The Roosevelts and African American Civil Rights Leaders

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Acknowledgments

In a speech he delivered at the dedication of a new chemistry building on the campus of Howard University during his first term as president in October 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt remarked that "Among American citizens, there should be no forgotten men and no forgotten races." Those same words are now carved into one of the granite walls that compose the nation's tribute to the late president at the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C. They also guided the authors of this study, and it is in this spirit of not forgetting that we wish to express our deepest thanks to all those who lifted us up along the way.

In our research, we were fortunate to count on the assistance of two stellar volunteers: Charlotte Pontifell, who, as an intern at the National Park Service, transcribed oral histories in the Park's archival collection; and Kimberly Woodward, who conducted extensive research on Mary McLeod Bethune in the FDR Presidential Library collections.

We also were extraordinarily fortunate to have the nation's preeminent Roosevelt biographer, Geoffrey Ward, advise us and offer his insights and feedback on each chapter as we worked. Not only was it a great comfort to be able to call on him for his expertise and judgment; his enthusiasm for the project meant so much to us at every stage. It also has been exciting for us to explore this subject at a time when so many outstanding historians in the field have created a new foundation for research through their scholarship. A number of these distinguished academics are now co-advisers on the forthcoming exhibition at the FDR Library on *Black Americans, Civil Rights, and the Roosevelts*. Let us thank in particular Patricia Bell-Scott, Allida Black, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Paula Giddings, Ira Katznelson, Lionel Kimble, David Levering Lewis, Patricia Sullivan, Joe Trotter, and Jill Watts. In so many ways, their work paved the way.

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We hope this study is especially helpful to the frontline rangers and volunteer staff in Hyde Park who will bring this history to life for rising generations of visitors and students seeking answers and understanding from this watershed era in our shared past. It was a profound privilege to trace the long civil rights movement through the lives of those who stood in its vanguard during the New Deal, World War II, and its aftermath and their relationships with Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

On a personal note, Kevin Burke wishes to thank his family for their love: Anna, Edward, Elizabeth, Sharon, Brian, Chris, Ashley, Kacie, and Braeden. He also cherishes his friends and fellow board members of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Hyde Park Foundation and fellow trustees of the FDR Library. And he dedicates his work on this study to his late mentor and friend, Ambassador William vanden Heuvel, whose commitment to the Roosevelt legacy, including the promise of the Four Freedoms, remains a source of "hope and history."

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prepared him for this study. He dedicates his work on the study to his late father, born on the eve of the momentous events discussed here, who led him to the world of books, history, and biography, and who would have thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

Introduction

When, on the eve of World War II, Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the first presidential library on the property of his home in Hyde Park, New York, he hoped future generations would travel there to research and write about the extraordinary times through which he and his generation were passing. Those times included the Great Depression, the New Deal, and, eventually, a second ghastly global conflict in the twentieth century that would redefine the balance of power in the world.

The era also included the seeds of the modern civil rights movement, a movement influenced in direct and indirect ways by Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's lives before, during, and after their unprecedented twelve years in the White House. How they evolved on the issue of race in America was in large part shaped by their relationships (both political and personal) with African American leaders, as well as by the Black members of their household staffs in Hyde Park, Washington, D.C., and the Little White House, FDR's retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia.

Those remarkable figures, some known and others obscured by time, are the focus of this study. By interweaving the stories of prominent Black leaders with those of key household staff members who were with the Roosevelts in their most intimate and vulnerable moments, and by employing a fast-paced, biographical, in-the-moment narrative style, this study equips the National Park Service with historical background and interpretive tools that will make the African American experience a vital and unforgettable part of the visitor experience.

In his rise to the presidency, FDR would find himself being quizzed about where he stood on race matters by the executive director of the NAACP Walter White, the subject of Chapter I. Republican Herbert Hoover's dismal tenure in the White House, which included White's successful grassroots efforts to block President Hoover's Supreme Court nominee, Judge John J. Parker, gave FDR an opening to Black voters, who were by then suffering from four years of the Depression. Nevertheless, most Black voters remained loyal to the Party of Lincoln and chose Hoover over Roosevelt. Would the new president be a different kind of Democrat or hold the conservative line established by the late Woodrow Wilson (for whom FDR had worked in the Navy Department) on race?

Roosevelt faced a major challenge right away. The New Deal era had its own versions of Black Lives Matter and debates over gun safety: chiefly, the scourge of lynching and the wariness of

President Roosevelt to take it on directly for fear of alienating more powerful interests, namely southern Democrats who in many ways held the keys to the sweeping economic reforms he hoped to push through the Congress and out into the country. FDR tried to convey to White how, though he was horrified by the brutality of lynching, his hands were tied politically on the issue. That didn't stop White from pressing for federal action, including through his all-out lobbying effort to get Congress to pass the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill in the 1930s. Eventually, a gap would open up between FDR and Eleanor—ER—during Roosevelt's second term over the gruesome and deadly practice.

But FDR would prove unwilling publicly to get behind the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill introduced in Congress. By the spring of 1936, the *Chicago Defender*, one of the nation's leading Black newspapers, would run the headline, "72 Lynchings Stain Roosevelt's Record," and quote at length a telegram sent directly to FDR from White's deputy at the NAACP, Roy Wilkins: "These killings by mobs have occurred at an average of one every fifteen and one-half days since you have been the Chief Executive of the nation."[1]

While FDR felt constrained, ER would go public in an increasingly vocal way—a shift that White leveraged. The racial fallout over ER's Arthurdale, West Virginia, homestead experiment, where first she included no African Americans and then angered white citizens when she attempted to do so, would lead her to invite White and others to the White House for a summit that would commence her education on the real conditions under which African Americans were living in the country. It was a perfect example of how the experimental spirit of the New Deal exposed racial injustice that altered ER's thinking. It also would spark her evolution from an employer of Black domestic employees to an advocate of equal rights and a partner of Black activists. In 1934, she enraged the president's press secretary, Stephen Early, by backing the anti-lynching bill. In 1935, she accepted an invitation to speak in Washington, D.C., at the NAACP's annual convention, where she would talk about her penchant for giving FDR reading material at night, the implication being that she had his ear on issues important to African Americans. That same year, she would lend her support to White's "An Art Commentary on Lynching," which was staged at a Manhattan gallery, and be attacked in the Georgia press by the state's governor, Eugene Talmadge. Rumors soon spread that she was in cahoots with Black domestics in the formation of "Eleanor Clubs" in the South, while FBI director J. Edgar Hoover suspected she had hidden Black ancestry.

In 1937, ER visited the South Side Boys' Club of Chicago. The following year, she spoke before the National Negro Conference in Philadelphia on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and trumpeted Richard Wright's book, *Uncle Tom's Children,* in her syndicated "My Day" column. Also in 1938, at the height of the fight over the Costigan-Wagner bill, ER denounced lynching at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare meeting in Alabama, where she also defied Birmingham's commissioner of public safety Eugene "Bull" Connor by sitting in the middle of the aisle to protest Jim Crow segregation when she couldn't sit next to her friend Mary McLeod Bethune.

The relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Bethune is the subject of Chapter II. With FDR focused on his recuperation from polio, ER sustained the family connection to public service by making speeches that coincided with her own political awakening. As part of these efforts, her mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt, agreed to host for her a luncheon meeting of the National Council of Women in 1927, where ER's friendship with Bethune was born. In addition to her support for the Tuskegee Institute, Sara Roosevelt made contributions to Bethune's Florida-based college, Bethune-Cookman Institute, as well as to the Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina, a preparatory high school led by another formidable African American educator, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown. FDR's mother also hosted fundraising teas for Bethune at her New York City home.

What was Bethune's journey to prominence, and what were her impressions of the Roosevelts? How did she leverage her friendships with Sara and Eleanor Roosevelt to advance her life's cause, Black education? Bethune built on her friendship with the Roosevelts to become the leader of an informal group of Black experts advising the White House on policy, the "Black Cabinet."

Neither FDR nor ER lived to see an African American sit in an official presidential Cabinet, but the first, Robert Weaver (appointed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965), got his start in Bethune's Black Cabinet and as an aide to FDR's Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes in 1934. Bethune would serve in another federal department that created opportunities for African Americans, the National Youth Administration, under Aubrey Williams, a leader of the liberal Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Williams also mentored a young white Texas New Dealer and state director of the NYA: Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Though the Black press called out FDR for his failure to act on racial injustice and inequality, it also zeroed in on the fact that twenty-three out of the Roosevelts' twenty-five White House household staff members were Black. Chapter III focuses on these Black domestic workers. Among

them were the couple Irvin ("Mac") and Elizabeth ("Lizzie") McDuffie, FDR's personal valet and a maid, respectively. A former Atlanta barber, Mac had been with FDR since 1927, and the presidential transition offered the McDuffies a chance to reunite under the same roof—the third floor of the White House's East Wing—after living apart for four years while Mac worked for then-Governor Roosevelt in Albany. Several profiles of the staff ran in the Black press, and Mac was interviewed on the record for at least one of them so that he could personally attest, as his valet and "friend," to FDR's character. Mac described FDR as a daily reader of the nation's leading Black newspapers, and, in listening to him speak at every campaign stop, he attested that FDR thought only in terms of "Americans," not with the labels Black and white. It was Mac who, in addition to cleaning FDR's clothes and cutting his hair, lifted him in and out of his bed and wheelchair each day and night.

"We feel like one large family," said Lizzie McDuffie, who was the only member of staff FDR allowed to clean his room.[2] Lizzie would establish herself as an effective ambassador for the Roosevelts in Black communities across the country when FDR ran for reelection in 1936 and 1940. At the same time, the McDuffies were in correspondence with the NAACP's Walter White, forging a friendship that was strengthened by their shared Georgia roots. When White's access to FDR was blocked by Early, the president's press secretary, his relationships with the domestic staff would prove invaluable.

Personal testimonials like those from the McDuffies were part of an effective communications strategy, revealing FDR's political dexterity in appealing to African American voters through the Black press while placating the conservative white southern base of his party on the level of policy. It became a precedent future presidents would follow, even as the delicate political bargain between northern liberals and southern white Democrats rapidly disintegrated over the question of civil rights.

No one exacerbated this fracture among the White House and white southerners more than Eleanor Roosevelt herself, who only increased her advocacy of African American rights during these years, from standing up against housing segregation in Detroit to traveling in the South and visiting with Black troops overseas. Perhaps most famously, in 1939 ER cemented her resistance to Jim Crow when she resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution over its refusal to permit Marian Anderson, the subject of Chapter IV, to sing at Constitution Hall. Her resignation followed a

discussion with White. Another Black Cabinet stalwart, Charles Hamilton Houston, chief litigator of the NAACP, led the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee to protest Anderson's exclusion from Constitution Hall and from the auditorium at Washington's Central High School.

World War II began about six months after ER's resignation from the DAR. African American civil rights leaders applied intense pressure before and during the United States' official entry into the war to end Jim Crow discrimination in the defense industry and military. The key figure here was A. Philip Randolph, the subject of Chapter V. Randolph was the founder of the most powerful Black union in the nation, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Politically, FDR needed the support of Randolph's union, and the support of labor more generally.

Randolph met with FDR at the White House ahead of the 1940 election to press for fair play in the defense industry. In June 1941, Randolph pushed FDR to the brink on the subject, vowing to organize and lead a March on Washington unless the president signed an executive order banning Jim Crow in the mobilization effort. This political chess match was the most dramatic example in FDR's entire tenure of Black activists like Randolph and White successfully lobbying the president to act and negotiating with him backed by their own fair share of political leverage—leverage that, a critical point, threatened to expose the nation's racial hypocrisies at a time when FDR was trying to hold the moral high ground in his struggle for his celebrated Four Freedoms and against European and Japanese fascism.

