

A black and white photograph of Harry S. Truman and Bess Truman. Harry is on the left, wearing glasses and a dark coat with a fur collar, smiling broadly. Bess is on the right, wearing a dark hat and a light-colored scarf, also smiling. They are standing in front of a large, dense crowd of people. The background is slightly out of focus, showing the tops of many heads and some flags.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

**HARRY S.
TRUMAN**

JULY 26 - OCTOBER 29, 1948

**Executive Order 9980—Regulations Governing Fair
Employment Practices Within the Federal Establishment, July
26**

“WHEREAS the principles on which our Government is based require a policy of fair employment throughout the Federal establishment, without discrimination because of race, color, religion or national origin; and

“WHEREAS it is desirable and in the public interest that all steps be taken necessarily to insure that this long-established policy shall be more effectively carried out;

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

“1. All personnel actions taken by Federal appointing officers shall be based solely on merit and fitness; and such officers are authorized and directed to take appropriate actions to insure that in all such actions there shall be no discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin.

“2. The head of each department in the executive branch of the Government shall be personally responsible for an effective program to insure that fair employment policies are fully observed in all personnel actions within his department.

“3. The head of each department shall designate an official thereof as Fair Employment Officer. Such Officer shall be given full operating responsibility, under the immediate supervision of the department head, for carrying out the fair employment policy herein stated. Notice of the appointment of such Officer shall be given to all officers and employees of the department. The Fair Employment Officer shall, among other things:

(a) Appraise the personnel actions of the department at regular intervals to determine their conformity to the fair employment policy expressed in this order.

(b) Receive complaints or appeals concerning personnel actions taken in the department on grounds of alleged discrimination because of their race, color, religion, or national origin.

(c) Appoint such central or regional deputies, committees, or hearing boards, from about the officers or employees of the department, as he may find necessary or desirable on a temporary or permanent basis to investigate, or to receive, complaints of discrimination.

(d) Take necessary corrective or disciplinary action, in consultation with, or on the basis of delegated authority from, the head of the department.

“4. The findings or action of the Fair Employment Officer shall be subject to direct appeal to the head of the department. The decision of the head of the department on such appeal shall be subject to appeal to the Fair Employment Board of the Civil Service Commission, hereinafter provided for.

“5. There shall be established in the Civil Service Commission a Fair Employment Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board) of not less than seven persons, the members of which shall be officers or employees of the Commission. The Board shall:

(a) Have authority to review decisions made by the head of any department which are appealed pursuant to the provisions of this order, or referred to the Board by the head of the department for advice, and to make recommendations to such head. In any instance in which the recommendation of the Board is not promptly and fully carried out, the case shall be reported by the Board to the President, for such action as he finds necessary.

(b) Make rules and regulations, in consultation with the Civil Service Commission, deemed necessary to carry out the Board's duties and responsibilities under this Order.

(c) Advise all departments on problems and policies relating to fair employment.

(d) Disseminate information pertinent to fair employment programs.

(e) Coordinate the fair employment policies and procedures of the several departments.

(f) Make reports and submit recommendations to the Civil Service Commission for transmittal to the President from time to time, as may be necessary for the maintenance of the fair employment program.

“6. All departments are directed to furnish to the Board all information needed for the review of personnel actions or for the compilation of reports.

“7. The term ‘department’ as used herein shall refer to all departments and agencies of the executive branch of the Government, including the Civil Service Commission. The term ‘personnel action,’ as used herein, shall include failure to act. Persons failing of appointment who allege a grievance relating to discrimination shall be entitled to the remedies herein provided.

“8. The means of relief provided by this order shall be supplemental to those provided by existing statutes, Executive Orders, and regulations. The Civil Service Commission shall have authority, in consultation with the Board, to make such additional regulations, and to amend existing regulations, in such manner as may be found necessary or desirable to carry out the purposes of this order. ”

**Executive Order 9981—Establishing the President’s
Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the
Armed Services, July 26**

“WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country’s defense:

“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, and as Commander-in-Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

“1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.

