944, p7.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

could win without it- and be proud of it.” In other words, Roosevelt was as forthright as Dewey was evasive.¹⁸⁸

The analysts were not proved wrong, with Roosevelt winning 25,602,504 popular votes and 432 in the Electoral College, compared to Dewey’s 22,006,285 and 99 respectively. The Democrats won the ten largest cities with a plurality of over two million.¹⁸⁹ The GOP lost thirty seats in the House and gained only one in the Senate; even Taft was re-elected by a mere 17,740 votes.¹⁹⁰ The gains made in 1942 had proved transitory and had been convincingly reversed. The result also demonstrated the absence of any real mandate for the party over the preceding two years.

Brownell’s analysis of the 1944 election gave the Republicans at least some cause for optimism: outside the “Solid South” the Democratic plurality was 1,227,849 out of 41 million votes cast. Furthermore, shifts of less than five percent, or 300,000 votes, in fifteen non-southern states would have given Dewey 274 electoral votes.¹⁹¹ In Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania a shift

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ “The 1944 Vote for President in the Ten Largest Cities,” TED, S2, B15, F5.

¹⁹⁰ Darilek, *Loyal Opposition*, p173.

¹⁹¹ These states were: Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, - Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma,

of less than one percent would have given the states to the Republicans; in Illinois and Maryland the shift required was less than two percent.¹⁹²

Ten of the states where the African American vote was considered crucial were carried with reduced majorities, putting the African American vote into perspective; the Republicans won only two states, Indiana and Ohio, where the African American vote was deemed important.¹⁹³ These ten states contributed 190 Electoral College votes to Roosevelt; had they gone to Dewey then the Republicans would have had a majority of 47. It would appear, therefore, that without the African American vote Roosevelt could not have won the election.

The Republican party's post-mortem after the election of 1944 identified a number of areas where the GOP needed to improve. Brownell reported that one of the groups neglected by the party was African Americans:

Oregon and Pennsylvania. Republican National Committee press release, "Statement by Herbert Brownell, Jr., Chairman, Republican National Committee," 11 November 1944. TED, S2, B38, F15. See also "Dewey needed shift of only 303,414 votes," *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 November 1944, NAACP, 18, B, 11, 0622. For the Republican assessment of the election see PRP, Part II, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, "The Presidential Election-1944," March 1945 reel 1, frames 0339-0342 and *ibid.*, April 1945, frames 0471-0500. This analysis suggests that a switch of 395,000 votes in Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania would have given the election to Dewey. However, "it is granted that statistical analysis of this kind can be readily turned in the other direction and show that a shift of a few votes in certain Republican States would have placed them in the Roosevelt-Truman column." PRP, 0339-0342.

¹⁹² RNC press release, "Statement by Herbert Brownell, Jr., Chairman, Republican National Committee," 11 November 1944. TED, S2, B38, F15.

There is a real need for national legislation which will improve the position of the Negro race and constructive proposals dealing with such matters as the poll tax, lynching laws, fair employment practices and other matters of concern to this important minority group must be studied and solutions to these problems must be found. We must remember that many of the questions are not capable of easy solutions and that passing laws is not enough. Our party must dedicate itself in fact and in spirit to the goal of helping our Negro citizens to create for themselves a lasting measure of prosperity.¹⁹⁴

Brownell was one of Dewey's closest and most senior advisors; this should have removed any lingering doubts Dewey had about the future importance of securing the African American vote.

Newspapers sympathetic to Dewey put Roosevelt's victory down to the soldier vote, but the *Plaindealer* reckoned that 85% of the African American vote had gone to Roosevelt. Indeed, the concentration of this vote in urban areas enabled the Democrats to carry Illinois, California, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Massachusetts and Missouri. Part of the problem the Republicans encountered with African American voters was because "the New York crowd ran the show,

¹⁹³ These states were: Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and Kentucky. Michigan, along with California, had seen the

spent the money and left the old time Republican leaders out of the picture.”

Particular resentment was directed towards C.B. Powell; he had been a Roosevelt supporter in 1940 and had led a lacklustre campaign among African American voters.¹⁹⁵

The *Crisis* credited Roosevelt’s victory at least in part to the CIO-PAC and this provided a lesson to African Americans. It was absolutely crucial that, in future, African Americans worked to get the vote out. The NAACP had made a start by distributing information on the records of congressmen but this had to be built upon.¹⁹⁶ Gordon Blaine Hancock asserted that Republicans had lost despite the fourth term issue, despite the breakdown of American traditions brought about by the New Deal, the money showered upon the GOP by business interests and the support of disgruntled Democrats. If they could not win with this kind of support then “they simply cannot win at all.”¹⁹⁷ In the 1930s, as notes Mayer, the Republicans could blame their electoral failures on

largest increase in African American population during the war. Wynn, p62.

¹⁹⁴ Chairman’s Report, Indianapolis, 22 January 1945. TED, S2, B38, F15.

¹⁹⁵ *Plaindealer*, 10 November 1944, p1.

¹⁹⁶ “Lesson from the Election,” *Crisis*, 51, December 1944, p376.

¹⁹⁷ Gordon B. Hancock, “Between the Lines: An Election Hero,” *Plaindealer*, 24 November 1944, p7.

the depression, “but by 1944 there was no way to escape the unpleasant conclusion that there were more Democrats than Republicans in the country.”¹⁹⁸

Brownell had finally recognised what African Americans had known since 1932: African American voters were an increasingly vital part of the American electorate and politicians ignored them at their peril. What remained to be seen was whether or not the Republicans, furnished with conclusive proof of this, would decide to do anything about it. The GOP was also reminded by the ever-dwindling band of African Americans loyal to it that it had lost every election since the African American vote defected to the Democrats. It was clearly time for the Republicans to live up to the distant memory of Lincoln and the more recent memory of their own platform pledges. Dewey, the party’s titular leader and still the governor of New York, was young enough and well regarded enough within the party to be given a second chance in 1948. Over the next four years he would be continually reminded why he lost in 1944, but had he learnt anything? Would he court the African American vote next time? And,

¹⁹⁸ Mayer, Republican Party, p465.

crucially, would the Republican party finally live up to its historic responsibility to African Americans?

CHAPTER SIX. Jockeying, Buckpassing and Double Talk.

A major impediment to Republican hopes of regaining the African American vote disappeared when Franklin Roosevelt died in April 1945. Harry Truman's assumption of the presidency did little to inspire African Americans. The journeyman senator from the border state of Missouri, and the choice of southern Democrats in 1944, had replaced the most popular white politician among African Americans since Lincoln.¹ There were, therefore, no guarantees that the African American vote would stay with the late president's party. With the defeat of 1944 still fresh in the memory, and Brownell's assertion that the African American vote was vital to the future success of the GOP, the Republicans, and Dewey in particular, now had the opportunity to respond positively. Dewey subsequently established a good record on civil rights as governor of New York; in fact, no governor in the country could boast more racially progressive legislation than Dewey by the time of the 1948 election. Nevertheless, Dewey yet again failed to win the African American vote and yet

again he failed to win the presidency. It is essential therefore to attempt to reconcile his good record on civil rights with his failure to win or even court the African American vote in 1948. Dewey was repeatedly reminded of the importance of the African American vote but still took no action. This may seem superficially perplexing, but Dewey, confident of victory, did not think it necessary to court any special interest vote.

Congressional Republicans remained reluctant to embrace actively civil rights between 1944 and 1948. Despite gaining control of both Houses of Congress in 1946, civil rights legislation was still not forthcoming. Critics pointed out that the Republican platform in 1944 had committed the party to wide-ranging civil rights legislation yet support remained half-hearted and vacillating. African American Republicans had trouble maintaining their equilibrium throughout the period and constantly lobbied the party to live up to its promises. Some gains were made but not enough to completely reassure loyal African American activists or convince African American voters of the party's good intentions.

¹ For a brief overview of Truman's pre-presidential record on civil rights see William C.

Truman's legion of biographers agrees that he was a sincere advocate of civil rights. Most concede, however, that Truman believed in legal not social equality.² Truman admitted as much at the NAACP convention in Chicago in 1940 and argued that African Americans did not want social equality either.³ While Truman's sincerity on civil rights is perhaps beyond dispute, this did not prevent him from using the issue expediently. Truman only fully espoused civil rights after the Republicans had gained control of Congress in 1946; he only began campaigning actively for the African American vote and making tangible concessions on civil rights after the Democratic convention of 1948.⁴ By this stage he had little choice other than to court African American votes if he wanted to be elected. Sincere or not, therefore, Truman was still prepared to use civil rights for his own political advantage, something side-stepped by some of the historiography of the period. The historiography pertaining to Truman also

Berman, The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration, Ohio State University Press, 1970. p8-23.

² See, for example, McCoy, The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1984, p106 or David McCullough, Truman, Simon and Schuster, New York and London, 1992, p247

³ Berman, p12. Alonzo Hamby, for example, recognises that "sometimes belief did not come naturally or easily" to Truman but stresses that even after he had left the presidency he continued to espouse civil rights. Alonzo Hamby, "The mind and character of Harry S. Truman," in Michael J. Lacey, The Truman Presidency, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1989, p48.

ignores the complexity or rationale behind the Republican attitude towards civil rights. What is clear, however, is that while the situation was improving, neither party had much to boast to African Americans about in 1948.

Existing historiography emphasises the importance of the farm vote in Truman's victory in 1948 while acknowledging that the African American vote was also important.⁵ This analysis can be reversed; it is obvious that the farm vote (and other special interest votes) was important, but it is essential to remember that without the African American vote Truman would not have won. Conversely, had Dewey made substantial (or even moderate) gains among African Americans in several key states, he would have been elected president. Truman's margin of victory in the African American wards of California, Ohio and Illinois exceeded his slender majorities in each of these pivotal states: a shift of less than 30,000 votes in these three states would have given Dewey victory.

⁴ Berman, px. Abels agrees that Truman's push for civil rights in 1947 and 1948 was designed to win the African American wards of major cities, he also contends that candidates would only risk alienating the South if they had the African American vote. Abels, Jaws of Victory, p296.

⁵ Historiography from a Republican perspective certainly believes this to be the case. See, for example, Abels, p171 and p290; Kenneth W. Thompson, (ed.) Lessons for Defeated Presidential Candidates, University Press of America, Lanham, New York and London, 1994, p107-108; Brownell and Burke, Advising Ike, p80 and Moos, The Republicans, p444.

The NAACP continued to exercise whatever influence it could, but the strategy it employed in the immediate post-war years wedded it even more closely to the Democratic party and almost inextricably linked its fate to that of Truman. Walter White, in particular, came into conflict with the Republican party over his perceived support for the Democrats and Truman. The real or imagined closeness of the NAACP to the Democrats was a further disincentive for Republicans, conservative ones, to appeal for African American votes. This is an area that must be dealt with to gain a greater understanding of why the GOP failed to regain the African American vote.⁶

The election of 1948 marked a turning point in the history of civil rights; never before had it been such an important and, eventually, decisive issue in a presidential election. In 1944 it could be claimed, with the aid of some creative mathematics, that the African American vote decided the outcome. In 1948 there can be little doubt that it did. Even the most cursory examination of the 1948 figures reveals that the African American vote was an extremely important, if not the decisive, factor in Truman's victory. Walter White had long

⁶ For an excellent discussion of the NAACP during the 1940s see Zangrando, Crusade, p166-

argued that the African American vote held the balance of power in American politics; now, finally, he was proved right. African American Republicans had long argued that their party could not be re-elected without the African American vote; they too had indisputable evidence for the truth of their claim, evidence their candidate chose to ignore.

i. "Nothing but parliamentary guile."

By the 1940s the focus of the NAACP had shifted away from the anti-lynching crusade towards abolishing the poll tax and creating a permanent FEPC. The controversy over the FEPC rumbled on during the spring and summer of 1945. The agency was, of course, a temporary wartime measure and a bill to extend its lifetime had languished in the Rules Committee since the Labor Committee approved it in February.⁷ The Russell Amendment of 1944 meant that FEPC appropriations had to be approved by Congress effectively

210. For a discussion of the efforts of the Association to place the struggle for civil rights within a global context see Plummer, Rising Wind, chapters 4 and 5. See also Hughes, Fight for Freedom, p110-140.

⁷ Roosevelt endorsed a permanent FEPC on the day of his death. Berman, p7.

destroying the autonomy of the agency.⁸ The FEPC had plenty of enemies. As always, southern Democrats were vocal in their opposition and, by the end of June 1945, the Senate Rules Committee proposed giving the agency \$125,000 to wind up its affairs. Mississippi's Theodore Bilbo vowed to hold the floor of the Senate until the end of the fiscal year to prevent Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, a prominent supporter of the legislation, from presenting an amendment to give the FEPC \$450,000.⁹

The new President, Harry Truman, worked behind the scenes for FEPC legislation during the spring of 1945 and by the summer was publicly backing a permanent agency. Yet by this stage any prospect of passing legislation was gone.¹⁰ The debate in the House on the FEPC threatened to delay other measures, particularly a \$771,000,000 appropriation for other war agencies.¹¹ Southerners eventually sought a compromise fearing that the FEPC could become permanent. "It would be far better to give them a small amount to operate without legal power," commented a southern congressman, "than to

⁸ Donald McCoy and Richard T., Ruetten, Quest and Response: Minority Rights in the Truman Administration, University Press of Kansas, 1973, p21.

⁹ *NYT*, 20 April 1945, p14, 29 June 1945, p1, and 29 June 1945, p32.

¹⁰ McCoy and Ruetten, p22.

¹¹ *NYT*, 4 July 1945, p1.

have them set up as a statutory body.”¹² There was a possibility that if the deadlock continued then thousands of war workers would go without pay.¹³

There were suggestions that there was sufficient support for Chavez’s bill but eventually Barkley sought a compromise and won a \$250,000 appropriation for the agency. This, in turn, freed funding for other agencies. It was suspected that Barkley did not want to see the Republicans claim the credit for prolonging the life of the FEPC and not everyone was satisfied with the new appropriation.¹⁴ Wayne Morse protested and this was initially viewed as the beginning of a filibuster, but it was apparent to him that the situation was hopeless.¹⁵ The *New York Times* believed that the outcome was a “qualified victory” for the FEPC but argued that such a debate should not be going on during a war. It concluded that opponents of the FEPC and also the Office of War Industries (OWI) had a chance to outline their grievances but “common sense” had prevailed in the House and the Senate.¹⁶ Neither side, therefore, wanted to be seen to be hampering the war effort with partisan bickering.

¹² Ibid., 8 July 1945, p12.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ McCoy and Ruetten, p23.

¹⁵ *NYT*, 13 July 1945, p1 and p22.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14 July 1945, p10.

In August Republican Senators Joseph Ball (Minnesota) and Harold Burton (Ohio) declared that they would insist upon the creation of a permanent FEPC in the fall and would have the support of other Republican senators in this endeavour. Seeing the opportunity to embarrass the administration, they noted that the Democrats had left the FEPC out of their programme.¹⁷ Truman soon rectified this, in September an FEPC was part of his twenty-one point programme. He told Congress that “substantial progress” had been made during the war to eliminate discrimination and efforts would continue during the post-war period with the creation of a permanent FEPC.¹⁸ This, noted the *New York Times*, “goes beyond the Democratic platform.”¹⁹ Yet by the end of September the House had blocked an FEPC bill.²⁰

By the end of 1945, the *New York Times* believed that the FEPC was on its “last legs” as it had been ordered by Congress to cease operating in June 1946. Truman had made it clear that he wanted to see an end to discrimination

¹⁷ Ibid., 8 August 1945, p34. Burton and Ball were also advocating amending the Wagner Act to place the same responsibility on unions as it did on employers, something opposed by the CIO and AFL. Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7 September 1945, p16.

¹⁹ Ibid., p22.

²⁰ Ibid., 27 September 1945, p15. The *Pittsburgh Courier* questioned Truman’s commitment to the FEPC in his 21-point plan of 1945 as he refused to use his power to prevent southerners from stalling the measure. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 September 1945, p6 cited in Berman, Politics of Civil Rights, p28. A. Philip Randolph agreed with the *Courier’s* analysis. Ibid.

in the federal government but it was equally apparent that a peacetime FEPC would be immensely controversial. Truman issued Executive Order 9664 in December 1945 further reducing the status and power of the FEPC to the extent that it became a mere fact finding agency.²¹ Chavez remained bullish, vowing to reintroduce an FEPC bill during the next session of Congress.²²

The *Crisis* blamed Truman for the ultimate death of the FEPC at the beginning of 1946 when he forbade the commission from issuing a directive in the Capital Transit case.²³ Most of the FEPC's offices had been closed and most of its funding withdrawn, but Truman wanted it to do a survey of discrimination against minorities after the war. "Thus," sighed the *Crisis*, "we are back where we started; making surveys to find out what everyone already knows, namely that there is brutal prejudice" against minorities. More research would simply make it more difficult than ever to pass legislation creating a permanent FEPC.²⁴

²¹ Berman believes that Truman had to sacrifice the FEPC to appease the South and, therefore, protect his domestic programme. *Ibid.*, p31.

²² *NYT*, 22 December 1945, p22.

²³ During the strike by Capital Transit workers in Washington DC in late 1945, Truman seized the company but refused to allow the FEPC, which had investigated Capital Transit for three years, to intervene to end its discriminatory practices. For further details on the Capital Transit case see Berman, p29-31

²⁴ "Truman Kills FEPC." *Crisis*, 53, January 1946, p8.

By February 1946 it was apparent that the bill for a permanent FEPC was going to be filibustered to death in the Senate; yet again, a tiny minority of senators was conspiring to thwart a piece of legislation that the majority, at least publicly, wanted. On 9 February 1946 48 senators (22 Democrats, 25 Republicans and one Progressive) voted for cloture; 36 (28 Democrats and 8 Republicans) did not.²⁵ There was more at stake, argued the *Crisis*, than the FEPC; the will of the American people was being obstructed by a small group of southern Democrats.²⁶

In February 1946, the FEPC bill was effectively killed by the refusal of those supporting it to back cloture. At various Lincoln Day speeches no senior Republican mentioned the FEPC debate.²⁷ The *Crisis* found this particularly infuriating as the GOP had pledged itself to an FEPC in its 1944 platform. It alleged, with some justification, that each party was “striving to make a record without actually passing this bill” and called the three-week battle in the Senate a sham. It also noted that every congressman was up for re-election in November and that African American voters would exact vengeance on those

²⁵ Berman, p34.

who had not supported the bill.²⁸ Roy Wilkins vowed that, henceforth, the NAACP was going to use its influence to defeat those senators who voted against cloture or “wilfully absented themselves from the session at which voting occurred.”²⁹ Barkley gave the bill his full support whereas Taft “contributed nothing... but parliamentary guile.”³⁰ J.W. Ivy, writing in the *Crisis*, asserted that the “Republican proclamation of support of a permanent FEPC at Chicago [in 1944] was simply political expediency and a device for snaring Negro votes in pivotal northern and western states.”³¹ By the time of the mid-term elections an FEPC law was no closer.

ii. “The colored voter will not be deceived by legislative jockeying, buckpassing and double talk.”

The faith of African American Republicans in their party continued to haemorrhage after the defeat of 1944. Robert Church took the lead in demanding publicly that the GOP pay more attention to the requirements of

²⁶ “FEPC Filibuster Shows the Way.” *Crisis*, 53, February 1946, p40.

²⁷ “Sham Battle.” *Ibid.*, 53, March 1946, p72. The bill was defeated three days before Lincoln’s birthday commemorations.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *NYT*, 16 February 1946, p3.

African Americans and the necessity of winning their votes, while Francis Rivers did so privately. Between 1944 and 1948 the Republicans were continually reminded of just how important African American votes were and the extreme folly of ignoring this almost universally accepted fact.

No one was more aware of this than Herbert Brownell, yet he refused to meet African American Republicans in early 1945, despite them coming to New York at their expense. Church then lambasted the Republican campaign of 1944 and specifically Brownell's tactics. Brownell's decision to appoint C.B. Powell, "one of Charley Michelson's Colored Democrats," to lead efforts among African Americans in the East was again criticised. Powell told reporters on his first day that the GOP had done nothing for African Americans.³² Equally inept, asserted Church, was the selection of George McKibbin, "of restricted covenant fame," to head the overall campaign among African Americans. All this had been done without consulting African American Republican leaders.³³ Church believed that without the "unpopular" appointments of Powell and McKibbin

³⁰ "FEPC: Its Feckless Friends." *Crisis*, 53, March 1946, p73.