After FDR issued his famous executive order 8802, creating the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission in June 1941, Randolph would call off the march. Still, he and other civil rights leaders kept the pressure on FDR throughout the war. In addition to demanding a "frank talk" with FDR in April 1942, Randolph participated in annual Negro Freedom Rallies inside New York City's Madison Square Garden, and he was joined by Mary McLeod Bethune. As a result, FDR issued executive order 9346 in May 1943, establishing a new Committee on Fair Employment Practice.

At the same time, Black journalists at the *Pittsburgh Courier* announced the launch of their "Double V Campaign" to hold the administration to account as it sought to project democratic values abroad while bowing to Jim Crow at home. What the White House soon learned was that the more the administration bent to the will of Black civil rights leaders, the more it risked splintering away the Democrats' base of support among white southerners, who began to flee to Republican candidates in the midterm and presidential races.

The study concludes with a chapter on ER's relationship with Pauli Murray, a future civil rights attorney and Episcopal priest, who collaborated with ER on a range of efforts, including championing National Sharecroppers Week and coming to the defense of the Black sharecropper Odell Waller when he was arrested for and found guilty of murder. Murray referred to her influential writings as a "confrontation by typewriter."

The correspondence between ER and Murray is extensive and illuminating. Their relationship was one of mutual respect and even affection, but Murray did not shy away from provocation when ER's public responses to the dire conditions of African Americans struck her as too measured, and the two sometimes exchanged angry words. But the friendship persisted, and Murray even came to convalesce at Val-Kill in the 1950s. In fact, Murray's most cherished experience there was a personal one, an intimate August 1952 gathering that united the aunts who raised her in Jim Crow North Carolina, with ER, an equally beloved mentor, along with close Roosevelt family members and ER's confidante Malvina "Tommy" Thompson. Murray's family would mourn reverentially at FDR's graveside and receive a rare behind-the-scenes tour of the Presidential Library. Sending a blurry snapshot of ER and Murray's aunts taken that day, Murray apologized to ER that her nerves "shook the camera." Still, Murray added, the photograph "rests on our mantelpiece" with other family mementos, since, "in our spiritual way, we consider you a member of the family."[3]

FDR died on April 12, 1945, in Warm Springs, Georgia. African Americans were there with him when he passed away: his longtime White House maid, Elizabeth McDuffie, and the cook Daisy Bonner, who, having prepared FDR's final meal, wrote her name on the kitchen wall; Chief Petty Officer Arthur Prettyman, FDR's personal valet since the departure of McDuffie; and Chief Petty Officer Graham W. Jackson, an accordionist, Navy recruiter, and award-winning war bond ambassador from Atlanta, who was one of FDR's favorite musicians, having played for him twenty-two times. This was supposed to be the twenty-third, but instead, Jackson— photographed with tears running down his cheeks—played "Going Home" on his accordion.

In 1949, FDR's closest Black associates, Mary McLeod Bethune, Walter White, and Channing Tobias, traveled to Hyde Park to visit the president's grave as members of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Foundation. Bethune prized FDR's walking stick, which ER gifted her. Another keeper of the flame was Lizzie McDuffie, who returned to live as a widow in Atlanta, where she maintained an

FDR memorabilia collection, worked on a memoir, and visited with Eleanor Roosevelt when she was in town. Her husband, Mac McDuffie, had died three years earlier, on the late president's birthday, January 30.

Eleanor Roosevelt carried on her work for many years after FDR's passing, and, in living until November 1962, witnessed and participated in the heroic phase of the civil rights movement. She also was a driving force at the creation of the United Nations, and her work in support of the UN Declaration of Human Rights proved crucial. On the civil rights front, ER joined the boards of the NAACP and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) soon after FDR's death and worked with NAACP's head attorney, Thurgood Marshall, on investigating a race riot in Columbia, Tennessee. As events began to accelerate in the mid-1950s, ER heralded the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision desegregating the nation's public schools (most of the justices were FDR appointees). With America's so-called Second Reconstruction underway after years of seeding during the New Deal and war, ER lent her support to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-1956 and met with Rosa Parks, E. D. Nixon (a longtime ally of A. Philip Randolph), and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Her reach across generations was expansive.

At the 1956 Democratic National Convention, ER would chair the party's Civil Rights Platform Committee. A year later, she would support the Little Rock Nine in their courageous efforts to desegregate Central High despite the massive resistance led by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus. For her activism in the South, the KKK placed a bounty of $25,000 on her head. As the decade turned and the nonviolent civil rights movement expanded, ER would stand in solidarity with the Freedom Riders attempting to integrate interstate bus lines in the South. No first lady had ever been so outspoken—in word or action—on civil rights. Advancing into older age, ER lived long enough to see the fruits of her advocacy, as well as FDR's, in the courts as well as in the formation of future leaders during the New Deal and World War II, playing out in the dawning 1960s.

Through this study of African American leaders and the Roosevelts, we hope to convey, in personal terms, how the long arc of the civil rights movement intersected with the extraordinary era FDR and ER shaped. This is their story. May it inspire others.

A general note: The authors wish to tell readers that some of the material covered in this study may contain insensitive, biased, and offensive language, views, and opinions from the past as well as

descriptions of violent episodes that are painful to read about; we have included them not only for historical accuracy but to capture the complexities of the era we have been charged with investigating for educational purposes. In addition, some of the materials may relate to violent or graphic events and are preserved for their historical significance.

Regarding the use of pronouns, we are sensitive to changes in usage that reflect changing standards of gender self-identification in our time; as historians, we have refrained from invoking these changes, however, in order to avoid overwriting the past with the present and without knowing how the subjects explored here would wish to be identified.

[1] *Chicago Defender*, May 9, 1936.

[2] Baltimore *Afro-American,* July 29, 1933.

[3] Patricia Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady: Portrait of a Friendship; Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Struggle for Social Justice. (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 209-210.

Chapter I

Black Lives Mattered
The Roosevelts, Walter White, and the Federal Anti-Lynching Campaign

On October 27, 1934, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) flew a large black flag with white letters from the window of its Fifth Avenue headquarters in New York City. It bore a stark but simple message: "A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY."[1]

Eight days earlier, more than 1,110 miles to the south in Marianna, Florida, Sheriff W. E. Chambliss discovered the dead body of a white woman, Lola Cannidy, and arrested her father's twenty-three-year-old Black farmhand, Claude Neal, based on a witness having seen the two speaking shortly before Cannidy disappeared. The accusation was rape and murder, and Chambliss knew that in the Black Belt of North Florida, such circumstances were combustible.[2]

Even though the medical examiner concluded that Lola Cannidy had, in fact, not been raped, Chambliss also knew that the mere accusation of a sexual motive would likely summon a lynch mob to his jail. To avoid such a showdown, he moved Neal and his family from place to place, including across the state line into Alabama. The white men coming for Neal, however, discovered his whereabouts, and soon a caravan of them drove the 175 miles from Marianna to Brewton, Alabama, where they threatened to destroy the jail and release all prisoners unless the one prisoner in their sights was handed over.

For two days they tortured Neal, while reports of the planned lynching fanned out to the press and across the radio, drawing to Marianna a drunken, heavily armed crowd of three thousand—a spectacle that appalled many Americans, including Walter Francis White, the forty-one-year-old executive secretary of the NAACP. It also gave White time to organize.[3]

When the Associated Press announced that the lynching would take place between 8:00 and 9:00 on the evening of October 26, White blasted a telegram urging Florida's Democratic Governor David Sholtz to act.[4] Only it was the mob that acted first, castrating Neal and mutilating his body before turning his bullet-riddled corpse over to the frenzied crowd, which tied it to a car, dragged it to the courthouse plaza, and hung it from a tree overlooking the town's Confederate memorial.[5]

Back in New York, White railed at Governor Sholtz for failing to deploy troops from the state capital only fifty miles away. The ending was all too familiar in the Jim Crow South. There were no

meaningful consequences for Florida's inaction nor for the local authorities who had shrunk from protecting Neal ahead of his trial, nor for the mob itself. The grand jury simply reported out: "Claude Neal came to his death … at the hands of a small group of persons unknown to us."[6]

There is an entry on the Claude Neal lynching case in the official files of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.[7] It isn't the only one. Mob rule and lynching may seem like artifacts of an earlier, "less civilized" era, but history shows that Claude Neal was just one of more than four thousand Black Americans lynched from the end of Reconstruction in the late 1870s to the 1950s.[8] As the nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative has noted:

Terror lynchings in the American South were not isolated hate crimes committed by rogue vigilantes. Lynching was targeted racial violence at the core of a systematic campaign of terror perpetrated in furtherance of an unjust social order…. Lynchings were rituals of collective violence that served as highly effective tools to reinforce the institution and philosophy of white racial superiority. Lynch mobs intended to instill fear in all African Americans, to enforce submission and racial subordination, and to "emphasize the limits of black freedom."[9]

The problem didn't go away when Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt moved into the White House. It haunted the nation, and African Americans in particular, throughout the New Deal.

Two elements distinguished the Claude Neal lynching, however. The first was a blistering sixteen-page memo compiled by Howard "Buck" Kester, a white southern minister and socialist sent by White to investigate the facts.[10] For his report, Kester recorded verbatim the testimony of one lyncher, who gleefully detailed Neal's demise "in all its ghastliness."[11] Kester also unearthed the names of four individual members of the mob, evidence the Florida authorities could have used as leads in their investigation.

The second element was White himself, who immediately sprang into action, publishing Kester's report while redacting his name to protect him as a source. White also sent a copy of the memo to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt with this note: "I have investigated some 41 lynchings and eight race riots and thought I was almost immune to these tortures, but this case has made me more ill and disheartened than any of the lynchings which have occurred in my memory."[12]

With the NAACP protest flag flying, White redoubled his efforts, begun at the start of 1934, to secure what had become a sort of "holy grail" for civil rights activists: a federal anti-lynching law.