“2. There shall be created in the national Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.

“3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the armed services in order to determine in what respect such rules procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.

“4. 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 the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

“5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or 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.

“6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order. ”

Letter to Ernest W. Roberts, August 18

“Dear Ernie:

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

“I am going to send you a copy of the report of my Commission on Civil Rights and then if you still have that antebellum 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 a pretty bad fix from a law enforcement standpoint.[ii]

[i] Salt Lake City.

[ii] On 7/25/46, a black married couple was tied to trees and shot dead on a road in Walton County, Georgia. Just earlier one of them, Roger Malcolm, had been bailed out of jail after being arrested on suspicion of having stabbed a white man. Although investigations were launched, no one was ever brought to trial for the two murders. See Wexler: *Fire in a Canebrake*, passim.

“When a Mayor and a City Marshal can take a negro [sic] Sergeant off a bus in South Carolina, beat him up and put out one of his eyes,[iii] 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 [sic] firemen were the thing because it was a back-breaking 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 [sic] 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.[iv] 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 re-elected, that failure will be in a good cause.

“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...

“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 this subject—as I expect to do in the South[emphasis in the original]. ”[v]

[iii] On February 12, 1946, Isaac Woodard, Jr. (1919-92), a returning U. S. Army veteran who had served in the Pacific theater, was beaten and blinded by police in Batesburg, S. C., after he reportedly violated Jim Crow travel laws on a Greyhound bus. In the ensuing trial, the town’s chief of police, Linwood L. Shull (1902-97), although admitting that he beat and blinded Woodard, was found not guilty by an all-white jury after they had deliberated about a half hour. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 319-20, 330-331.

[iv] “Colored Firemen Killed Or Wounded,” vol. IV, 483-484.

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This is a photograph of a political cartoon regarding civil rights and the 1948 election by Clifford Berryman. November 14, 1948. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 60-336. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

[v] Ferrell, *Off the Record*, 146-47. This was Truman’s response to a letter from his former Army comrade Ernest W. Roberts (1893-1966) of Independence, Mo., who asked the president to “go easy” on civil rights or he would lose the southern vote in the upcoming presidential election. See also McCullough, *Truman*, 587-589.

Address to the Ministerial Alliance of Harlem, New York [sic] [i] , Upon Receiving the Franklin Roosevelt Award, October 29

“Dr. Johnson, and members of the Ministerial Alliance which has given me this award:

“I am exceedingly grateful for it. I hope I shall always deserve it. This, in my mind, is a most solemn occasion. It’s made a tremendous impression upon me.

“Franklin Roosevelt was a great champion of human rights. When he led us out of the Depression to the victory over the Axis, he enabled us to build a country in which prosperity and freedom must exist side by side. This is the only atmosphere in which human rights can thrive.

“Eventually we are going to have an America in which freedom and opportunity are the same for everyone. There is only one way to accomplish that great purpose, and that is to keep working for it and never take a backward step.

“I am especially glad to receive the Franklin Roosevelt Award on this day—October 29. This date means a great deal to me personally, and it is a significant date in the history of human freedom in this country.

“One year ago today, on October 29, 1947, the President’s Committee on Civil Rights submitted to me, and to the American people, its momentous report.

[i] Formally, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater New York. NYT, 10/30/48, 1.

“That report was drawn up by men and women who had the honesty to face the whole problem of civil rights squarely, and the courage to state their conclusions frankly.

“I created the Civil Rights Committee because racial and religious intolerance began to appear after World War II. They threatened the very freedoms we had fought to save.

“We Americans have a democratic way of acting when our freedoms are threatened.

“We get the most thoughtful and representative men and women we can find, and we ask them put down on paper the principles that represent freedom and a method of action that will preserve and extend that freedom. In that manner, we get a declaration of purpose and a guide for action that the whole country can consider.

“That is the way in which the Declaration of Independence was drawn up.

“That is the way in which the Constitution of the United States was written.

“The report that the Civil Rights Committee prepared is in the tradition of these great documents.

