

Background Essay and Videos: President Truman and Civil Rights:

Was Truman influenced by moral, public opinion, national interests, or political advice to address Civil Rights issues?

Source: "President Truman and Civil Rights." Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. Web. 16 June 2015.
<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/desegregation/large/lessons/dseg.html>.

African Americans have fought in every conflict in American history. Almost always, however, they were segregated into their own units. The 54th Massachusetts in the Civil War, The Buffalo Soldiers of the plains, and the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II are examples of how these men fought with courage and valor in these units.

This practice did however limit the ability of African Americans to be promoted, to have equal treatment, and to be recognized for their contribution. After World War II, African Americans began to demand that they be given life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in equal portions as white Americans as the Declaration of Independence promised.



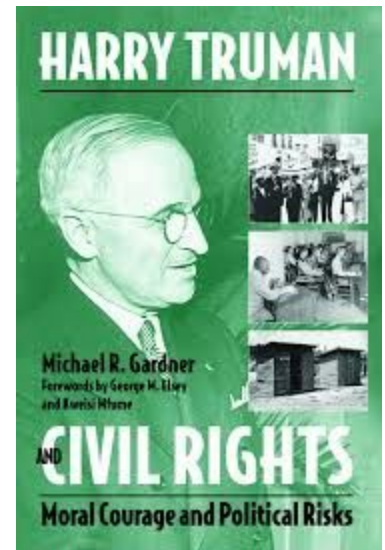
They could not have been encouraged that the President of the United States, Harry Truman, was known to have the prejudices of his community when it came to views of race. He used racial slurs, told racist jokes, opposed sit-ins and intermarriage and called Dr. Martin Luther King a troublemaker.

Whether he would act as President as he felt in private was not the question. It was assumed he would follow the lead of most other politicians of that time period and not show sympathy for African Americans' goals for equal treatment.

To the astonishment of many, including many in his own party, on July 26, 1948 Harry Truman made one of the biggest contributions to date for racial integration and equality. In issuing executive Order 9981 Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. These documents trace what some call the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. You will be asked to read, understand and work with these documents to answer the burning question: **Was Truman influenced by moral, public opinion, national interests, or political advice to address Civil Rights issues?**

Glossary:

Segregated - maintaining separate facilities for members of different, especially racially different, groups.



Student Hook

Look at the following photographs. What do you notice? What is different about the pictures?

What questions do you have about the pictures?



1945



1942



1950

Source 1

Letter from Mrs. Amelia A. Dixon to Harry Truman, March 12, 1948

Note: Mrs. Amelia A. Dixon from Walton, Kentucky, sent Harry Truman a letter encouraging him to issue an Executive Order that would desegregate the military.

Source: Folder: June 1948 [1 of 2], OF 93-B Truman Papers, Truman Library.

March 12, 1948

Dear Mr. President

I am not dictating to you. I am merely stating facts. If you want to be in the White House four more years be the man we think you are. You can win the re-election if you end racial segregation in the armed forces, discrimination in all federal departments and Jim Crowism in all the United States. You have the power to do that without new legislation. Be presumptuous. We Negro people will be you up. You can prevail, now is your probability. Send out your proclamation. You could start here in the White House, half of your body guards could be black. I served in World War II. I will gladly die before I will serve in world war III under the present conditions. This is the way we all feel.

Very truly yours,

Mrs. Amelia A. Dixon

Glossary

Jim Crow-a practice or policy of segregating or discriminating against blacks, as in public places, public vehicles, or employment.

Desegregate - to eliminate racial segregation.

Amelia Dixon Letter Questions

1. Who was the author of the document? (Circle the author's name and who they are.)
2. When was the document written? (Underline the date)
3. Who was the intended audience?
4. Identify the author's claims and evidence used to support the claims.
5. How does the author's language indicate the author's perspective?

Using the following code, mark evidence that would support one of the four motivation factors.