Twelve years earlier, in 1922, the Dyer anti-lynching bill had been introduced, only to die in the Senate. The cause of its death was the notorious and seemingly invincible southern Democratic filibuster.[13] In the intervening years, 180 more Black Americans had been lynched, and though the overall numbers were trending down, the onset of the Great Depression saw a disturbing spike, even after FDR took office.[14]

Still, the energetic start and reformist zeal of the early New Deal gave White reason to hope that maybe this time would be different. Further encouraging him was the rise of a more vigilant southern press corps since the last battle, as well as a new generation of southern white liberals who refused to stay silent on the issue.[15]

At the same time, there was reason to be cautious. President Roosevelt arrived in Washington without much of a record on civil rights as governor of New York. And in his 1932 election, it was his opponent, the incumbent Republican president Herbert Hoover, who had carried the Black vote, which had grown significantly in northern cities as a result of the ongoing Great Migration from the rural South. Despite the Depression and Hoover's ineffective response to it, most African American voters and most of the African American press remained loyal to the Party of Lincoln, while Roosevelt's winning Democratic coalition included overwhelming white-voter support in the South. FDR's choice of the conservative Texan John Nance Garner as his running mate persuaded White, equally critical of Hoover, to vote for the Socialist candidate in the race, Norman Thomas.[16]

More daunting for the anti-lynching forces, the Depression had ushered in several gruesome new cases. As White noted to the author James Weldon Johnson, his predecessor as executive secretary of the NAACP, "lynchings usually go up in number when the price of cotton goes down."[17] Hard times in other economic sectors and regions of the country likewise preceded an uptick in mob violence. Perhaps the most notorious lynching of the early Depression happened in the industrial Midwest, when, in August 1930, three Black teenagers, Abe Smith (age eighteen), Thomas Shipp (age nineteen), and James Cameron (age sixteen), were arrested for the murder of a white man and the rape of a white woman. The next day, a mob of around fifty to one hundred white men stormed the jail, dragged and beat Smith and Shipp to death, then hung them from a tree in the Marion public square as tens of thousands watched. In the aftermath, a chilling image of the scene, captured by the photographer Lawrence Beitler, entered the nation's bloodstream; today it is recognized as the "most iconic photograph of lynching in America." Remarkably, Cameron was saved from the lynch mob,

perhaps a token of some underlying humanity in the crowd. He would serve four years in prison, a sentence for which he was pardoned in 1993 by Indiana Governor Evan Bayh.[18]

But it was the crowd in the foreground that told the greater story. Ordinary men and women and children, seemingly all white, gathered together as if for a community picnic on a balmy August evening. They wore summer dresses, straw boaters, short-sleeved shirts and ties. Many were smiling. A man in a white shirt with a toothbrush moustache gesticulated at the victims. Thousands of copies of Beitler's photo were made, sold, and passed around the globe as postcards—and can still be found in flea markets today. We cannot know the motivations of all the people who mailed or received or bought such images, but some undoubtedly saw them as ghoulishly humorous.[19]

Others had a different response. In Brooklyn, New York, a Jewish teacher and labor activist named Abel Meeropol was so horrified by the inhumanity he saw in that image that he wrote a poem, "Strange Fruit," which was performed and recorded by the legendary jazz vocalist, Billie Holiday. (We revisit the power of this song, and ER's response to the play of the same name, in the epilogue to this chapter.)

Some recognized in the Marion case that lynching was a national crisis. As the *East Tennessee News* reported, this "deplorable affair" showed that "mob law" can break "forth in all its fury in North as readily as in the South." Only a federal law, the paper recommended, would "serve to discourage the tendency of irresponsible hoodlums who are inclined to take the law into their own hands."[20]

White was quick to investigate the Marion lynching, able to do so more openly than in similar cases in the South because Indiana had a state anti-lynching law on its books. Working with Indiana's NAACP leader Katherine Bailey, White established that the actions of the Marion mob had been enabled by local and state authorities. The governor had refused to call out the National Guard and, critically, the sheriff had left unlocked three steel doors of the jail that held Cameron, Smith, and Shipp. Like many other officials in Indiana who were elected with the full support of the Ku Klux Klan, Marion's sheriff refused to use force to disperse the lynch mob even though the state's anti-lynching law gave him that authority. White sent Indiana's Republican Governor Harry G. Leslie the names of twenty-seven members of the mob, and a few were even put on trial—itself a kind of victory for the NAACP that was unlikely in the Deep South—even though they were ultimately acquitted. Despite White and Bailey's efforts, however, few African Americans were willing to engage in a

concerted campaign to end lynching in the early 1930s. "The brother is still asleep," White complained to James Weldon Johnson.[21]

The NAACP's decision to prioritize economic issues during the Depression over racial violence received a jolt from the infamous Scottsboro Boys case in Alabama, where, in 1931, nine youths had been falsely accused of raping two white women aboard a freight train. It was significant that the teenagers' case was promoted by the International Labor Defense group associated with the Communist Party and not the NAACP. Unlike in Marion, White resisted immersing his organization in a case in the Deep South that involved interracial sex.[22] But by failing to do so, White had given the NAACP's rivals on its left flank a reputation for being more aggressive and willing to challenge racial injustice head on.

And from there the lynchings continued, demanding a response. In the South, there were seventy-two between 1930 and 1933, an average of two per month.[23] Just six months into President Roosevelt's first term, two African Americans, alleged to have murdered a white woman, were sprung from a jail by a white mob in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and shot dead in August 1933. (A third prisoner was shot but survived.) The role of local law enforcement in facilitating this lynching was so brazen that White and Charles Hamilton Houston (soon to be the NAACP's first full-time legal counsel), determined to awaken their organization to action, rushed to bring the matter to the new president's attention. Houston obtained the support of the American Civil Liberties Union and traveled to the White House in the hope of securing a meeting with Roosevelt. Told to return the next day, Houston and his associate waited for an hour before a receptionist turned them away.[24] It was a worrying sign to them that the Roosevelt administration had little interest in diverting its focus from the nation's economic emergency. Houston did not give up so easily. Instead, he met with FDR's new attorney general, Homer Cummings, and urged him to direct the Justice Department to intervene in the Tuscaloosa case due to the appearance of collusion between local authorities with the mob. Cummings asked Houston to submit a memorandum as a first step. For the NAACP, this was a minor victory and prompted the printing and distribution of multiple copies of Houston's forty-seven-page memo. Still, the Justice Department did not respond until the spring of 1934, when it decided not to prosecute the case.[25]

Two months later, another spectacle lynching occurred on Maryland's Eastern Shore, one that would revive White's interest in pursuing a federal anti-lynching law. In the small Black Belt

community of Princess Anne, a two-thousand-strong white mob attacked state troopers and used a battering ram to break down the door of the jail to lynch George Armwood, a Black man accused of killing an elderly white woman.[26] It seems likely that President Roosevelt would have learned of this particular case, since a Black newspaper noted that he had been awarded an honorary degree from nearby Washington College just a few hours after the Armwood lynching had taken place.[27]

But it was the lynching in San Jose, California, a few weeks later, on November 26, 1933, that convinced many Americans of the need for a national solution to mob violence and spectacle lynchings. Notably, and in a break from the usual pattern of cases, two white men accused of murdering the scion of a wealthy white family were seized from the Santa Clara county jail. When the local radio station announced the time and place of their execution, thousands poured in to cheer as the accused were hanged from a tree and set on fire. As shocking as the event itself, the Republican governor of California, James Rolph, praised it as "a fine lesson for the whole nation."[28] White described Rolph's statement as "'the most brazen approval of lynching … the country has ever seen."[29]

President Roosevelt's stern rebuke of Rolph was equally uncompromising. "We do not excuse those in high places or in low who condone lynch law," FDR announced in a nationally broadcast fireside chat a few weeks before Christmas 1933. White must have been emboldened by the words the president chose, which stated for the record that a "new generation" of Americans "seeks action" to end "that vile form of collective murder—lynch law—which has broken out in our midst anew."[30] The NAACP secretary called FDR's words "magnificent and uncompromising." W. E. B. Du Bois, a constant critic of White within NAACP circles, could at least agree with him on that sentiment. In the *Crisis* magazine he edited, Du Bois noted Woodrow Wilson's and Herbert Hoover's failure to condemn or even mention lynching and praised Roosevelt for declaring "frankly that lynching is murder. We all knew it but it's unusual to have a president of the United States admit it. These things give us hope."[31]

Keenly aware of southern white sensitivities, FDR may have felt at greater liberty to speak out because this case involved white victims well outside the region. Whatever the president's impetus, within weeks of the radio address, White seized upon the sentiment and prevailed upon Democratic senators Robert Wagner of New York and Edward Costigan of Colorado to introduce a new anti-lynching bill at the start of 1934. The Costigan-Wagner bill attacked the problem in two ways: it

imposed fines on counties where lynchings took place, and it empowered the federal government to intervene when county or state officials, through their negligence, failed to maintain law and order. State officials would now face fines, federal trials, and possible imprisonment for failing to enforce state laws on lynching.[32]

Anticipating fierce opposition from southern Democrats to the bill, White put two goals at the top of his list. First, he knew he'd have to convince the South's congressional delegation that their voters were on board. Second, he'd have to persuade President Roosevelt to back the bill with words *and* action. After all, Roosevelt was the head of the Democratic Party and, thanks to the alphabet soup of relief programs he was delivering to the nation, he had political capital to spend. Yet despite the excitement FDR had generated with his fireside chat, he pointedly did not mention the Costigan-Wagner bill when he addressed Congress at the start of the new year. A master "juggler" when it came to politics, Roosevelt knew how to keep people guessing.

Walter White was the chief architect of the 1934 Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill, but he had been building the case for federal legislation for that crime for most of his adult life.[33] White would lead the NAACP for a quarter-century, from the early 1930s until his untimely death in the mid-1950s. And while he did not live to see the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act, he helped lay the groundwork for them as early as 1916, when, as a twenty-three-year-old graduate of Atlanta University, he founded the city's first NAACP branch.[34] Soon after, he caught the attention of the organization's national leader, the author James Weldon Johnson, who hired him to work undercover in the South.[35] Born Black according to the old "one-drop rule," but with blond hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion, White was the ideal undercover agent.[36] He was, as some put it, a "voluntary negro,"[37] a man who could have passed as white but didn't, and even joked with his close friends about his skin color. An old Atlanta acquaintance, L. B. Palmer, said to White in 1925, "You are no more a Negro than Roosevelt was a Dutchman." (In this case, he meant the late President Theodore Roosevelt, of the Oyster Bay—not Hyde Park—Roosevelts.)[38]

Embracing his African American identity was a choice White made as a thirteen-year-old in 1906, when he witnessed the sadistic Atlanta Riot rolling right up to his family's front door.[39] For three days, white Atlantans rampaged through the city, killing dozens of African Americans and destroying the property of middle-class Black residents. White's parents—George, a postal carrier,

and Madeline, a former teacher—both born enslaved, raised their seven children in the Congregationalist faith and sent them all to college,[40] yet they couldn't shield them from the dark side of Jim Crow rule. In recalling how he felt during the Atlanta Riot, White said, "a tension different from anything I had ever known possessed me. I was gripped by the knowledge of my identity, and in the depths of my soul I was vaguely aware that I was glad of it."[41]

Following his founding of the Atlanta branch, from 1918 to 1926, White investigated scores of lynchings and several "race riots," including the massacres of hundreds of Black people and the destruction of Black businesses in Elaine, Arkansas, and in the now-infamous 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre in Oklahoma. On several occasions, he narrowly escaped with his life. In his many travels, White saw that all classes of white Americans engaged in spasms of violence, not just those people referred to as "rednecks" or poor whites, as was often claimed. Indeed, he came to believe that those with the most power—from sheriffs to landowners and businessmen—enabled and sometimes orchestrated the violence while protecting the perpetrators after the fact. To infiltrate white communities after lynchings occurred, White adopted several identities. Though he'd previously worked in the life insurance business—one of the few well-paying jobs open to Black college graduates at that time—perhaps his most effective persona was as a traveling patent medicine salesman. He also pretended to be a land speculator or a northern reporter sympathetic to the southern point of view.[42]

When White emerged as the NAACP's executive secretary—its leading figure—in 1931, he personally believed that a successful nationwide crusade against lynching was needed as a precondition for achieving all other civil rights—indeed all human rights. In fact, just two years earlier, he had published a searing indictment of lynching in his book, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929), which drew on his undercover experiences and marshaled statistical evidence to debunk the argument that lynching was a way of punishing Black men for raping white women. In reality, he argued, the fury and sadism of white mobs was a means of social and economic control: it kept African Americans in their assigned "place" in the Jim Crow South. Yet belief and strategy were two different things, and given the organization's failure to organize enough pressure on Congress to pass the earlier Dyer anti-lynching bill in 1922, White, for his first three years as the NAACP secretary, deferred to voices that made the compelling argument that the group should focus on other urgent fronts, not only fighting against systemic racism and the Depression, but also against

the influence of the Communist Party and others to their left that were urging a more radical program of reform.[43] Among them was W. E. B. Du Bois, the legendary African American scholar, a founder of the NAACP in 1909, and the editor of the organization's flagship publication, the *Crisis*.[44]

