

1941-1944

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

---

*Franklin D.  
Roosevelt*



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## Memorandum Condemning Discrimination in Defense Work, June 12

“Complaints have repeatedly been brought to my attention that available and much-needed workers are being barred from defense production solely because of race, religion, or national origin. It is said that at a time when labor stringencies are appearing in many areas, fully qualified workers are being turned from the gates of industry on specifications entirely unrelated to efficiency and productivity. Also that discrimination against Negro workers has been nation-wide and other minority racial, national, and religious groups have felt its effects in many localities.

“I note with satisfaction that the Office of Production Management has recognized the seriousness of this situation, and that on April 11, 1941, it addressed a letter on the subject to all holders of defense contracts. As Chief Executive of the Nation I place the full support of my office behind your statement to the effect that ‘All holders of defense contracts are urged to examine their employment and training policies at once to determine whether or not these policies make ample provision for the full utilization of available and competent Negro workers. Every available source of labor capable of producing defense materials must be tapped in the present emergency.’

“No Nation combating the increasing threat of totalitarianism can afford arbitrarily to exclude large segments of its population from its defense industries. Even more important is it for us to strengthen our unity and morale by refuting at home the very theories which we are fighting abroad.

“Our Government cannot countenance continued discrimination against American citizens in defense production. Industry must take the initiative in opening the doors of employment to all loyal and qualified workers regardless of race, national origin, religion, or color. American workers, both organized and unorganized, must be prepared to welcome the general and much needed employment of fellow workers of all racial and nationality origins in defense industries.

“In the present emergency, it is imperative that we deal effectively and speedily with this problem. I shall expect the Office of Production Management to take immediate steps to facilitate the full utilization of our productive manpower. ”



"Franklin D. Roosevelt with Winston Churchill in Casablanca, Morocco." January 22, 1943. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 48223628(32).  
<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Memorandum Condemning Discrimination in Defense Work, June 12, 1941." Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.usb.edu/wis/?pid=16129>. The memorandum was addressed to William S. Knudsen (1879-1948) and Sidney Hillman (1887-1946), members of the staff of the Office of Production Management.

**Memorandum for William S. Knudsen and Sidney Hillman  
[codirectors, Office of Production Management] June 12**

“Complaints have repeatedly been brought to my attention that available and much-needed workers are being barred from defense production solely because of race, religion, or national origin. It is said that at a time when labor stringencies are appearing in many areas, fully-qualified workers are being turned from the gates of industry on specification entirely unrelated to efficiency and productivity. Also that discrimination against Negro workers has been nation-wide, and other minority, racial, national, and religious groups have felt its effects in many localities. This situation is a matter of grave national importance, and immediate steps must be taken to deal with it effectively.

I note with satisfaction that the Office of Production Management has recognized the seriousness of this situation, and that on April 11, 1941, it addressed a letter on the subject to all holders of defense contracts. As Chief Executive of the Nation I place the full support of my office behind your statement to the effect that, “All holders of defense contracts are urged to examine their employment and training policies at once to determine whether or not these policies make ample provision for the full utilization of available and competent Negro workers. Every available source of labor capable of producing defense materials must be tapped in the present emergency.”

No nation combating the increasing threat of totalitarianism can afford arbitrarily to exclude large segments of its population from its defense industries. Even more important is for us to strengthen our unity and morale by refuting at home the very theories which we are fighting abroad.

“Our government cannot countenance continued discrimination against American citizens in defense production. Industry must take the initiative in opening the doors of employment to all loyal and qualified workers regardless of race, national origin, religion or color. American workers, both organized and unorganized, must be prepared to welcome the general and much-needed employment of fellow-workers of all racial and nationality origins in defense industries.

“In the present emergency, it is imperative that we deal effectively and speedily with this problem. I shall expect the Office of Production Management to take immediate steps to facilitate the full utilization of our productive manpower. ”



"TVA Production: Elemental Phosphorus. A Negro worker tending an electric phosphite smelting furnace which is producing elemental phosphorus at a TVA chemical plant in the Muscle Shoals area." June 1942. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 66275(62).  
<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

**Executive Order 8802—Reaffirming Policy of Full Participation in the Defense Program By All Persons, Regardless of Race, Creed, Color, or National Origin, and Directing Certain Action in Furtherance of Said Policy, June 25**

“WHEREAS it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

“WHEREAS there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in certain industries engaged in defense production solely because of consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin, for the detriment of workers’ morale, and of national unity.

“NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations, in furtherance of said policy and of this Order, to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.



“And it is hereby ordered as follows:

“1. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational aid training programs for defense production shall take special measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

“2. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all defense contracts hereafter negotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

“3. There is established in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, which shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed. The Chairman and members of the Committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall be entitled to actual and necessary transportation, subsistence, and other expenses incidental to performance of their duties. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this Order and shall take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies which it finds to be valid. The Committee shall also recommend to the several departments and agencies of the Government of the United States and to the President all measures which may be deemed by it necessary or proper to effectuate the provisions of this Order. ”



**Executive Order 8823, Providing for an Additional Member of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice in the Office of Production Management, Established by Section 3 of Executive Order No. 8802 of June 25, 1941, July 18**

“By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes, section 3 of Executive Order No. 8802 of June 25, 1941 establishing in the Office of Production Management a Committee on Fair Employment Practice consisting of a chairman and four other members, is hereby amended to provide that the Committee shall consist of a chairman and five other members. ”



"Photographic Section-Information Service-Works Progress Administration-Washington, D.C. A man at work with Jack-hammer." 1935. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 53227(1957). <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

EO 8823, Providing for an Additional Member of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice in the Office of Production Management, Established by Section 3 of Executive Order No. 8802 of June 25, 1941. Minorities in Defense, FEPC, U. S., ODM, Division of Labor Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1941.

**Letter to Mark Etheridge, chairman, FEPC, September 3, 1941**

Please accept my thanks for your letter of August 29, to which I have given careful consideration. This will inform you that I have approved the Committee's recommendation. I am, therefore, today forwarding to the heads of all departments and independent establishments a letter emphasizing the necessity of impartial administration of the Federal Civil Service, entirely without prejudice based on creed, race, or national origin. I enclose a copy.

“May I, in advising you of my approval, ask you to convey to the members of the Committee an assurance of my heartfelt appreciation of their conscientious work, which I trust will contribute vitally to the solution of a grave problem.”

The text of the letter which the President sent to the heads of all departments and independent establishments follows:

“To Heads of ALL Departments and Independent Establishments:

“It has come to my attention that there is in the Federal establishment a lack of uniformity and possibly some lack of sympathetic attitude toward the problem of minority groups, particularly those relating to the employment and assignment of Negroes in the Federal Civil Service.

“With a view to improving the situation, it is my desire that all departments and independent establishments in the Federal Government make a thorough examination of their personal policies and practices to the end that they may be able to assure me that in the Federal Service the doors of employment are open to all loyal and qualified workers regardless of creed, race, or national origin.

“It is imperative that we deal with this problem speedily and effectively. I shall look for immediate steps to be taken by all departments and independent establishments of the Government to facilitate and put into effect this policy of nondiscrimination in Federal employment. ”



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1942

**Excerpts from the Press Conference, February 13**

Q. Mr. President, did you see Secretary [Claude R. ] Wickard's statement that the F. S. A. has not been paying poll taxes?

THE PRESIDENT: "I did. "

"These tenant people, these people who come under Federal grants have a budget which includes everything, every necessity of life. It includes food, includes clothing, includes a bed to sleep in, and it includes taxes of all kinds. And in these budgets they allow people to put down one form of tax, which is a poll tax.

"This controversy reminds me of the time seven or eight years ago, when there was a drive in this country to prevent anybody on W. P. A. from voting. Now that is an awfully good parallel. Why, there were cheers and yells from a certain type of mind in the country when it was proposed that persons, because they were poor, would have to be cut out from the right to vote."