M=moral PO = public opinion NI= national interest PA=political advice

Source 2

Source: Letter, Roy Wilkins to Harry S. Truman, January 12, 1953, professing admiration for Truman's civil rights record during his administration, and Truman's thanks in reply, January 14, 1953. Papers of Harry S. Truman: Official Files.

January 12, 1953

President Harry S. Truman
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:



You must be receiving many letters and your hours in these last days of office must be filled with many duties, but I felt that I could not see you leave Washington without telling you how I feel about one phase of your administration.

I want to thank you and to convey to you my admiration for your efforts in the civil rights field, for your pronouncements and definitions of policy on racial and religious discrimination and segregation.

You have many accomplishments on record during your tenure of the White House (many more by far than is admitted publicly by the Republicans or the majority of the nation's press) but none more valuable to our nation and its ideals than your outspoken championing of equality of opportunity for all Americans without regard to race, color or national origin.

Mr. President, no Chief Executive in our history has spoken so plainly on this matter as yourself, or acted so forthrightly. We have had in the White House great men — great diplomats, great politicians, great scholars, great humanitarians, great administrators. Some of these have recognized inequality as undesirable, as being at variance with the democratic principles of our country; but none has had the courage, either personal or political, to speak out or act in the Truman manner.

You spoke, Sir, when you knew that many powerful influences in your own party (and in the party of the opposition) would not heed you. You reiterated your beliefs and restated your demands for legislation when political expediency dictated a compromise course. This is sheer personal courage, so foreign to the usual conduct in political office—high or low—as to be unique in the annals of our government. But it was worthy of the Presidency of the United States of America. No little man, no mere politician would have sensed the fitness of such conduct in the nation's leader.

Source 2 continued

President Truman--2

January 12, 1953

Your great desire was to achieve peace. Your sincere efforts toward this goal have saved us from a Third World War thus far and have laid a foundation on which others, if equally devoted, can bring peace to the world.

In urging that America erase inequality between its citizens, as citizens, you were outlining a component of the complex mosaic for peace in the world: the hope, dignity and freedom that democracies offer mankind in contrast to the offerings of totalitarianism. Your sure realization of the truism that preaching without practice would be powerless as a force for peace is a measure of the quiet greatness you brought to your high office.

As you leave the White House you carry with you the gratitude and affectionate regard of millions of your Negro fellow citizens who in less than a decade of your leadership, inspiration and determination, have seen the old order change right before their eyes.

Their sons are serving their country's armed forces in pride and honor, instead of humiliation and despair.

A whole new world of opportunity in education is opening to their children and young people.

The barriers to employment and promotion on the basis of merit have been breached and will be destroyed.

Some of the obstacles in the way of enjoyment of decent housing have been removed and others are under attack.