His clash with White was personal: Du Bois was aloof and intellectual, White gregarious and middlebrow. Du Bois was raised in the North, White in the South. Their ages put them at odds, in a sense. Du Bois was a full generation older than White, and their differences were ideologically based as well. White was a firm integrationist who wanted to wage battle in the federal courts for equality in education and voting rights, and he invested considerable time in lobbying, public relations, and courting white allies—when they could be found—in the legal system, in Congress, and in the White House. At one point, early in White's tenure as NAACP secretary, Du Bois tried leading a mutiny against him. He even used White's light skin color to attack him as ignorant of the problems facing the country's Black masses. Significantly, their joust included a dispute about Eleanor Roosevelt's stalled efforts to build an integrated subsistence homestead colony in Arthurdale, West Virginia. Du Bois lambasted White as "idiotic" for his "futile and helpless" protest against segregation at Arthurdale. Instead, Du Bois urged black Americans to "ask for subsistence colonies of their own," then explicitly played the race card against White, stating that his arguments were logical but "beside the point": "In the first place, Walter White is white," Du Bois wrote. "He has more white companions and friends than colored. He goes where he will in New York City and naturally meets no Color Line, for the simple and sufficient reason that he isn't 'colored.'"[45]

Joel Spingarn, the NAACP's white president, suggested that Du Bois's attack had hit below the belt, not least of all because other NAACP officials who were darker-skinned than White (or than Du Bois, for that matter) agreed with him and opposed Du Bois's increasing affinity for "self-segregation," a belief that African Americans should no longer oppose separation but instead embrace it as a strategy for surviving the Depression in the face of implacable white racism. Born three years after the end of the Civil War in 1868, during the hopeful era of Reconstruction, Du Bois had lived through the rollback against Black civil and political rights in the late nineteenth century and watched as the nation drew a stark "color line" at the dawn of the twentieth. By the time the Depression struck, he had about given up on waiting for the white power structure to change. Instead, he urged his followers to strive for economic independence wherever it could be found on their side of the color line. As influential as Du Bois was, White ultimately won the internal battle

with him within the NAACP. In July 1934, Du Bois resigned as editor of the *Crisis* and as a member of the NAACP national board.

White also was threatened by growing African American support for the Communist Party USA, which in 1931 had directed its legal arm to aggressively champion the cause of the Scottsboro Boys case, when, as mentioned above, the NAACP proved too flat-footed in its response. The Communists, in coming to the defense of those nine Black teenagers wrongly sentenced to death for the alleged rape of two white women, used the case to condemn racism in uncompromising language. Up at the NAACP's headquarters in New York, White feared their revolutionary policy of a separate Black state in the Deep South would scare off potential allies.[46]

His renewed campaign for a tough anti-lynching law in 1934 enabled him to triangulate against the Communist insurgents to his left while asserting his own priorities at a time when the NAACP had been divided internally. And in addition to pursuing justice, he believed that a supercharged campaign for the Costigan-Wagner bill would sharpen his organization's own radical appeal, reenergize its flagging local branches, and pull in much-needed membership dues.

The setting for the drama was Washington, D.C. Its first scene was the Senate. A few weeks after Franklin Roosevelt called out mob rule in his fireside chat, Senators Costigan and Wagner proposed their anti-lynching bill. A month later, in February 1934, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, chaired by Frederick Van Nuys of Indiana, held a two-day hearing on the bill, but it was White who orchestrated the proceedings. The hearings showcased the merits of the bill and was broadcast on the NBC radio network, courtesy of an anonymous donor who paid for it.[47]

To prosecute the case, White assembled an array of noted writers, academics, and artists, Black and white, and offered a platform to other progressive groups, such as the ACLU, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Church League for Industrial Democracy.[48] Although White lobbied William Green of the American Federation of Labor, he did not attend, and organized labor in general was notably absent from the proceedings. (As we will see in later chapters, it would take time to forge the alliance between Black groups and labor unions that would become so important to the Democratic Party in the 1950s and 1960s.)

Equally important, White seized on the hearings to introduce lawmakers and the country to a rising generation of African American leaders and activists, notably Charles Hamilton Houston, the

dean of Howard Law School, who oversaw the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's challenge to segregation in education, public accommodation, and voting rights. Houston, who had been lobbying the Roosevelt administration on the issue since 1933, chose to speak about the impact of lynching on American foreign policy. The nation's enemies, he warned, were well aware of lynching and its demoralizing effects on Black patriotism. "There is not a single foreign nation," he told the hearings, "which envisions the possibility of war with the United States that does not gamble on the possibility of Negro defection."[49] Houston dismissed the popular belief that only the rape of white women by Black men sparked lynchings, adding forthrightly that "lynching is not to protect southern women but southern profits." Its goal is to "continue the exploitation of the Negro, and to terrorize him to the point that he dare not make any resistance or protest."[50]

More recent claims blaming Communists for provoking lynchings were also false. Instead, Houston stated, racist violence was driving African Americans toward the Communists. And indeed, two Communists—one Black (James W. Ford) and one white (Bernard Ades)—testified before the Committee, arguing that Costigan-Wagner did not go nearly far enough.

Another fresh voice was Juanita Jackson, a student at the University of Pennsylvania who would soon build the NAACP's formidable youth chapters. A native of Maryland, Jackson spoke eloquently about the "complete paralysis" of her state "before mob rule" in the 1933 Princess Anne lynching. She summed up the case succinctly: "Federal intervention is the only power that local [white] communities fear."[51]

As impressive as Jackson, Houston, and others were, it was White himself who dominated the proceedings behind the scenes and at the microphone.[52] To be sure, he was a solid, albeit not spellbinding, orator, yet he used his speech to offer a compelling forensic examination of the horrors of lynching. Between 1882, when the numbers began to be recorded (also the year Franklin Roosevelt was born) and 1934, White reported that 5,053 Americans had been lynched, and of those, 70 percent had been African Americans. He then attacked the mythology surrounding lynching cases by citing surveys that showed that only one-sixth of the Black men lynched had actually been accused of rape. He also demolished the false claim that lynching victims were almost always guilty. In fact, White revealed, thirteen of the twenty-one African Americans who had been lynched in 1930 had been innocent. Similarly, he swatted aside claims that lynching was necessary because of the slow course of justice and legal loopholes that could see a guilty man go free. Instead,

White showed that few African Americans ever secured release on technicalities or points of law. Nevertheless, he argued, due process was fundamental to citizenship, and Black citizens deserved no less than their white neighbors.

White then turned to the heart of the matter: the longstanding issue of pitting southern states' rights advocates against supporters of federal intervention. This had been the issue that had doomed the 1922 Dyer bill in the Senate. (In fact, it went back to the slavery debate that precipitated the Civil War.) A lot had changed since then, not least of all the massive expansion of federal power with the New Deal's relief and recovery efforts—especially in the South, the "Nation's Number 1 Economic Problem," as FDR would soon label it.

Building his argument, White noted wryly to the Senate committee that "states' rights" arguments are never "raised when States seek financial aid for relief, public works, education, and other boons from the Federal Government." They were only raised, it seemed to him, in matters like lynching or Blacks' civil rights.[53] But White also was careful to cultivate the growing number of white southerners who *had* taken a stand against lynching, and assured southern senators that Costigan-Wagner "deprives the States of no single right which they now have." He also praised the changes that were manifest in press coverage and public opinion in the South since 1922. At that time, the white press had been united in opposing the Dyer anti-lynching bill as an unwarranted federal intrusion. Now, in 1934, White could list scores of recent southern newspaper editorials condemning the rise in lynchings and urging a federal solution to mob violence. Supporting testimony from Elizabeth Yates Webb, a white Vassar history professor and daughter of a North Carolina congressman, and Nashville's Albert Barnett, a white Methodist minister, underlined White's point: unlike in 1922, the white South appeared ready to accept federal help in ending lynching.

Professor Webb testified that she was no expert in lynching or the proposed legislation, nor was she representing any organization, but, like four generations of her forebears, she was born and brought up in the South. She was also educated there, and like "thousands of southern white men and women—especially women" of her college-educated generation, she wanted to bring about more decent race relations.[54]

Like Webb, Barnett's testimony made clear he was a bona fide southerner, born in Alabama, educated in Georgia, and now resident in Tennessee. He introduced for the record several newspapers stories about southern churches and synagogues that had expressed support for federal

anti-lynching legislation. A federal law like Costigan-Wagner, Barnett insisted, was not a threat to southern states' rights since it "is constituted out of" existing state laws that made lynching a statutory offense in Alabama, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina, and that made counties financially liable up to $10,000 for allowing lynchings to occur in eleven states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia.[55]

Setting his sights on the nation and on President Roosevelt, White closed, "The United States stands at the crossroads. If Negroes can be lynched with impunity and without fear of punishment today, white people can be lynched tomorrow."[56] This "spirit of anarchy and of lawlessness," White argued, was the gravest question facing the American people in 1934. And he invoked Roosevelt's own words on the radio promising to use "the strong arm of government for [the] immediate suppression" of lynching, organized banditry, and kidnapping. At the same time, White pressured the president by submitting into the *Congressional Record* letters from public officials and press articles expressing support for his radio address. Politically, White hoped to turn up the heat on the White House. After all, as White noted, there had been only ten lynchings in 1932, before FDR took office, but twenty-eight in 1933. That 180 percent increase, White concluded, "provides all the argument necessary for passage of this bill."[57]

The February 1934 congressional hearings were a bravura performance that fired up local NAACP branches and their progressive allies in the North. Still, White knew all too well that many white southerners who opposed lynching were nevertheless adamantly opposed to federal intervention. By their lights, murder of whatever variety was and had to remain a state matter and could not be solved by an interventionist federal crime bill. Better to let things alone, they advised, and allow the moderate and liberal voices of the South to persuade those same neighbors to give up their ropes and their robes. Anything else would only trigger reactionary southern fears of another federal-imposed Reconstruction program. It was one thing to provide economic relief or electrification to distressed white southerners; it was quite another to bring the federal criminal law to bear on the violence that kept the Jim Crow system in place. One was palliative, the other a provocation, and southern liberals' warning to Washington to let them apply their own cure of moral suasion to lynching was one that even many northern liberals found persuasive.

It was here that White's relationship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt became crucially important, for two reasons. First, he saw that she could become his conduit to potential southern

allies of a federal law, especially white women like Jessie Daniel Ames, the dynamic leader of the Association of Southern Women to Prevent Lynching. But the main reason White needed ER's support was that no one else in America was more beloved than FDR in the South at that time, and no one had greater access to the president than the first lady. If she could somehow persuade him to back the Costigan-Wagner bill, its odds of making it through the Congress would be significantly increased.

The Roosevelts likely had been on Walter White's radar since the late 1920s, when Franklin Roosevelt was governor of New York and White was working at the NAACP headquarters in Manhattan. The year FDR took office in Albany—1929—also saw the publication of White's book-length exposé on southern lynching, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*. The stock market crash that same year would set the stage for FDR's presidential victory in 1932, and with the ensuing launch of the New Deal—and with ER's growing awareness of the problems facing Black Americans—White and the NAACP would seize the opening to forge a political alliance with her and, through her, they hoped, her husband's administration.[58]

The year 1934 would mark a turning point in their relationship. In her first year in the White House, ER had failed in her efforts to include African Americans along with struggling white families in the experimental Homestead Colony she helped establish in Arthurdale, West Virginia. The Black press took note. Then, when she tried to remedy the situation, she found herself unprepared for the white backlash against the very idea of a racially mixed community. In other words, the New Deal met Jim Crow, and ER found herself in the middle.