Q. "Mr. President, do you approve of the poll tax in principle? Do you think it's a sound tax, anyway?"

THE PRESIDENT: "I suppose the best thing to do is quote the war editor of the Montgomery, Alabama, Journal and let him talk to you. "

(Reading): "No one questions the wisdom of the Alabama law which prohibits anyone from paying another's poll tax. It might be a good—"

“And mind you that is a state tax.”

“—it might be a good thing if it were enforced generally in the South, but the law does not forbid a farmer or anyone else to go to his bank and borrow money to pay his taxes – poll taxes or no poll taxes. Why then all the fuss about the F. S. A. which is the only bank available to many farmers?”

Q. “Do you think the poll tax in itself, Mr. President, has kept the poor people in the past from voting in the past?”

THE PRESIDENT: “Yes, of course it has. ”

Q. “Do you think that is a good idea?”

THE PRESIDENT: “No. I have been opposed to a poll tax all my life. ”

Woolley and Peters, The American Presidency Project, “Excerpts from Press Conference, 2/13/42.

The issue was whether or not the federal government was paying the poll tax, levied by some southern states, for tenant farmers. To this question, Roosevelt answered, no, while at the same time supporting the program under which the Farm Security Administration provided loans to the farmers so that they themselves could pay the tax in order to be able to vote. NYT, 2/14/42, 1, 32.

See also “The Struggle to Abolish the Poll Tax,” vol. III, ccxxix- ccliv.



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### **Executive Order 9346—Establishing a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, May 27**

“In order to establish a new Committee on Fair Employment Practice, to promote the fullest utilization of all available manpower, and to eliminate discriminatory employment practices, Executive Order No. 8802 of June 25, 1941, as amended by Executive Order No. 8823 of July 18, 1941, is hereby further amended to read as follows:

“Whereas it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

“Whereas there is evidence that available and needed workers have been barred from employment in certain industries engaged in defense production solely because of consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin, for the detriment of workers’ morale, and of national unity.

“Whereas it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the war effort by all persons in the United States regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders; and

“Now, Therefore, by virtue by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statutes, and as President of the United States and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of any person in war industries or in Government by reason of race, creed, color, or national origin, and I do hereby declare that it is the duty of all employers, including the several Federal departments and agencies, and all labor organizations, in furtherance of this policy and of this order, to eliminate discrimination in regard to hire, tenure, terms, or conditions of employment, or union membership because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

“It is hereby ordered as follows:

“1. All contracting agencies of the Government of the United States shall include in all contracts hereafter negotiated or renegotiated by them a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin and requiring him to include a similar provision in all subcontracts.

“2. All departments and agencies of the Government of the United States concerned with vocational and training programs for war production shall take all measures appropriate to assure that such programs are administered without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

“3. There is hereby established in the Office for Emergency Management of the Executive Office of the President a Committee on Fair Employment Practice, hereinafter referred to as the Committee, which shall consist of a Chairman and not more than six other members to be appointed by the President. The chairman shall receive such salary as shall be fixed by the President not exceeding \$10,000 per year. The other members of the Committee shall receive necessary traveling expenses and, unless their compensation is otherwise prescribed by the President, a per diem allowance not exceeding \$25 per day and subsistence expenses on such days as they are actually engaged in the performance of duties pursuant to this Order.

“4. The Committee shall formulate policies to achieve the purposes of this Order and shall make recommendations to the various Federal departments and agencies and to the President which it deems necessary and proper to make effective the provisions of this Order. The Committee shall also recommend to the Chairman of the War Manpower Commission appropriate measures for bringing about the full utilization and training of manpower in and for war production without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.

“5. The Committee shall receive and investigate complaints of discrimination forbidden by this Order. It may conduct hearings, make findings of fact, and take appropriate steps to obtain elimination of such discrimination.

“6. Upon the appointment of the Committee and the designation of its Chairman, the Fair Employment Practice Committee established by Executive Order of June 25, 1941, hereinafter referred to as the old Committee shall cease to exist. All records and property of the old Committee and such unexpended balances of allocations or other funds available for its use as the Director of the Bureau of the Budget shall determine shall be transferred to the Committee. The Committee shall assume jurisdiction over all complaints and matters pending before the old Committee and shall conduct such investigations and hearings as may be necessary in the performance of its duties under this order.