³¹ "Sham Battle." *Ibid.*, p72.

³² Church to Brownell, 19 March 1945. TED, S4, B32, F29. Church had attended every Republican national convention from 1912 to 1940. Charles Michelson had been the Democrats' publicity director in 1940.

the Republicans may well have won the 300,000 votes in fifteen non-southern states needed to put Dewey in the White House in 1944.³⁴ The GOP's approach to African Americans was, Church attested, backward looking and politically unsustainable. The Republican National Committee, unlike the Democratic party, the CIO-PAC and even the Communist Party, did not have a single African American in any policy forming position. "Every major political organisation, has seen the light but us," complained Church. It was also imperative that any African Americans appointed be "from voting states," a clear effort to curtail whatever influence Perry Howard and his ilk still held.³⁵

Church, his concerns ignored, called a meeting of African American Republican leaders in August 1945 to awaken Republicans from their "lethargy towards the largest single minority, and get them to place in authority, Colored Republicans, on the National Committee, so that they can help formulate the policy of the Committee, toward Colored people."³⁶ He again reminded Republicans that since they had lost the African American vote they had not

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Letter from Robert R. Church, President of United Minorities, to African American Republican leaders, 1 August 1945. Ibid., S4, B32, F29.

won a presidential election and were unlikely to do so until they regained it.

Church asserted that “the time has now come for us to corral our forces and by specific demand point out the way for the Republican party to recapture the Negro Vote.”³⁷

Later that month African American Republicans convened, under the chairmanship of Church, as the Republican American Committee and issued a “Declaration to the Republican Party.” The Declaration was fairly wide-ranging, but the bulk of it dealt with familiar themes. As the party had not won a presidential election since it lost the African American vote, “its entire attitude and strategy must be completely changed as it affects colored citizens” if this trend was to be reversed. The committee was alarmed at the exodus of African Americans from the party and the party’s lack of commitment to equal rights. It also demanded that African American Republicans be allowed to appoint their own leaders: “We do PROTEST the imposition of HAND PICKED LEADERS not of our choosing by the Republican National committee.” It noted that there was no African American organisation within the party until a few weeks prior

³⁷ Ibid.

to elections and that African Americans were excluded from policy formulating positions. They also demanded that Brownell meet Church.³⁸

The Committee challenged the party chairman to confirm that African Americans were part of the party and that the GOP would serve their interests. The party had to seek legislation for full employment, a civil rights bill for Washington DC and anti-lynching and anti-poll tax laws. The lack of an FEPC also perturbed the Committee, especially as it had been part of the party's platform in 1944. The party, therefore, had to vote for cloture on the FEPC bill and endorse adequate state FEPC laws based on New York's State Anti-discrimination law.³⁹

The *Afro-American* commented after the mid-term elections of 1946 that the GOP had claimed for years that it did not have the votes to pass anti-poll tax, FEPC and anti-lynching legislation, but this was no longer the case, commenting that "if the GOP means business... it now has the best opportunity

³⁸ The Republican American Committee, (henceforth RAC) "Declaration to the Republican Party," 24-25 August 1945, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0170-0172. Capitals in original.

³⁹ Ibid. New York's State Anti-Discrimination Commission law had been passed in March 1945. The Committee thanked Dewey and Senators Langer (North Dakota), Morse (Oregon), Ball (Minnesota), Burton (Ohio), Aiken (Vermont), Capper (Kansas), Ferguson (Michigan), Wherry (Nebraska) and Smith (New Jersey) as well as Representatives La Follette (Indiana), Baldwin (New York), Keefe (Wisconsin) and Bender (Ohio). This, of course, did not mean that any of these Republicans actually endorsed the demands of the Committee. African American signatories included: C.B. Powell, T. Gillis Nutter, George A. Parker, Bishop D.H. Sims and

in years to prove it.”⁴⁰ In January 1947 the *Afro-American* received a predictable reply from Joseph Martin. Martin, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, told a group of African American leaders that the party would not be pursuing an FEPC bill:

The FEPC plank in the 1944 Republican platform was a bid for the Negro vote, and they did not accept the bid. They went out and voted for Roosevelt. I'll be frank with you. We are not going to pass an FEPC bill, but it was nothing to do with the Negro vote. We are supported by New England and Middle Western industrialists who would stop their contributions if we passed a law that would compel them to stop religious as well as racial discrimination in employment. I am not saying that I agree with them, but that is the situation we face, so we may as well be realistic. We intend to do a lot for the Negroes, but we can't afford to pass the FEPC bill.... We have a number of mavericks in our party who may not go along with us on needed labor legislation, so we may need some voters from the other side until this issue is taken care of. After the labor legislation is out of the way, we may be able to pass the poll tax bill.⁴¹

Eunice H. Carter. Powell's presence is perhaps surprising considering the criticism levelled at him by Church during and after the 1944 campaign.

⁴⁰ *Afro-American*, 6 December 1946, cited in McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, p69.

⁴¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 January 1947, p6 cited in Berman, *Politics of Civil Rights*, p59.

This startling admission encapsulated the Republican attitude towards civil rights. It can only have further eroded the ever-fading hopes of loyal African Americans that the party would take positive action on matters of importance to African Americans. It illustrated that the GOP was still very much the party of business and where business interests and civil rights clashed the party would side with business. It was a frank admission that the FEPC plank in 1944 had been a political gambit and it was an equally frank admission that this had failed. As always, bigger issues took precedence, in this case the impending Taft-Hartley law. Politics rather than sentiment would continue to dictate Republican policy. The best thing that could be said of Martin's statement was at least it was honest.⁴²

In August 1948 the Republican American Committee issued a press release, expressing its disappointment that the first Republican controlled Congress in sixteen years had not, despite platform pledges, taken any action on civil rights and economic problems. The GOP faced serious problems unless this was rectified: "we wish to remind the Republican party that the colored

⁴² Berman does not intimate who attended this meeting or whether its content was meant for

voter will not be deceived by legislative jockeying, buckpassing and double talk." The Committee restated its demands and urged the party to "nurture and cultivate the noticeable trend of colored voters back to our party" in 1946. To do this, the "entire attitude and strategy" towards African Americans had to change. The Committee again resolved that anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills had to be "must" legislation; moreover, the party had to appoint a special committee to examine the relationship between African Americans and the GOP. Finally, party principles had to be enshrined in a bill of rights.⁴³

This was militant stuff from the Republican American Committee, but it was telling Brownell nothing he did not already know. In addition to his analysis immediately after Dewey's defeat in 1944, in late 1945 Brownell urged Republicans to take a more considered approach to the winning of votes including appeals to special interest votes. Again, he stressed the importance of African American voters and "the need for a careful and accurate presentation

public consumption. It seems unlikely, however, that Martin, potentially writing off the African American vote, would have wanted this to be common knowledge. *Ibid.*, p59.

⁴³ RAC press release, 27 August 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0216-0217. African American Republicans from Cleveland made similar demands in June 1948. They demanded that the party platform include commitments on anti-lynching, the poll tax, the FEPC, discrimination in interstate transport, military desegregation, education, southern representation, voting in Washington DC, and the admission of Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico as states. Clayborne George, "Committee of Citizens in Cleveland Ohio," submission to the Republican platform committee, 9 June 1948. NAACP, pt18, C, 29, frame 0268-0269.

of the Republican point of view” to them.⁴⁴ Close contact had to be maintained between the party and African American voters; the creation, in November 1945, of the National Council of Negro Republicans, chaired by Joseph V. Baker, was a step in the right direction.

Brownell published a further report in April 1946. In this he recognised that since 1936 the African American voter had become increasingly important in at least thirteen states and was “an integral part of the electorate and his influence is strong in all close congressional districts where he resides.”⁴⁵

Brownell declared that

the Republican party should support unequivocally the rights of Negroes to full citizenship in the whole of the United States.... The Democratic party is so constituted that it must deny those rights... I cannot impress upon you too strongly my belief that the National Committee should increase its efforts among the Negro voters of the country.⁴⁶

At this stage of the Truman presidency these were valid criticisms.

⁴⁴ Herbert Brownell, “Chairman’s Report, Republican National Committee Meeting, Chicago, December 7, 1945.” TED, S2, B38, F15. This report also dealt with appeals to female voters, veterans and young Republicans.

⁴⁵ RNC News Release, “Report of Herbert Brownell, Jr., Chairman to the Republican National Committee,” 1 April 1946, *ibid.* The states Brownell mentioned were Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, California, Michigan, New Jersey, Missouri, Tennessee, Indiana and Virginia.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Brownell, perhaps heeding the advice of Church, appointed African American Valores "Val" Washington as Executive Assistant to the campaign manager of the Republican National Committee to establish a minorities division in April 1946.⁴⁷ Washington was a graduate of the University of Indiana, a Willkie supporter in 1940 and a former general manager of the *Chicago Defender*. He was appointed by Governor Green to the Illinois Interstate Commerce Commission in 1941, and was the only African American in the country to hold such a position.⁴⁸ According to historians Cornelius Cotter and Bernard Hennessy, Washington argued that African American fraternal organisations, fraternities and sororities for example, provided the best way of communicating with African American leaders. This may have been an effective way of garnering support among the African American middle classes,

⁴⁷ Ibid. One of Washington's first tasks was to carry out a survey among African American voters in seven marginal congressional districts.

⁴⁸ For biographical details on Washington see *Negro Statesman*, 15 March 1946. TED, S2, B46, F1 and Cornelius Cotter and Bernard Hennessy, Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees, Atherton Press, New York, 1964, p161. The *Negro Statesman*, a monthly magazine for African American Republicans, hailed Washington's appointment as evidence of the Republican party's commitment to African Americans. *Negro Statesman*, 15 March 1946. TED, S2, B46, F1. Washington was not limited solely to African American concerns, in 1947 he toured the country at the request of Brownell assessing Republican strength in various areas. Washington to Brownell, 8 June 1947, 16 June 1947 and 16 August 1947. Ibid.

argue Cotter and Hennessy, but it was unlikely to galvanise the mass of African Americans.⁴⁹

In another, undated, memorandum, written as party chairman, Brownell once again stressed the importance of the African American vote, urging the GOP to “take a definite stand of true liberalism” towards African Americans and noting that the “loss of that voting bloc can be directly attributed to our own carelessness.”⁵⁰ Brownell reminded Republicans that one of the founding objectives of the party was the freeing of the slaves and had not “the immortal Lincoln” been assassinated then “the complete emancipation of the Negro would have been accomplished.”⁵¹ He recognised that African Americans were becoming increasingly vocal in demanding their constitutional rights and “if the Republican party has the moral fortitude to sincerely uphold the law of the land

⁴⁹ It would not be until 1960 that the GOP would permit Washington to approach African American churches as a way to gain African American support. Cotter and Hennessy assert that “he was prevented [previously] because of the fear that such an approach, directed almost exclusively to Protestant churches, might be interpreted as evidence of bigotry.” Cotter and Hennessy, p161-162. Hugh Bone argues that “less is known about the work of the minorities sections than about any other activities of the national office.” This is partly because they were inactive for most of the year and only really had a properly defined purpose at election time. Hugh Bone, Party Committees and National Politics, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1958, reprinted 1968, p90.

⁵⁰ Herbert Brownell, Republican party chairman, undated memorandum. TED, S2, B38, F15.

⁵¹ Ibid.

I am very certain that the Negro voter will return to the Republican party to which he so justly should still be a part.”⁵²

In October 1947 an official GOP party publication, The Republican, recognised the need to regain the African American vote. In an article entitled “Wake up Republicans,” J.N. Wagner, a Chicago lawyer, asserted that there was much to be gained by courting African Americans. It was apparent to Wagner that African Americans held the balance of power in up to seventeen states.⁵³ He believed that the Democrats had used the FEPC issue to entice African Americans away from the Republicans, therefore, the GOP needed to regain African American trust. The party, he asserted, had to mount a “militant campaign... to prove to the Negro that his welfare was of vital importance to the Republicans.” For a start, Republicans needed to join interracial committees: “if these inter-racial meetings were started now and not six weeks before the coming election, the results might prove astounding.” Wagner believed that up to half a million African American veterans could be voting in the South and

⁵² Ibid. Another trusted Dewey lieutenant, Irving Ives, warned Dewey in early 1948 that the issues of anti-lynching, anti-poll tax, anti-discrimination and anti-segregation “are almost as difficult for the Republicans as for the Democrats.” “Outline of subjects for inclusion in a discussion of national affairs: Part IV, Civil Rights.” Ives to Dewey, 17 March 1948. Ibid., S10, B 22, F5.

they should be cultivated instead of southern lily-whites. The GOP should also seek to deny representation to southern states denying the vote to African Americans.⁵⁴

Wagner maintained that African Americans voted Democratic because they received more, and better, representation in the party. Could African Americans really continue to see the GOP as “their” party, mused Wagner? He concluded that the party of Lincoln had to address seriously the needs of African Americans: “if Republicans will only befriend the Negro today, that Negro will vote Republican tomorrow. Let’s wake up Republicans.”⁵⁵

External African American pressure was also put on the Republican party. The NAACP wrote to the Republican National Committee at the end of March 1946 with its perennial demands for an FEPC, an anti-lynching bill, an anti-poll tax law, a housing bill and the end of the conservative Republican-southern Democrat coalition. The Association again noted that although an FEPC was advocated in the GOP platform in 1944 the party’s record on the issue was decidedly mixed. If, for example, the Republicans voted for cloture, then an

⁵³ J.N. Wagner, “Wake up Republicans,” The Republican, October 1947, NAACP, pt18, C, 29,

anti-poll tax law could be passed in weeks. Finally, the Republican National Committee had to repudiate the coalition between conservative Republicans and southern Democrats; the Association warned that African Americans would pay very close attention to the Republican stance on these issues in the elections of 1946 and 1948.⁵⁶

As the 1948 GOP convention approached, the “Continuations Committee of Negro Organizations,” representing twenty-one organisations with six million members, outlined what African Americans wanted from the party of Lincoln. The committee was not approaching the Republican party with high expectations as it, despite its victory in the 1946 mid-terms, had not, as noted, implemented any of its 1944 platform commitments. They pointed out that an anti-lynching bill had failed as had an amendment to the selective service act exempting military personnel from the poll tax. One of the main reasons for African American re-alignment, it declared, was “the cavalier treatment” of African Americans by Republican leaders. It was reiterated that the African American vote was no longer the preserve of any one party. Furthermore,

African Americans refused to be persuaded by the platitudes of Republican platform writers demanding that the GOP “live up to its pledged word.”⁵⁷ It is abundantly clear, therefore, that Dewey had ample evidence, from some of his closest allies, from voices within and outside of the Republican party, of the vital importance of the African American vote long before the election of 1948. What remained to be seen was how he responded as he sought the presidency for a second time.

iii. “I mean business on this thing.”

Defeated in his bid for the presidency in 1944, Dewey returned to Albany to continue as governor of New York. Launching his programme in January 1945, he advocated the passage of an anti-discrimination bill. Dewey had been blamed for the failure of an earlier effort to pass similar legislation, and this renewed effort was not without considerable opposition. The idea of the state

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ NAACP press release, 30 March 1946, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0177.

⁵⁷ White to Thurgood Marshall, draft of statement to the Republican National Committee by the Continuations Committee of Negro Organizations, 27 March 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0284-0286. In common with the earlier “Declaration by Negro Voters,” the NAACP and particularly White were the prime movers in this exercise. White wanted the committee to appear at the Republican convention. White to Carroll Reece, 20 May 1948. Ibid., frame 0266.

government acting as an enforcer of minority rights was a radical departure. As well as those who simply opposed the bill on ideological grounds were those who believed that legislation against discrimination, both on the local and the national level, would actually exacerbate the problem. Nevertheless, Dewey addressed the issue of discrimination in his speech to the New York State legislature in January 1945, emphasising the need for legislation. He recognised that legislation alone would not solve the problem but stressed that “action should be taken to place our state in the forefront of the nation in the handling of this vital issue.”⁵⁸

At the end of January the State Commission Against Discrimination, chaired by Irving Ives, published its report. Ives had been appointed by Dewey in the wake of the failure of the 1944 bill and was supported by Democratic State Senate leader, Elmer F. Quinn. The *New York Times* contended that the anti-discrimination bill could be “one of the most controversial” bills of the new session. Ives steeled himself for the battle ahead declaring: “I mean business on

⁵⁸ *NYT*, 4 January 1945, p13. Also quoted in Smith, *Dewey*, p443. For a brief account of the progress of the anti-discrimination bill see Smith, p443-8.

this thing.”⁵⁹ A new commission, with an annual budget of \$300,000, would protect the right to employment without discrimination on account of race, creed, colour or national origin. It would seek to do this through “conciliation, persuasion and conference” in the first instance but could seek redress through the courts and could prosecute offenders if necessary. The bill viewed discrimination as “un-American” and punishable by a fine of \$5,000 or a year in prison. It pointed out that the problem was not insurmountable as those employers who integrated their workforces during the war were “now generous in their praise” of minority workers.⁶⁰

Frank S. Columbus, whose appointment to the Commission had been condemned by the NAACP, opposed the findings of the commission.⁶¹ He believed that the SADC would have a “demoralising effect” on transport workers.⁶² The bill’s supporters were concerned that they might not have

⁵⁹ *NYT*, 29 January 1945, p1.

⁶⁰ *NYT*, 29 January 1945, p20. The Urban League, NAACP, CIO, National Lawyers Guild, NNC and the National Conference of Christians and Jews were among the groups publicly backing the SADC. *NYT*, 4 February 1945, p31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29 January 1945, p20. For more on the SADC’s findings and the dissenting views of Columbus see *ibid.*

⁶² *NYT*, 7 February 1945, p19. The New York Chamber of Commerce and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York were among those organisations opposing the SADC. For the Chamber of Commerce’s opposition see *NYT*, 1 January 1945, p25. For the Association of the Bar’s opposition see *NYT*, 22 February 1945, p3. Ives vigorously defended the bill; he and Louis Hollander of the CIO attacked the stance of the New York Chamber of Commerce. *NYT*, 13

enough backing in the state legislature to pass it. There was also a fear that the very vocal support of the CIO was alienating conservative upstate New Yorkers, the most militant opponents of the bill.⁶³ Crucially, the *New York Times* reported in mid-February that Dewey had not helped Republican legislative leaders to garner enough votes to pass the bill.⁶⁴ Within a few days, however, Dewey overcame his reticence, describing the bill as “one of the great social advances of our time.”⁶⁵ There was clearly political capital to be made by Dewey and the GOP in championing the bill. The *New York Times* commented that some Republicans saw the bill as a way to win minority votes.⁶⁶ Yet many other Republicans remained uneasy about the bill and “would like to see it beaten or at least extract most of its teeth.”⁶⁷

The concerns raised among employers meant that there was doubt whether the bill could pass in its current form, if at all. The rationale behind the bill was generally supported, but there were doubts that it could actually achieve its

February 1945, p1. For Ives' defence of the bill see *ibid.*, p18. For further reports on opposition see *NYT*, 7 January 1945, iv, p6 and *NYT*, 1 February 1945, p15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8 February 1945, p14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1945, p1. It should be noted that the *New York Times* doubted whether Dewey's endorsement would make much difference. For upstate opposition to the SADC see *ibid.*, 15 February 1945, p17.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Dewey*, p446.

⁶⁶ *NYT*, 13 February 1945, p1. For Ives' defence of the bill see *ibid.*, p18

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 February 1945, iv, p10.

aims. Among Republican opponents was Senator Frederic Bontecou, Dewey's running mate in the 1938 gubernatorial election. He and others argued that the bill would encourage malicious claims and force employers to keep incompetent staff. It seemed that some Republicans were determined to reinforce the perception that the party opposed civil rights. Moreover, the Democrats and the American Labor Party (ALP) eagerly supported the bill while the CIO "virtually appropriated the measure as its own."⁶⁸ The bill was likely to pass, therefore, with solid Democratic support "plus a scattering of Republican votes,"⁶⁹ making the Democrats the main beneficiaries at election time. Dewey's intervention would at least protect him from charges that the bill was forced upon him and could also be advantageous when he sought African American votes in the 1946 election.⁷⁰

With the Democrats united in support of the bill, it only required the votes of a further eight Republicans to pass. Dewey apparently told a delegation demanding the passage of the bill, which included Thurgood Marshall and Francis Rivers, that he wanted it passed without amendments. The delegation

⁶⁸ Ibid.

was not given a statement from Dewey endorsing the bill, nor did he publicly re-state his support, but he did make it clear to them that he was in favour of the SADC.⁷¹ The *New York Times* believed that Dewey's endorsement would convince wavering Republicans to back the SADC, indeed, he met opponents of the bill in an attempt to enlist their support.⁷² Beyer argues that Dewey "wielded tremendous behind-the-scenes pressure on its behalf while at the same time avoiding any direct public pronouncements on the issue."⁷³

The opponents of the SADC called a public hearing to publicise their cause but this backfired when the hearings were attended predominantly by supporters of the measure.⁷⁴ Ultimately the opponents of the measure had to admit defeat but claimed that their opposition "crumbled under the weight of one of the most formidable political combinations ever to appear in support of a single legislative proposal."⁷⁵ At the end of February the SADC or Ives-Quinn

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 17 February 1945, p26.