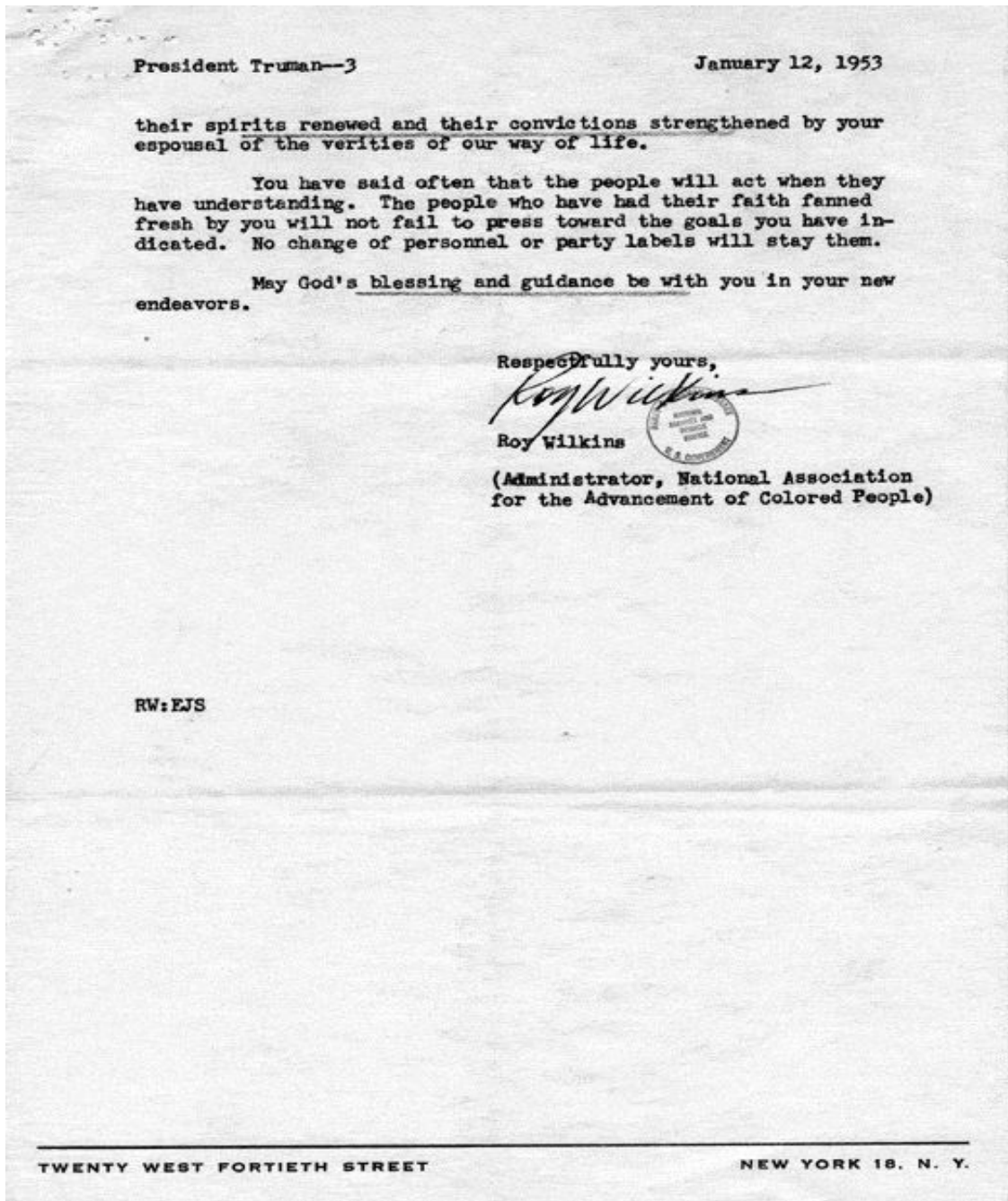
Restrictions upon the precious citizenship right of casting a ballot have been reduced and soon this right will be unfettered.

Some of the cruel humiliations and discriminations in travel and accommodation in public places have been eliminated and others are on the way out.

But in addition to these specifics, Mr. President, you have been responsible through the pronouncements from your high office, for a new climate of opinion in this broad area of civil rights. By stating a government policy, by relating that policy to the cherished ideals of our nation, you have recalled for the American people that strength of the spirit, that devotion to human welfare and human liberties, that made our country man's best hope for the things all men hold dear.

In their prayers for your health and long life, Negro Americans are joined, I am sure, by hosts of other citizens who have had

Source 2 continued



Wilkins Letter Questions- Pay particular attention to paragraphs 4 and 5.

1. Who was the author of the document? (Circle the author's name and who they are.)
2. When was the document written? (Underline the date)
3. What does the document claim?
4. What is the tone of the letter?
5. What do you think Truman's response was to the letter?

Using the following code, mark evidence that would support one of the four motivation factors.