Bruised by this experience, in January 1934 (incidentally, the same month the Costigan-Wagner bill was introduced), she invited several Black leaders, including White, to the White House to advise her on race matters and how she might help. One biographer, Blanche Wiesen Cook, views that meeting as "a new moment in civil rights politics" that "represented a new formation in America's racial geometry." Never before had a first lady so wholeheartedly dedicated herself to the cause of African Americans. In Cook's words, "ER assured the leaders" at the January meeting "that her door was always open, her heart with them."[59] That same year, she joined the NAACP as a member, and, in turn, White accepted her recommendation that he serve on FDR's Virgin Islands

Advisory Council. Most importantly, the first lady embraced the NAACP's pursuit of a federal anti-lynching law as a moral cause.

On the surface, her relationship with White seemed businesslike. They addressed each other as "Mrs. Roosevelt" and "Mr. White." Beneath that surface, though, they shared a common bond in pursuing human rights, and, in joining forces against lynching, they developed a genuine friendship and political partnership that endured for the next twenty years.[60]

In that relationship, White was usually in the position of pushing ER for more action and access. He flooded her with letters, telegrams, news clippings, and invitations, hoping she would help him, among other things, build that bridge to her husband. The first lady was usually in the role of cracking doors open when she could, making symbolic appearances when the setting seemed right, and cautioning—sometimes pleading—with White to slow down when she sensed that his approach was alienating the very people he was trying to reach.

Famously, they teamed up on Marian Anderson's landmark 1939 concert at the Lincoln Memorial. We also know White had ER's personal phone number at her Manhattan residence, and, as their friendship deepened, he became a frequent guest at her Hudson Valley retreat, Val-Kill, and even brought his mother, Madeline Harrison White, there for a visit. Upon his mother's death, White wrote ER a very moving note about how much that stay had meant to her, a woman who had been born enslaved in Georgia during the Civil War.[61]

It was by standing with White and the NAACP on the 1934 anti-lynching bill that Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with him was first forged. Over time, Eleanor allowed the public to see sunlight between her and her husband, whose inclination—at least in his first term—was generally to avoid confrontations with powerful southern Democrats, especially those who chaired important congressional committees essential to New Deal programs.[62] For the rest of their personal and political lives together, ER would take on this role, as interpreter of Black civil rights to FDR. She challenged him to include African Americans in his strategic thinking. He did not always agree, but he listened. And sometimes he moved.

That was White's hope when he tried to arrange a meeting with the president shortly after the introduction of the Costigan-Wagner bill in 1934. The question for both ER and White was how the first lady might best be deployed. At first White wanted ER to testify in person at the February committee hearing on Capitol Hill. She declined, fearing that she would be a lightning rod for critics

of the bill. When they met in early March, ER told White that her husband wanted him to know "that he was going to do everything he could to get [Costigan-Wagner] passed at this session. He is working quietly in order to avoid raising too much opposition to the bill."[63] Around the same time ER wrote to White that "the President feels that that lynching is a question of education in the states, rallying good citizens, and creating public opinion so that the localities themselves will wipe it out. However, if it were done by a Northerner, it will have an antagonistic effect." This echoed FDR's remarks to the Socialist Norman Thomas about lynching, "I know the South and there is arising a new generation of leaders, and we've got to be patient," for Roosevelt believed lynching was a problem that would not be ended overnight, and certainly not by an antagonistic federal intervention.[64]

By April 1934, White had further grounds for optimism. Support for Costigan-Wagner in the Senate was finely balanced. A majority on the Senate Judiciary Committee gave their assent and passed the bill on to the full Senate for its consideration. White counted fifty-two votes in the Senate and a majority in the House in favor of the Bill. Only thirty Senators were officially opposed, but, crucially, they included hardline conservative southern Democrats who controlled the legislative agenda. Their most potent weapon—the filibuster—was in the works.[65]

When ER invited her friend Jessie Daniel Ames to tea at the White House that month, she hoped that an endorsement of Costigan-Wagner by a prominent southern white women's leader might sway the votes of a few more senators. In making her case, the first lady noted that many young members of Ames's organization backed the federal law, and it also had the support of southern white Methodists. But neither tea nor ER's arguments moved Ames. Like many southern moderates, Ames believed that white southerners were best positioned to solve the region's crisis and that they were reluctant to look to Washington, D.C., for help, and even warier of working alongside reform-minded southern Blacks. It would take the next generation of southern liberals—active from World War II to the early 1960s—to decisively break with white supremacy.[66]

Disappointed by Ames's stance, ER continued to press White's arguments with her husband. White's own efforts to convince FDR directly had been rebuffed by his White House gatekeepers, Press Secretary Stephen Early and Executive Assistant Marvin McIntyre, both sons of the South, who claimed that their boss was "too busy."[67] In the meantime, southern senators revived their old

playbook from the 1922 Dyer anti-lynching bill by launching a filibuster against Costigan-Wagner on April 26, 1934 (thirty years before another southern filibuster would nearly derail the 1964 Civil Rights Act). The news may have forced FDR to finally give his wife an answer to her constant prodding. She wrote White on May 2: "The president talked to me rather at length today about the lynching bill. As I do not think you will agree with everything that he thinks, I would like an opportunity of telling you about it, and I would also like you to talk to the President if you feel you want to."[68]

Getting around the complications (and the publicity) of a formal sit-down, ER invited White for tea at the White House on Sunday afternoon, May 6 (not May 7, as White incorrectly remembered it), and used the get-together as a cover for him to make a personal appeal to the president. FDR's mother, Sara Roosevelt, a longtime supporter of the late Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, also attended to make it three-on-one.

FDR arrived late, invigorated from a day of sailing on the Potomac River. Seeing who was there, he tried at first to run out the clock by charming White, but the NAACP leader would not be distracted. He also was ready for FDR's questions and reasons for avoiding public support of the Costigan-Wagner bill. Quickly surmising that ER had prepped White for this informal lobbying session, FDR appealed to his own mother for support. But she, too, agreed with Mr. White.

While there were no major breakthroughs, the meeting ended congenially, giving White some measure of hope. That optimism can be felt in a report on the interview in the *Chicago Defender*, the influential Black newspaper, on May 19, 1934, under the headline:

PRESIDENT TALKS HOUR ON ANTI-LYNCHING BILL;
Chief Executive Interviewed by Walter White; Abhors Rule by Mob Murder

The article put the most positive possible spin on the meeting, stressing that it lasted "more than an hour." And its unnamed reporter—could it have been White himself?—stated that President Roosevelt was "interested in the Costigan-Wagner Bill and asked several questions which showed he had given the legislation attention even in the midst of the national recovery program." The rest of the article distilled White's contentions to FDR: that there were enough Senate votes to pass the bill, and that, despite doubts, its controversial liability clause—fines for counties that failed to prevent or

punish lynchings—passed constitutional muster. More important was the simple fact that FDR and White had *had* a meeting, that they had "chatted informally"—as equals—and that the president had taken the issue of lynching seriously, personally abhorred it, and would make time for the issue in his schedule.

The *Chicago Defender's* view (and certainly White's view) was clear: this was progress. After all, since 1933, FDR had rebuffed all of White's requests to see him.[69] No African American had even dined at the White House since 1901, when Booker T. Washington had accepted Theodore Roosevelt's invitation, only to elicit the vitriol of southern politicians. And when First Lady Lou Hoover had invited Jessie DePriest, the wife of Republican Congressman Oscar De Priest, to a White House tea in 1929, Senator Cole Blease of South Carolina was so outraged that he delivered a racist poem about the event on the Senate floor (though it was later struck from the *Congressional Record*). It is perhaps understandable, then, that White breezily related his chat with the Roosevelts "over teacups" to the NAACP official, Daisy Lampkin.[70]

The glow of that progress didn't last long, however. Looking back on the White House meeting fifteen years later in his memoir, *A Man Called White*, the NAACP secretary would recall that FDR ended the conversation with a stark assessment of the political dilemma he faced as head of the executive branch at a time when southern votes in Congress meant life or death for his New Deal programs. Famously, White quoted FDR as saying to him:

I did not choose the tools with which I must work. Had I been permitted to choose them, I would have selected quite different ones. But I've got to get legislation passed by Congress to save America. The Southerners [...] occupy strategic places on most of the Senate and House committees. If I come out for the anti-lynching bill now, they will block every bill I ask Congress to pass to keep America from collapsing. I just can't take that risk.[71]

Despite the president's candid words, White was upbeat after the meeting. He continued to see the glass half full where FDR was concerned, an optimism that was strengthened when FDR kept his word from the meeting and informed Majority Leader Joe Robinson of Arkansas (via the bill's sponsors) "that the President will be glad to see the bill passed and wishes it passed." White also lobbied his press contacts to ask FDR directly whether he favored a vote on Costigan-Wagner, and for the first time in public, the president said yes. But it was too little, too late, and apparently he qualified it with what the historian William Leuchtenberg called "mealy-mouthed" language about

his support for the "objective" of the bill while assuring Robinson that he would not fight to overcome the southerners' filibuster.[72] Moreover, when FDR met with Senators Costigan and Wagner, White was not invited, because the senators feared he would only antagonize McIntyre, FDR's southern-born and -educated secretary in charge of appointments. As the spring of 1934 unfolded, the bill remained jammed up, and by June, with the southern filibuster locked in place, Costigan and Wagner accepted their bill's defeat. It would have to be resubmitted the following year.

As 1935 began, White believed further progress had been made. The Claude Neal lynching in Florida had refocused public attention on the need for federal solutions to crime, and Howard Kester's memo on the horrific events there was the centerpiece of the NAACP's full-court press for a renewed bill. FDR's reaction to the Neal case was instructive, however. Asked by a journalist whether he now supported Costigan-Wagner, the president quipped, "Check up and see what I did last year. I have forgotten."[73]

The administration's cautious approach to federal anti-lynching measures was also made clear by Attorney General Homer Cummings's refusal of the NAACP's demand that he use the 1932 Lindbergh Kidnap Act to prosecute Neal's killers. Still, White was encouraged by the new Congress that met after the midterm elections. It was the first time since the Civil War that a president's party had increased its majorities in both houses, and included Democrats from districts where Black voters had just switched from the GOP because of the Roosevelts and the New Deal. In the face of such success, FDR had to find a way to balance his southern white base with an increasingly influential northern Black vote.[74] Trying to tip that balance, White oversaw the delivery of thousands of telegrams and letters to members of Congress demanding passage of the Costigan-Wagner bill.

The NAACP had also stepped up its grassroots efforts in the intervening months, a change of tactics by White, who was less comfortable advancing direct-action methods than he was engaging in behind-the-scenes lobbying of the first lady and members of Congress. In mid-December 1934, around seventy protesters, many of them young African American women with anti-lynching placards and some with nooses around their necks, picketed Cummings's National Crime Conference at the Daughters of the American Revolution's headquarters at Memorial Continental Hall in Washington, D.C. They were protesting the refusal of Cummings to include lynching as part of the conference agenda.[75] Cummings feared that including lynching would be "embarrassing" and would antagonize southern politicians whose help he needed in passing broad federal anti-crime

legislation.[76] FDR attended the conference and denounced recent "horrifying lynchings," a contrast, the *New York Times* reported, to Cummings's avoidance of the subject.[77] Although it was targeted to a specific audience, the president's speech, in marking a break in his silence on the issue, encouraged the ever-optimistic White. Perhaps FDR would act in 1935? If he did, then ER would again be central to White's political strategy.