⁷² Ibid., 21 February 1945, p15.

⁷³ Beyer, p159.

⁷⁴ *NYT*, 21 February 1945, p1. Beyer suggests that it was Dewey and supporters of the measure who called the public hearing. Beyer, *Dewey, 1937-1947*, p159.

⁷⁵ *NYT*, 22 February 1945, p1.

bill passed the New York Assembly by 109 to 32 without amendment.⁷⁶ This followed a six-hour debate in which three amendments were offered and rejected; the amendments and all the votes against the bill were from Republicans, but only two votes were from New York City itself.⁷⁷ The bill then passed the Senate by a vote of 49 to 6. The five members of the new commission were yet to be appointed but there was a feeling that Dewey would take his time to consider the possible candidates as the commission would not begin work until the beginning of July. Dewey was keen to appoint those he felt were impartial in order to reassure the many opponents of the law.⁷⁸ The passage of the bill clearly demonstrated Dewey's skill as a chief executive, it also firmly established him as the leading progressive force within the Republican party.

Dewey signed the Ives-Quinn bill into law on 12 March 1945 describing it as a reaffirmation by the people of New York of their faith "in the simple

⁷⁶ The bill was actually drafted by Charles Tuttle, the chairman of the temporary commission appointed by Dewey the previous year. Ibid., 15 March 1945, p24.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1 March 1945, p1. For the terms of the bill see ibid., p16 and ibid., 6 March p17.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 17 March 1945, p38. In July Dewey picked the five members of the SADC. Henry C. Turner, a lawyer and former president of the New York City Board of Education, was chairman. He was joined by Elmer F. Carter, editor of *Opportunity* and a member of the NAACP, Edward J. Edwards, a labour leader, Julian J. Reiss, a director of the International Tailoring company and Mrs Leopold K. Simon, an attorney and member of the State Workmen's Compensation Board. Carter declared: "in the field of human relations, this is the most important step since the

principles of our free Republic," principles which would now be a reality for more of the people.⁷⁹ The *Crisis* was fulsome in its praise: "successful passage of the measure is striking evidence of what can be accomplished when the forces of fair play are properly organised to combat discrimination in employment." It also argued that Dewey gave his full support to the bill and it commanded bipartisan support as a Democrat in the House and a Republican in the Senate sponsored it. The *Crisis* believed that the passage of such a bill in New York made continued opposition to a national law even less justifiable.⁸⁰

Adam Clayton Powell extolled the bill as the most important enactment for African Americans since the 14th and 15th Amendments, while the *Pittsburgh Courier* hoped that Dewey's accomplishment would encourage the federal government to take action.⁸¹

Dewey may have been slow to endorse the Ives-Quinn bill but he was quick to praise it. He told the New York NAACP: "it has been a matter of deep gratification for me that we have made such great progress in our state this year

Emancipation Proclamation." Roy Wilkins praised the composition of the commission. *Ibid.*, 7 July 1945, p21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 March 1945, p38.

⁸⁰ "Ives-Quinn Bill." *Crisis*, 52, April 1945, p109. The CIO also praised Dewey. *NYT*, 26 March 1945, p20.

in inter-racial relations. I know I can count on you and the NAACP for support in the sober and difficult work of administering our new legislation.”⁸² In a radio address he reassured New Yorkers that the new law was not designed to “tell you who you may have in your home as domestic help or guests or roomers, or that it may tell employers who they may hire and who they may not hire, or that it is designed to discriminate in favor of one group against another. It is, of course, none of these things.” The law, he stressed, merely upheld the Constitution.⁸³ Democratic state chairman Paul Fitzpatrick attacked Dewey for claiming credit for the Ives-Quinn law, suggesting that it “was forced upon him and the Republican party.” “Public opinion,” continued Fitzpatrick, “was far ahead of him and he caught up with it only as a matter of political expediency.” Fitzpatrick recalled Dewey’s torpedoing of a similar measure the previous year and maintained that the Republicans had no qualms about again abandoning the bill. He claimed that it had only become law through the efforts of the Democrats.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Smith, *Dewey*, p447. Neither reference is cited.

⁸² Dewey to James E. Allen (New York NAACP), 28 March 1945. TED, S4, B245, F54.

⁸³ *NYT*, 5 May 1945, p28.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 May 1945, p14.

Dewey's biographer Richard Norton Smith agrees that the governor was not as enthusiastic about the Ives-Quinn law as he appeared publicly. He reports a conversation in which Dewey exclaimed to Ives: "For God's sake, Irv, you really care about this thing. Why?" Ives apparently replied, "For God's sake."⁸⁵ Dewey's ambivalence did not prevent him from taking credit for the law; but in doing so, he tended to stress the "undramatic" approach that it took. Dewey emphasised this to the Negro Labor Committee:

most gratifying of all, to me, is the widespread acceptance of the spirit of our new law. We have, indeed, a new approach, through sober, constructive leadership. We seek to educate, to convince, to break down bars, to open doors, to create where hostility existed, a cordial welcome. We look to the day when, truly, no man shall be deprived of equal opportunity because of race, religion or national origin.⁸⁶

Dewey believed that the bill would provide "living reality to the great principles of our culture. It expresses the rule that must be fundamental in any society-

⁸⁵ Smith, p663. Journalist Warren Moscow recounted this conversation to Smith.

⁸⁶ Dewey to Mark Starr, Negro Labor Committee, 11 February 1946. TED, S4, B127, F6.

that no man shall be deprived of the chance to earn his bread by reason of the circumstances of his birth.”⁸⁷

The Commission reported to Dewey after eight months of operation in March 1946. Some progress had been made but the magnitude of the Commission’s task was becoming apparent: “the Commission is under no illusion that discriminatory employment practices have been eliminated in New York state or that the relatively small number of complaints are indicative of the extent of such discrimination.” It recognised “a program of education directed to the minds and hearts of men” was also needed.⁸⁸ The promotion of minorities in the workplace, as well as the employment of them in the first place, proved to be one of the major problems for the new SADC.⁸⁹ The Commission also noted that other states were watching developments in New York with a view to following the Empire State’s example.⁹⁰

The law rid New York of Jim Crow trains and saw four times as many African American women employed in sales and clerical work. It also set

⁸⁷ Smith, p447.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 22 March 1946, p23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1 April 1946, p16.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1 July 1945, section iv, p10. It would be five years before a complaint ended up in court. Smith, p448.

precedents for other civil rights legislation during Dewey's tenure as governor of New York. On 5 April 1948 he signed the New York State Fair Education Practices Act, outlawing racial and religious discrimination in higher education. Sponsored by Elmer F. Quinn and Lewis Olliffe, a Republican, it became law in September.⁹¹ By 1950 a similar law prohibited discrimination in public housing. Smith sees Dewey as an effective proponent of African American rights because he "stressed education over headlines and reconciliation over the sound and fury of post-war America."⁹² This was done without shocking the GOP at large or imitating the Democrats. The question that remained was whether Dewey could translate his record into votes on a national level.

The Ives-Quinn law could have provided the template for legislative action by the Republican party on civil rights on the national level as it demonstrated what could be done with a thoughtful approach to the problem of discrimination. Here was a successful law that commanded bipartisan support and was untainted by overt expediency on the part of its advocates. Clearly, there were those elements in New York's Republican party who were deeply

⁹⁰ In May 1945, for instance, Connecticut passed an anti-discrimination bill based on the Ives-

opposed and their concerns would have been shared by other Republicans nationally, but a coalition of moderate Republicans and liberal Democrats could have championed similar legislation in the Congress.

iv. “If we’re going to have a comedian in the White House, let’s have a good one.”

When Roosevelt died, many commentators wondered if the African American vote would remain loyal to the Democrats or become truly independent. Writing on the eve of the 1948 presidential election, Henry Lee Moon, a member of the NAACP and involved in the CIO-PAC, felt that African Americans had voted for Roosevelt and not his party. Furthermore, he expected that they would not vote as a bloc as they had done in previous elections. He stressed, however, that their support remained the vital factor in those states that had been crucial to Roosevelt’s victory in 1944. Echoing NAACP doctrine, he noted that the influence of African Americans came from the “strategic

Quinn law. Ibid., 2 May 1945, p26.

⁹¹ Ibid., 6 April 1948, p13 and 15 September 1948, p33. Religious institutions were exempted.

⁹² Smith, p448.

diffusion” of their votes in marginal states.⁹³ Walter White, trotting out the argument he had been expounding for nearly twenty years, agreed: “no person and no organisation can deliver the Negro vote; it is an imponderable and independent vote, and the Negro increasingly demands results for his support.”⁹⁴ It appeared for the first time that the African American vote would have to be truly earned. Although the memory of Roosevelt was fresher than that of Lincoln, there was a feeling that Truman could squander his predecessor’s legacy. Neither party could confidently rely on history, distant or recent, to deliver the African American vote.

In the early days of the Truman presidency 87% of Americans felt that the unassuming Missourian was doing a good job.⁹⁵ Within eighteen months this had changed dramatically. He was ridiculed in the press and was viewed as the most incapable incumbent since Andrew Johnson succeeded Abraham

⁹³ Moon, Balance of Power, p198. Henry Lee Moon expounded his theory in the *New Republic*, see *Plaindealer*, 22 October 1948, p11.

⁹⁴ Walter White, “Will The Negro Elect Our Next President,” *Collier’s*, 22 November, 1947, cited in Moon, p214. See also, *Plaindealer*, 21 November 1947, p2. There were now seventeen states, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, California, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Missouri, West Virginia, Maryland, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Massachusetts, where the African American vote could prove crucial.

⁹⁵ Harold Foote Gosnell, Truman’s Crises: A Political Biography of Harry S. Truman, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1980, p311.

Lincoln.⁹⁶ With an election looming, he had alienated both farmers and labour, two of the Democrats' core supporters. Economically, the predicted post-war depression never materialised, unemployment was low and business thrived but the cost of living had risen and there was a shortage of housing, consumer goods and even meat. Americans' other concerns in the post-war world revolved around reconversion to a peacetime economy and the threat posed by the Soviet Union.⁹⁷

Truman accepted the advice of Bob Hannegan, the Democratic party chairman, not to involve himself in the 1946 midterm elections. Most Democrats running for office neither mentioned him nor sought his endorsement; some even played recordings of Roosevelt's speeches to bolster their chances. For many it was not enough. As predicted, the Republicans won both Houses of Congress, for the first time since 1928. In the House, Republicans now outnumbered Democrats by 246 to 188, in the Senate the margin was 52 to 38. The Democrats also lost Chicago, Detroit, New York and

⁹⁶ New York entertainer Billy Rose suggested that W.C. Fields would make a better president, stating that "if we're going to have a comedian in the White House, let's have a good one." McCullough, Truman, p521.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p522.

Jersey City while the Republicans now occupied a majority of the country's governor's mansions.

Many Republicans believed that their new mandate meant the end of the New Deal. The Republican congressional leadership, which fell into the hands of conservatives such as Taft and Martin, certainly thought so as they set about trying to dismantle the Roosevelt's legacy. There was a sharing of labour between Taft and Vandenberg in the Senate: Vandenberg took charge of foreign affairs while Taft dealt with domestic policy. Nevertheless, the divisions that had plagued the party for a generation still remained. A schism remained over foreign policy and there was a reluctance among more liberal elements to utterly destroy the New Deal. As with the midterms of 1942, the GOP mistook a protest vote for a mandate.

The attitude of African Americans in 1946 is difficult to gauge with any accuracy. The Republican National Committee estimated that the party had won about half of the African American vote, gaining the majority of it in Illinois

and making substantial gains in Pennsylvania.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, many other traditionally Democrat voters had voted for the Republicans so this should not have necessarily been seen as a repudiation of the Democrats by African Americans. Yet the Democrats had reason to be concerned. African American leaders believed that the African American vote would desert the Democrats due to the party's "Bilboism," the death of Roosevelt, and Eleanor Roosevelt's lack of influence. There was also concern about the party's indifference towards an FEPC and the continuing influence of southerners. This must have made worrying reading for Democrats. The Republicans' analysis of the results suggested that their success was no mere protest vote, arguing instead that it was the programme of the GOP and alienation from excessive bureaucracy that attracted voters.⁹⁹

v. "An American Charter of Human Freedom."

⁹⁸ The election also saw the Republican party begin to make inroads into urban areas due to the shift in African American, labour and veteran votes. PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, reel 1, frame 0630. The return of African American voters to the Republican party also helped to account for victories in Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri and Michigan. Gains were also reported in Harlem. *Ibid.*, frame 0642. See also the Report of the Colored Division, 5 December 1946. Republican Party Papers, Republican National Committee, part 1, series A, reel 8, frame 0062-0063. Party chairman Carroll Reece singled out Val Washington for particular praise.

For the first eighteen months of the Truman presidency the low expectations of African Americans were justified. Truman limited himself to gestures; for example, he supported the FEPC bill when it had little chance of passage and urged the end of the poll tax yet did not enforce the Supreme Court's "white primary" ruling of 1944.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Truman needed to demonstrate to liberal elements in his party that he could be a decisive leader; in the fall of 1946, civil rights provided such an opportunity. Mob violence against African Americans escalated throughout 1945 and 1946 and, after a number of particularly vicious lynchings, Truman finally met the National Emergency Committee to End Mob Violence on 19 September 1946.¹⁰¹ This group, led by Walter White, gave the president shocking details about attacks on African Americans and warned him that this was hurting America's image abroad. As a direct result of this meeting, Truman formed the President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR). Truman had actually already decided to form a committee to

⁹⁹ PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the RNC, 1938-1980, reel, frame 0652.

¹⁰⁰ Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948," *Journal of Southern History*, 37, 1971, p599. In 1944 the Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v Allwright* that the Democratic all-white primary election was unconstitutional. The NAACP campaigned against the Democratic primary in Texas, as the state had prevented African Americans from participating in the election. For a brief account of the case see Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, p13-15.

investigate civil rights abuses but chose this meeting as the ideal time to make it public. "Here was," declares Berman, "an ingenious solution that would serve Truman's political needs by allowing him through symbolic action to improve his standing among northern liberals while, conversely avoiding the alienation of the South."¹⁰²

Berman sees a very deliberate shift in Truman's attitude towards African Americans and civil rights after the 1946 congressional elections. Henceforth Truman realised that he needed the African American vote if he was to be returned to the White House in 1948.¹⁰³ Truman, under attack over strikes, rising prices as well as the sacking of Henry Wallace as Secretary of Commerce, deemed it wise to wait until December 1946 before issuing Executive order 9808 to create the PCCR. The fingerprints of the NAACP were all over the PCCR. Four of White's recommendations, Frank P. Graham, Franklin Roosevelt Jr., Dorothy Till and Channing Tobias, were appointed to

¹⁰¹ NAACP press release, "Truman promises committee. He will work to end mob violence," 20 September 1946, NAACP, pt18, C, 26, 0430. The Committee represented 47 organisations. For more details on the lynchings in question see Zangrando, *Crusade*, p173-177.

¹⁰² Berman, *Politics of Civil Rights*, p51-52. According to Walter White, on hearing of the situation in the South Truman exclaimed: "My God! I had no idea it was as bad as that! We have to do something." White, *A Man Called White*, p330-331.

¹⁰³ Berman, p77. Truman was also sensitive to the Cold War context particularly after an NAACP delegation including White, Du Bois and Bethune presented African American

the Committee. Two other members of the fifteen-strong committee, Sadie T. Alexander and Morris L Ernst, were also NAACP allies. The NAACP could expect, therefore, to have, at the very least, indirect input into the committee.¹⁰⁴

The PCCR became symbolic of White and Truman's dependence on each other. If Truman was sincere, then the NAACP could achieve a number of its goals; if he was being expedient, then the Association's credibility would suffer in African American communities and it would also be isolated on the national political stage.¹⁰⁵ An indication of the importance of the new alliance between Truman and the NAACP came in June 1947 when Truman became the first president to address the Association's annual conference. While this was of huge symbolic importance he did not make any specific promises.¹⁰⁶

grievances to the United Nations in October 1947. This greatly embarrassed the American government

¹⁰⁴ For correspondence between the Association and the PCCR see NAACP, pt18, B, 25, 0526-0727. For editorial comment on the PCCR and the response of leading Republicans to it see *ibid.*, frame 0826-852.

¹⁰⁵ Zangrando, p178. White believed that Truman had staked his political career on the line by endorsing civil rights. McCullough, Truman, p570.

¹⁰⁶ Wayne Morse and Eleanor Roosevelt also spoke at the convention. For the full text of the address see *NYT*, 30 June 1947, p3. Truman's advisors were keen to make the speech as uncontroversial as possible. Memorandum, including a draft of the speech, from David K. Niles to Matthew J. Connelly, 16 June 1947 Papers of Harry S. Truman: Files of Clark M. Clifford, Merrill, Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, 11, University Publications of America, 1996, p320-322. Truman, according to Berman, ignored this advice. Berman, p61. For Walter White's speech at the convention see Merrill, p331-333.

In October 1947 the recommendations of the Committee were announced and proved to be more wide-ranging than Truman had expected.¹⁰⁷ Zangrando correctly asserts that the report, entitled "To Secure These Rights," became "thereafter the American civil rights agenda at all levels."¹⁰⁸ Truman commended the Commission's report as "an American charter of human freedom" but refused to say how much of it he was prepared to implement.¹⁰⁹ As he had encouraged the committee, he had to endorse at least some of its findings, which he did by early 1948. The recommendations of the PCCR required congressional approval meaning that this was not, therefore, a presidential crusade for civil rights. Truman believed that, like Roosevelt, he could keep African Americans and white southerners relatively happy. When it became apparent, however, that southern opposition was going to be more militant than at first expected, he shelved plans for a civil rights bill. At this stage, Truman was disinclined to stand up to the South.

¹⁰⁷ See "To Secure These Rights," Donald McCoy and Raymond G. O'Connor, Readings in Twentieth Century American History, Macmillan, New York, Collier Macmillan, London, 1963, p531-4. For White's praise of the PCCR's findings see *Plaindealer*, 21 November 1947, p2.

¹⁰⁸ Zangrando, p175.

¹⁰⁹ Sitkoff, JSH, 37, p600.

In January 1948 the Republican Policy Committee announced its intention to pass anti-lynching, anti-poll tax and FEPC legislation in the current session. Anti-lynching would be given priority while the other two measures would be dropped if a long filibuster seemed likely.¹¹⁰ This may have been in response to “To Secure These Rights”; it was almost certainly an attempt to pre-empt Truman on civil rights. In February 1948, Truman proposed a ten point legislative programme including measures to end lynching and Jim Crow and the establishment of a permanent FEPC. The omnibus civil rights bill as it became known was the first ever special message to Congress on civil rights, and was, in fact, the strongest civil rights programme ever proposed. Barkley, who had not been consulted, knew that southerners would be outraged by the bill and refused to sponsor it.¹¹¹

The Republicans continued their own tentative steps in the civil rights arena. On 6 February the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee voted 7-5

¹¹⁰ *Plaindealer*, 23 January 1948, p5.

¹¹¹ *NYT*, 3 February 1948, p3. Ironically, considering the poll tax and the effective disenfranchisement of African Americans, there were some southerners who questioned the influence that the electoral system gave to African Americans and minorities. Representative Ed Gossett of Texas declared: “our archaic electoral system has placed control of the two major parties in the hands of minorities in New York and Chicago. Both parties get down on their bellies and crawl in the dirt and kiss the feet of the minorities.” *NYT*, 4 February 1948, p1 and p6. Berman argues that Truman was more concerned about Wallace than any bolt by southerners. Berman, p87. See also McCullough, *Truman*, p587.

to release Irving Ives' bill to create a permanent National Committee Against Discrimination in Employment, in effect an FEPC law.¹¹² A decision on the priority of civil rights bills was to be made by a conference of Republican senators. The Republican Policy Committee would then make recommendations, but Taft emphasised that the Marshall Plan would take precedence. The *New York Times* suggested that Senate and House policymakers were cautiously optimistic that a filibuster on the anti-lynching bill could be broken.