“7. Within the limits of the funds which may be made for that purpose, the Chairman shall appoint and for the compensation of such personnel and make provision for such supplies, facilities, and services as may be necessary to carry out this Order. The Committee may utilize the services and facilities of other Federal departments and agencies and such voluntary and uncompensated services as may from time to time be needed. The Committee may accept the services of State and local authorities and officials, and may perform the functions and duties and exercise the powers conferred upon it by this Order through such officials and agencies and in such manner as it may determine.

“8. The Committee shall have the power to promulgate such rules and regulations as may be appropriate or necessary to carry out the provisions of this Order.

“9. The provisions of any other pertinent Executive Order inconsistent with this Order are hereby superseded.”

## President's Proclamation 2588—Directing Detroit Race Rioters to Disperse, June 21

“By the President of the United States of America  
A Proclamation.

“Whereas, the Governor of the State of Michigan has represented that domestic violence exists in said State which the authorities of said State are unable to suppress, and

“Whereas, it is provided in the Constitution of the United States that the United States shall protect each state in the Union, on application of the Legislature, or of the Executive, when the Legislature cannot be convened, against domestic violence; and

“Whereas, the Legislature of the State of Michigan is not now in session and cannot be convened in time to meet the present emergency, and the Executive of said State under Section 4 of Article IV of the Constitution of the United States, and the laws passed in pursuance thereof, has made due application to me in the premises for such part of the military forces of the United States as may be necessary and adequate to protect the state of Michigan and the citizens thereof against domestic violence and to enforce the due execution of the laws; and

“Whereas, it is required that whenever it may be necessary, in the judgment of the President, to use the military forces of the United States for the purposes aforesaid, he shall forthwith, by proclamation, command such insurgents to disperse and retire peacefully to their respective homes within a limited time.

1943

“Now, Therefore, I, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, do hereby make proclamation and I do hereby command all persons engaged in said unlawful and insurrectionary proceedings to disperse and retire peacefully to their respective abodes immediately, and hereafter abandon said combinations and submit themselves to the laws and constituted authorities of said State;

“And I invoke the aid and cooperation of all good citizens thereof to uphold the laws and preserve the public peace.”



Franklin D. Roosevelt giving a speech behind a lectern, 1930. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 47961005. <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

Roosevelt: “Proclamation 2588—Directing Detroit Race Rioters to Disperse, June 21, 1943. Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.usb.edu/wis/?pid=16414>.



**[Construction of Executive Order 9346] Letter to Attorney General Francis Biddle, November 5**

My Dear Mr. Attorney General: You have brought to my attention the Comptroller General's opinion holding that Executive Order 9346 is directive only and not mandatory in requiring insertion in all Government contracts of a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment on account of race, creed, color, or national origin; and requiring the contractor to include similar contractual provisions in all subcontracts.

There is no need for me to reiterate the fundamental principles underlying the promulgation of the Executive order, namely, that the prosecution of the war demands that we utilize fully all available manpower, and that the discrimination by war industries against persons for any of the reasons named in the order is detrimental to the prosecution of the war and is opposed to our national democratic purposes.

I realize the hesitancy of the Comptroller General to withhold payments on Government contracts in which these provisions have not been included where there is doubt as to whether the order is mandatory. I therefore wish to make it perfectly clear that these provisions are mandatory and should be incorporated in all Government contracts. The order should be so construed by all Government contracting agencies.

Very sincerely yours,  
Franklin D. Roosevelt





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### **Appointment of a Committee to Investigate Discrimination in Railroad Employment, January 3**

“I have received from the Fair Employment Practice Committee certification that the Committee has reached an impasse with a number of railroads and railroad labor organizations in its effort to secure the removal of discriminations in certain fields of railroad employment; I am enclosing a copy of the letter to me from Chairman Malcolm Ross of the Fair Employment Practice Committee and also copies of pertinent documents in this case.

