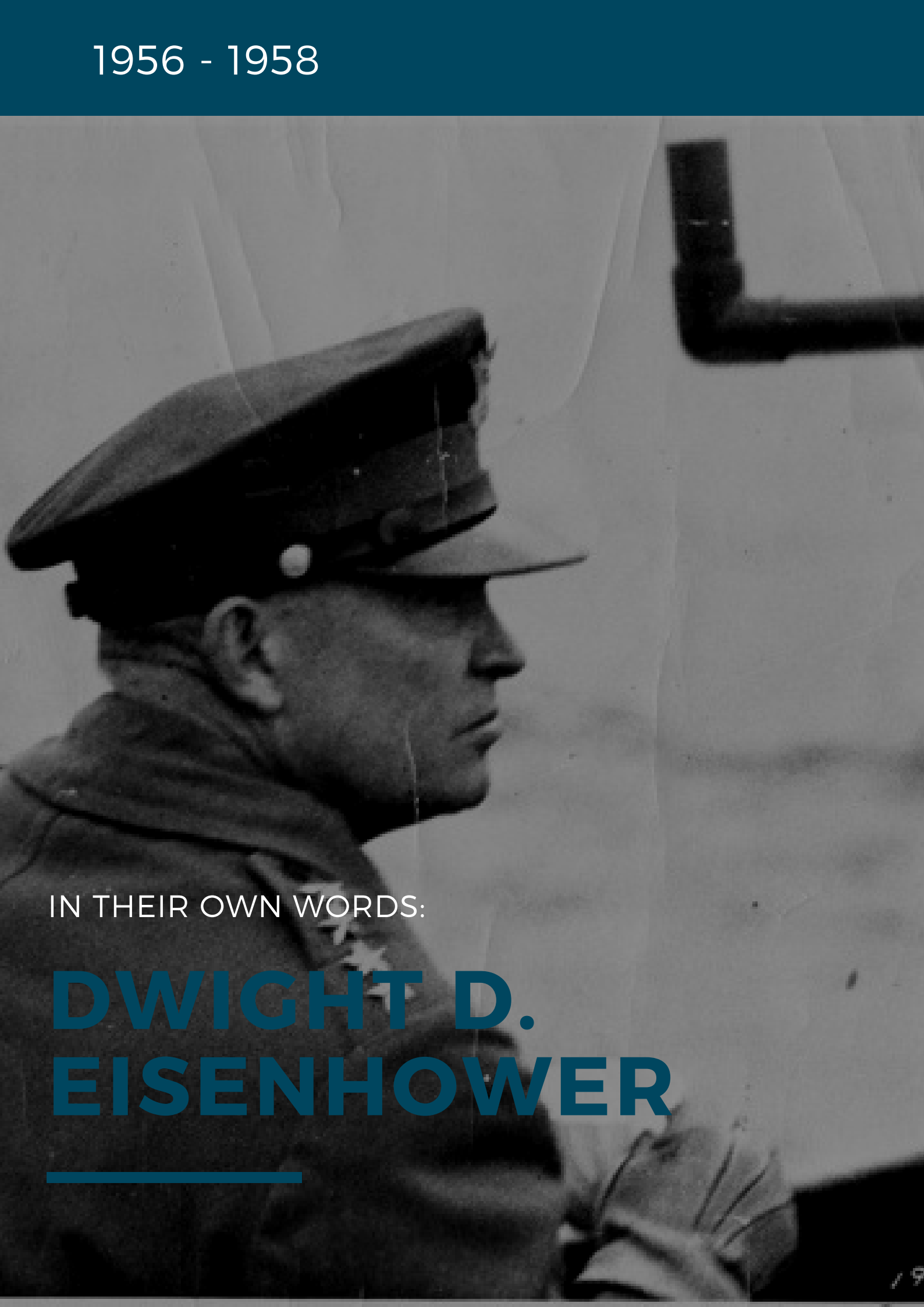


1956 - 1958



IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

**DWIGHT D.
EISENHOWER**

State of the Union Message, January 5

“We are proud of the progress our people have made in the field of civil rights. In Executive Branch operations throughout the nation, elimination of discrimination and segregation is all but completed. Progress is also being made among contractors engaged in furnishing Government services and requirements. Every citizen now has the opportunity to fit himself for and to hold a position of responsibility in the service of his country. In the District of Columbia, through the voluntary cooperation of the people, discrimination and segregation are disappearing from hotels, theaters, restaurants and other facilities.