The Republicans clearly believed that there was political capital to be had from civil rights. Chairman Carroll Reece, in a letter to party activists, claimed that the Democrats had done "nothing tangible" on civil rights. He defended the GOP's record declaring that civil rights legislation had always been passed in the House "with overwhelmingly Republican support."¹¹³ He claimed that the reason these efforts had failed was because of the use of the filibuster by southern Democrats. Reece reminded readers that the Democrats had controlled Congress since 1932 without passing any civil rights legislation whereas the

¹¹² This was despite the committee's chairman, Robert Taft, voting with the southerners on the

recent Republican record at the state level, particularly in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, was excellent.¹¹⁴

By March Truman abandoned efforts to pass the omnibus civil rights bill due to greater than expected southern resistance.¹¹⁵ In April, after a secret vote, Republican senators decided to support the anti-lynching ahead of the anti-poll tax bill. Taft argued that the anti-lynching bill stood the best chance of success but this meant, in effect, that other civil rights bills were being set aside indefinitely.¹¹⁶ Before long, however, even the anti-lynching bill was threatened as Congress was giving priority to military matters due to the escalation in international Cold War tensions.¹¹⁷ The motivation behind this momentary Republican concern for civil rights was undoubtedly dictated by political

issue. Berman, p88. Ives had been elected to the Senate in 1946.

¹¹³ *NYT*, 16 February 1948, p4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Berman notes that "southerners who were inclined to revolt, of course, failed to understand that Truman was engaged in symbolic action, that his rhetoric was a substitute for a genuine legislative commitment." Berman firmly believes that the threat of a southern revolt prevented any action on civil rights. Berman, p95.

¹¹⁶ *NYT*, 10 April 1948, p8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1948, p3.

necessity and the desire to make things awkward for the Democrats; civil rights

was, after all, potentially the final full stop in Truman's political obituary.

CHAPTER SEVEN. Dewey Defeats Truman.

i. "The Politics of 1948."

As the election of 1948 approached and the prospect of a Truman defeat became ever more likely, the president and his advisers decided to seek actively the northern African American vote. A secret memorandum entitled "The Politics of 1948," often attributed to Clark W. Clifford but actually written by James Rowe, recognised that the African American vote had been a major factor in the Democrats' victory in 1944.¹ Rowe argued that the African American vote had been for the Democrats ever since Robert L. Vann's "Turn your pictures of Abraham Lincoln to the wall" speech in 1932.² The 'balance of power' theory, Rowe ventured, "may or may not be absolutely true, but it is certainly close enough to the truth to be extremely arguable."³ He argued that this explained Dewey's "assiduous and continuous cultivation of the New York

¹ The more famous Clifford version of this memorandum appeared in November 1947. Clifford took credit for the "Politics of 1948" because Rowe was a law partner of Thomas Corcoran, who Truman disliked. McCullough, *Truman*, p590.

² Interestingly, Rowe argued that the only exception to this was in New York in 1946. James Rowe, Jr., confidential report, "The Politics of 1948," 18 September 1947. Papers of Kenneth Hechler, Merrill, *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*, 14, p29-51.

³ *Ibid.*

Negro vote” and the passage of the SADC. New York Democrats believed that Dewey would carry New York in 1948 because he commanded the support of African Americans and Italians.⁴ Moreover, thanks to Walter White and other leaders, the African American voter had become a “hardboiled trader” who was deeply concerned by the dominance of southerners in the Democratic party and their efforts to block civil rights legislation.⁵ Republicans were well aware of this and, therefore, had nothing to lose by championing civil rights legislation: if it succeeded they could take the credit; if it failed they could blame the Democrats. To counter this, the Democrats had to emphasise the improvement in the economic conditions of African Americans since 1932, although this strategy had “worn a bit thin.”⁶ New tactics, rather than mere gestures, were needed to ensure that African Americans did not vote Republican in the key states of Illinois, Ohio and New York.⁷

Rowe maintained that the Republicans would advocate an FEPC and measures against the poll tax and lynching at the next session of Congress. The president should, therefore, respond by “recommending measures to protect the

⁴ Ibid.

rights of minority groups.” Crucially, he believed that “the South can be considered safely Democratic” and “can be safely ignored.” The South’s only importance stemmed from its representatives in Congress and alienating it was “the lesser of two evils.”⁸ Truman, he felt, had to deliver specific measures to specific constituencies, Jews, African Americans and farmers, for example, and directly address potentially controversial issues that affected these constituencies. Rowe stressed that policy “must be tailored to the voter not to the congressman; [policy] must display a label which reads ‘no compromises.’”⁹ Truman accepted these recommendations in part, but Rowe seriously underestimated southern opposition and this caused the president to delay putting forward civil rights measures.

Evidence of the importance of the African American vote continued to reach senior Democrats during early 1948. William Batt, who was in charge of the party’s research division, reported to Clifford in April 1948 that Henry Wallace, running on the Progressive ticket, was becoming an increasing threat

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

in New York.¹⁰ It was imperative that Truman end segregation in the federal government and the military; Batt recognised that this could precipitate a southern revolt, but he maintained that the issue had to be addressed. In addition, “the judicious use of appointments, like that of Bill Hastie, is of course tremendously effective.” Further appointments in urban areas would help to nullify the appeal of Wallace.¹¹

By June, Truman was being urged to recall Congress because “this election can only be won by bold and daring steps, calculated to reverse the powerful trend now running against us.”¹² This would have had a number of benefits, including highlighting the record of the 80th Congress (“the glass jaw of the Republican party” according to *Harper’s* columnist Elmer Davis) and forcing Dewey and Warren to defend it.¹³ This was likely to embarrass Dewey and Warren and would split the GOP on a number of issues including housing,

⁸ Kirkendall, “Election of 1948,” in Schlesinger, History of Presidential Elections, 8, p3106-3107. Rowe, as Gosnell notes, seriously underestimated the depth of feeling in the South over civil rights. Gosnell, Truman, p367.

⁹ Sitkoff, ISH, 37, p597.

¹⁰ For more information on the perceived threat of Wallace see Americans for Democratic Action analysis, “Henry A. Wallace: The first three months.” Merrill, p172-174.

¹¹ Confidential memorandum from William L. Batt to Clark Clifford and Cael Sullivan, 20 April 1948. Papers of Clark M. Clifford, *ibid.*, p184-185. Hastie had been appointed governor of the Virgin Islands.

¹² Unsigned memorandum, “Should the President call Congress back?” 29 June 1948. *Ibid.*, p249-250.

¹³ *Harper’s Magazine*, September 1948. Cited in Joyner, Republican Dilemma, p76.

foreign policy and social security. The Democratic strategy would also allow Truman to be portrayed as a crusader for ordinary people. Nonetheless, this was potentially hazardous. Of particular concern was the possibility that the Republicans would introduce civil rights legislation and cause a southern filibuster. This could be avoided if the president or Alben Barkley, the Senate minority leader, warned southerners that they risked giving the election to the GOP and losing their patronage within the Democratic party. If southerners remained recalcitrant, then Truman should publicly endorse a moderate bipartisan civil rights programme. It was again emphasised that “the election will be won or lost in the northern, Mid-western and western states. The South cannot win or lose the election for the Democratic Party.” Truman could only claim credit for civil rights legislation as long as Democrats, not Republicans, introduced it.¹⁴

By the time of the Democratic National Convention in July 1948 Truman’s priority was to be re-nominated and as a result he played down civil rights. Having been re-nominated, he was then forced to accept a more far-

¹⁴ Unsigned memorandum, “Should the President call Congress back?” 29 June 1948. Papers of

reaching civil rights plank than he had wanted. Initially it seemed that the 1944 plank would be repeated as this proved tolerable to the South and appealed to minorities without adopting the specifics of Truman's earlier ten point plan. However, the liberal Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), including Mayor Hubert Humphrey of Minneapolis, successfully forced the party to accept a strengthened plank.¹⁵

This in turn caused many southern delegates, although not as many as feared, to leave and eventually form the States' Rights Democratic ("Dixiecrat") party.¹⁶ When Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrat presidential candidate, was reminded that Truman's civil rights policy was merely a restatement of Roosevelt's he allegedly replied: "I agree, but Truman really means it."¹⁷ Historian Jules Abels argues that the Dixiecrats could have done more to thwart civil rights had they remained within the party; the southern bolt, therefore, made poor political sense and lifted any further obstacles to the embrace of civil

Samuel I. Rosenman, Merrill, p249-250.

¹⁵ For the strengthened plank and Hubert Humphrey's speech on the subject see Schlesinger, History of Presidential Elections, 8, p3182-3 and p3184-6. White commended the eventual plank "real Americanism." NAACP press release, "NAACP hails Democrats on civil rights stand," 15 July 1948. NAACP, pt18, B, 10, 0931.

¹⁶ For more on the Democrats' debate on the civil rights plank see *NYT*, 13 July, 1948, p1. For the Dixiecrat walkout and adoption of civil rights plank see *NYT.*, 15 July 1948, p1. See also Gosnell, p376-381 and McCoy and Ruetten, Quest and Response, p123-127.

¹⁷ Abels, Jaws of Victory, p84. Apparently Thurmond did not remember making this remark.

rights by the party.¹⁸ David McCullough comments that “whether Truman and his people appreciated it or not, Hubert Humphrey had done more to re-elect Truman than anyone at the convention other than Truman himself.”¹⁹ Dixiecrat posturing, therefore, helped ensure that northern African Americans continued to back Truman.²⁰

It is clear that, faced with the dual threat of former vice-president Henry Wallace’s liberal challenge on the Progressive ticket and the Dixiecrat revolt, the decision to seek actively the African American vote was made for Truman. Prior to the convention Truman, despite his advisors’ attempts to minimise the importance of a southern revolt, had shown no real stomach for outright defiance of Dixie. By the time the convention had finished he had no alternative but to follow Rowe and Clifford’s strategy.

Regardless of the pressures on Truman, the consequences of the Dixiecrat walkout were immediate and positive. Two weeks after the convention Truman issued Executive Orders 9980 and 9981 establishing a Fair Employment Board

¹⁸ Ibid., p99.

¹⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, p638-640. Truman called Humphrey and the ADA “crackpots.”

²⁰ Truman was also aided by the fact that voters viewed Wallace, not him, as the Communist threat. In September the *New York Times* reported that the southern revolt was helping the

and creating a Committee on Equality of Treatment in the Armed Services.

African American leaders were privately unhappy with the limited scope of these measures but publicly supported Truman.²¹ The following day the special session of Congress started.

These measures, together with the Dixiecrat revolt convinced many African Americans that Truman was sincerely committed to civil rights. It should be noted that after he had issued these Executive Orders Truman made no further comment on civil rights for two months, again showing his reluctance to embrace fully the issue. Truman remained, therefore, reluctant to campaign overtly for African American votes. The research division of the Democratic National Committee recognised the importance of the African American vote in the West and recommended that Truman make speeches on civil rights in Los Angeles, Chicago and Omaha. He was advised to make only brief references to civil rights and to keep the main theme of the speeches on some other subject. Truman, however, remained circumspect; he referred to civil rights briefly in

Republicans. "Southern revolt, gaining strength, helping Republicans." *NYT*, 13 September 1948, p1.

²¹ The *Baltimore Sun* believed that the orders were "politically inspired." *Baltimore Sun*, 27 July 1948 cited in Berman, p118. On 18 August Randolph, convinced of Truman's sincerity, called off plans for resistance to the draft. Berman, p118.

Chicago but not at all in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, by endorsing civil rights in the Democratic platform and issuing executive orders on discrimination in the military and the federal government, Truman recognised that he was taking a calculated risk.

ii. "The front men for a motley collection of mediocre performers."

The Republicans had renewed reason to be confident as the 1948 election approached. In April 1945 the politically indestructible Roosevelt had died, and in 1946, for the first time in eighteen years, the GOP controlled both Houses of Congress. They were able to stall the administration at every turn and it seemed highly unlikely that Truman would be re-elected. Moreover, according to Hugh Gloster in the *Crisis*, the Republicans were extremely keen to take advantage of these splits reporting that they were now endorsing legislation on lynching, the poll tax and an FEPC.²²

Arthur Krock agreed that any southern revolt over civil rights would ensure a Republican victory and that the GOP was determined to exploit

²² Hugh M. Gloster, "The Southern Revolt." *Crisis*, 55, May 1948, p137-139 and 155-156.

Democratic problems on the issue with “a ‘civil rights’ plank even stronger than the president’s message to Congress.” This meant that the northern Democrats had to be even more forthright in their support of civil rights, particularly if they wanted to win important northern states and thwart Wallace. Krock suspected that southern Democrats, expecting a defeat for Truman, were more interested in 1952; they surmised that after the almost certain defeat that awaited in 1948 the power struggle in the Democratic party would be between the South and Wallace.²³

The campaign for the Republican nomination saw a few new hopefuls. Governor Earl Warren of California, who had turned down the vice-presidential berth in 1944, was now a contender, as were John W. Martin the Speaker of the House of Representatives and Harold E. Stassen the former governor of Minnesota. Notwithstanding the appearance of new challengers, the main contenders were again Dewey and Taft. For African American voters there can really have been no doubt as to who to support. Taft had opposed the New Deal, sought to give relief apportionment to the states and, throughout his career,

²³ Arthur Krock, “Are the southerners heading for ‘futility?’” *NYT*, 4 June 1948, p22.

despite being from the pivotal state of Ohio, had done little to recommend himself to African Americans.²⁴ The *Cleveland Call and Post*, a Republican newspaper, remarked that the senator “seems to be hell-bent to eliminate the Negro vote” and was “doing more to drive hundreds of thousands of Negro voters away from the party than anything the New Deal has ever done.”²⁵ Taft also opposed school desegregation. In 1943 he declared that “it occurs to me that once the federal government goes into the question of white and colored schools, we will never stop. We shall go on until we require every state to permit colored and white children to go to the same schools as we do in Ohio.”²⁶

There was a feeling among African Americans that Taft was against fair

²⁴ For a diatribe against Taft and everything he stood for see “His Record is Against Him: A Speakers Handbook on Robert Alphonso Taft” issued by the United Labor League of Ohio in 1950. This booklet attacks Taft’s positions on most issues, including the FEPC, lynching and the poll tax, and goes so far as to suggest that he was at best ambivalent towards the rise of Nazism, condoned Charles Lindbergh’s isolationist sympathies and condemned the Nuremberg trials and executions after World War Two. For an unashamedly sycophantic account of Taft’s career see Russell Kirk and James McClellan, *The Political Principles of Robert A. Taft* (Fleet Press, New York, 1967). Kirk and McClellan believe that Taft would have done better than Landon, Willkie or Dewey and optimistically argue that it was “virtually certain” that he could have defeated Truman in 1948. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this book is “a project of the Robert A. Taft Institute of Government.” The best and most balanced approach to Taft’s political career is James Patterson’s *Mr Republican*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1972) although Caroline Harnsberger’s *A Man of Courage: Robert A. Taft*, (Wilcox and Follett Company, Chicago, Toronto and New York, 1952) completed shortly after Taft’s death, is also dependable.

²⁵ *Cleveland Call and Post*, undated, cited in Moon, *Balance of Power*, p208. Taft was suspicious about the tactics the NAACP employed, comparing them to the “technique of the Communist group and the PAC.” Taft to Leslie Perry, NAACP, pt18, B, 9, 0112. “Taft,” Patterson concludes, “like most white Americans... simply failed to appreciate the plight of the black man in American society, for little in his own experience had exposed him to it.” Patterson, *Mr Republican*, p304-305.

²⁶ Quoted from the *Congressional Record*, 89, 14 October 1943, NAACP, pt18, B, 9, 0404.

employment legislation and for states' rights.²⁷ Taft's opposition to civil rights may have been ideological rather than racist, but it was nonetheless deeply disturbing to African Americans.²⁸ There was also a suspicion that Taft was keen to court the white southern vote. Visiting South Carolina in 1948, Taft declared that the GOP was "very hopeful of carrying several southern states." He told his audience that he deplored discrimination against African Americans in employment but argued "there is probably more of this in the North than the South." He spoke in favour of an anti-lynching law and the abolition of the poll tax but again opposed the proposed FEPC bill as it encouraged "federal interference." His preferred way of tackling the problem was the setting up of a board to investigate discrimination.²⁹ Later in his tour of the South, Taft urged adherence to American traditions and the abandonment of the New Deal.³⁰ Taft also reassured southerners that the GOP was the party of states' rights.

²⁷ Joseph Ferguson, "Taft called poor choice to win Negroes' votes," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1947. TED, S5, B11, F14.

²⁸ For criticism of Taft by Walter White about the lack of civil rights legislation introduced by Republicans see, *Plaindealer*, 28 May 1948, p5.

²⁹ *NYT*, 5 June 1948, p2.

³⁰ *NYT*, 6 June 1948, p1. Dewey also went South visiting Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. "Dewey finds votes on Maryland visit." *Ibid.*, 9 June 1948, p23. For more on Taft and African Americans see "A Look at the Candidates." *Crisis*, 55, January 1948, p9.

A confident, if not united, Republican party met in Philadelphia where, despite the efforts of Taft and Stassen, Dewey was unanimously re-nominated.³¹ Dewey thus became the first defeated presidential candidate to be re-nominated.³² He was in virtual control of the convention; his advisors, according to Beyer, “even toyed with the idea of having him nominated by acclamation.”³³ He was, therefore, acceptable to both conservatives and liberals within the party. The general feeling was that only Dewey stood any realistic chance of defeating the president: Truman led Taft in every hypothetical poll prior to the conventions.³⁴ Brownell became campaign manager.³⁵

Earl Warren, who, like Dewey, had the dubious distinction of being dubbed “the new Calvin Coolidge,” won the vice-presidential nomination,

³¹ For reports that Stassen and Taft were joining forces to thwart Dewey see, *NYT*, 21 June 1948, p1. The votes of two African American members of the Credentials Committee at the convention ensured the seating of a pro-Dewey delegation from Georgia. This was particularly ironic as the two committeemen were Taft delegates from other states. They voted against the pro-Taft Georgia delegation due to its perceived lily-whitism. Dewey's forces had apparently pointed out to African American delegates that Taft had not ensured the passage of any civil rights legislation in the Senate, despite George Bender's anti-poll tax bill negotiating the House. *Plaindealer*, 2 July 1948, p8. See also, *NYT*, 22 June 1948, p1 and W.J. “Bill” Shaw to White 4 June 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0253.

³² *NYT*, 25 June 1948, p1.

³³ Beyer, *Dewey, 1937-1947*, p190. Joyner attests that Republicans “were not exultant about Dewey's candidacy.” Joyner, *Republican Dilemma*, p75.

³⁴ Dewey certainly felt that Taft was too conservative to be elected. [Thompson, *Lessons*, p104.] In fact, Dewey “intensely disliked” Taft according to David McCullough. McCullough, *Truman*, p672. Taft commented that “I had to struggle constantly against the idea that I could not be elected.” Patterson, *Mr Republican*, p417. Nevertheless, he remained confident that Dewey would win and be president for eight years. For more information on the rivalry between the two men see *ibid.*, p423-427. Patterson agrees with the view that Taft could not have won the election. *Ibid.*, p427.

giving the ticket an east-west balance and a liberal look. It also, as Conrad Joyner points out, “accentuate[d] the changed nature of the party.”³⁶ Warren’s record on minority rights was mixed. He had a liberal reputation and practised non-partisan politics in his own state receiving both the Democrat and Republican nominations for governor. His most infamous act was sanctioning the internment of Japanese Americans during World War Two, but otherwise his record was reasonably progressive. He grew up in integrated surroundings, but does not seem to have particularly endeared himself to California’s African American population. He lost in the African American districts of Los Angeles and San Francisco in 1942 and, overwhelmingly, in 1946. In 1947, there was not a single African American among twenty-five judicial appointments. Nevertheless, he did integrate the state National Guard, increase minority employment in the civil service and had fought against the Klan as District Attorney. In January 1945 he announced the creation of a Political and Economic Equality Commission to study the problems of minorities in the state. He did, however, fail to pass a state FEPC. He had asked for an FEPC in

³⁵ *NYT*, 27 June 1948, p1.