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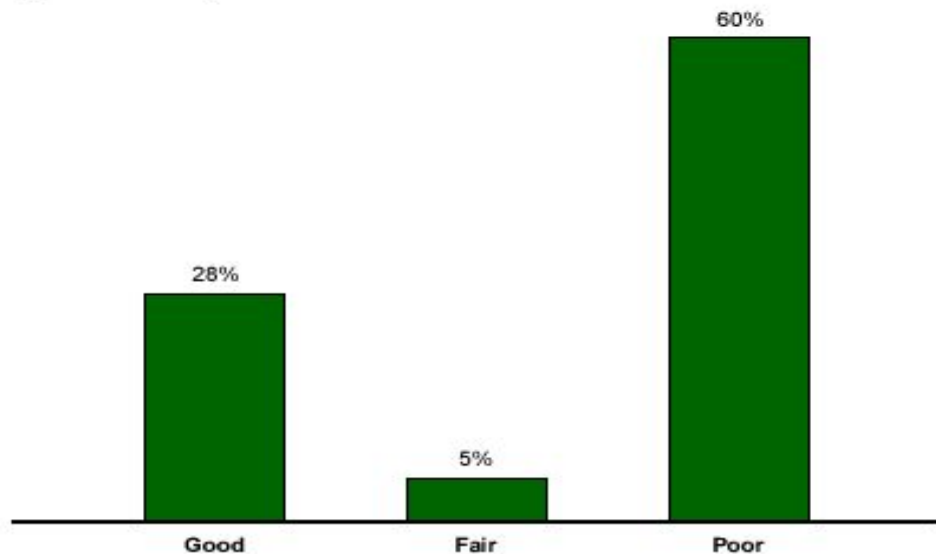
Source 3

Source: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/7444/Gallup-Brain-Strom-Thurmond-1948-Election.aspx>

The survey below was a nationwide survey given to the American public. But the public was clearly not ready to accept the idea of desegregation of the armed forces -- 63% thought that black troops and white troops should remain separated, while 26% thought they should live and work together. This issue was especially sensitive, since the memory of hundreds of thousands of blacks serving in the armed forces during World War II was still fresh in Americans' collective consciousness. Gallup is an American research-based, global performance-management consulting company. Founded by George Gallup in 1935, the company became known for its public opinion polls conducted in several countries. Gallup provides research and strategic consulting to large organizations in many countries, focusing on "analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems.

1948: Desegregation of Armed Services

It has been suggested that white and colored men serve together throughout the U.S. armed services -- that is, live and work in the same units. Do you think this is a good idea or a poor idea?



Gallup Poll Questions

1. What conclusions can you make about the public's view of segregation based on this graph?
2. What other questions would you have asked the public if you were the Gallup organization?
3. If you were Truman, how would you feel about this graph?

Using the following code, mark evidence that would support one of the four motivation factors.

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Source 4

Source: Correspondence Between Harry S. Truman and Ernie Roberts, a close friend from Independence, MO ; September 2, 1948. President's Secretary's Files, Truman Papers. Ernest Roberts was a business owner (Faultless Linen Supply Company in Kansas City, MO). Truman's letter is in response to Ernie's letter which addressed his view (and those he hoped Truman would have) regarding Truman's re-election, the status of the South and other national interests

August 18, 1948

Dear Ernie:

I appreciated very much your letter of last Saturday night from Hotel Temple Square in the Mormon Capital.

I am going to send you a copy of the report of my Commission on Civil Rights and then if you still have that antibellum proslavery outlook, I'll be thoroughly disappointed in you.

The main difficulty with the South is that they are living eighty years behind the times and the sooner they come out of it the better it will be for the country and themselves. I am not asking for social equality, because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings and, as long as I stay here, I am going to continue that fight. When the mob gangs can take four people out and shoot them in the back, and everybody in the country is acquainted with who did the shooting and nothing is done about it, that country is in pretty bad fix from a law enforcement standpoint.