To kick off the new campaign for Costigan-Wagner, White planned what he called a "monster rally" against lynching at Carnegie Hall in New York City and invited the first lady to speak.[78] Before saying yes, she dropped a memo in her husband's basket. "FDR—I would like to do it," she confided, while also promising to clear her speech with him. "But," she added, "will do whatever you say." The president replied tersely through an intermediary, his longtime assistant Marguerite "Missy" LeHand, that she should not attend. His message to his wife: "This is dynamite."[79]

Heeding his alarm, ER decided to pass on the rally. She did, however, attend White's groundbreaking and provocative art exhibition on lynching that opened in the spring of 1935 at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries in midtown Manhattan. Some fainted at the shocking images, which showed on canvas what Kester's memo on Claude Neal had signaled in print: that Americans had to overcome their indifference and find it within themselves to challenge and stop the inhumanity of lynching. The exhibition was yet another strand in White's broad anti-lynching strategy in which promoting cultural change was just as important as lobbying Congress and the White House.[80] Interestingly, ER, showing her own sense of the politics of the moment, made a point of dropping by the art exhibition but only allowed White to inform the press *after* she'd departed. Exercising similar care, she advised White against enflaming the white South by taking the exhibit on the road there. In her push-and-pull, albeit coordinated, way, the first lady worked in tandem with the NAACP leader throughout the early months of 1935. Meanwhile, White continued to lobby white southern liberals and made headway in persuading some northern labor unions to join the effort. This time the American Federation of Labor passed a resolution in favor of Costigan-Wagner, and White began a productive relationship with an AFL lobbyist in the nation's capital, Mike Flynn. But beyond the lynching issue, a close alliance between the NAACP and labor on bread-and-butter issues was slow to emerge. It would improve with the formation of integrated CIO unions in 1936 and with A. Philip Randolph's initial March on Washington call before World War II, but there were continuing tensions between Black and white workers over issues like hiring, seniority, and promotion.[81]

On the pages of the *Nation* and the *Crisis* magazines, intellectuals like Pearl S. Buck and Sherwood Anderson wrote eloquently about the scourge of lynching. Alongside anti-lynching rallies throughout the nation, the famed composer George Gershwin and other entertainers appeared on radio shows that condemned lynching and that were given free airtime by NBC and CBS. In terms of national cultural influence, White's arguments were beginning to take hold.[82]

Behind the scenes, ER continued to work on FDR, and perhaps her arguments and White's were beginning to have an impact. On March 20, 1935, FDR wrote Attorney General Cummings a memo about another lynching, this time of Ab Young in Mississippi, where the mob had crossed state lines into Tennessee to capture the intended victim. Tellingly, FDR noted, "I am inclined to think Walter White is right. If his statement is correct, this man Abe [sic] Young was kidnapped," and thus could be prosecuted under the 1932 Federal Kidnapping Act (otherwise known as the Lindbergh Law). Roosevelt asked of Cummings, "Please let me have your slant."[83] Cummings was unequivocal that the Smith case, like the Claude Neal case before it, could not be prosecuted under existing legislation because these lynchings did not involve a ransom or reward. But his argument was more one of politics than of the law. Cummings acknowledged that while White and others had a "justifiable hatred for the crime of lynching," any effort to tackle that crime would be a "doubtful policy to attempt … except upon a clear mandate from Congress."[84] In other words, Roosevelt's attorney general warned him against using the executive branch to solve a legislative problem. Gradually, though, the idea of doing just that began to take root.

In this second legislative effort against lynching during the New Deal, the Van Nuys Subcommittee and the full Senate Judiciary Committee again gave Costigan-Wagner a favorable report. Yet also as before, in April 1935, southern Democrats slammed the door with another filibuster. Impervious to White's statistical evidence on the motivations for most lynchings, Senator Ellison DuRant "Cotton Ed" Smith of South Carolina warned that the Costigan-Wagner bill threatened the virtue of southern white womanhood. Sensing the momentum slipping away, White mounted a desperate, last-minute lobbying effort to persuade northern and western senators to break the southern filibuster.

In the meantime, FDR chose to remain silent, refusing to condemn the use of the filibuster or the southern Democrats in his party spearheading it. The reason? In a crowded legislative session, he needed the crucial votes of South Carolina senators Smith and James Byrnes, as well as others in the

southern delegation, to pass two other landmark bills working their way through Congress: the Social Security Act and a different Wagner Act, otherwise known as the National Labor Relations Act. Combined, they formed what we now think of as the heart and soul of the Second New Deal.

As a result, on May 1, 1935, Senator Costigan pulled the anti-lynching bill as a collateral casualty of these competing efforts, so pivotal to the Roosevelt administration's reform agenda in counteracting the economic impacts of the Depression and strengthening the nation's social safety net. In protest, White resigned from the President's Virgin Islands Advisory Council and pilloried FDR for failing to join the majority of Americans in supporting the anti-lynching bill. "In justice to the cause I serve I cannot afford to remain even a small part of your official family," White wrote the White House.

Despite this defeat, the NAACP secretary remained close to Eleanor Roosevelt and thanked her for her valiant efforts. In turn, she encouraged White to keep pressing the issue. "Of course, all of us are going on fighting," she wrote him. For her part, ER sent her husband news clippings condemning his silence on such an important human rights issue. To one she even added the note, "Pretty bitter isn't it? I can't blame them, though…."[85]

ER also defended White against his critics on FDR's White House staff. That summer, Press Secretary Early wrote to ER's private secretary, Malvina "Tommy" Thompson, at Campobello, Maine, to complain about White, who, he said, was "bombarding the President with telegrams and letters." "Frankly, some of his messages have been decidedly insulting," Early confided in Thompson, and added that White had been one of the "worst and most continuous of troublemakers" since before FDR was elected. Early was particularly incensed by an incident at a restaurant at the Capitol Building where, he said, White had "demanded that he be served, apparently deliberately creating a troublesome scene … for publicity purposes and to arouse negroes throughout the country." The language of President Roosevelt's press secretary is instructive here. Early viewed White as transgressing the fixed racial boundaries of Jim Crow Virginia, where he had been raised as the proud descendent of the Confederate general Jubal A. Early.[86] Press secretary to private secretary, Early perhaps hoped that Thompson could pressure the first lady to steer clear of such a "troublemaker," or at least help rein in White.

White, however, would not be reined in. That September he wrote ER again. "Would it be possible," he asked, "for the President to receive a quite small and carefully selected committee to

discuss confidentially and frankly the situation with regard to the Negro?" To avoid "unwelcome publicity," he suggested the meeting should be held at Hyde Park and not the White House to ensure "frank discussions" leading to conclusions of "mutual benefit" on matters like the Costigan-Wagner bill. Unstated was White's concern that any White House meeting would be thwarted by FDR's gatekeepers like Early. The limited delegation would include such persons as James Weldon Johnson and J. E. Spingarn. Both had impeccable credentials. Johnson, a Black former leader of the NAACP, had served Theodore Roosevelt as consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua. Spingarn, the white president of the NAACP, was, like Roosevelt, a figure of wealth and importance in Dutchess County. ER replied quickly, dashing White's hopes. "It is impossible, I am afraid," she told him, as "he has every minute taken" before a planned trip to the West Coast. She did add a note of encouragement, stating that a later meeting "may be possible," since FDR had "promised me that he would do his best."[87] ER, five years older than Early, still harbored some of the residual racial blind spots of her times and her class position—her casual use of the term *piccaninnies* to describe African American children, for instance.[88] But as she expanded her reach and role as first lady, she also began to see African American civil rights leaders like White and the educator Mary McLeod Bethune as her social and intellectual equals. It was this Eleanor Roosevelt who replied directly to Early after reading his note to Thompson. Apologizing if White had indeed been a "great nuisance" to her husband's beleaguered press secretary, ER nevertheless insisted that White was not being rude. "If you ever talked to him, and knew him, I think you would feel as I do," she wrote. "He really is a very fine person with the sorrows of his people very close to his heart."[89]

Other allies were less sympathetic to White following the second failure of the Costigan-Wagner bill. The NAACP's Houston told him, acidly, "All along I've been telling you that your president [FDR] had no real courage and that he would chisel in a pinch."[90] The *Nation* and the *New Republic* magazines also bitterly attacked FDR, and the Black press was nearly unanimous in its condemnation of his failure to challenge the forces of southern white supremacy in the Senate. Even the NAACP's own publication, the *Crisis*, by then edited by Du Bois's successor Roy Wilkins, spoke out against Roosevelt to the point that White himself opined that FDR's silence in the face of another southern filibuster—a trade-off necessary, he believed, for their support of Social Security and other New Deal measures—had been the bill's "greatest single handicap."[91]

There is little doubt that Franklin Roosevelt privately empathized with both his wife and White on the issue of lynching. And he certainly respected the views of his largely Black domestic staff at the White House, including his personal valet, Irvin "Mac" McDuffie, and Mac's wife, Elizabeth "Lizzie" McDuffie, the first lady's personal maid. White knew the couple from Atlanta, and they would prove to be a force on the campaign trail for the president in the Black community during his first reelection campaign. White would leverage his hometown connection with the McDuffies in accessing the White House when FDR's political handlers gave him the runaround. Lizzie McDuffie noted that White "could bypass a few government channels through me."[92]

The truth was that FDR abhorred the inhumanity of lynching and worried about its consequences for the sanctity of the rule of law, so vital to the integrity, confidence, and workings of the nation's democratic institutions. On January 2, 1936, President Roosevelt tried to melt the ice a bit by meeting with White for a second time, after their 1934 porch visit with Eleanor and Sara Roosevelt. It was in the White House, not the intimate gathering at Hyde Park he had requested the previous September, but ER had kept her promise to White that such a meeting was possible, and the president had kept his promise to his wife that he would do his best.

It was then that FDR proposed a half-measure of having the Justice Department conduct its own investigations of lynching crimes, rather than reviving the Costigan-Wagner bill once more in Congress. White appreciated the president's offer, but he had deep reservations about what he dubbed the "U.S. Department of (White) Justice."[93] He especially doubted that Attorney General Cummings would be much of an ally. Cummings, after all, had refused to even include lynching as a topic to be discussed at his 1934 Crime Conference. White's contempt for and feud with the attorney general continued into 1937, when he wrote him a bitter and sarcastic note about an FBI investigation of a cloak that had gone missing at a Cummings family party. Once the cloak had been found, White asked, perhaps the FBI officers could "investigate the interstate kidnapping and … lynching of Claude Neal" in Florida, a case that was by then three years old.[94]

White was also hostile to the Federal Bureau of Investigation under J. Edgar Hoover. When they first met in 1923, the FBI director told him he could do nothing to stop the Ku Klux Klan from marching openly in Tuskegee, Alabama, to intimidate African Americans seeking employment at a newly constructed veterans' hospital. (Their robes were made from the hospital's sheets.)[95] Hoover, like Cummings, was steadfast in resisting any FBI or DOJ involvement in the Claude Neal case.[96]

Still, White backed FDR's bid for a second term that year, and when he won in a landslide, White incorporated FDR's suggestion about Justice Department involvement into a third federal anti-lynching effort in 1937.