“It is disturbing that in some localities allegations persist that Negro citizens are being deprived of their right to vote and are likewise being subjected to unwarranted economic pressures. I recommend that the substance of these charges be thoroughly examined by a Bipartisan Commission (to be) created by the Congress. It is hoped that such a Commission will be established promptly so that it may arrive at findings which can receive early consideration.

The stature of our leadership in the free world has increased through the past three years because we have made more progress than ever before in a similar period to assure our citizens equality in justice, in opportunity in civil rights. We must expand this effort on every front. We must strive to have every person judged and measured by what he is, rather than by his color, race or religion. There will soon be recommended to the Congress a program further to advance the efforts of the Government, within the area of Federal responsibility, to accomplish these objectives. ”

84th Congress, 2nd session, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1956, 51.

This “bipartisan commission” became the U. S. Civil Rights Commission, which was included in the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 412.

Cabinet Meeting, March 9

“I believe that [Attorney General] Herb Brownell should put forward what he has got here, but with a statement that many Americans understandably are separated by deep emotions on this subject [civil rights legislation]. One of the prime reasons for this is that, after all, another system was upheld by the Supreme Court for 60 years [Plessy v. Ferguson^[i]]. These people in the South were not breaking the law for the past 60 years, but, ever since the “separate but equal” decision, they have been obeying the Constitution of the United States. Now we cannot erase the emotions of three generations just overnight. . . People have a right to disagree with the Supreme Court decision – since the Supreme Court has disagreed with its own decision of 60 years standing – but, of course, the new decision should now be carried out. ”

[i] Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U. S. 537 (1896).

The President's News Conference of October 6

Q. "Douglas B. Cornell, Associated Press: Mr. President, Adlai Stevenson said in a civil rights speech in Harlem that you were trying to run on the Democratic record, that the Democrats started desegregation of the Armed Forces, and that the Republicans have made a brazen attempt to take credit for civil rights progress. Would you care to comment, sir?"

THE PRESIDENT. "Well, there have been since January 1953 a whole series of efforts directed toward assuring, in every area to which clear Federal authority extends, equality of opportunity for all people. This is applied to the Armed Forces, to Government contracts, to the District of Columbia, to all sorts of things.

"For example, long before the Supreme Court decision was handed down, the Defense Department and HEW had moved to eliminate segregation in schools on Army posts.[i] Sometimes we had obstacles, but it was done – all kinds of things.

"Now, it is perfectly true the problem of segregation in the service has been discussed, to my certain knowledge, for 45 years, because I was in the Army that long.

"When I joined the Army there were two infantry regiments that were Negro, and two cavalry regiments. Through the years we gradually got down into smaller units; that is, they were not segregated so completely, these larger units.

[i] See Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 241-250

“So far as I know, I was the first combat commander that ever used Negroes incorporated actually into white units on the battlefield. I did this in the winter of '44-45. Twenty-four hundred Negroes out of my command volunteered for front line service. They had been in service units.

“I organized them into squads, and some of them had Negro squad leaders, some white squad leaders. But they all got along together. They lived together in the same camping grounds, ate at the same messes. And General Patton, who, at first, was very much against this, became the most rabid supporter of the idea, he said, this way. Some of these white units, by the way, were southern units; this was the thing that convinced me that the thing could be done.

“But, of course, the Army and all the other services, in general were somewhat against it because they thought they would get into trouble; and, of course, you do have some trouble in your social events on a Post. You have dances for a company. Well, when you begin to mix in that social order, and you have both Negroes and whites, at first there was some trouble. Gradually, it was ironed out, and the progress went ahead.

When we came in, in '53, it looked to us like it was time to take the bull by the horns, and eliminate it all; and that is what we have done.”

The President's News Conference of October 11

Question, Charles W. Roberts, Newsweek: “On September 5 you stated that it was not important whether you endorsed the Supreme Court’s decision on integration so long as it was enforced. Since then a number of people, mostly Democrats, have said that it is important whether you endorse the decision. Could you amplify your position on that?”

The President: “Look, I put it this way: We start out with article I of the Constitution, and we go on right down to the end, including its amendments, and the Constitution as it is interpreted by the Supreme Court, I am sworn to uphold it.