January 1946, hoping to pre-empt a federal law, but made no progress. He tried again on several occasions but believed that his efforts failed because the proposal was too radical for some and not radical enough for others.³⁷ Warren accepted the vice-presidential nomination because Dewey would give the office cabinet status.³⁸ “The Warren nomination,” asserts Abels, “seemed to be a bull’s eye at the time, but Warren soon turned out to be a monumental disappointment to Dewey.” He concludes that “Warren had no hand in strategy decision.”³⁹

The Republican civil rights plank of 1948 was largely a reaffirmation of the 1944 plank and endorsed the measures that the Eightieth Congress, in a large part due to the efforts of Republicans, had failed to pass. It recognised that “constant and effective insistence on the personal dignity of the individual, and his right to complete justice without regard to race, creed or color, is a fundamental American principle.”⁴⁰ It included the perennial call for anti-lynching legislation (again without specifying whether this would be on the

³⁶ Joyner, p75.

³⁷ Biographical details from: Leo Katcher, Earl Warren: A Political Biography, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York and London, 1967, Earl Warren, The Memoirs of Earl Warren, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1977 and Moon, Balance of Power.

³⁸ *NYT*, 26 June 1948, p1.

³⁹ Abels, Jaws of Victory, p68 and p152. Moos argues that Warren, “known for his integrity, honesty and record of progressive achievements... was still having a difficult time raising his candidacy to major league status.” Moos, The Republicans, p435.

⁴⁰ Johnson and Porter, National Party Platforms, p450.

state or federal level) as well as demanding the abolition of the poll tax and the desegregation of the armed forces. However, plans to support the creation of a permanent FEPC were dropped to appease the more conservative elements within the party and also to win southern votes.⁴¹ Walter White presented the demands of the Continuations Committee of Negro Organizations, and the six million people they represented, to the convention but generated little enthusiasm.⁴²

According to the *Plaindealer* the civil rights plank, described as the “usual ambiguous document,” was written without African American input.⁴³ The newspaper also commented that Dewey had been advised by certain elements to tone down his support for civil rights if he wanted to achieve his political ambitions, but it maintained that a Dewey victory would mean that African Americans had a friend in the White House.⁴⁴ The *Plaindealer* reported “an air

⁴¹ Beyer, p189. According to Beyer, the platform was adopted in twenty seconds.

⁴² NAACP press release, “Republican convention hears spokesmen for six million Negroes,” 17 June 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0300.

⁴³ Later in the same edition, the *Plaindealer* described the Republican platform as a “forthright document, definite in its pledges.” *Plaindealer*, 2 July 1948, p7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1948, p1 and p8.

of confidence” among African American Republicans attending the convention due to the nomination of Dewey and his private pledges on civil rights.⁴⁵

The *Crisis* rebuked the Republicans over their failure to enact civil rights legislation despite their platform commitments in 1944 and control of the Congress for almost two years: “the Republican candidate for the presidency will have to make it on his own. His party in Congress has produced a big, round zero as far as the Negro is concerned.”⁴⁶ The *Afro-American* agreed, asserting that Dewey and Warren were “still only the front men for a motley collection of mediocre performers whose actions in Congress have been something less than lousy.”⁴⁷ McCoy and Ruetten put this problem more succinctly: “Dewey had to run on Taft’s record.”⁴⁸ If the Republicans wanted African American votes, therefore, it was down to Dewey to win them. The Republican party’s civil rights sub-committee, according to the NAACP, “consistently evaded or expressed disapproval” of the recommendations of the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p1.

⁴⁶ “From the GOP Congress: Nothing.” *Crisis*, 55, June 1948, p189.

⁴⁷ *Afro-American*, 3 July 1948. McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, p123.

⁴⁸ McCoy and Ruetten, p123.

Continuations Committee of Negro Organizations.⁴⁹ White, pausing momentarily during an attack on Wallace, condemned the “beautiful pledges” of the GOP’s 1948 platform, accusing the Republicans of joining forces with reactionary southern Democrats to defeat FEPC, lynching and poll tax measures.⁵⁰

iii. “The best strategy requires maximum efforts to achieve positive legislation rather than a program of only defense and counter-offensive.”

Further pressure for action came from within the Republican party in the aftermath of the convention. James Rowe’s “The Politics of 1948” memorandum is justifiably famous and is correctly seen as the catalyst for Truman’s embrace of civil rights in 1948. Had Truman not acted upon at least some of Rowe’s recommendations then the outcome of the election might have been very different. Students of the Republican party could be forgiven for wondering why the GOP was not offered similarly sage advice. The truth of the

⁴⁹ The Continuations Committee of Negro Organizations consisted of representatives from 21 African American organisations. NAACP press release, “Republicans hedge on civil rights platform,” 18 June 1948. NAACP, pt18, B, 10, 0844. See also NAACP press release, “Republican convention hears spokesmen for six million Negroes,” 17 June 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0300.

matter is that Francis Rivers, one of Dewey's closest and most loyal African American allies, viewed the situation with regard to the African American vote with increasing alarm during the summer of 1948 and urged Dewey to take appropriate action. Yet again Dewey was warned about the centrality of the African American vote, and yet again he ignored this advice.

Rivers, having consulted Jack Blinkoff, urged the GOP to take advantage of the special session of Congress and strenuously advocate civil rights legislation. "The best strategy," he told Dewey adviser Charles Breitel, "requires maximum efforts to achieve positive legislation rather than a program of only defense and counter-offensive to Mr Truman's moves."⁵¹ It appeared that A. Philip Randolph was ready to urge African Americans to refuse the draft unless the armed forces were desegregated.⁵² Randolph wanted a Republican, preferably Irving Ives, to propose an amendment to the selective service act barring discrimination. If Randolph was to carry out his threat then "civil rights will be a burning discussion in America at the height of the special session" due

⁵⁰ *NYT*, 23 June 1948, p16.

⁵¹ Rivers to Charles Breitel, Counsel to the Governor, 20 July 1948. TED, S5, B280, F30.

⁵² Randolph and fifty of his supporters had picketed the Republican convention demanding an end to Jim Crow in the military. *Plaindealer*, 2 July 1948, p1. For more details on Randolph's campaign to desegregate the armed forces see Berman, Politics of Civil Rights, p97-100.

to prosecutions of those refusing the draft.⁵³ It was imperative, therefore, that during the special session of Congress Republicans be seen to be doing all they could to defeat the filibuster of the anti-lynching bill. "This would occur," Rivers believed, "at the same time that Mr Truman would appear in the light of failing to live up to his pretension in refusing to cause an end to draft resistance by issuing an executive order to ban Jim Crow in the armed forces."⁵⁴ Randolph wanted to meet Dewey to urge the governor to oppose publicly segregation in the armed forces.⁵⁵

Rivers enclosed a thirteen-page memorandum, written with the aid of Blinkoff, with his letter. It presented three reasons why the Republicans should push civil rights legislation: principle, legislative efficiency and expediency. As far as principle was concerned, there needed to be "belated recognition" that political equality was essential in a democracy. There was also a Cold War dimension; if America was to be "the exemplar and inspiration to the world" then it had to address genuinely the plight of its African American citizens.⁵⁶

The legislative session would be too short to pass complicated bills. Rivers and

⁵³ Rivers to Charles Breitel, Counsel to the Governor, 20 July 1948. TED, S5, B280, F30.

Blinkoff argued that the difficulties the party might encounter with controversial or complicated legislation would not emerge if it embraced civil rights. Anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills, they stressed, would not, and should not, divide the GOP.⁵⁷

The embrace of civil rights by the Republican party could be done with little political risk as it was in accord with the founding principles of the party and the current party platform; the only voters it would alienate were those in the South who would not vote Republican anyway. "On the contrary," they argued, "the Republican party can use the adoption of civil rights legislation for legitimate political capital among minority groups in pivotal states, whose importance to Republican victory can not be overestimated."⁵⁸

Republicans had to be very wary of any alliance with southern Democrats, as this "would permit Mr Truman to appear as the champion of idealism."⁵⁹ The GOP, they warned, would then "be compelled to explain and rationalize its alliance with... the worst elements of the Democratic party." Conversely,

⁵⁴ Ibid. Of course, within a week Truman had signed Executive Order 9980.

⁵⁵ Ibid..

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

endorsing civil rights would incur the wrath of southern Democrats and “the Republican party would reveal itself to the American electorate as being uncompromising on the question of civil rights.”⁶⁰ In order to avoid accusations that the Republicans were using civil rights to divide the Democrats, it was important for the Republican leadership to state publicly why it was supporting the legislation. Rivers and Blinkoff offered a draft of such a statement in an attempt to turn Truman’s slurs about a “do-nothing” Congress against the president by arguing that it was the final desperate act of a discredited president determined to hold onto power at any cost.⁶¹

They believed that it was extremely important that the Republicans receive due credit for any legislation passed during the special session. One way of doing this would be to have Dewey very publicly consult congressional Republicans during efforts to pass civil rights legislation. Another possibility would be Dewey’s public support of the bills in response to a request “from outstanding leaders in American life.”⁶² Alternatively, Republican leaders could introduce the bills, with Dewey joining the fray once the southern filibuster

⁵⁹ Ibid.

commenced, this in turn would draw Truman into the debate and associate him with southern reactionaries. Regardless of the success or failure of civil rights legislation Dewey would benefit. Mirroring Democratic analysis, Rivers and Blinkoff argued that civil rights legislation would be “passed due to Dewey-Republican leadership” or fail “because of lack of Truman leadership.”⁶³

Rivers and Blinkoff believed that there would not be sufficient time in the special session to deal adequately with the Ives’ bill to prevent discrimination in employment and bills to end segregation in the armed forces. It was essential, however, that the anti-poll tax and anti-lynching bills were not watered down to appease southern senators as this “would only arouse bitter opposition from the minority groups whom it is intended to benefit and lead to charges that the Republican party is evading its responsibility and is insincere.”⁶⁴

Rivers’ analysis makes a good deal of sense but it does not suggest anything that Dewey could do independently of the congressional party. It does not advise Dewey to address directly African American concerns to African

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. A major concern of Democrats was that the Republican party would be able to take credit for civil rights legislation or at least blame Democrats for its failure.

American audiences and it ignores the decent record of Dewey, both in terms of legislation and appointments, as governor of New York. Rivers also relies on the good faith of Republican congressmen, something not very much in evidence throughout the period, and their ability and willingness to turn the recall of Congress to their advantage. Dewey did indeed ignore this advice almost certainly due to his confidence that he would prevail over Truman, but it could also be a reflection of his own exasperation with Republicans in Congress. This memorandum really should have been sent to the likes of Taft and Vandenberg as well, since Dewey had little influence over the Republican legislative programme in Congress. Nevertheless, it again shows that African American Republicans were very far ahead of the party leadership; it also illustrates that an imaginative response could be offered to Truman's recall of Congress if only the GOP was willing to demonstrate some political acumen. Unfortunately for the GOP, much of Rivers's analysis proved prescient. Truman did indeed pass an executive order prohibiting discrimination in the armed

⁶⁴ Memorandum by Francis Rivers and Jack Blinkoff, 20 July 1948, TED, S5, B280, F30.

forces. He was able to portray himself as “a champion of idealism” while the Republican became associated with the ‘forces of reaction.’

The Republicans had been warned privately and publicly, internally and externally, from friend and foe alike that something positive had to be done to win back the African American vote. In 1936 the party was unelectable. In 1940 its presidential candidate’s liberalism was viewed with unjustified scepticism; in 1944 the party ran a passionless campaign with a candidate who was tainted by both his own political record and that of his party in Congress. In 1948 the stakes could not have been higher. Truman’s PCCR and demonstrated commitment to civil rights together with the secession of the Dixiecrats from the Democratic party meant that the Republicans would need to wage the most vigorous campaign in their history if they were to make any dent in the African American vote. They had again chosen Thomas Dewey and he was better placed than any contemporary Republican to regain the African American vote; indeed no Republican candidate since “the immortal Lincoln” had as palpably positive a record on African Americans as Dewey. There can be no doubt that Dewey had a good record on African American appointments. Aside from Rivers,

Dewey appointed Bertha Diggs to the Department of Labor, three African American Assistant Attorney Generals and a number of other African Americans to notable positions.⁶⁵ Joseph Ferguson, of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, claimed that Dewey was “without a peer” where minorities were concerned and this was “based upon a bold record of downright fairness in the use of official prerogatives where race and religion have been concerned.”⁶⁶ Dewey’s failure to utilise his record and the advice of trusted allies remains one of the greatest errors of the campaign of 1948.

iv. “The best platform, the best candidates and the best record.”

Brownell at least partially heeded the exhortations of African Americans Republicans, and particularly their criticism of the 1944 campaign, by appointing Val Washington Executive Assistant to the Campaign Chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1946. Washington set about his task enthusiastically but he soon became embroiled in a dispute with the NAACP. A feud developed between Washington, himself an NAACP member, and Walter

⁶⁵ “Appointments of Colored People in State Employ made by Governor Dewey,” undated.

White. Washington wrote to White in April 1946 praising his work and requesting assistance in drawing up a Republican programme.⁶⁷ When no reply came, Washington told the press that he had tried to contact White four times without success. White, once again, was accused of being biased towards the Democratic party. Washington believed that this was part of a pattern of anti-Republican propaganda disseminated by White. He concluded that the NAACP secretary's attack was "not surprising to those of us who know the attitude of the officers of your association towards the party." He believed that the NAACP was wrong to attack the GOP without informing the public of the party's attempts to co-operate with the Association.⁶⁸

Washington wrote angrily to Leslie Perry, administrative assistant in the Association's Washington DC office, declaring that he did not realise that "Mr White was so enmeshed [sic] in Democratic politics" or that the NAACP had ceased to be non-partisan.⁶⁹ Perry reiterated that the White would have refused to co-operate with Washington because of the non-partisanship of the

TED, S7, B63, F11.

⁶⁶ Joseph Ferguson, "Dewey and Eisenhower popular," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 December 1947. TED, S5, B11, F14.

⁶⁷ Washington to White, 24 April 1946, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0194.

NAACP.⁷⁰ White felt that Washington was treating him unfairly when the Republican claimed that White's regular column in the *New York Herald Tribune* had urged African Americans to vote for the Democrats. He contemptuously but privately dismissed Washington as an "underling" and maintained that the NAACP would deal with the GOP leadership. He emphasised, however, that he had only recently found out that Washington had written to him in April but maintained that he had never seen the letter.⁷¹

In August 1948 Brownell argued that the appointment of Washington demonstrated that the GOP was "the unswerving enemy" of discrimination.⁷² Washington stated that the Republican campaign among African American voters would be conducted on the basis of Dewey's record as governor of New York. "The Republican party," asserted Washington, "has the best platform, the best candidates and the best record," and African Americans knew that a GOP victory would greatly benefit them. He argued that the Democrats were still the party of the South, and it was southerners who controlled many of the most

⁶⁸ "GOP official hits at civil group policy," undated, uncited newspaper clipping but probably the *Republican News*, *Ibid.*, frame 0208.

⁶⁹ Washington to Perry, 18 December 1946, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, frame 0211.

⁷⁰ Perry to Washington, 20 December 1946, *Ibid.*, frame 0209.

important congressional committees. He noted that Truman's conversion to the cause of civil rights happened during a Republican congress but was absent when the Democrats controlled both houses. He also believed that Truman had the power to end discrimination in the military but the president preferred to delay action; in fact, Truman had "never really had any intention of doing anything about civil rights." The PCCR and Truman's message to Congress were, Washington claimed, gambits to win the African American vote. Dewey's record, by contrast, "assures vigorous prosecution of all violations of civil rights under existing Federal civil rights statutes."⁷³

It was not long before the feud between White and Washington re-ignited. Washington wrote to Dr Louis T. Wright, the chairman of the NAACP Board of Directors, in late September to protest "on behalf of myself and other Republicans" who were members of the NAACP about the political activities of Association members "in violation of its rules." He cited White's column in the *New York Herald Tribune* criticising Dewey and New York's anti-discrimination law yet praising Truman's civil rights committee. Washington

⁷¹ White to Leslie Perry, 31 December 1946, *Ibid.*, frame 0204. White described Washington's

contended, with some justification, that Truman “as a former senator, knew that there was not the slightest possibility of any of his civil rights recommendations being enacted into law so long as the southern wing of his party could resort to a filibuster in the Senate.” Truman, Washington argued, had not done everything that he could and the NAACP should investigate this.⁷⁴

Washington then rejected NAACP criticism of Republicans in the 80th Congress, arguing that the Taft-Hartley law protected the rights of African Americans.⁷⁵ He reasoned that many of the unions that discriminated against African Americans had closed shop contracts, preventing employers from taking on African Americans even if they wanted to. Under Taft-Hartley African Americans could work without the necessity of being a union member. Washington claimed that the Taft-Hartley law was in effect an FEPC for organised labour. He also noted the recent efforts of GOP senators to prevent

accusation that he had urged African Americans to vote for the Democrats as “a lie.” *ibid.*

⁷² *Plaindealer*, 13 August 1948, p8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10 September 1948, p1 and p6.

⁷⁴ Washington to Wright, 27 September 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0325-0326. These articles had appeared in the *Herald Tribune* on 19 September and 26 September.

⁷⁵ The Taft-Hartley law was part of the GOP’s drive to curb union power in the aftermath of the strikes of 1946. It banned the closed shop- whereby non-union workers could not be employed- but allowed a union shop requiring workers to join a union. It acted against certain union practices, such as secondary boycotts and union contributions to political campaigns, while union leaders had to swear an oath declaring that they were not members of the Communist party. Strikes by federal employees were banned and an eighty-day cooling off period was imposed on strikes that the president decided affected the national interest. The act was passed

Mississippi's Theodore Bilbo from taking his Senate seat, suggesting that Republicans were motivated by Bilbo's race record as well as charges of corruption. This contrasted with Truman's silence on Bilbo.⁷⁶

Wright was concerned enough about Washington's allegations to call a meeting of the members of the Committee on Administration.⁷⁷ White, as he had been in 1940, was found innocent of violating the Association's rules. Wilkins wrote to Washington to inform him of the decision, explaining that White was acting in a personal capacity and not speaking for the Association.⁷⁸ The Association reiterated that it "supports no candidate for political office; no officer or member of the Association may endorse any political candidate in the name of the Association; and no paid executive may endorse any political party either as an individual or as an officer of this Association."⁷⁹

If this kind of criticism was coming solely from Republicans then it could perhaps be dismissed as bluster but the politicisation of the NAACP had not

over Truman veto. For more detail see Patterson, Mr Republican, p352-369 and Kirk and McClellan, The Political Principals of Robert A. Taft, p119-132.

⁷⁶ *Plaindealer*, 1 October 1948, p1 and p2.

⁷⁷ Wright to the members of the Committee on Administration, 1 October 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, 0336. Washington asked to be informed of the outcome, Washington to Wright, 5 October 1948, *ibid.*, frame 0340.

⁷⁸ Wilkins to Washington, 18 October 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 29, frame 0344-0345.

⁷⁹ *Plaindealer*, 22 October 1948, p2.

gone unnoticed in the African American press. Noted African American columnist George Schuyler asserted that those who believed the NAACP was non-partisan "should have their heads examined."⁸⁰ McCoy and Ruetten agree that White's praise for Truman "challenged the credibility of the organisation's claim to non-partisanship."⁸¹

Washington perhaps overreacted to his perceived snub by White, but White's attitude is critical to understanding where the Association stood politically. The start of the feud between the NAACP and Washington coincided with White's meeting with Truman and the establishment of the PCCR. It gives greater credence, therefore, to the view that the NAACP was increasingly binding its fate to that of Truman. It also suggests that strict non-partisanship was becoming increasingly untenable and potentially unwise politically. Non-partisanship was commendable in principle and, ideally, protected African Americans from further political isolation by not associating them with a defeated party or candidate. The Association had long urged African Americans to support their friends and defeat their enemies, but it was

⁸⁰ McCoy and Ruetten, Quest and Response, p139.

blatantly obvious that most of their friends were northern Democrats and the only real targets it had north of the Mason-Dixon line were invariably conservative Republicans. Of course, the Association praised many Republicans, but ultimately reasoned that aligning itself with northern liberal Democrats made the most sense. An unforeseen consequence of this was that the Association was placing its hopes on a perpetual minority. Liberal Democrats, even with the genuine support of liberal Republicans, would never have the strength to overcome the combined power of conservative Republicans and southern Democrats. If a Republican president, backed by a Republican Congress could be persuaded to support civil rights legislation, preferably as a non-partisan issue, liberal Democrats would be unlikely to oppose it, particularly as many of them relied on the urban African American vote. Arguably, this scenario was played out in microcosm in New York when the SADC was passed. These conditions were in place, although crucially in the absence of a Republican president, between 1946 and 1948, yet the Republicans, conditioned to opposition, remained ambivalent towards civil

⁸¹ Ibid.

rights. A difficulty with this interpretation is that a Republican Congress would be inherently conservative and would, almost certainly, have been elected at the expense of liberal Democrats, making the prospects for civil rights legislation bleak.