This time, the campaign began in the House of Representatives, with a bill sponsored by Joe Gavagan, the liberal white Democratic congressman from Harlem in New York City. All but working out of Gavagan's office at the Capitol, White lobbied northern House Democrats, who, like FDR, had won a majority of the Black vote in 1936 (a first for a Democratic president). That statistic spoke volumes for FDR's cautious, ambiguous, but ultimately politically successful strategy in handling the Costigan-Wagner bill. While his inaction on lynching had not been enough to damage the reputation he had earned among African Americans for the New Deal's actions in creating jobs and fighting poverty, now that Black voters were within the Roosevelt coalition, they could exert new pressures through their elected representatives.

The winds of political change appeared to be moving in White's direction on April 16, 1937, when the Gavagan anti-lynching bill passed the House by a vote of 277-120. Northern Democrats voted 173-14 for the bill. Only a single southerner, Maury Maverick of Texas, voted in favor of it. A frustrated Gavagan recalled, "I got very little support from the White House."[97] On the very day the bill passed, there was another gruesome lynching in the country. Two Black prisoners in Duck Hill, Mississippi, were sprung from their jail cells with the collusion of the local sheriff. They were then tortured and burned to death with blowtorches. Yet no one was charged.

With this shocking crime in the air, the Gavagan bill moved to the Senate, where White was hoping to build on the momentum of the House. He would have been aware, though, that the Dyer anti-lynching bill had also passed the House in 1922, only to be filibustered in the Senate. ER again promised to lobby the president, but FDR again had a reason he could not lend his full-throated support to a federal anti-lynching bill. As he told his wife, he already had too much political capital wrapped up in his Supreme Court reform ("packing") plan. FDR refused ER's suggestion that he meet with White or their Dutchess County neighbor Spingarn and told her he had no advice to give the NAACP officials.[98] In short, he could not afford to antagonize southern allies like Byrnes of South Carolina, whom he needed for blocking and tackling in the legislative chamber. The Senate co-sponsors of the anti-lynching bill, Wagner (again) of New York and Van Nuys of Indiana, then

delayed again until early 1938.[99] By then, White's efforts would see him become the first African American to grace the cover of *Time* magazine (January 24, 1938, issue).

Once again, however, southern senators countered with a six-week filibuster. On many economic and political matters, the southern delegation was deeply divided. And there were differences of political style. Among the most unreconstructed racists was Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi, who compared Walter White to a "rape fiend" and dismissed the legislation as "a diabolical effort to despoil the womanhood of the Caucasian race."[100] He would later propose resettling all Black Americans in West Africa and "crowning Eleanor Roosevelt Queen of Greater Liberia."[101] Yet Bilbo also remained ferociously loyal to FDR's economic policies and help for agriculture. He once wrote to the president as "one Southern cotton farmer to another."[102] Byrnes, a key ally of FDR's (whom he would nominate to the Supreme Court and bring into the White House to help lead the mobilization effort during World War II), named White as the instigator of the bill and warned that the NAACP would make more, unnamed "demands" if given an inch. [103] Observing White make frequent trips to huddle with the Senate majority leader during the filibuster, Byrnes complained that the Kentuckian "[Alben] Barkley can't do anything without talking to that nigger first."[104] White, though, would get revenge. When Byrnes angled for the vice presidential nomination in 1944 (a slot that would ultimately go to Harry Truman), the NAACP secretary helped scupper his chances by reminding Democrats of the South Carolinian's racism and his role in filibustering the anti-lynching bill.[105]

By the time of the 1937-1938 filibuster, the issue was no longer just about lynching, but about resisting the emerging African American challenges to Jim Crow, including the right to vote and to equal justice under the law. And it was also about resisting the growing power and influence of White. One southern newspaper even claimed that White had a secret tunnel from the Hay-Adams House (an iconic D.C. hotel) to the White House.[106] To the southern senators, it did not matter that the previous year's Duck Hill lynching was not a rape case, nor that 72 percent of all Americans and that even 57 percent of southerners supported the law, according to a 1937 Gallup Poll.[107] And there was evidence that FDR had been right in his comments to the Socialist Norman Thomas that "a new generation of leaders was arising in the South." That spring, more than two-thirds of the all-white student body at the University of Texas declared support for the bill and opposition to the filibuster.[108]

Decades of anti-lynching efforts by the NAACP and others might have worked to change hearts and minds, but not in the southern congressional delegations. There, progressive civil rights reform met suffocating political power—and would for another generation, until Lyndon Johnson, an FDR protégé, broke the southern filibuster to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act. FDR did not have the leverage to do so in 1938, and, if his 1937 court-packing scheme was any indication, he might have failed trying.

FDR's room to maneuver on the Van Nuys-Wagner bill was limited when even the most liberal southern white New Dealers like Alabama's Hugo Black and Florida's Claude "Red" Pepper joined the filibuster. Black was known for his fairness to Black people as a young prosecutor and would prove to be a powerful voice for racial equality once FDR appointed him to the Supreme Court. But he opposed the anti-lynching bill for the same reason he had earlier joined the Ku Klux Klan: in Alabama, it was politically pragmatic to do so. Black was also a strong voice for the Wagner Act and other labor measures opposed by southern conservative critics of the New Deal like Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina.[109] Despite the senator's opposition to the anti-lynching law, White supported Black's nomination to the Supreme Court, largely through the influence of the Roosevelts.[110]

Pepper was the only member of Florida's congressional delegation to support FDR on what would become the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, the legislation that created a national minimum wage. Pepper's opponent, J. Mark Wilcox, a member of the House and proponent of Florida's big business interests, voted against it. FDR took a risk by siding with Pepper, who the previous year had courageously campaigned to end the poll tax, a major barrier to Black voting.[111] Senator Pepper's victory in that spring's primary persuaded FDR that he could defeat other conservative southern members of Congress who opposed his economic agenda. That primary fight explains Pepper's support of the filibuster—he feared his opponent would use it against him—and also FDR's reluctance to get involved in the Senate anti-lynching fight. Just as he needed southern liberals like Hugo Black on the Supreme Court, he needed Pepper in the Senate and was not going to break with his staunchest allies for their support of the filibuster.[112]

The president *was* angry with those like Senator Walter George of Georgia who opposed his pro-labor agenda. FDR's "Dutch was up," the *New York Times* reported in April 1938. But there was little sign of that Dutch fighting spirit when it came to an anti-lynching law.[113] He also had other

priorities in 1938, in addition to the purge: the nation had slipped back into a recession, and war was looming in Europe and the Far East. Anxious to move on, the president had his son, James Roosevelt, call Senator Byrnes to get his views. "Father would like to know what likelihood there is of the filibuster's ending." James asked. Byrnes's reply was clear: "Tell him not until the year 2038, unless the bill is withdrawn by then."[114] FDR heard the message and asked the Senate to act quickly on an emergency $250 million relief appropriation to fight the recession. That would require an end to the anti-lynching debate one way or another. On February 16, 1938, a northern Democratic motion to close the debate (and force a vote) was narrowly defeated by 46-42. Southern Democrats were unanimous in opposing cloture, but they were joined by ten (of thirteen) Republicans who supported the filibuster in principle. Five days later, northern Democrats withdrew the bill.[115]

In early 1939 the white philanthropist James Ryan withdrew his financial support for another anti-lynching campaign by the NAACP. That July, the NAACP board of directors downgraded anti-lynching to focus on other matters. Houston among others had long resisted White's emphasis on the lynching bill at the expense of working with organized labor and on other economic matters, calling it "bad strategy." Mary White Ovington, the NAACP's most prominent white female leader, advised White that solid victories, not just moral ones, were needed.[116] The lynching issue did not go away, but the energy that White had given to the issue dissipated somewhat.

Another anti-lynching bill passed the House of Representatives in January 1940. The 252-131 margin was slightly lower than it had been in 1937. The next month, White and Arthur Spingarn met with FDR, who once again chose not to intervene. It was an election year, and FDR was also preoccupied with a looming global conflict. Without even a filibuster, the bill died.[117] It was a minor campaign issue in 1940 when FDR's Republican opponent, the Indiana businessman Wendell Willkie, promised a federal anti-lynching law, abolition of the poll tax for voting, and an end to Jim Crow in the federal government. The leading Black newspapers, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *New York Age*, and the *Chicago Defender*, all supported Willkie, in large part because of his unabashed support for civil rights—and FDR's failure to back an anti-lynching bill.[118] The *Chicago Defender* noted, however, that Willkie handled the lynching question with kid gloves and that both parties had a "mum is the word" agreement not to make lynching or anti-lynching a campaign issue.[119] The president still won the African American vote handily on Election Day.

During FDR's first two terms, White, the NAACP, and Eleanor Roosevelt had devoted considerable energies to transforming the national debate on lynching. In terms of the court of public opinion, they succeeded in depicting lynching as an affront to human rights—the sort of thing that democracy-minded Americans feared about Nazi Germany. And crucially, the number and frequency of lynchings declined in the decade after White began his campaign in 1934. Between 1930 and 1933, seventy-two African Americans had been lynched. Between 1934 and 1937, the total dropped to fifty-three, and between 1938 and 1941 it fell dramatically to eighteen.[120]

Why, then, did an anti-lynching bill fail in Congress? Why, although he opposed lynching on a personal level, did FDR do so little to rally Congress behind a federal anti-lynching law? And why, despite FDR's clear failures on lynching, did African Americans in 1936, 1938, and 1940 give up their vote in increasing numbers to the president and the Democratic Party that was still the party of white supremacy in the South?

First and foremost, Walter White could not overcome the power southern Democrats wielded in Congress because of that body's Seniority Rules. Voter suppression in the South, including the all-white primary system, for years had allowed southern Democrats to win election after election, their safe seats translating into prestigious committee chairmanships. At the same time, the filibuster rule gave a small minority of senators near-limitless powers to delay or prevent any civil rights measures. A "supermajority" of sixty votes was needed for cloture.

A master strategist, FDR also was a political realist, and he was unwilling to jeopardize the New Deal by provoking southern Democrats. In 1936, he won every southern state by a landslide—in South Carolina it was 99 percent. In Jackson County, Florida, where Claude Neal was lynched, he won 91.5 percent of the vote.[121]

The unanimity of southern support for FDR after his first term was based on support for his economic recovery policies and on Roosevelt's acceptance that states' rights and white supremacy would continue in the New Deal. The historian Ira Katznelson has shown that southerners in Congress "fortified Jim Crow" by making certain that New Deal agencies preserved the racial status quo. As one commentator referring to Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson of Arkansas put it, "So long as they [the New Dealers] fought the money power and the big industries—so long as they were pro-farmer and did not stir up the niggers—he was with them."[122] And neither northern Democrats

nor FDR pushed to include farmworkers or domestics—two-thirds of all southern employees—in landmark legislation like the Social Security Act of 1935. Significantly, when pushed by the southern filibusters, northern Democrats did not fight to keep the debate going on Costigan-Wagner in 1935 and 1936. In the 1937 and 1938 bills, however, particularly in the House with Gavagan, where nearly all non-southern Democrats supported the bill, a clear sectional division began to emerge. This was not enough to overcome the unity of the Senate filibuster against the bill by southern Democrats, supported by some Republicans who saw the maneuver as "the last barrier to tyranny. [123] But the process of sectional differences—with northern Democrats and Republicans in support of civil rights and southern white Democrats isolated—can be traced to the 1930s debates on lynching.