“I don’t ask myself whether every single phrase of that Constitution, with all its amendments, are exactly what I agree with or not.

“I am sworn to uphold it, and that is what I intend to do. ”

Address at International Airport, Miami, Florida, October 29

“Four years ago I pledged that as President of all the people, I would use every proper influence of my office to promote for all citizens that equality before the law and of opportunity visualized by our founding fathers. I promised further to do this with conviction that progress toward equality had to be achieved finally in the hearts of men rather than in legislative halls. I urged then, as I urge now, the handling of this question to the greatest possible extent on a local and state basis. ”

State of the Union Message, January 10

“High priority should be given the school construction bill. This will benefit children of all races throughout the country – and children of all races need schools now. A program designed to meet emergency needs for more classrooms should be enacted without delay. I am hopeful that the program can be enacted on its own merits, uncomplicated by provisions dealing with the complex problems of integration. I urge the people in all sections of the country to approach these problems with calm and reason, with mutual understanding and good will, and in the American tradition of deep respect for the orderly processes of law and justice.

President Eisenhower Dwight D. Eisenhower visits Naples, Italy. Eisenhower returning from a small craft after being brought from a destroyer in the harbor. March 2, 1944. Credit: USS Biscanye (AVP-11), United States Navy. National Museum of the U.S. Navy. Photograph. Accession 80-G-58290. <https://www.history.navy.mil>



“I should say here that we have much reason to be proud of the progress our people are making in mutual understanding – the chief buttress of human and civil rights. Steadily we are moving closer to the goal of fair and equal treatment of citizens without regard to race or color. But unhappily much remains to be done.

“Last year the Administration recommended to the Congress a four-part program to reinforce civil rights. That program included:

(1) “creation of a bipartisan commission to investigate asserted violations of civil rights and to make recommendations;

(2) “creation of a civil rights division in the Department of Justice in charge of an assistant attorney general.

(3) “enactment by the Congress of new laws to aid in the enforcement of voting rights; and

(4) “amendment of the laws so as to permit the Federal Government to seek from the civil courts preventive relief in civil rights cases.

“I urge that Congress enact this legislation. ”

The President's News Conference of June 19

Question: “Mr. President, your civil rights bill, sir, has passed the House, now faces action in the Senate, and there it seems that delaying tactics and probably a filibuster may stop it. ”

The President: “The point hasn't come up, and I have not discussed that with the leaders. Normally, I do not comment on the procedures of either Senate or House action, because it is their business, and it is not for me to interfere to say how they shall do things.

“Now, I would like to say one word about my concept of this civil rights action. That civil rights action bill was designed and conceived in the thought of conciliation and moderation, not of persecution of anybody. “It seems to me that after the unanimous decision by the Supreme Court about segregation many things could have happened. You will recall that at that time I was asked questions right here in this group: did I contemplate sending the Army into the South to enforce this decision?

“There was a great deal of stir, and it was time, as I saw it, for moderation and the development of a plan that everybody of good will could support.

“Now, I have been very badly disappointed that some people see in this program an opportunity to disturb their own rights, or to interfere in their own social order, in an unjust and improper way. To my mind, this is a very moderate, decent thing to do, and I hope that some thinking on the part of all of us will lead others to believe the same way. ”

Statement on the Objectives of the Civil Rights Bill, July 16

I am gratified that the Senate, by a vote of 71 to 18, has now made H. R. 6127 the pending order of business before that body.

This legislation seeks to accomplish these four simple objectives:

1. To protect the constitutional right of all citizens to vote regardless of race or color. In this connection we seek to uphold the traditional authority of the Federal courts to enforce their orders. This means that a jury trial should not be interposed in contempt of court cases growing out of violations of such orders.
2. To provide a reasonable program of assistance in efforts to protect other constitutional rights of our citizens.
3. To establish a bi-partisan Presidential commission to study and recommend any further appropriate steps to protect these constitutional rights.
4. To authorize an additional Assistant Attorney General to administer the legal responsibilities of the federal Government involving civil rights.

The details of language changes are a legislative matter. I would hope, however, that the Senate, in whatever clarification it may determine to make, will keep the measure an effective piece of legislation to carry out these four objectives – each one of which is consistent with simple justice and equality afforded to every citizen under the Constitution of the United States.

I hope that Senate action on this measure will be accomplished at this session without undue delay.

