



IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

**HARRY S.
TRUMAN**

1944 - 1946



USA 20c

1944

1944

Interview with Grace and Morris Milgram

“During our interview Truman spoke frankly about Negroes. Independence, Missouri is practically a southern town, and as the senator talked his attitude seemed no worse, and probably much better, than the attitude of most white men in this section.

“He told us, ‘I don’t believe in social equality. I believe in equality of opportunity. There never will be social equality.’ He informed us that Negroes ‘are not and never will be’ served in restaurants and soda fountains of Independence.”

“He never has, and ‘never will’ invite a Negro to his home for dinner. ‘I reserve the right to choose my guests,’ he said. ‘There are lots of whites too, whom I’ve never had to dinner and never would invite to my home.’ The senator probably intended this remark as a sincere compliment to the Negroes***

“The most remarkable of Senator Truman’s beliefs is his delusion that Negroes have organized ‘push days.’ Negroes, he told us, ‘are going too far in St. Louis. The Negroes have started a push day once a week, which they shove white people out of the bars. Why, St. Louis is sitting on a keg of dynamite. And they’ve got a push day in Washington too! I won’t let my daughter go down town on the street cars on Thursdays, anymore. It’s not safe. They push people off the street cars.’”



1945

USA 200

1945

**May 5, Walter White visits the White House (Gardner, 12)
Letter to the Chairman, House Rules Committee [Adolph J. Sabath], Concerning the Committee on Fair Employment Practice. June 5, 1945**

“I understand that the House Appropriations Committee has deleted from the War Agencies Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1945, all appropriations for the Fair Employment Practice Committee.

“This action will have the effect of abolishing the Committee and terminating its work without giving the Members of the House of Representatives an opportunity to vote on the question.

“The Fair Employment Practice Committee was originally established before the attack upon us at Pearl Harbor, and was an integral part of our defense production program. It has continued since then in one form or another; and has grown steadily in importance. Its work has been based on the principle that the successful prosecution of the war demands the participation of all available workers regardless of race, creed or color, and that the policy of the United States was to encourage all such persons to full participation in the war effort.

“The war is not over. In fact a bitter and deadly conflict lies ahead of us. To abandon at this time the fundamental principle upon which the Fair Employment Practice Committee was established is unthinkable.

“Even if the war were over, or nearly over, the question of fair employment practices during the reconversion period and thereafter would be of paramount importance. Discrimination in the matter of employment against properly qualified persons because of their race, creed, or color is not only un-American in nature, but will lead eventually to industrial strife and unrest. It has a tendency to create substandard conditions of living for a large part of our population. The principle and policy of fair employment practice should be established permanently as a part of our national law.

I understand that one reason assigned for omitting an appropriation for the present Committee is that a proposal is now before the Congress to establish a permanent and statutory Fair Employment Practice Commission.

“The legislation providing for this Commission is now in the Rules Committee.

“Unless it is sent to the floor, the Members of the House will have no opportunity to vote upon it. The result will be that on July 1st next the principle of fair employment practices will have been abandoned by the House of Representatives.

“I therefore urge the Rules Committee to adopt a rule permitting this legislation to be voted upon by the Members of the House as quickly as possible.

“Very sincerely yours,

Harry S. Truman.