Considering the record and motivation of the Republicans in Congress between 1946 and 1948, and the fact that they were either not astute enough or not interested enough to promote civil rights, it is perhaps not surprising that the NAACP sought sanctuary with the Democrats. Whether a Republican Congress serving President Dewey would have been any more forthcoming on civil rights is a moot point. The principle behind the FEPC, for instance, would have remained an anathema to many conservative Republicans.

v. "If the Republicans are smart, they will enact this program."

Some contemporary commentators felt there was a sense of desperation surrounding Truman's embrace of civil rights. The *Commonweal* warned in August 1948 that the military and the Civil Service might delay action on Truman's executive orders in the hope that the Republicans were victorious.

Nevertheless, Truman deserved credit for his “courageous stand,” but this praise was tempered by the sense of desperation surrounding the Truman administration: “is it courage to take an action when there can be no fear of the fruit of the action?” The two executive orders, therefore, only served to re-emphasise the hopelessness of Truman’s position.⁸²

In October 1948 *Commentary* examined what progress had been made on civil rights in the year since “To Secure These Rights.” In a thoughtful, well-argued and wide-ranging article it concluded that there had been “pitifully little accomplished” and the 80th Congress had done nothing. The programme was in the hands of congressional Republicans, but it was clear that Truman could have done more, although there was no doubting his “audacity in sponsoring the committee.” Ultimately, Truman’s message to Congress in January 1948 “indicated that a retreat was in prospect” as there was no explicit support of the committee’s recommendations with regard to the military. Indeed, Attorney

⁸² *Commonweal*, 68, number 17, 6 August 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 26, 0254-0255. The *Commonweal* also reported the comments of Democratic Senator Howard McGrath of Rhode Island who declared: “If the Republicans are smart, they will enact this program.”

General Clark had actually abandoned the planned enlargement of the civil rights section of the Justice Department.⁸³

Some commentators suggested that Truman would restart the crusade for civil rights once he had secured the nomination, whereas others doubted that he was “capable of such careful political design.” Moreover, civil rights could save Truman from a defeat similar to that suffered by Landon. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Republicans, Truman had “exhibited intrepid statesmanship.” Among Republicans there was “little passion for the [civil rights] program and [they] did not believe its enactment vital to their success.” Indeed, Taft actually indulged the opponents of civil rights: “it seems slightly implausible that so little was accomplished by so many.” Optimists had hoped that “To Secure These Rights” would have compelled the Republicans to take action but the GOP sensed victory in 1948 and was, therefore, not interested, particularly after Wallace had decided to run. There was a belief that the Wallace candidacy would split the African American vote and give marginal states to the Republicans.

⁸³ James A. and Nancy F. Wechsler, “The Road Ahead for Civil Rights- The President’s Report:

There was also a Republican fear that Truman would take credit for the passage of civil rights laws but a surfeit of Republican self-confidence remained the most likely reason for inaction. Dewey's election would not guarantee civil rights legislation, as conservative Republicans and southern Democrats would heavily outnumber liberals in Congress. Furthermore, Dewey had "never manifested any tendency to battle for lost or hazardous causes." Dewey was the "caricature of the totally political man," geared towards elections and not government, exhibiting no strong feelings on civil rights. Admittedly, "some of his best appointments" had been African Americans.⁸⁴

FEPC legislation in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut reflected the "comparative enlightenment" of the governors and the states involved. At the Republican convention debate on civil rights was sidelined, despite African American leaders wanting a "dramatic declaration from the party of Lincoln." Again this indicated that the GOP was confident of victory. It was apparent, therefore, that neither party had much to boast about where African Americans

One Year Later, *Commentary*, October 1948, p297-304. NAACP, pt18, C, 26, 0303-0310.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

were concerned while civil rights remained one of the most vexing questions in American politics.⁸⁵

The Research Division of the Democratic National Committee saw Wallace as a potentially bigger threat to the Democratic hold on the African American vote than the Republicans in New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles. After persuasion from Clifford, and only a week before the election, Truman made a speech in Harlem in front of 65,000 people. This speech, on the first anniversary of the report of the PCCR, was the only one he made directly addressing civil rights. In it he defended his record and condemned the “do nothing” Congress for not passing his proposals. McCoy and Ruetten argue that the Harlem speech was probably too late in the campaign to influence many voters.⁸⁶

Dewey was an unenthusiastic campaigner. He was reluctant either to repeat the mistakes of 1944 or widen the splits within the party; he felt that the less he said the fewer people he would alienate. His main tactic, therefore, was to emphasise unity. The *New York Times* believed that Dewey’s priority was to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

hold votes.⁸⁷ He had good reason to be confident: just about everybody in the country, with the possible exception of Harry Truman, believed that the Republicans would win. Dewey's faith in opinion polls was well known and in 1948 he was ahead in just about every poll. The Crossley Poll of 15 October 1948, for example, put Dewey ahead in 27 states, including many of those with significant numbers of African American voters.⁸⁸ There appeared, therefore, little need for Dewey to embroil himself in the civil rights or, indeed, any controversy.

The difficulty for Dewey, as McCoy and Ruetten point out, was that while his record as governor of New York was undoubtedly good, he was largely unknown to African Americans elsewhere in the country.⁸⁹ The Republican National Committee sought to publicise Dewey's achievements through advertisements in the African American press, yet he barely mentioned civil rights during his campaign.⁹⁰ McCoy and Ruetten claim that Dewey "took a firm stand" on civil rights in New Castle, Pennsylvania, but suggest that a

⁸⁶ McCoy and Ruetten, Quest and Response, p141. Berman states that the decision to speak in Harlem was made at the last minute. Berman, Politics of Civil Rights, p126.

⁸⁷ *NYT*, 3 October 1948, iv, p3.

⁸⁸ Press Release by Archibald M. Crossley of the Crossley Poll, 15 October 1948. TED, S2, B4, 6. For other polls predicting a Dewey victory see Gosnell, Truman, p407-409.

speech in his home state on 21 October illustrated his “low-key” approach to the issue.⁹¹ In this speech, made in tribute to the late Al Smith, Dewey demanded “justice and equal treatment for all” and asserted that he had “found it possible to find peaceful, honest solutions” to the problems of minorities.⁹²

Dewey’s virtual silence on civil rights did not, however, eliminate the potential for alienating African American voters. Taft was sent South to campaign, either to remove him as a threat to Dewey on the national scene or as a genuine effort to woo the South. Either way, his utterances owed more to the Republican party of 1928 than 1948. He told an audience in South Carolina that the Republicans were “far more in accord with the views of the South than the policies of the Truman administration.” Many southern editors interpreted his words as an indication that Dewey would not be a strong proponent of civil rights. Dewey avoided speaking in the South, and so the only notable Republican voices heard below the Mason-Dixon Line belonged to Taft, Stassen and Carroll Reece.⁹³ Some southern Republicans were inferring that, if elected,

⁸⁹ McCoy and Ruetten, p137.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p137-8.

⁹² *NYT*, 22 October 1948, p4.

⁹³ Ibid., p7.

Dewey would rely on Taft where the South was concerned.⁹⁴ Taft was reported as saying that “substantially there is no difference between the Republican party and southern Democrats.”⁹⁵

In the North, Republican designs on the African American vote were threatened by the emergence of Henry Wallace and his Progressive party. Wallace was at least initially a bigger threat to the Democratic hold on the African American vote than the Republicans were. Wallace openly endorsed civil rights, although his campaign was geared more towards foreign policy, and he spoke on the subject in the South as well as the North, and always to integrated audiences. In June, however, Walter White expressed his concern that Wallace’s presidential bid would lead to a more conservative Congress making civil rights legislation an even more distant prospect.⁹⁶

Wallace attacked both parties on civil rights arguing that Truman did not believe in civil rights while the “Republicans remember the name of Abraham

⁹⁴ *Plaindealer*, 29 October 1948, p1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 November 1948, p8.

⁹⁶ *NYT*, 23 June 1948, p16. Actor and singer Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois were among those African Americans attending the Progressive convention on 20 July 1948 in Philadelphia. Berman, p115.

Lincoln but wilfully forget the principles of Abraham Lincoln.”⁹⁷ White complained that he had asked Wallace to speak to the NAACP for years without success and contended that the former vice-president had largely ignored African Americans until 1944.⁹⁸ William Hastie, now the governor of the Virgin Islands, dismissed the Progressive party as “a political puppet securely tied to the communist party line.” Moreover, Wallace was “notoriously disinterested” in civil rights while vice-president and in the cabinet. Hastie also warned of a “reactionary Republican” administration if Wallace did well.⁹⁹ As late as September, the *New York Times* reported that many African Americans were still backing Wallace, but his campaign was heavily influenced by communists and by the time of the election his star had waned.¹⁰⁰

Truman’s strategy was to attack the congressional Republican record rather than that of Dewey in order to taint the GOP candidate by associating him with this “do nothing” Congress. These attacks, which were clearly unfair to Dewey’s record, elicited little response from the New York governor. Dewey could have countered by defending his achievements and attacking the equally

⁹⁷ *NYT*, 26 June 1948, p4.

bad record of Democratic congressmen, but he chose not to. When asked why Republicans had not enacted the legislation requested by Truman, given the similarities between it and the Republican platform, Brownell replied that it was designed to be enacted by a Republican president. "Obviously," he declared, "this cannot be done at a rump session called at a political convention for political purposes in the heat of the campaign."¹⁰¹

Accusations of a "do nothing" Congress were, according to Abels, "an arrant fiction."¹⁰² Whether the 80th Congress did anything constructive, however, is another matter. In fact, some Republicans even felt that their record would be an advantage and attempted no effective defence of their record. The GOP stance during the special session perhaps mirrored that of Roosevelt during the interregnum: neither was about to do anything to help a "lame duck" president desperately seeking self-justification.

⁹⁸ Abels, *Jaws of Victory*, p208-209.

⁹⁹ *NYT*, 14 October 1948, p21. Hastie was speaking at the Democratic party's headquarters.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 September 1948, p1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 21 July 1948, p1. The *Afro-American* rejected Brownell's explanation. *Afro-American*, 31 July 1948. McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, p132. Robert Hannegan, the Democratic party chairman until October 1947, had recommended that Truman attack Taft not Dewey in the presidential election. Gosnell, *Truman*, p368.

¹⁰² Abels, p38.

Throughout the campaign of 1948, there was a perception that congressional Republicans were only interested in civil rights legislation as a way to embarrass and split the Democrats. In August K. M. Landis II, writing in the *Chicago Daily Sun Times*, bemoaned the Republicans' stance. "One of these days, by some accident," sighed Landis, "a real civil rights program will pass, and it may then be too late for anybody to believe in the good faith of the party of Lincoln."¹⁰³ Landis had a point, but it is clear that it was not only the Republicans who were "playing politics" with civil rights legislation. Truman never really believed that any civil rights legislation would be passed during the special session and it was obvious to Republicans that the issue was being used to embarrass them before the election.¹⁰⁴ They decided, therefore, to respond in kind in an effort to increase Democratic divisions. After a week of debate the anti-poll tax bill was removed from the Senate's agenda.

In September, paralleling 1936, the Republicans won in Maine. Brownell publicly declared that the victory virtually ensured a GOP victory in November. He announced that the success confirmed unofficial reports that Dewey would

¹⁰³ K.M. Landis II, "Mockery in the Senate," *Chicago Daily Sun Times*, 4 August 1948,

be elected with an “overwhelming majority.” Dewey, however, was more circumspect and warned against over-confidence.¹⁰⁵ On the eve of the election Taft, ignoring Dewey’s appeal, predicted a five million majority for the Republicans.¹⁰⁶

Brownell later credited Clark Clifford for formulating the Democratic strategy in 1948. Clifford exploited the “great differences between Dewey’s moderate, internationalist position, and the much more conservative and isolationist positions of the congressional leadership.” It was for this reason that Truman called Congress back into session; it was clear to Dewey that Truman was turning the campaign into a battle between the president and the Republican controlled Congress rather than a contest between the candidates. Dewey sent Brownell to Washington to meet Republican congressional leaders to discuss the situation but Taft refused to budge. Both Taft and Vandenberg viewed the recall of Congress as a blatant ploy by Truman, which prevented Republicans

NAACP, pt18, C, 26, 0258.

¹⁰⁴ According to McCoy and Ruetten, p132.

¹⁰⁵ *NYT*, 15 September 1948, p1. Chase Smith’s victory was at least in part due to AFL/CIO backing.

¹⁰⁶ *NYT*, 1 November 1948, p15.

from going home to campaign.¹⁰⁷ Brownell suggested that they pass an extension to social security and a more liberal immigration act, which would show the electorate that the GOP did have a progressive programme. Vandenberg and Taft, however, refused.¹⁰⁸ Dewey and Brownell decided to keep this meeting secret as it would further expose splits within the party.

In the latter stages of the campaign it appeared that Truman was catching up on Dewey. Brownell met Republican state chairmen to discuss whether Dewey should change his tactics. They decided, virtually unanimously, that Dewey should not alter his strategy. They also, according to Brownell, were later highly critical of the campaign Dewey ran.¹⁰⁹ Towards the end of September reports were beginning to reach the Dewey camp that victory was no longer assured, with Truman making gains in California and Illinois.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, pollster Elmo Roper concluded that Dewey was attracting no more support than he had in 1944; disenchanted Democrats were backing Thurmond or Wallace or simply had not decided how to vote.¹¹¹ The Associated Negro

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, Lessons, p106.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p106-p107.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p108.

¹¹⁰ Smith, Dewey, p524.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Press carried out a survey among African American voters and predicted that not only would the vast majority of them be voting for Truman, but also that Truman would win the election. The ANP's survey suggested that seven out of ten African Americans would be voting for Truman.¹¹²

vi. "The only way a Republican is going to get into the White House is to marry Margaret Truman."

Truman won an extremely close election, winning 24,105,812 popular votes and 303 electoral votes to Dewey's 21,970,065 and 189 respectively. The polls had got it wrong again; they were not as inaccurate as the legendary *Literary Digest* poll of 1936 but, as the *Chicago Daily News* quipped, "the pollsters may say that the error was not great but when a man breaks into a dance after he has been pronounced dead, the doctor can expect to lose a few patients."¹¹³ A swing of sixty electoral votes would have given Dewey a

¹¹² *Plaindealer*, 29 October 1948, p1 and p5.

¹¹³ Abels, *Jaws of Victory*, p275. In the aftermath of the election, the Republican party's Research Division reported that Gallup overestimated the Republican vote by 4.4%, Crossley by 4.4% and Elmo Roper by 7.1%. Ironically, Gallup and Crossley allowed for a 4% margin of error, which was less than the margin of victory in twenty-one states totalling 290 electoral votes. "The 1948 Election: A Statistical Analysis, May 1949." PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the RNC, 1938-1980, reel 1, frame 0774.

majority in the Electoral College. The importance of the African American vote to Truman is starkly illustrated by his slender majorities in California, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio and West Virginia, a total of 112 electoral votes. Although Truman lost New York, he won 108,000 votes in Harlem compared to 34,000 for Dewey and 29,000 for Wallace. Dewey actually managed to poll even fewer African American votes in New York than he had in 1944.¹¹⁴ In direct contests in New York between African American Democrats and Republicans, the Democrats won.

If Dewey had won Ohio, California and Illinois he would have become president with 267 electoral votes. A shift of 3,500 votes would have given Ohio to Dewey, with a shift of 16,500 votes, Dewey would have won Illinois. In fact, Truman's 130,000 majority in African American areas of Chicago was four times his Illinois majority.¹¹⁵ Truman ran ahead of Dewey by three-to-one in Chicago and Ohio's African American wards.¹¹⁶ A shift of 9,000 would have given Dewey California. In all, a shift of only 30,000 votes out of 10,661,000

¹¹⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 13 November 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 18, 0358.

¹¹⁵ Abels, p296. Indeed, it is very likely Dewey would have won Illinois had Wallace been on the ballot. Figures for African American voting also available in McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, p142.

¹¹⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 November 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 18, 0355-0356.

cast in three pivotal states would have given Dewey overall victory.¹¹⁷ J.

Howard McGrath, the Democratic chairman, recognised that the African

American vote was extremely important in carrying these three states.¹¹⁸

Republican analysis agreed that the African American vote was important in

Chicago, New York and Philadelphia and conceded that it was “a potent

influence” in California, Illinois and Ohio.¹¹⁹ Berman argues that Dewey carried

Delaware, Indiana and Maryland with African American votes. The

Republicans, however, did not win the majority of the African American vote in

any state.¹²⁰

Predictions of a Dewey landslide may have actually deterred many

Republicans from going to the polls, but analyst Samuel Lubell concluded that

the opposite was true: “far from costing Dewey the election, the [Democratic]

stay-at-homes may have saved him almost as crushing a defeat as Landon

¹¹⁷ “The 1948 Election: A Statistical Analysis, May 1949.” PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the Republican National Committee, 1938-1980, reel 1, frame 0771. See also Abels, p290.

¹¹⁸ McCullough, Truman, p713.

¹¹⁹ “The 1948 Election.” PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the RNC, 1938-1980, reel 1, frame 0793. This analysis did not suggest what percentage of African Americans voted for the Democrats. It did, however, question the basis for Walter White’s contention that 69% of African Americans had voted Democrat.

¹²⁰ Berman, Politics of Civil Rights, p130-131.

suffered in 1936.”¹²¹ Without Wallace and Thurmond, Truman could have won a further 85 electoral votes giving him a landslide.

Different groups were keen to take credit for this unlikely of victories. Abels believes that the farm vote particularly in Ohio, Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin was crucial; overall Dewey’s vote had dropped by 585,000 in ten Mid-west states since 1944.¹²² Brownell maintained that the crucial issue in 1948 was the farm vote; the GOP’s own analysis concurred.¹²³ He had urged Dewey to pay greater attention to the farm vote and almost resigned over the issue.¹²⁴ Dewey later admitted to knowing little about farming concerns. Truman was also helped by the fact that most southern states remained loyal.

African Americans were eager that their role be recognised. The *Pittsburgh Courier* noted that Truman owed his success in Illinois, Ohio and California to the African American vote. It contended that African American

¹²¹ McCullough, *Truman*, p714. Polls carried out by the Democratic party itself invariably predicted a Truman victory. Gosnell, *Truman*, p407-409 H.L. Mencken, writer and professional curmudgeon, described Dewey’s defeat as “complete, colossal and ignominious.” Moos, *The Republicans*, p447. Taft commented ruefully that “the result of the election was a tragedy, largely because it was entirely unnecessary.” Patterson, *Mr Republican*, p425.

¹²² Abels, p290. These states were Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin. This situation in the Mid-west may have been different had Charles Halleck been the vice-presidential candidate instead of Warren.