Letter to Captain E. E. “Swede” Hazlett, July 22

“I think that no single event has so disturbed the domestic scene in many years as did the Supreme Court’s decision in 1954 in the school desegregation case. That decision and similar ones earlier and later in point of time have interpreted the Constitution in such a fashion as to put heavier responsibilities than before on the Federal Government in the manner of assuring each citizen his guaranteed constitutional rights. . . . There must be respect for the Constitution – which means the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution – or we shall have chaos. . . . This I believe with all my heart – and shall always act accordingly.”



President Dwight Eisenhower chats with President Harry S. Truman and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes at an airfield in Brussels, Belgium. July 15, 1945. Credit: Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 96-11. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.”

Personal letter from the President to Captain E. E. “Swede” Hazlett, Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 25, July 1957, DDE Dictation, 22 July 1957, DDEL.

Statement by the President on the Civil Rights Bill, August 2

“My first reaction to this vote in the Senate last night is to extend my sincere appreciation to Senator Knowland [i] and to those Senators who stood with him in valiant and persistent efforts to bring to all of our citizens protection in their right to vote—a protection of which many are now deprived.

“Rarely in our entire legislative history have so many extraneous issues been introduced into the debate in order to confuse both legislators and the public.

“The result cannot fail to be bitterly disappointing to those many millions of Americans who realized that without the minimum protection that was projected in Section 4 of the bill as it passed the House of Representatives, many fellow Americans will continue, in effect, to be disenfranchised. [ii]

“Finally, no American can fail to feel the utmost concern that an attempt should be made to interpose a jury trial between a Federal judge and his legal orders. During our history as a nation, great Americans have pointed out that such a procedure would weaken our whole judicial system and particularly the prestige of the Federal judiciary. In this case it will make largely ineffective the basic purpose of the bill—that of protecting promptly and effectively every American in his right to vote. ”

[i] William F. Knowland of California, as Senate minority leader, was a champion in the fight for the enactment of the 1957 Civil Rights Act. See, among others, 5/9/57 in vol. 5, and Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 364, 378-79, 399.

[ii] Part 4 of the civil rights bill gave the attorney general authority to seek injunctions in court to protect Fifteenth Amendment rights. See 4/4/57; in vol. 5 appendix, “Justice Samuel J. Ervin, Jr., and Contempt,” 4/2/57, and “Civil Rights and Injunctions,” 4/30/57; also, Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 365.


Address at a National Newspaper Publishers Association Luncheon, May 13

“Because of the problems that have been raised about the issue of racial discrimination and indeed any other types of discrimination, we have to be interested. We must be interested. We must do something about the constitutional rights of the individual. To my mind, every American whatever his religion, his color, his race, or anything else, should have exactly the same concern for these matters as does any individual who may have felt embarrassment or resentment because those rights have not been properly observed. So it means that every American, if we are true to our constitutional heritage, must have respect for the law. He must know that he is equal before the law. He must have respect for the courts. He must have respect for others. He must make perfectly certain he can, in every single kind of circumstance, respect himself.

“In such problems as this, there are no revolutionary cures. They are evolutionary. I started in the Army in 1911. I have lived to see the time come when in none of the armed services is practiced any kind of discrimination because of race, religion, or color. In the Federal Government this same truth holds steady. In laws we have seen enacted those affecting the rights of voting. They are, let us pray, to be observed exactly as any other law passed and published by the Congress.

“Such things as these mean progress. But I do believe that as long as they are human problems—because they are buried in the human heart rather than ones merely to be solved by a sense of logic and of right—we must have patience and forbearance. We must depend more on better and more profound education than simply on the letter of the law. We must make sure that enforcement will not in itself create injustice.

1958



I do not decry laws, for they are necessary. But I say that laws themselves will never solve problems that have their roots in the human heart and in the human emotions. It is because of this very reason that I am more hopeful that we will, as the years go past, speak to each other only as Americans without any adjectives to describe us as special types of Americans. . I am hopeful that we will see ourselves as equals before the law, equal in economic and every other kind of opportunity that is open to any other citizen. It is because education and understanding and betterment of human people can bring these things about, that I am hopeful. ”

Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 5/16/58, 622.

President Eisenhower acknowledges the crowd of bystanders during his visit to the White House. November 18, 1952. Credit: Abbie Rowe, National Park Service. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 96-11. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.”