“It was the authors of the Declaration of Independence who stated the principle that all men are created equal in their rights, and that it is to secure these rights that governments are instituted among men.



“It was the authors of the Constitution who made it clear that, under our form of government, all citizens are equal before the law, and that the Federal Government has a duty to guarantee to every citizen equal protection of the laws.

“The Civil Rights Committee did more than repeat these great principles. It described a method to put these principles into action, and to make them a living reality for every American, regardless of his race, his religion, or his national origin.

“When every American knows that his rights and his opportunities are fully protected and respected by the Federal, State, and local governments, then we will have the kind of unity that really means something.

President Harry S. Truman (second from left) holds a certificate during his visit to Boys Town, Nebraska. June 5, 1948. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Credit: John S. Savage, 1905-1989, Omaha World-Herald. Photograph. Accession 2015-2009. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

“It is easy to talk of unity. But it is the work that is done for unity that really counts.

“The job that the Civil Rights Committee did was to tell the American people how to create the kind of freedom that we need in this country.

“The Civil Rights Committee described the kind of freedom that comes when every man has an equal chance for a job—not just the hot and heavy job—but the best job he is qualified for.

“The Committee described the kind of freedom that comes when every American boy and girl has an equal chance for an education.

“The Committee described the kind of freedom that comes when every citizen has an equal opportunity to go to the ballot box and cast his vote and have it counted.

“The Committee described the kind of freedom that comes when every man, woman, and child is free from the fear of mob violence and intimidation.

“When we have that kind of freedom, we will face the evil forces that are abroad in the world—whatever or wherever they may be—with the strength that comes from complete confidence in one another and from complete faith in the working of our own democracy.

One of the great things that the Civil Rights Committee did for the country was to get every American to think seriously about the principles that make our country great.

“More than 1 million copies of the full text of the civil rights report have been printed in books and newspapers.

“More than 30 different pamphlets based on the report have been printed and distributed by private organizations.

“Millions of Americans have heard the report discussed on the radio.

“In making the recommendations, the Civil Rights Committee did not limit itself to action by the President or by the executive branch. The Committee’s recommendations included action by every branch of the Federal Government, by State and local governments, and by private organizations and by individuals.

“That is why it is so important that the Civil Rights Committee’s report be studied widely. For in the last analysis, freedom resides in the actions of each individual. That is the reason I like to hear that scriptural reading from the Gospel according to St. Luke. That’s just exactly what it means. It means you and I must act out what we say in our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. It is in his mind and heart – and to his mind and heart -- that we must eventually speak to the individual.

“After the Civil Rights Committee submitted its report, I asked Congress to do ten of the things recommended by the Committee.

“You know what they did about that.

“So I went ahead and did what the President can do, unaided by the Congress.

“I issued two Executive Orders.

“One of them established the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.

“The other one covered regulations governing fair employment practices within the Federal establishment.



United States Air Force Staff Sergeant Edward Williams (right) of St. Louis, Missouri, exchanges a handshake with his Commander-in-Chief, President Harry S. Truman. October 12, 1950. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum.. Photograph. Accession 64-318. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

“In addition to that, the Department of Justice went into the Supreme Court and aided in getting a decision outlawing restrictive covenants.[ii]

“Several states and municipalities have taken action on the recommendations of the Civil Rights Committee, and I hope more will follow after them.

“Today the democratic way of life is being challenged all over the world. Democracy’s answer to the challenge of totalitarianism is its promise of equal rights and equal opportunity for all mankind.

“The fulfillment of this promise is among the highest purposes of government.

“Our determination to attain the goal of equal rights and equal opportunity must be resolute and unwavering.

“For my part, I intend to keep moving toward this goal with every ounce of strength and determination that I have. ”[iii]

[ii] Shelley v. Kraemer 334 US 1 (1948).

[iii] Truman: “Address in Harlem, New York, Upon Receiving the Franklin Roosevelt Award,” 10/29/48.” Peters and Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13078>.