Letter to Charles H. Houston, December 7

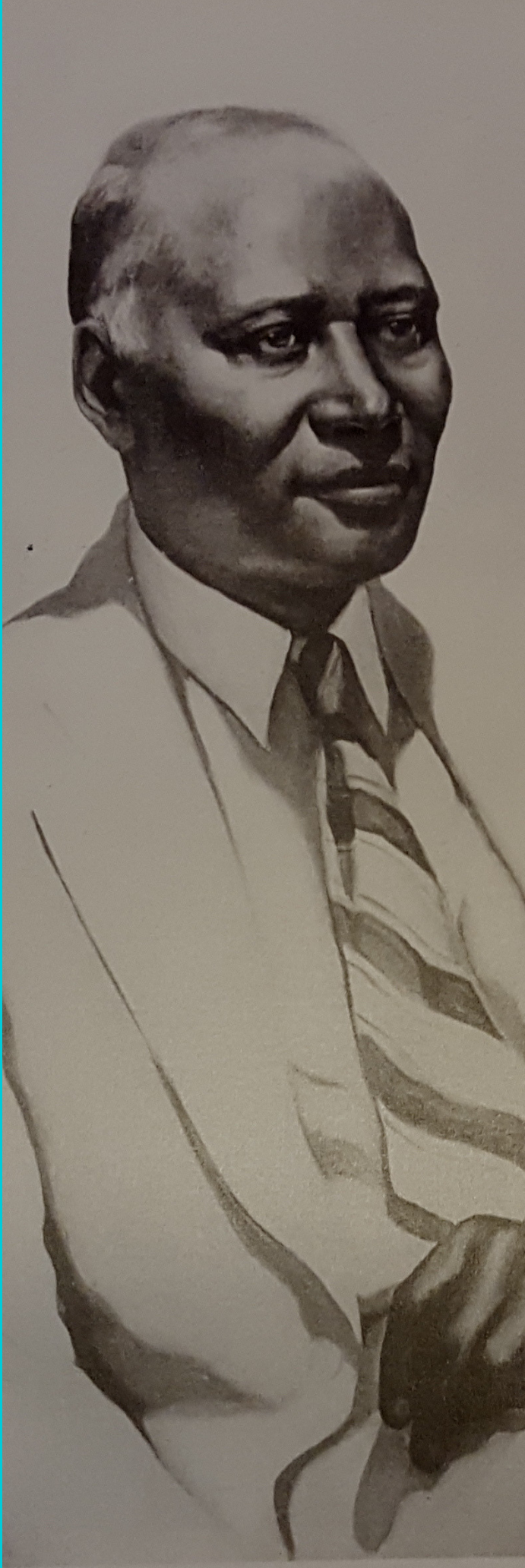
“Dear Mr. Houston:

“Your letter of December third has been received.

“When it was found necessary under the wartime powers conferred upon the President by the Congress, to seize the Capital Transit property, the conditions under which the property was to be operated were the same as those of any other property so seized. The law requires that when the Government seizes a property under such circumstances, it ‘shall be operated under the terms and conditions of employment which were in effect at the time possession of such plant, mine, or facility was so taken.’

“In view of this apparent contradiction between the law and the order which the Fair Employment Practice Committee proposed to issue, it was thought best to suggest that the order be temporarily postponed. The property was not seized for the purpose of enforcing the aims of the Fair Employment Practice Committee, laudable as these aims are, but to guarantee transportation for the citizens of Washington and vicinity.

“As anxious as I am for Congress to pass legislation for a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee, I cannot contravene an Act of Congress in order to carry out the present Committee’s aims. Under the circumstances it was felt the issuance of the proposed order would prove injurious to the accomplishments desired by all of us who are honestly interested in promoting the welfare of minority groups.



“I regret that you were unwilling to approach the problem from this viewpoint. As suggested in your letter, your resignation is accepted, to be effective immediately. ”

Very sincerely yours,
Harry S. Truman

Truman, Letter to Charles H. Houston, 12/7/45. Harry S. Truman Papers, Official File, HSTL

Charles Hamilton Houston, Betsy Graves Reyneau, 1943-1944. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 11-001, Robbins, Warren M, Warren M. Robbins Papers, (<http://siarchives.si.edu>)

**Special Message to the Congress
Presenting a 21-Point Program for the
Reconversion Period. September 6,
1945**

“During the years of war production we made substantial program in overcoming many of the prejudices which had resulted in discrimination against minority groups.

“Many of the injustices based upon consideration of race, religion, and color were removed. Many were prevented. Perfection was not reached, of course, but substantial progress was made.

“In the reconversion period and thereafter, we should made every effort to continue this American ideal. It is one of the fundamentals of our political philosophy, and it should be an integral part of our economy.

“The Fair Employment Practice Committee is continuing during the transition period. I have already requested that legislation be enacted placing the Fair Employment Practice Committee on a permanent bases. I repeat the recommendation.

Public Papers of the Presidents, 12/18/45, 282.

Palmer, Alfred T, photographer. Operating a hand drill at Vultee-Nashville, woman is working on a "Vengeance" dive bomber, Tennessee. Nashville Tennessee United States, 1943. Feb. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017878540/>.



Executive Order 9664, Continuing the Work of the Fair Employment Practice Committee, December 18

“By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statutes, it is hereby ordered as follows:

“The duties and responsibilities imposed upon the Committee on Fair Employment Practice by Executive Order 8802, dated June 25, 1941, as amended by Executive Order 8823 of July 18, 1941, and by Executive Order 9346 of May 27, 1943, shall be continued there-under for the period and subject to the conditions stated in the National War Agencies Appropriations Act, 1946, (Public Law 156, 79th Congress, 1st Session, approved July 17, 1945).