“Obviously in such a complicated structure as the transportation industry, we cannot immediately attain perfect justice in terms of equal employment opportunities for all people. I am sure, however, that you agree with me that all Americans at this time should be anxious to see to it that no discriminations prevent the fullest use of our manpower in providing the strength essential to the major military offensives now planned. Indeed, hardly anything in America now seems so important as such a unity based upon justice as will make possible the best use of all our human resources in this year of supreme national effort.

“The specific questions involved in the case certified to me by the Fair Employment Practice Committee relate only to discriminations against certain classes of Negro railroad employees in connection with which complaints were filed with the Committee. These employees are locomotive firemen, trainmen, switchmen, dining car and shop employees.

“I believe it to be highly important in connection with this situation that a small committee of disinterested and distinguished citizens be appointed to discuss this matter as my representatives with the railroads and labor organizations. I am sure that agreements shaped in good sense and good will can be reached.

1944

“I am asking to serve on this committee yourself [i] as Chairman, Frank J. Lausche,[ii] Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, and Judge William H. Holly of the United States District Court in Chicago.[iii]

“I plan to call a meeting of the committee with representatives of carriers and labor organizations in Washington in the very near future. I am aware of the other public demands being made upon your time and energy today, but I trust I may have your acceptance of this most important public undertaking. ”[iv]



Franklin D. Roosevelt campaigns from back of the "Pioneer" railroad car. October 1936. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 61-393. <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

[i]. Walter P. Stacy (1884-1951), chief justice of the North Carolina State Supreme Court. Who was Who in America, 1951-1960, 3:814.

[ii]. Frank J. Lausche (1895-1990) would later serve as governor of Ohio, and subsequently be elected to the U. S. Senate. Obituary, NYT, 4/22/90.

[iii]. William H. Holly (1869-1958), judge of the U. S. Court for the Northern District of Illinois, had just taken senior status the year before. Who Was Who in America, 1951-1960, 3: 410.

[iv]. Roosevelt, "Appointment of a Committee to Investigate Discrimination in Railroad Employment, January 3, 1944." Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.usb.edu/wis/?pid=16496>.

**Excerpts from the Press Conference for the Negro  
Newspaper Publishers Association, February 5**

“Mr. Ira Lewis [Pittsburgh Courier]:[i] There is one very pressing question that is causing the colored people lots of concern. I think that we represent here perhaps five or six million readers, and that question is posed to us at all times. It is a grievous and vexing one. It has to do with the treatment of our boys in the armed services. They haven't been treated right by civilian police, and by the M. P. 's [Military Police]. We know of instances where soldiers on furlough have come home and taken off their uniform on account of intimidation.

“And they think, Mr. President, that that is your responsibility. They think that you alone can correct that. I think you can put your hand right on the question, which will do more towards strengthening morale and making more for unity and making the Negro citizen believe that he is a part of this great commonwealth. Just one word from you, we all feel, would do that. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: “I am glad you brought that up, because I have been in touch with it. It is perfectly true, there is definite discrimination in the actual treatment of the colored engineer troops, and others. And you are up against it, as you know perfectly well. I have talked about it—I had the Secretary of War[ii] and the Assistant[iii] —everybody in on it. The trouble lies fundamentally in the attitude of certain white people—officers down the line who haven't got very much more education, many of them, than the colored troops, and the Seabees, and the engineers, for example. And well, you know the kind of person it is. We all do.

We don't have to do more than think of a great many people that we know. And it has become not a question of orders—they are repeated fairly often, I think, in all the camps of colored troops—it's a question of the personality of the individual. And we are up against it, absolutely up against it. I always think of the fact that it probably is improving. I like to think that mere association helps things along.”[iv]

[i]. Ira F. Lewis (1883-1948) was the managing editor of the Pittsburgh Courier.

[ii]. Henry L. Stimson (1867-1950), U. S. secretary of War (1940-45); he also supported federal legislation protecting service members from violence.

[iii]. Truman K. Gibson, Jr. (1912-2005), a black Chicago lawyer, succeeded Judge William H. Hastie as civilian aide to the Secretary of War in February 1943, specializing in issues affecting black military personnel, NYT, 1/2/2006, B-7.

[iv]. Roosevelt, “Excerpts from the Press Conference for the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, February 5, 1944.” Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16453>.