¹²³ “The 1948 Election.” PRP, Part 2, Reports and Memoranda of the Research Division of the Headquarters of the RNC, 1938-1980, reel 1, frame 0772. Moos also emphasises the loss of the farm vote as the vital factor in Dewey’s defeat and notes that 682,382 people voted for congressmen but not for president. Moos p444-445.

support for Truman was because of his stance on civil rights and the recall of Congress: “to find out if Republicans meant what they said in their June platform.” The *Courier* also noted that most of the African American press had supported Dewey.¹²⁵ The *Chicago Defender* reckoned that 5,000,000 African Americans had gone to the polls and between 80 and 85% had backed Truman.¹²⁶ The NAACP calculated that Truman won 69% of the vote in African American wards.¹²⁷

The *Crisis* reckoned that African Americans voted for Truman by a margin of at least three-to-one. This was attributed to the president’s civil rights programme and the fact that he “risked his chances of securing the nomination at Philadelphia by defying the Dixie rebellion.” The Taft-Hartley law was also a factor as was the failure of the 80th Congress to enact civil rights legislation. In Dewey the Republicans had picked the best possible candidate from an African American point of view. Yet African Americans, like whites, “did not warm to him, did not trust him.” Furthermore, he failed to speak out on major issues meaning that “they did not know where he stood on their special interests and

¹²⁴ Thompson, *Lessons*, p107.

on general black problems.”¹²⁸ Dewey was further hampered by his low profile among African Americans outside New York. He did not help his cause by barely mentioning civil rights during the campaign.¹²⁹ One Harlem editor asserted that African Americans “felt if they didn’t support Truman no other politician would ever defy the southerners again.”¹³⁰

What should have been made abundantly clear to the Republican party was that they had to start winning African American votes if they were ever to harbour hopes of regaining the presidency. The best start they could make in this endeavour would be to rule out any further alliance with southern Democrats. Yet there remained a fear among African Americans that this alliance would continue to stymie civil rights legislation in the new Congress. The *Crisis* concluded that ultimately few African Americans voted for Wallace,

¹²⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 November 1948, NAACP, pt18, C, 18, 0355-0356.

¹²⁶ *Chicago Defender*, 13 November 1948, *ibid.*, frame 0358.

¹²⁷ NAACP press release, 27 January 1949, *ibid.*, frame 0374.

¹²⁸ Smith, *Dewey*, p524.

¹²⁹ The RNC sought to publicise Dewey’s achievements through advertisements in the African American press. McCoy and Ruetten, *Quest and Response*, p137.

¹³⁰ Richard Kirkendall, “Election of 1948,” in Schlesinger, *History of Presidential Elections*, 8, p3139-40.

suggesting the increasingly influence of Communists in the latter stages of his campaign as the reason.¹³¹

Brownell later recalled that “we thought Dewey would be elected, and we based out predictions not so much on the Republicans’ strength as on the Democrats’ weaknesses.”¹³² They believed that the splits in the Democratic party would ensure a Republican victory. Clark Clifford contended that everything the Democrats did was geared towards labour, the farmer, African Americans and the consumer.¹³³ Truman was most responsive to labour, at least partly due to Taft-Hartley but Abels argues that “the farm vote turned out to be the key to the election result.”¹³⁴ The Democrats were able to portray the Republicans as the enemies of the farmer, particularly after Stassen had accused the administration of keeping food prices high. Abels comments: “the Stassen charge was as disastrous to the Dewey cause as any single incident in the 1948 campaign.”¹³⁵

¹³¹ “The Election- And After.” *Crisis*, 55, December 1948, p361. The desire not to “waste” votes was almost certainly a factor as well.

¹³² Thompson, *Lessons*, p105.

¹³³ Abels, *Jaws of Victory*, p165.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p171.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p173.

Truman had not only rebuilt the Roosevelt coalition but he had also received more African American votes than his predecessor ever had. African Americans responded to Truman's policies as poor people as well as a minority group, believing that his stance on social welfare, as well as civil rights, would benefit them.¹³⁶ Truman was a genuine believer in civil rights and he was surrounded by a team of advisors who were not only sympathetic to this cause but also saw the political benefits of promoting it. It must also be borne in mind that African Americans had voted in greater numbers than ever before, but that should not detract from Truman's achievement. In the North the African American population had grown by 40% during the war and 80% of them voted for Truman.¹³⁷ Without the African American vote Truman would not have won the election. The threats from Wallace and Thurmond were contained, while Dewey's supposed liberalism did little to endear him to African American voters.

¹³⁶ McCoy and Ruetten, p144. For the Democrats' propaganda efforts among African Americans see McCoy and Ruetten, p139-140

¹³⁷ Albert D. Butler estimates that one and a half million people, almost all African American, left the South between 1940 and 1950. Butler, "Negro Migration from the South," in Vander, Progress of the American Negro, 1940-1963, p3.

The African American vote in 1944 had, on reflection, been vital to Roosevelt's success, but even armed with this fact the Republicans did not respond positively in 1948. It was as if the Republicans had learnt nothing from the experience. They seemed to believe their own propaganda: the election was already won and they did not have to court interest groups. Moreover, they seemed oblivious to their abject failure to regain the African American vote. Herbert Brownell, in spite of all the evidence he had uncovered to the contrary, later declared that "Dewey's success in attracting the support of black and ethnic voters was one of our sources of inspiration."¹³⁸ Brownell clearly recognised the importance of the African American vote and the need for the GOP to broaden its support but his advice was ignored. He, like many others, attributed Dewey's defeat to the farm vote, which was doubtless a factor, but his overall analysis is clearly flawed. Dewey did indeed win in Harlem in 1942, but he lost there in 1944, 1946 and 1948. This constitutes an emphatic, if perhaps unfair, reflection of the attitude of African American voters towards Dewey. Brownell was a sincere advocate of civil rights, but here his analysis has clearly

¹³⁸ Brownell and Burke, Advising Ike, p96.

been coloured by hindsight. Nevertheless, the rise to prominence of Brownell and Warren were the most positive aspects of the Republican defeat; as Attorney General and Chief Justice respectively, they were the source of the few constructive achievements on civil rights of the Eisenhower years. "Dewey had a complex about the Negro vote," concludes Abels, "which he had always courted in New York but never got."¹³⁹ Berman takes a different view, asserting that in 1948 Dewey's cause was hindered by "actively soliciting" southern votes.¹⁴⁰ "Perhaps," speculates Smith, "blinded by the hope of picking up southern electors, he ignored the issue." Abels disagrees: "Dewey and Brownell admit that they never entertained serious hopes of winning any state in the Solid South."¹⁴¹

Contemporary Americans were no wiser about where the governor stood on racial matters: 20% believed he would support federal civil rights legislation, 24% felt that he would leave it to the states to decide and a further 20% thought he opposed both state and federal action.¹⁴² This reflected the perception that Dewey had "no apparent interest in general ideas" and "no sign of an underlying

¹³⁹ Abels, p220.

philosophy.”¹⁴³ Truman was also a much better orator than Dewey: “Truman’s speeches were colorful, they had punch, crispness and were organised around the facts. They had lots of humor.” Dewey, on the other hand, “put everybody to sleep.”¹⁴⁴

Mayer believes that in 1948 the Republicans had “everything to gain and little to lose by spearheading the fight against discrimination” because they had no southern constituency and, therefore, little to lose by courting African Americans. He continues: “it required nothing more than a reactivation of a historic position that had been abandoned out of sheer apathy.”¹⁴⁵ The long-term effects of Truman’s victory were to make civil rights a part of urban liberalism and a legitimate political issue with people becoming increasingly sympathetic towards it.¹⁴⁶ African Americans now had higher expectations than ever and this was something that future presidents, especially Democratic ones, would have

¹⁴⁰ Berman, Politics of Civil Rights, p130-131.

¹⁴¹ Abels, p194.

¹⁴² Smith, Dewey, p524.

¹⁴³ Beyer, Dewey: 1937-1947, p241. “Dewey,” Benjamin Stolberg declared, “never knows more than he says.” Beyer, p241.

¹⁴⁴ Abels, p249.

¹⁴⁵ Mayer, “The Republican Party, 1932-1952,” in Schlesinger, History of United States’ Political Parties, 8, p2285.

¹⁴⁶ According to Sitkoff, post-election polls showed that more people than ever were in favour of civil rights. Sitkoff, JSH, 37, p615.

to take account of. In addition, the slow process of removing racist practices and the ending of segregation had begun.

Truman ultimately admitted defeat and postponed agitation for civil rights until the next session of Congress. By the end of his presidency Truman, presiding over a deeply split party, was much more interested in foreign policy. Nevertheless, Truman, “a reluctant liberal” according to Barton Bernstein, was the first president of the 20th century to embrace civil rights, however limited his goals and eventual achievements were.¹⁴⁷ The expectations raised by Truman would have to be dealt with by future presidents.

More generally, Abels believes that “the Republicans couldn’t agree on whether they had been chastised because Dewey was too far on the left or the Eightieth Congress was too far on the right.”¹⁴⁸ Many Republicans felt that the reason they lost was because the party was too keen to appropriate aspects of the New Deal. Others believe that it was the influence of the Old Guard and reactionaries that had caused their defeat. The majority of party members adhered to the view that the party offered “me too” policies to the voter rather

than more conservative alternatives. What was abundantly clear was that Dewey would not be running again.¹⁴⁹ It was reported that Taft was not too disappointed at Dewey's defeat, but he did not make these sentiments public.¹⁵⁰

Abels asserts that Dewey was philosophical in defeat, but there was residual bitterness from Republican congressmen over his coolness toward them during the campaign.

Many Republicans blamed the defeat on Dewey. Buddington Kelland, a Republican National Committeeman from Arizona, felt that the "Albany group" had too much influence: "it was not a campaign in any real sense of that word. It consisted in sending a train around the country to give the good people a chance to see the next president of the United States." He continued: "the Albany group provided the candidate with smug, shallow, insincere speeches" which were "contemptuous" to friend and foe alike and served to "stir up an avalanche of apathy." Kelland believed that it was a "bland and selfish campaign conducted solely for the benefit of the candidate" and ignored Republican members of

¹⁴⁷ Barton J. Bernstein, Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1970, p295.

¹⁴⁸ Abels, p276.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p277-278.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p278-279.

Congress.¹⁵¹ Kelland, however, had earlier agreed with the strategy of saying nothing controversial.¹⁵² Dewey put his defeat down to over-confidence but stated that he would remain the titular leader of the party. Politically the result was a disaster for the Republican party; they “snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.” Groucho Marx suggested a new strategy: “the only way a Republican is going to get into the White House is to marry Margaret Truman.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *NYT*, 16 November 1948, p24.

¹⁵² Smith, p525.

¹⁵³ Abels, p270.

CONCLUSION. The Deck or the Sea?

The Republican party has never been very enthusiastic about African Americans and their rights. Legend had it that the GOP was formed to rid America of slavery, fought the Civil War to achieve this end and then protected the newly-enfranchised former slaves in its aftermath. This was a powerful legend to African Americans living through the dark days of Redemption in the South, and it was a legend that many took North with them in the early 20th century. The abolition of slavery was, however, only one of a number of considerations that motivated the party's founders. The amendments to the Constitution that freed the slaves, made them citizens and gave them the vote were indeed Republican amendments, however, the Republicans who sought to protect African Americans were a minority in the party even in the 1860s.

During Reconstruction certain traits that would later become synonymous with the party had begun to emerge, namely that it was pro-big business and anti-big government. The Republican party, concerned with making America rich in the 1920s and then trying to rebuild the party from the wreckage of the

Great Depression in the 1930s, failed to react to the increasing political sophistication of African Americans. As late as the 1930s, many Republicans felt that because they had given African Americans freedom and Abraham Lincoln they were owed African American allegiance in perpetuity.

Why then did the Republican party lose the African American vote? Herbert Hoover's role is central. Hoover may have had more pressing matters to deal with in the aftermath of the stock market crash in October 1929, but it is difficult to imagine him doing any more damage to the party's relations with African Americans if he had deliberately set out to alienate them. For a start his southern policy was impractical and short-sighted. The southern vote for the Republicans in 1928 was a protest against the candidacy of Al Smith not an endorsement of Hoover, but he and his advisers mistook this protest for a fundamental change in the region's voting habits. The GOP would commit this error again nationally in 1938, 1942 and 1946 and each time it would fail to learn lessons or recognise a basic principle of American politics: with the exception of 1934, midterm elections always see a swing away from the party in power. In fairness, midterm elections are often good indicators for the next

presidential election, but the 1930s and 1940s were not a normal time in American politics.

Hoover gambled on the South in 1928. He gambled that he could break the Democratic stranglehold on the region, he gambled that he could make the Republicans a national party and he gambled that he could do this without alienating the burgeoning African American vote in the North. It was a gamble that initially seemed to pay off. In an uncanny premonition of the legendary "Roosevelt Coalition," Hoover briefly commanded the support of African Americans and white southerners. Yet he lacked the personality and the political dexterity, demonstrated by Franklin Roosevelt, to keep such an alliance in tact.

From the outset, Hoover's southern policy was built upon shaky foundations. Most southerners felt about as at home in the Republican party as African Americans did in the Democratic party. To many southerners, the Republicans were still the party of Reconstruction, black rule, carpetbaggers, scalawags and, of course, Abraham Lincoln. Even if the Republicans managed to surmount all of these problems, the party was an essentially paper

organisation in the South: it existed solely to send delegates to national conventions and receive patronage from Republican presidents.

African Americans were less outraged that Hoover wanted to reform the party in the South, the need for reform was self-evident, than the fact that he seemed determined to do this on a lily-white basis. Rather than attempting to create a two-party system in the South by enfranchising African Americans, who were natural Republicans, Hoover chose to embrace white southerners, to whom Republicanism was an anathema. Hoover's supporters argue that it was never his intention to rid the southern wing of the GOP of African Americans, suggesting that this was merely an unfortunate by-product of the reform. His harshest critics assert that he was intimately involved in the planning and prosecution of the reforms and was fully aware of the consequences the plan would have on African Americans. Hoover may not have been directly responsible for efforts to prosecute African American Republicans in the South, notably Perry Howard, without similar action against corrupt whites, but this still exposes southern reform as a racist sham.

Many Republicans in the 1920s and early 1930s felt that they had more to gain by breaking down the 'Solid South' than they did by courting the northern African American vote. Simple arithmetic and grade school history revealed this to be an inherently hazardous venture. The strategically placed African American vote in the North was potentially more important than the rotten boroughs of the South. Yet the Republicans persevered with this strategy to the extent that there was even a suggestion that Dewey preferred not to court the African American vote in 1948 in case he alienated the South. He won neither the African American vote nor the South and lost the election as a result. Perhaps the Republicans felt that they could not be a truly national party until they had established themselves in the South, perhaps they realised that very few votes were actually needed to win southern states. Perhaps they saw white southerners purely as fellow conservatives.

Hoover's actions as president reveal, at best, insensitivity towards African Americans and, at worst, a blatant and callous disregard for their feelings. There was a perception that Hoover simply did not care. By 1932 even Hoover's staunchest allies among African American Republicans were losing patience in

him. The Parker episode confirmed to many African Americans that the Republican party and Hoover could no longer be trusted. The nomination of an avowed and unrepentant segregationist to the Supreme Court by a Republican president was a grievous insult to African Americans. It provided further evidence that African Americans had to consider seriously their continued allegiance to the GOP. The campaign against pro-Parker senators illustrated to African Americans that they could wield political power and reinforced the notion that the ballot was their most effective weapon in their quest for change. The NAACP was happy to engage in battle with Hoover over Parker and the fight confirmed their mutual prejudice and mistrust.

A number of factors coincided to deprive the Republican party of the African American vote. The Hoover presidency is, of course, pivotal, but this does not fully explain it. Had the depression not occurred then there is the likelihood that the switch of the African American vote would have been delayed, although perhaps not ultimately prevented. Furthermore, the Hoover presidency and the depression coincided with the increasing number of African Americans living and voting in the North. This in itself would not necessarily

have been significant but for the concentration of the African American population. This meant that African American votes, although relatively few in number, assumed a greater importance with each election. African Americans also, for the first time, had an effective and articulate political outlet in the shape of the NAACP.

Hoover has always suffered in comparison to Roosevelt. One difference between them was that Roosevelt maintained lines of communication with African Americans and was much less dismissive of their spokesmen. This gave the impression of concern, although it rarely led to action, and meant that African Americans had a president who was listening to their problems if not solving them. Roosevelt recognised the value of symbolism and employed it to great effect throughout his presidency, whereas Hoover did not.

Throughout the New Deal, Roosevelt was happy to take the credit for the progress of African Americans without actually publicly advocating or supporting it. He remained sufficiently distant from perceived gains for African Americans to avoid overly offending the South, but Eleanor Roosevelt and the "Black Cabinet" associated him with reform in the eyes of African Americans.

This reinforces the notion that there were in effect two Democratic parties in the 1930s, and perhaps even two Franklin Roosevelts, a progressive liberal party in the North and a reactionary conservative one in the South.

The New Deal is crucial to understanding African American re-alignment.

Without the Great Depression there would have been less need and little support for mass federal intervention. The kind of economic intervention required to help African Americans was unprecedented and would have been politically impossible to implement without the seriousness of the crisis that engulfed all Americans in the 1930s. The social change that took place during the New Deal could not, therefore, have taken place under “normal” circumstances. If there had been any inclination towards progressive reform or genuinely reaching out to African Americans from 1920 to 1932 it would have been extremely unpopular. Under these circumstances, the lack of a reformist impulse in the Republican party is understandable. Nevertheless, the Republican party of the 1920s had little interest in the lowest echelons of American society, African Americans included.

The loss of the African American vote by the Republicans can, therefore, be explained relatively straightforwardly. The alienation African Americans felt from Hoover was compounded by the onset of the Great Depression; the Depression led to the election of Roosevelt and the benefits his New Deal brought to African Americans persuaded them to vote Democrat. The nature of Republican attempts to regain these votes, why they failed and why they did not do more are much more complicated. The Republican party was held responsible for the Depression and subsequently spent twenty years in opposition. The party had no cogent response to the New Deal, and spent the period split over it, isolationism and World War Two and then foreign policy after the war. The party had threatened to disintegrate on a couple of occasions, as it lurched from one crisis of confidence to the next. This does not justify the party's neglect of African Americans, but it does put it into context.

What then did the GOP do to reach out to this formerly loyal group of supporters? The simple answer in the early thirties is not very much. The shock of the Great Depression, magnified by resounding defeats in 1932 and 1934, left the party in turmoil. It was clear that the party had to change, but it was unclear

as to what change would involve or which faction of the party would dictate reform. Preoccupied with survival it comes as little surprise that the Republicans paid scant attention to African Americans during the early New Deal.

In the early 1930s many Republicans saw the need to change the nature of their appeal and some of the most vocal demanded that the party become more liberal. In the forefront of this was William Borah; he outlined articulately the reasons why the party needed to reconnect with the American people. Between 1932 and 1936 he frequently and passionately spoke out on this issue, indeed, he sought the presidential nomination in 1936 on the basis of it. Yet this was the same William Borah who stubbornly opposed anti-lynching legislation and in doing so alienated his party from the group of voters most in need of GOP liberalism. Borah's presidential bid may never have been very serious but, aside from Scottsboro, it roused African Americans like no issue since the Parker nomination. The NAACP claimed, and frankly deserved, much of the credit for the torpedoing of Borah's presidential ambitions. As with the Parker nomination, the Association had brought pressure to bear on the Republican

party and won. Borah's statements perhaps exaggerated the gap that had developed between the Republican party and African Americans, but the NAACP was able to exploit this. Borah's views did not reflect the party as a whole, but he was the sole Republican opposing the anti-lynching bill with any vigour, and much louder than any Republican supported it, and there is no doubt that his stance cost the GOP African American votes.

Anti-lynching should have been viewed as a moral issue and the Republicans could have easily embraced it without alienating their supporters. Some Republicans, however, linked it to states' rights and the extension of federal power and it was this fear of the growth of federal power that facilitated the rise of the conservative Republican southern Democrat coalition. This coalition was then able to thwart other legislation that would have been beneficial to African Americans, such as anti-poll tax laws and the creation of a permanent FEPC. The conservative nature of Republican politics in this period, and subsequently, meant that they had very little substantive policy that was attractive to African Americans and helps to explain the failure of the Republicans to recapture the African American vote. Republican economic

policy was not, therefore, designed to benefit the lower strata of American society, and this is where most African Americans resided.

The Republicans, nonetheless, remembered African Americans in time for the 1936 election. This election did see a change in the GOP's attitude towards African American voters, but equally, it saw a change in attitude of African American voters towards the GOP. African Americans voted overwhelmingly for Hoover in 1932, of that there is no doubt, but it was unenthusiastic support borne of political impotence. In 1932 African Americans had a choice of the party of the South or the party of Lincoln. In 1936 they could chose between the party of the New Deal and the party of the Great Depression. For the first time, therefore, they had a genuine alternative and this was something that some Republicans, including their candidate Alf Landon, realised.

The Republicans had a point when they warned African Americans that relief was not the solution to their problems, but it was difficult argue with food and jobs, particularly as this was more than twelve years of Republican rule had offered. Landon had a decent record on race relations in Kansas but there was little he could do in the face of the tangible benefits brought by Roosevelt.