“As a part of its duties the Committee shall investigate, make findings and recommendations, and report to the President, with respect to discrimination in industries engages in work contributing to the production of military supplies or to the effective transition to a peacetime economy. ”

Attached Statement

“In connection with the attached Executive Order, the President has sent the following directive to the heads of all Government departments, agencies and independent establishments:

“Cutbacks in government employment have resulted in a considerable displacement of wartime workers in Washington and the field. The Civil Service Commission, in the interest of retaining capable and efficient employees wherever possible, has established a set of principles governing reduction in force and transfer of employees to peacetime activity. It has come to my attention that a considerable number of loyal and qualified employees have been refused transfer and reemployment by employing agencies solely because of race and creed. This condition is a violation of civil service rules which have been issued by the President and in violation of existing law.

“I am writing to request that you make careful analysis of your personnel policies, procedures and practices in order that you can assure me that they are in accord with national law and policy and in order that all qualified workers in existing temporary war jobs will be considered fairly for appointments without distinction because of race, creed, color or national origin.

“In addition, your full cooperation with FEPC in all matters affecting the employment of minorities in government is requested. ”



1946

USA 200

1947

Conference with the executive committee of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, March 1

(Responding to a statement by Mrs. Robert L. Vann of the *Pittsburgh Courier* on behalf of the committee in which she commended the president for appointing qualified African Americans to responsible positions in the government and for his support of the FEPC legislation.) “. . . there are things that are necessary today of course – it is a pity that they have to be done – but there are certain things that are necessary to be done to give us the Bill of Rights as it is written in the Constitution of the United States. We want to see equal opportunity for everybody, regardless of race, creed or color.

“I have been rather disturbed and alarmed at the anti-Semitic propaganda that has been distributed in this country, which in the end results in anti-color purposes the same as we had in 1922 and 1924 after the other war – the people who would go behind sheets. We don’t want to see that happen after this war. We want to see an implementation through this FEPC legislation of what is in the Constitution. We all have the same feelings inside of us here that we should have that, that men are created equal – with equal rights. We have to have special legislation to enforce it – to implement the thing that God Almighty intended us to have automatically. ”

The President's Press Conference of April 11

“Q. Mr. President, in your Chicago press conference, there was something mentioned about the poll tax. Can that be taken to mean that States alone have the power to repeal –

“THE PRESIDENT. I anticipated that you would ask me that question, and I have got a statement prepared for you which will be the answer to you. I will read it for you.

“[Reading, not literally] ‘I haven't changed my position on Federal anti-poll tax legislation. I am still in favor of Federal legislation. I voted for cloture on this issue in the Senate, and I would do so again if I were a Senator.

“However, I also favor State action. There is no contradiction between Federal and State action on this matter. While the Federal anti-poll tax legislation has been pending in the Congress, several States have abandoned the poll tax. ’

“And you must have the support of the people for any law. The prohibition law proved that.

“[Continuing reading, not literally] ‘This is a great step forward, and I hope more States will see fit to change their poll tax laws.



President Harry S. Truman holding a press conference at Little White House in Key West, Florida. March 1, 1946. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 63-133. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

“It may well be that the possibility of Federal action has stimulated State action. This is often the case with State and local legislation. For example, while we were pressing for the Federal action on fair employment practice legislation, several States and a number of municipalities have adopted fair employment practice acts. Federal legislation and State legislation should supplement one another wherever possible. I am in favor of both Federal and State action on anti-poll tax legislation, FEPC and all similar legislation. ’

“This ought to clear the matter up completely. ”

The President's News Conference of 4/11/46, Public Papers of the Presidents, 192-3; Statement by the President, President's Secretary's Files, HSTL.

See also Minutes, 4/8/46, and Report of the Secretary for the May, 1946, Meeting of the Board. EC; headnote, “The Struggle to Abolish the Poll Tax,” vol. III, ccxxix-ccliv.

Letter Accepting Resignation of the Chairman and Members of the Fair Employment Practice Committee, June 30

[Released June 30, 1946. Dated June 28, 1946]

“Dear Mr. Ross:

“I have your letter of June 28, containing the resignation of yourself and your fellow Committee members, together with recommendations made pursuant to Executive Order No. 9664.

“The members of your Committee performed an important war service task of great difficulty and delicacy. They performed it capably, even under a continuous barrage of criticism and harassment.

“The degree of effectiveness which the Fair Employment Practice Committee was able to attain has shown once and for all that it is possible to equalize job opportunity by governmental action, and thus eventually to eliminate the influence of prejudice in the field of employment.

Please convey to the members of the Committee my appreciation of the devotion they brought to this war-time task. I thank them for their service, and I accept their resignations with great regret.