When a Mayor and a City Marshal can take a negro Sergeant off a bus in South Carolina, beat him up and put out one of his eyes, and nothing is done about it by the State authorities, something is radically wrong with the system.

On the Louisiana and Arkansas Railway when coal burning locomotives were used the negro firemen were the thing because it was a backbreaking job and a dirty one. As soon as they turned to oil as a fuel it became customary for people to take shots at the negro firemen and a number were murdered because it was thought that this was now a white-collar job and should go to a white man. I can't approve of such goings on and I shall never approve it, as long as I am here, as I told you before. I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected that failure will be in a good cause.

Source 4 continued

- 2 -

I know you haven't thought this thing through and that you do not know the facts. I am happy, however, that you wrote me because it gives me a chance to tell you what the facts are.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN

Mr. E. W. Roberts
c/o Faultless Starch Company
Kansas City, Missouri

Note in longhand --

This is a personal & confidential communication and I hope you'll regard it that way - at least until I've made a public statement on the subject - as I expect to do in the South.

HST

(Envelope marked - Personal and Confidential)

Report enclosed - "To Secure These Rights" --
"The Report Of The President's Committee
On Civil Rights"

Ernie Letter Questions

1. Who was the author? (Circle the author and who they were.)
2. When was it written? (Underline the date)
3. Based on this letter how was America different from today?
4. What language does the author use to persuade the document's audience?
5. How is this letter similar or different from the Amelia Dixon letter?

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Source 5
NAACP: Audio

Source: Address before the NAACP (June 29, 1947) at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Note: Truman was the first President to address the NAACP.

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Instructions: As you listen to Truman's address, notice what Truman's main points are. Make a list of what Truman says about the Civil Rights movement.

NAACP speech questions:

- 1) Explain the importance of this speech.
- 2) How did his audience impact what he presented in the speech?

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Source 6

Source: Excerpt of Truman's Message to Congress, February 2, 1948

Note: This excerpt was part of a longer speech that outlined Truman's Civil Rights Program.

To the Congress of the United States:

Unfortunately, there still are examples--flagrant examples--of discrimination which are utterly contrary to our ideals. Not all groups of our population are free from the fear of violence. Not all groups are free to live and work where they please or to improve their conditions of life by their own efforts. Not all groups enjoy the full privileges of citizenship and participation in the government under which they live.

We cannot be satisfied until all our people have equal opportunities for jobs, for homes, for education, for health, and for political expression, and until all our people have equal protection under the law.

One year ago I appointed a committee of fifteen distinguished Americans and asked them to appraise the condition of our civil rights and to recommend appropriate action by Federal, state and local governments.

The committee's appraisal has resulted in a frank and revealing report. This report emphasizes that our basic human freedoms are better cared for and more vigilantly defended than ever before. But it also makes clear that there is a serious gap between our ideals and some of our practices. This gap must be closed.

Truman's Address Questions

1. Who was the author of this document? (Circle the author and who they were.)
2. When was the document written? (Underline the date)
3. What was Truman's purpose for this speech?