Landon, and the Republicans, made many mistakes in 1936 but paramount among them, as far as African Americans were concerned, was the plan to give control of relief payments to the states, and this undoubtedly cost African American votes. The election of 1936 demonstrated that the Republicans could ill-afford to needlessly offend their remaining supporters, but the party's attitude towards relief made discrimination against African Americans highly likely.

After his defeat, Landon did maintain a commitment to African Americans from his position within the Republican hierarchy. In 1940 he advocated replacing older African American Republicans with more vigorous and committed younger men. He also believed that it was important to consult African American leaders in pivotal states. In 1944 he worked for a liberal "Negro" plank, hoping that this would not only bring African Americans back to the party, but would also expose Democratic hypocrisy. He also applauded Brownell's pledge to pay more attention to African American voters in that year, and in 1946 he advocated the complete integration of African Americans into the party set-up. Landon's commitment to African Americans, therefore, extended beyond electioneering in 1936, but it also coincided with the waning

of his, never great, reputation. Landon would forever be the man who led the GOP to the most humiliating defeat in its history, and, however well intentioned, his influence would always be circumscribed because of this.

The GOP's internal efforts at reform during the 1930s were haphazard and superficial, designed to create an illusion of unity rather than address the fundamental problems of the party. Perhaps the best example of this was the Frank Committee, set up after the debacle of the 1936 presidential election. The appointment of Ralph Bunche to examine the needs of African Americans suggested sincerity on the part of the GOP, but his findings were far too radical for the party. Indeed, they were radical by most standards in the 1930s, and were unsubtly replaced with a harangue against the New Deal. Overlooking African Americans would have been less damaging than patronising them. African Americans were not fooled, particularly as it was common knowledge that Bunche's recommendations had been ignored. An opportunity for the GOP to recommit itself to African Americans had been carelessly discarded.

It is ironic that it took Wendell Willkie, a former Democrat, to try genuinely to reconcile the Republican party and African Americans. Many,

including Walter White, dismissed Willkie's commitment to African Americans during the election of 1940; they had heard too many promises from too many Republican candidates in the past. Nevertheless, Willkie demonstrated throughout his remaining four years that he meant every word he had said on civil rights. For the first time, a major political figure, a potential presidential candidate again in 1944, spoke out on civil rights and disregarded the consequences. There is nothing to suggest that Willkie was being expedient. Neither is there anything to suggest that he embraced civil rights because he recognised that the southern white vote was unwinnable, nor is there evidence that he was looking towards the African American wards of Chicago, New York and Philadelphia solely because of their crucial votes. The evidence categorically confirms that Willkie vocally supported civil rights because he genuinely believed that it was the right thing to do. Willkie recognised that America could not fight a war for democracy abroad while denying thirteen million of its own citizens their basic democratic rights at home. Willkie, the grandson of political refugees, knew that democracy in the United States could not exist separate and unequal, it had to be a living reality for all Americans,

regardless of colour, creed or political ideology. The myths so often attached to Lincoln were briefly embodied in Willkie.

Willkie may have been the man to bring the African American vote back to the Republican party after 1940 but, regardless of whether he had lived beyond October 1944, he was unlikely to be given the opportunity. Many Republicans soon regretted their impetuous choice of presidential candidate in 1940, seeing him as an opportunist and a divisive influence, who was barely even a nominal Republican. Willkie's notion of "loyal opposition" during World War Two, which he embraced with the noblest of intentions, was characterised by his "One World" trip. This was a personal triumph but further alienated him from many within the GOP. Here was the Republican presidential candidate of 1940 gallivanting around the world, at the hated Roosevelt's request, during potentially crucial midterm elections. Many Republican activists felt that his priorities were wrong; that the president was using him and that his enthusiasm for internationalism was dangerous for party and country. In the Wisconsin primary in 1944 they told him so. He took the message and, true to his word, withdrew from the contest. The party did not even bother inviting

Willkie to the 1944 convention. He was never able to make good his vow to not only to be nominated in 1948 but also to win the election.

Willkie was undoubtedly the presidential candidate most committed to civil rights that either party had ever seen. His defeat in 1940 and subsequent alienation from the party's hierarchy suggest that, even if he had lived, a Willkie presidency was a very distant prospect indeed. Willkie did not, therefore, represent renewed idealism within the GOP, nor did he foreshadow a genuine commitment to civil rights. Pockets of racial liberalism remained in the party throughout the 1940s, Irving Ives, Jacob Javits, (both New Yorkers) and Wayne Morse all stand out, but the party could not shake off the perception that its assurances on civil rights did not extend beyond tokenism.

In 1948 Thomas Dewey had the best record on civil rights of any governor in the United States. New York's State Anti-Discrimination Commission (SADC) was the first law of its kind to combat discrimination against minorities in employment. It provided an example that other states and eventually the federal government would follow. Dewey publicly supported the law, even when many in the New York Republican party did not, and

demonstrated that Republicanism and social justice were not mutually exclusive.

Despite the SADC and measures against discrimination in higher education,

Dewey still could not win African American votes. In 1944, 1946 and 1948

African Americans rejected him: in 1948 this rejection cost him the presidency.

The blame for this lay with Dewey himself. In 1944, leading a party tainted by isolationism, he had the near impossible task of challenging a still popular president who had been further buoyed by allied victories. The American people clearly felt that the experienced Roosevelt was the man to guide them in the post-war world. On civil rights, Dewey was tarnished by his rejection of a prototype of the future SADC but in 1948, he had no excuses. Republican analysis after 1944 indicated that the African American vote in crucial states could dictate the outcome of a relatively close presidential election. The fact that this research was carried out by one of Dewey's closest political allies, Herbert Brownell, demonstrates that he was aware of just how important the African American vote would be if he sought the presidency again. In 1948 Dewey had an enviable record on civil rights but he failed to translate this into African American votes.

The most plausible explanation for Dewey's failure to court the African American vote in 1948 seems to be overconfidence. He felt that he had hampered his cause in 1944 by being too abrasive, and in 1948, ahead in every poll, he decided to act like a president in waiting rather than a candidate. He refused to rebuke Truman's often unfair attacks on his record and that of the "do nothing" Congress. His confidence was understandable, rarely can an incumbent have gone into an election with the problems Harry Truman had. Dewey assiduously avoided controversy and, in 1948, civil rights was controversial. It has been suggested that Dewey did not campaign for the African American vote because he felt that the GOP could make gains in the South, but this was never a realistic prospect.

The Republicans were utterly outmanoeuvred by Truman and consequently lost one of the closest elections in American history. One, among many, reasons for his defeat was the fact that Truman won 80% of the African American vote, a greater percentage than Roosevelt ever won. Overwhelming African American support for Truman would have been understandable if Dewey had had a reputation as a civil rights obstructionist, but Dewey was

hamstrung by his refusal to campaign on his record. His problem was as much about communication as commitment: even his own supporters did not know where he stood on civil rights. African Americans, even in his own state, assumed the worst.

Dewey had a great opportunity to win back at least some of the African American vote in 1948. African Americans, unshakeable in their support for Roosevelt, had been beginning to waver. They had voted for the man rather than the party meaning that the African American vote was potentially, and probably briefly, independent. Moreover, it would not have taken many African American votes to give victory to Dewey.

Republican ambivalence towards African Americans must be compared to the attitude of the Democrats during the same period. The Democrats, for example, only introduced a "Negro" plank into their platform in 1940, and this was even vaguer than the typically woolly efforts of the Republicans. It is also worth re-emphasising that although Roosevelt was extremely popular among African American voters he never championed their cause. Civil rights only finally became a national issue in 1948. Truman's initial reticence on the issue

evolved from genuine concern to expediency. Truman's advisers recognised that he needed the support of African Americans, and other special interest groups, if he was to be elected. Political calculation was, therefore, clearly a major factor in his championing of civil rights.

Harry Truman gave the credit for his victory in 1948 to the labour and farm votes. These were certainly factors but there may have been more to Truman's assertion than is immediately obvious. Clearly, one of Truman's priorities in his new administration would be the repeal of the Taft-Hartley law and labour was going to be his main ally in this endeavour. Truman could risk being associated with labour and, indeed, farmers as they were both extremely powerful interest groups, but African Americans were different. They received little credit for the Democratic victory outside of African American circles and, by effectively ignoring their contribution to his victory, Truman could refuse to accede to any of their demands. He made it very clear to Walter White in the aftermath of the election that he would not be pushing civil rights and implied that the African American vote was not an important factor in his election success. Truman's reticence is understandable: African Americans were not

nearly as useful allies as labour and farmers, particularly if the South was to be rehabilitated. This again calls into question Truman's earlier pledges on civil rights and reinforces the impression that he used the issue expediently. With the South more loyal than expected, one of Truman's aims was to reintegrate the region back into the Democratic party, and this was not going to be done by fulfilling pledges on civil rights.

In the 1950s civil rights would go through periods of activity and stagnation, and this coincided with the African American vote being seen as independent: over half voted for Eisenhower in 1956 before switching to Kennedy in 1960. In 1960 Kennedy ensured the African American vote would return to the Democrats when he famously telephoned Martin Luther King Jr. in jail. Ironically, this came after King Sr. had predicted that the African American vote would go to the Republicans. The election of Kennedy ushered in the most important period in civil rights history and throughout it, and as a legacy of it, the African American vote remained solidly Democratic. In the 1950s, when the solidity of the African American vote had momentarily fractured, action on civil rights on a federal level was, at best, fragmented and grudging. It was always

the hope of Walter White that the African American vote would not remain, what he termed, the “chattel of any one party,” and would vote along class and economic lines as other Americans did. The reality was, however, that African Americans had to vote as a block if they were to exert any influence. White’s pragmatic hope for the African American vote, therefore proved to be idealistic. To make any progress, African Americans had to sell their vote to the highest bidder; if the vote was not solid then it could not dictate the outcome in key states, and consequently the result of a Presidential election. And there lay African Americans’ best hope for equality.

Landon, Willkie and Dewey all had liberal reputations in race relations, and were altogether more progressive than their counterparts in the 1920s. Indeed, it should be emphasised that each had a better reputation than Roosevelt had on the issue. Part of the difficulty that they faced was that congressional Republicans were often at odds with their presidential candidates on specific and important areas of policy. In the 1930s and 1940s, progressive candidates were associated with conservative Congresses. The conservatism of Republicans in Congress is best illustrated by the NAACP’s anti-lynching

campaign. Of course, the main blame for failure lies with southern Democrats, but there was more that the Republicans, the original allies of such legislation, could have done.

Perhaps African American Republicans of the period held an unrealistic view of what their party actually represented. The party had, after all, paid little or no attention to their needs since Reconstruction. African American Republicans are often dismissed as old-fashioned and clinging to a mythical past. This certainly holds true for people such as Perry Howard and Emmett Scott, but for Robert Church and others like him the protection of the GOP was essential if they were to be able to continue to operate in the South. Church was much too experienced a politician to view the GOP nostalgically. His increasingly passionate pleas for action in the 1940s reflect not only the extremely limited options for southern African Americans, but also the disenchantment of a loyal party member exasperated at what the GOP had become. There was also a growing number of professional politicians among African American Republicans in the North, people such as Francis Rivers and Val Washington, who had established themselves within the party's hierarchy.

Rivers was the public and successful face of African American Republicanism. He could attempt to influence Republican policy from a relatively strong position within the party as he had the advantage of being close to Dewey and being genuinely highly thought of by him. Rivers's suggestions for the party were constructive but private; equally, his criticisms of the Democrats were articulate and valid. There was no need for him to publicly lambast the party as he could be assured of a hearing from Dewey. To some African Americans, his closeness to Dewey was a disadvantage and he was seen as being too influential in the development of policy towards African Americans. Nevertheless, Rivers's achievements both as a judge and a Republican were considerable.

Church, by contrast, had few of Rivers's advantages. Based in Memphis and, in effect, marooned from the Republican party's hierarchy, Church had to take his grievances to the press. This perhaps reflects his and, by definition, other southern African Americans' desperation, but it also illustrates that he still regarded the GOP as the main, if not the sole, protector of African American rights in the South. From Church's point of view, if the Republicans were not

prepared to protect African American rights then no-one would and, as a result, he sought to cajole, threaten and shame the party into action. Brownell certainly recognised that Church had a point, and even sympathised, but there was no enthusiasm within the party and the perception remained that there was little to be gained if it came to the rescue of beleaguered southern African Americans. There was also the possibility of breaking the Solid South. In the 1930s and 1940s this never approached the efforts of Hoover in 1928 but it still pre-occupied some Republican strategists in 1948.

Val Washington, like Francis Rivers, was an African American who operated from within the Republican party. Washington recognised that if the Republican party was to regain the confidence of African American voters then it had to improve its relationship with the NAACP. Washington was a member of the Association, as indeed was Rivers, and after his appointment by the RNC in 1946, wrote a courteous letter to Walter White suggesting that they meet to discuss ways of improving relations between the GOP and African Americans. White never saw the letter. It either did not arrive, was lost or was deliberately kept from him.

Washington's intemperate response to this perceived snub suggests that he did not have very high expectations about any meeting with White. It would undoubtedly have been a propaganda coup for the Republicans but it would have interfered with the Association's non-partisanship, always particularly jealously guarded where the GOP was concerned. Washington could at least say he had tried and he could, and did, cite White's failure to respond as evidence that the NAACP was backing the Democrats and had abandoned non-partisanship. White contemptuously dismissed the criticism. He was used to moving in grander circles and would deal with the GOP's national leadership rather than an "underling" like Washington.

African American Republicans, then, attempted to use their influence from within and outside the party's structures to bring it closer to African Americans and to bring their votes back to it. The record shows that these efforts were unsuccessful. The failure of Church's exertions would reinforce to African Americans that the party was not interested in their problems or their rights. Rivers's criticisms on the New Deal and the Democratic party were valid but ineffectual without a genuine, coherent and feasible alternative. Washington was

constrained by a limited remit from the party and the mutual distrust he shared with the NAACP.

Often derided as too conservative and out of touch by later civil rights' groups, the NAACP played a crucial role in the politicisation of African Americans during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. It gave African Americans a voice in national politics, it gave them a sense of their political worth and, through campaigns such as the anti-lynching crusade, it gave them a focus for their anger. Much of the credit for this must go to Walter White. Headstrong, impetuous and not afraid of making enemies, White, who was to all intents and purposes "white," but chose to live his life as a "colored" man in Jim Crow America, dominated and was the public face of the Association for a quarter of a century. Yet White's leadership is open to criticism. It can be argued that the anti-lynching crusade served to aggrandise the Association rather than stamp out the problem, or that it concerned itself with abstract goals which had little impact on day-to-day life of African Americans, or even that it was undemocratic.

Added to this is the perception, dealt with throughout the thesis, that the NAACP was abandoning its non-partisan roots in favour of an ever-closer alliance with the Democratic party, and in doing so was reducing the possibility of the Republican party taking any positive action on civil rights. All of this can be attributed to White's leadership, but to view these factors in an entirely negative light is to do White a disservice. He guided the Association through the Great Depression, the most serious crisis it had ever faced. He helped legitimise African American protest at a time when it did not have the strength or the confidence to take its grievances onto the streets and he helped to globalise the civil rights struggle. Nevertheless, White continues to be ignored by biographers and resented for ousting Du Bois from the Association.

Republicans were historically sympathetic to the plight of African Americans but were not prepared to take the action necessary to alleviate it. By the 1930s, the party's broader principles took precedence over an archaic and largely sentimental commitment to African Americans. Equally, African Americans maintained an emotional rather than an ideological attachment to the GOP. Federal intervention was, therefore, contrary to the party's beliefs in a

decentralised federal government and a balanced budget. Economics more than social policy wedded African Americans to the New Deal, and the economic conservatism of the Republicans alienated them from African Americans in the same way as it alienated them from other elements of the working class. In fact, the African American presence, as the poorest section of American society, was incongruous in a party of businessmen and conservative middle class whites. African Americans were, therefore, Republicans due to the lack of viable alternatives. The Republicans simply did not and could not espouse the liberal economic policies needed to improve the position of African Americans.

It is vital to recognise that civil rights was a fairly minor campaign issue until 1948 (and again until 1960). The Depression dominated the elections of 1932 and 1936, and was still a major factor in 1940. The war was the pre-eminent issue in 1940 and 1944, while the foreign policy and the domestic record of Harry Truman came under scrutiny in 1948. The plight of African Americans remained peripheral, but it did continue to grow in importance. The period saw African Americans recognise their electoral influence; eventually the national parties realised this and, in the case of the Democrats, acted upon it.

Moreover, throughout the period there was an erosion of the trust which African Americans had placed in the Republican party. The failure of the GOP to aid African Americans in the 1920s was exposed by the gains they made under an apparently hostile Democratic administration in the 1930s. It showed that not only were the Republicans' economic policies unsuited to the needs of African Americans, but also that their previous commitment had not extended beyond tokenism. At the height of the New Deal the Democrats, as the party of Bilbo, Byrnes and Smith, still did not constitute an alternative to the GOP. Most African Americans were still registered as Republicans in 1936, yet most voted for Roosevelt, and it was he rather than his party who African Americans supported.

The GOP platforms in 1940, 1944 and, to a lesser degree, 1948 were the most comprehensive ever offered to African American voters, yet they were rightly viewed with suspicion. Joe Martin later admitted that the pledge to create a permanent FEPC in 1944 was a blatant attempt to win back the African American vote. When this failed to persuade African Americans to abandon Roosevelt the GOP lost interest in the FEPC. Of course, part of the reason that

Republicans were wary of an FEPC was that many of their backers were businessmen who were likely to be affected by the new legislation, and business money was more important than African American votes. Perhaps this was part of the Republican dilemma: how to reconcile having the richest and poorest sections of American society inside the party. Prior to 1934 African Americans could be largely ignored, after all no-one, Republican, African American or Democrat, seriously expected them to vote for anybody other than the party of Lincoln. Besides, African American votes were simply not important enough to merit special attention. As the 1930s progressed and World War Two began the situation became more complicated. African American votes were now important and the Democrats wanted them. The uncomfortable truth is that Democratic espousal of civil rights was often no more genuine than the Republican.

The Republicans appeared temperamentally incapable of reaching out to African Americans. In the 1940s much of the blame for this lies with Robert Taft. Taft, bereft of any real empathy for those occupying the lowest economic strata of society, by definition African Americans, and motivated by a hatred of

Roosevelt and the New Deal, effectively controlled Republican domestic policy.

He had little interest in legislation of benefit to African Americans: he was, at best, lukewarm about anti-poll tax and anti-lynching measures and was not only downright hostile to fair employment legislation but was also viewed as the Republican most sympathetic to the South.

It is in some respects difficult to understand why the Republican party did not make more of an effort to regain the African American vote. The GOP was repeatedly warned that this constituency could determine the outcome of a presidential election yet it repeatedly ignored this advice. Exasperated African American Republicans, particularly Robert Church, pleaded with the party of Lincoln to make concessions to African Americans. Yet the party failed to respond positively. Expediency, pragmatism and arithmetic suggested that the Republicans should court the African American vote. African Americans were wedded to the New Deal by economics, but this did not necessarily prevent the GOP from advocating policies unencumbered by economics. Anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills were symptomatic of the Republican failure of African

Americans. Here were two issues, one symbolic and one practical, which could have demonstrated Republican goodwill.

Lynching and the poll tax were both extinct in the North and, therefore, would not have roused opposition from traditional Republicans in the region. There was also a very practical benefit if an anti-poll tax law was passed with GOP support: many southern African Americans still saw themselves as Republicans. This was a potential opportunity for the Republicans to tap millions of new voters and finally break the 'Solid South.' This would, of course, have required rebuilding the party in the region but the benefits could have been enormous. The fact the Republican party either did not recognise this or was simply not interested, points to an absence of idealism and a lack of good sense.

The Republican attitude to African Americans from 1928 to 1948 was characterised by ignorance, conservatism, ambivalence, tokenism and perhaps a lack of political judgement, but it was not characterised by hostility or overt racism. Unlike in the Democratic party, there were no public racists in the GOP. The political survival of no Republican member of Congress depended upon

racist appeals to his white constituents, yet too few were prepared to make even a perfunctory stand on civil rights. The party clearly could have done more. It could have advocated anti-lynching and anti-poll tax legislation and genuinely tried to pass it. It could have listened to the concerns of its own African American members. It could have attacked the blatant hypocrisy of the Democrats on civil rights, but it did none of these things. Lincoln bequeathed the loyalty of African Americans to the Republican party. In the 1930s and 1940s, this legacy was lost.

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