“Very truly yours,

“Harry S. Truman”

Malcolm Ross, chairman, FEPC. Text “Note: The Committee, in its letter of June 28, recommended that the President continue to urge upon the Congress the passage of legislation which would guarantee equal job opportunity to all workers without discrimination because of race, color, religious belief, or national origin; that the Federal Government take steps not only to promulgate its policy more widely, but to enforce it as well; and that the appropriate Government agencies be instructed to include statistics on employment and unemployment by race and by sex.”

Letter to Charles G. Bolte, chairman, American Veterans Committee, Concerning Discrimination on Campus, August 28

“Dear Mr. Bolte: I appreciate your favorable response to the establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education and welcome your support of its work.

“I am keenly aware of the fundamental problem of discrimination in education to which you have called specific attention, and of the broader problem of intolerance which this discrimination symbolizes. Those who sincerely desire to see the fullest expression of our democracy can never rest until the opportunity for an education, at all levels, has been given to all qualified Americans, regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, sex or economic status.

“It was with this principle very clearly in mind that I asked the members of the Commission to consider ‘ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able young people.’ I am pleased that the Commission, in its first meeting recently concluded, has decided to deal specifically with this problem. I am sure that the members of the Commission will spare no effort in devising methods for eliminating existing barriers of discrimination affecting educational opportunity in our institutions of higher learning.

“We have only recently completed a long and bitter war against intolerance and hatred in other lands. A cruel price in blood and suffering was paid by the American people in bringing that war to a successful conclusion. Yet, in this country today there exists disturbing evidence of intolerance and prejudice similar in kind, though perhaps not in degree, to that against which we fought the war.

“Discrimination, like a disease, must be attacked wherever it appears. This applies to the opportunity to vote, to hold and retain a job, and to secure adequate shelter and medical care no less than to gain an education compatible with the needs and ability of the individual.

“Very sincerely yours,
“Harry S. Truman”

Public Papers of the Presidents, (letter dated 8/28/46) 9/4/46, 423.

In his letter to Truman, Bolte expressed the American Veterans Committee's welcome of the president's declaration that the purpose of the commission was to “re-examine the system of higher education in terms of objectives, methods and facilities in the light of the social role it has to play.” Bolte said his committee was assured that Truman shared their “conviction that the role of American education must include the championship of freedom and of the right of every American to participate fully in all of the benefits of our democracy.” In order to play that role, Bolte said, higher education institutions needed to re-examine their “selective quota system of admission under which the chance to learn, and thereby become a more useful citizen, is denied certain minorities.” However, Bolte said, discrimination against minority groups was “by no means confined to the college campus. New and ominous signs of intolerance are appearing every day throughout our country, and it is to this disturbing trend that we call your attention.” Stories of such intolerance, which fill the press, he said, included “unprovoked violence and the denial of civil liberties.” Letter from Bolte to Truman, 8/12/46, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official File of the Harry S. Truman Papers, HSTL.

The American Veterans Committee, Inc., was created prior to the end of World War II by a group of soldiers and early dischargees as a politically liberal organization to seek peace and reform for the benefit of veterans. Tyler, “The American Veterans Committee,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Autumn 1966): 420.

Letter to Atty. Gen. Tom Clark, September 20

“Dear Tom: I had as callers yesterday some members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and they told me about an incident which happened in South Carolina where a negro Sergeant, who had been discharged from the Army just three hours, was taken off the bus and not only severely beaten but his eyes deliberately put out, and that the Mayor of the town had bragged about committing this outrage.

“I have been very much alarmed at the increased racial feeling all over the country and I am wondering if it wouldn't be well to appoint a commission to analyze the situation and have a remedy to present to the next Congress – something similar to the Wickersham Commission on Prohibition.



Five unidentified African-American soldiers are at work in the snow, somewhere in Korea during the Korean War. ca. April 1951. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, Frank Pace Papers. Photograph. Accession 63-1446-30. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

“I know you have been looking into the Tennessee and Georgia lynchings, and also been investigating the one in Louisiana, but I think it is going to take something more than the handling of each individual case after it happens – it is going to require the inauguration of some sort of policy to prevent such happenings.

“I’ll appreciate very much your views on the subject.

“Sincerely yours,

“Harry S. Truman”

Truman letter to Atty. Gen. Tom C. Clark.

Truman met with the delegation led by Walter White on 9/19/46, following an upsurge of racial violence. Report of the Secretary for the September 1946 Meeting of the Board, with Monthly Report of Legal Department for July and August, EC; Report of the Secretary for the October 1946 Meeting of the Board, with Monthly Report of the Legal Department for September; Monthly Report of the Legal Department for November 1946; Report of the Secretary for the December 1946 Meeting of the Board, all in EC. Gardner, Truman and Civil Rights, 16-18. See also White, *A Man Called White*, 331.