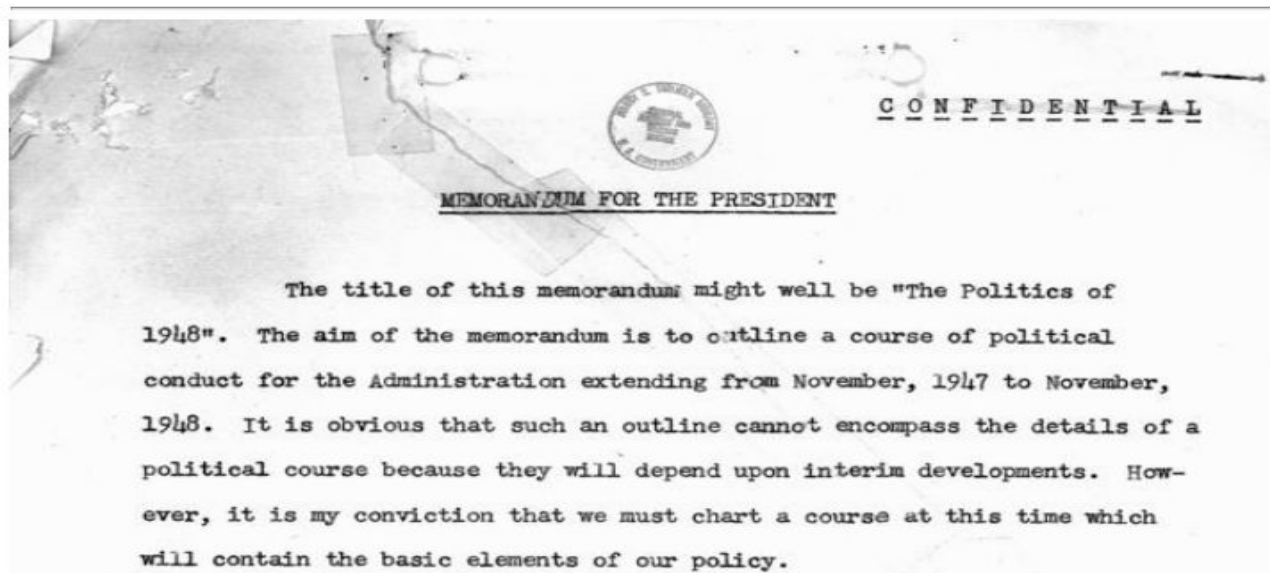
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Source 7

Note: Clark Clifford worked as Truman's White House Counsel from 1946-1950. Truman relied upon Clifford's advice. The following excerpt is part of a 50 page document confidentially written for Truman by Clifford on political issues at home and abroad. The document addressed not only the current status of issues such as housing, civil rights, and world affairs, but suggestions on how to respond to the issues in order to win the 1948 election. The sections included deal with civil rights.

Memo, Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1947.
Political File, Clifford Papers.



As well aware of this Democratic chink in the armour as the Negro are the Republican politicians. They make no great secret of their intent to try to pass a FEPC Act and anti-poll tax statute in the next Congress. Whether they are successful -- or whether Democratic filibusters will block them -- they can't see how they can lose in such a situation either way. The Negro press, often venal, is already strongly Republican.

To counteract this trend, the Democratic Party can point only to the obvious -- that the really great improvement in the economic lot of the Negro of the North has come in the last sixteen years only because of the sympathy and policies of a Democratic Administration. The trouble is that this has worn a bit thin with the passage of the years. Unless the Administration makes a determined campaign to help the Negro (and everybody else) on the problems of high prices and housing--and capitalized politically on its efforts--the Negro vote is already lost. Unless there are new and real efforts (as distinguished from mere political gestures which are today thoroughly understood and strongly resented by sophisticated Negro leaders),

(6) Civil Rights.

The Republicans know how vulnerable the Democratic Party is insofar as the negro vote is concerned. They have been bending every effort to woo the negroes away from the Administration's fold. In all probability, Republican strategy at the next session will be to offer an FEPC, an anti-poll tax bill, and an anti-lynching bill. This will be accompanied by a flourish of oratory devoted to the Civil Rights of various groups of our citizens.

The Administration would make a grave error if we permitted the Republicans to get away with this. It would appear to be sound strategy to have the President go as far as he feels he possibly could go in recommending measures to protect the rights of minority groups. This course of action would obviously cause difficulty with our Southern friends but that is the lesser of two evils.

Clifford Memorandum Excerpt Questions

1. Who was the author? (Circle the author and who they were)
2. When was it written? (Underline the date)
3. Identify the author's purpose in creating the document.
4. Did Truman follow the recommendations of Clifford? How do you know this?

Using the following code, mark evidence that would support one of the four motivation factors.
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