Gardner provides the text of the Department of Justice news release, 9/20/46, announcing that charges had been filed against Lynwood Lanier Shull, Batesburg, South Carolina, Chief of Police. He was charged with beating and torturing Isaac Woodard, Jr., the African American veteran of the Bronx, who was brutally blinded in both eyes. Shull was charged with violating a federal civil rights statute, which prohibited police and other public officials from depriving anyone of their civil rights. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights*, 17-18.



Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson, Senator Theodore F. Green, and President Harry S. Truman, hold the original United States Constitution prior to the document being permanently sealed during Constitution Day ceremonies at the Library of Congress. September 17, 1951. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, Joseph H. Short and Beth Campbell Short Papers. Credit: Library of Congress. Photograph. Accession 2005-323. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

Truman, December 5

“The federal government is hampered by inadequate civil rights statutes. The protection of our democratic institutions and the enjoyment by the people of their rights under the Constitution require that these weak and inadequate statutes should be expanded and improved.”

See also Gardner, Harry Truman and Civil Rights, 27.

Statement by the President Regarding the Signing of Executive Order 9808 Creating the President's Committee on Civil Rights, December 5

“Freedom From Fear is more fully realized in our country than in any other on the face of the earth. Yet all parts of our population are not equally free from fear. And from time to time, and in some places, this freedom has been gravely threatened. It was so after the last war, when organized groups fanned hatred and intolerance, until, at times, mob action struck fear into the hearts of men and women because of their racial origin or religious beliefs.

“Today, Freedom From Fear, and the democratic institutions which sustain it, are again under attack. In some places, from time to time, the local enforcement of law and order has broken down, and individuals—sometimes ex-servicemen, even women—have been killed, maimed, or intimidated.

“The preservation of civil liberties is a duty of every Government—state, Federal, and local. Wherever the law enforcement measures and the authority of Federal, state, and local governments are inadequate to discharge this primary function of government, these measures and this authority should be strengthened and improved.

“The Constitutional guarantees of individual liberties and of equal protection under the laws clearly place on the Federal Government the duty to act when state or local authorities abridge or fail to protect those Constitutional rights.

“Yet in the discharge of the obligations placed on it by the Constitution, the Federal Government is hampered by inadequate civil rights statutes. The protection of our Democratic institutions and the enjoyment by the people of their rights under the Constitution require that these weak and inadequate statutes should be expanded or improved. We must provide the Department of Justice with the tools to do the job.

“I have, therefore, issued today an Executive Order creating the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and I am asking this Committee to prepare for me a written report. The substance of this report will be recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment by legislation or otherwise of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.”

Executive Order 9808, Establishing the President's Committee on Civil Rights, December 5

“WHEREAS the preservation of civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution is essential to domestic tranquility, national security, the general welfare, and the continued existence of our free institutions; and

“WHEREAS the action of individuals who take the law into their own hands and inflict summary vengeance is subversive of our democratic system of law enforcement and public criminal justice, and gravely threatens our form of government; and

“WHEREAS it is essential that all possible steps be taken to safeguard our civil rights;

“NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, it is hereby ordered as follows:

“1. There is hereby created a committee to be known as the President's Committee on Civil Rights, which shall be composed of the following-named members, who shall serve without compensation:

“Mr. Charles E. Wilson, Chairman; Mrs. Sadie T. Alexander; Mr. James B. Carey; Mr. John S. Dickey; Mrs. Morris L. Ernst; Rabbi Roland G. Gittelsohn; Dr. Frank P. Graham; the Most Reverend Francis J. Haas, Mr. Charles Luckman; Mr. Francis P. Matthews; Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.; The Right Reverend Henry Knox Sherrill; Mr. Boris Shishkin; Mrs. M. E. Tilley; Mr. Channing H. Tobias.

“2. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to inquire into and to determine whether and in what respect current law enforcement measures and the authority and means possessed by Federal, State, and local governments may be strengthened and improved to safeguard the civil rights of the people.

“3. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

“4. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons employed in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for the use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.

“5. The Committee shall make a report of its studies to the President in writing, and shall in particular make recommendations with respect to the adoption or establishment, by legislation or otherwise, of more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States.

“6. Upon rendition of its report to the President, the Committee shall cease to exist, unless otherwise determined by further Executive Order. ”



President Harry S. Truman meeting with Senator Harley Kilgore of West Virginia and unidentified African American men. March 12, 1946. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 59-1187. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

Truman: “Executive Order 9808—Establishing the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, December 5, 1946.” Peters and Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=60711>.