At the same time, northern Black support for the Democrats spiked between 1932 and 1940 *in spite of* FDR's silence on lynching, which the Black press condemned and covered extensively. This suggested that FDR's strategy of pushing forward with the economic recovery, even with its discriminatory provisions baked in, could carry the African American vote while also keeping moderate and liberal white southerners in the tent. That was the needle FDR was threading, and as effective as White was in getting the word out about lynching, and as insistent as ER was, it wasn't enough to convince FDR that he needed to spend his political capital on the problem by a divisive battle in Congress.

White also overestimated the power and influence of southern white moderates in and out of Congress. When push came to shove, even those who hated and were ashamed of lynching, such as Jessie Daniel Ames and Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh *News and Observer*, balked at inviting federal action to end it.[124] In response, in 1938, White, along with Mary McLeod Bethune and Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, began to address the weaknesses of southern liberalism by founding the Southern Conference on Human Welfare.

Additionally, there were limits to the support for the campaign within the Black community itself (by then about twelve million strong). Some, like Du Bois, wanted to focus on kitchen-table issues, such as labor and housing. Others, including the younger, more radical members of the National Negro Congress, called for mass demonstrations. But White was reluctant to launch direct-action campaigns (a tactic associated with the Communist left), preferring instead to play an inside game by focusing on the courts, the Congress, and the presidency.

Above all, the anti-lynching campaigns of the 1930s helped professionalize the NAACP's lobbying efforts in general, and they prepared the organization for the many civil rights battles to come. Grassroots campaigns, such as A. Philip Randolph's 1941 March on Washington Movement, would be central, as would the rapid expansion of NAACP membership and local branch activism under young leaders like Juanita Jackson, Ella Baker, and Rosa Parks. It also can be fairly said that the anti-lynching campaign helped awaken—even radicalize—Eleanor Roosevelt to the cause of racial injustice as never before, a cause for which she would risk her own life traveling the South in the years that followed.

In the final analysis, perhaps FDR, unlike the first lady, did not view lynching as an immediate human rights crisis. The political fissures between them that the anti-lynching campaign revealed remain intriguing to biographers to this day. The Roosevelts' biographer Joseph Lash notes, for example, that, "When a politician must move pragmatically and make compromises with city machines and southern senators that are difficult to square with his liberal principles, it is inconvenient to have a moralist [like ER] around."[125]

When push came to shove, it may appear that ER chose principle and FDR chose pragmatism. But this ignores a crucial element of the president's long-term efforts to involve the Justice Department in lynching cases, stretching back to 1935 when he suggested to Attorney General Cummings that "Walter White was right" that federal intervention was justified in lynchings like Claude Neal's. Cummings was reluctant to pursue that angle, but later attorneys general had a different view and were more amenable to FDR's call in 1938 that Justice investigate all lynchings.

Cummings's successor, Frank Murphy, was a staunch New Dealer and a one-time board member of the NAACP. In 1939, Murphy established what would become the Civil Rights Section (CRS) of the Criminal Division of the Justice Department, committed to investigating and prosecuting civil rights violations, including lynching. In 1941, a new attorney general, Francis Biddle, directed the CRS and the FBI to forcefully investigate lynchings.[126]

The issue was given greater importance by the United States' entry into World War II. On January 25, 1942, six weeks after Pearl Harbor, a mob of seven hundred whites in Sikeston, Missouri, stormed a jail cell holding Cleo Wright, a laborer accused of stabbing a white woman. Wright's legs were tied to the back of a car that was driven to a local Black Baptist church, where

horrified parishioners looked on as he was doused with gasoline and set ablaze. Mercifully, he died within minutes.

The next day White fired off a missive to FDR about "the most crushing blow to Negroes" and warned the president that the Japanese would be sure to see the propaganda value of an unpunished Wright lynching—exactly as Charles Houston had warned at the 1934 Senate hearings.[127] The difference between the Claude Neal and the Cleo Wright cases was striking.

This time, Attorney General Biddle immediately ordered the Justice Department to investigate the case—and the state's governor offered his full cooperation. State and national NAACP leaders worked closely with the Justice Department. Even some southern newspapers joined the condemnation of the mob, with the *Tampa Daily Times* suggesting that the Wright case had raised the question of "what kind of democracy we claim to be fighting for."[128] While the efforts of the Justice Department failed to secure any indictments for Wright's murder, White believed that the federal investigation of this case produced a precedent for future prosecutions.[129]

If FDR had left office, as expected, after his second term ended in January 1941, it is doubtful that he would be praised (or remembered) for his actions on civil rights. That he is at all is in large part due to his third and fourth terms. As we shall see in the following chapters, it was World War II that transformed the trajectory of the long civil rights movement in the United States. And FDR, with ER, White, and others constantly pushing from his left, would be a pivotal figure in that era of change. Instead of remaining cautiously silent at key moments as in the anti-lynching campaign, FDR agreed to mandate fair play in defense jobs and appointed progressive lawyers to head the Justice Department and liberal judges to the federal bench. Most importantly, he articulated a postwar order based on his vision of the Four Freedoms, including freedom against fear (inescapably reminding us not only of the horrors of war but also of domestic terrorism and racial violence).

In "The Negro Loses a Friend," a piece for the *Chicago Defender*, White mourned *that* FDR—the moral leader of the Four Freedoms—after his death in April 1945, describing him "as a close personal friend." Candidly, though, White admitted, "We did not always see eye to eye on issues relating to the Negro or the reactionary southern leadership of his party but one never questioned the integrity and sincerity of his desire to secure, as far as possible for him to do so, the full fruits and benefits of democracy for all men whatever their creed or color."[130]

ER gave a similarly warm tribute to White in her syndicated "My Day" column when he died of a heart attack at age sixty-two in 1955. She praised him as a "man of great courage, moral and physical," who never acted "from anger" but "from reason." She also said that White helped his race and his country by being "persistent but calm and … objective." His passing was a significant loss. "I always liked to talk things over with Walter White," ER recalled. "I shall miss him personally." [131]

A haunting reminder of the enormous work that remained before her and the nation came only a few months later with the now-notorious lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till during a family visit in Mississippi. It would take another ten years—and the death of another president, John F. Kennedy – to finally convince enough senators to do the right thing and pass the first major voting rights bill since Reconstruction.

Perhaps because Walter White never achieved such a signature victory in his own lifetime, his story faded from view. He died just ten months after the Supreme Court's unanimous May 1954 ruling that separate schooling was inherently unequal, as White, Houston, and Thurgood Marshall had long argued. But the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* left much work to be finished by the next generation who, assisted by a more aggressive national press corps and television cameras, captivated the nation with its dreams.

Epilogue

In 1999, *Time* magazine named "Strange Fruit" the "Song of the Century." It was written as an anti-lynching poem in 1937 by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish teacher and American Communist Party member from the Bronx. The words were inspired by his seeing the often-reproduced photograph of the 1930 Marion, Indiana, lynching of Abe Smith and Thomas Shipp. But it was the version first sung and recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939 that remains inscribed in many American hearts today.[132]

The song proved powerful for ER. Eight months after FDR died, she attended a performance of the Broadway play *Strange Fruit* and wrote about it in "My Day."

We need to understand these circumstances in the North as well as in the South. There are mental and spiritual lynchings as well as physical ones, and few of us in this nation can claim immunity from responsibility for some of the frustrations and injustices which face not only our

colored people, but other groups, who for racial, religious or economic reasons, are at a disadvantage and face a constant struggle for justice and equality of opportunity.[133]

The sobering truth is that lynching remained a central issue throughout the Roosevelt years. That cuts against the administration's achievements in humanizing industrial capitalism and reinventing the Democratic Party with an expanded base that included African Americans. In the end, FDR chose his political bets. One can only speculate how history might have been different had he roared back into office in his second term fixated on passing the anti-lynching bill instead of packing the Supreme Court. The Dixiecrats might have bolted earlier—and that could have had repercussions for World War II, where southern Democrats like Senator James Byrnes of South Carolina supported FDR's foreign policy.

By bringing the anti-lynching story of the 1930s back into the frame today, we not only revive fascinating characters like Walter White; we add to the complexity of the New Deal and remind ourselves that we can learn as much from what FDR did *not* accomplish—and *why*—

as we can from what he, the first lady, and White achieved.

Fourteen presidents have occupied the White House since FDR's four terms. It must be noted for the record that not one of the first thirteen signed a federal anti-lynching bill. In 2005, the Senate issued an apology to the victims of lynching and their families for its failure to pass a law. But in 2018, eighty years after the Van Nuys-Wagner bill was pulled, members of the House and Senate introduced a fresh anti-lynching bill as a form of recompense and of recognition that Congress and the nation had failed to act boldly on such crimes when given several chances to do so in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Democratic Congressman Bobby Rush of Illinois introduced similar legislation in the House, noting: "While many may argue that lynching has been relegated to history, you only need to look at the events in Charlottesville [in August 2017] to be reminded that the racist and hateful sentiments that spurred these abhorrent crimes are still prevalent in today's American society."[134]

In February 2020 the House passed the Emmett Till Antilynching Act by a margin of 410-4. Despite that 99 percent vote and ninety-nine declared votes for the Senate version, the legislation languished in the Senate on the eve of the November 2020 election.[135] Rush reintroduced the bill to the House in January 2021. It passed the House Judiciary Committee that December, but the measure did not make it to the statute book. When Rush tried again the following year, this time it

passed through the House by a vote of 422-3 on February 28, 2022. A week later, the Senate, the historic slayer of anti-lynching bills through the filibuster, voted unanimously to pass a companion bill.[136]

At last, on March 29, 2022, the fourteenth man to assume the office FDR held for so long, President Joseph R. Biden, signed a federal anti-lynching bill into law. This one made lynching a federal hate crime. Biden credited several people for making this historic moment possible, including his own vice president, Kamala Harris, who had co-sponsored the bill in the Senate; Democratic Senator Cory Booker and Republican Senator Tim Scott; and Bobby Rush and other congressional leaders; as well as Bryan Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Institute. Biden cited the EJI's crucial role in educating the public about the lynching of 4,400 Black people between 1877 and 1950. It was deserved praise, as was the president's warm evocation of lynching victim Emmett Till and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, whose descendants were represented at the signing ceremony. And he praised all those who believed, like Wells-Barnett, that "the way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon the wrongs."

On such occasions, a president cannot invoke the names of all who contribute to a law's passage. But Walter White was undoubtedly one of the most important leaders in the long campaign against lynching whom Biden did not mention. His heroic efforts in the 1930s to enact a federal anti-lynching law, along with Eleanor Roosevelt and liberals in Congress from both parties, foundered mainly because of the institutional strength of white supremacy in the Senate, not because the laws were unpopular. Opinion polls and votes in the House suggested most Americans supported White's campaign. The power of southern Democrats, though, a key source of New Deal support for FDR on Capitol Hill, was undoubtedly a contributing factor to White's failure. But FDR was not just a decelerating force on the issue. He, too, turned the light of truth upon wrongs to right them, not least by his appointments to the Justice Department, which established a Civil Rights Section of the Criminal Division of the Justice Department and began to investigate and prosecute lynchings. Roosevelt's Supreme Court appointments would also build on the groundwork of Black lawyers like the NAACP's Charles Hamilton Houston across a wide swath of civil rights issues.

[1] See a photo of the NAACP flag here: https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/06/0610002r.jpg.

[2] The most comprehensive account is James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982; updated 2014). A brief but thorough account can be found in Philip Dray,

At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America (New York: Random House, 2003), 344-355. Dray states that the Neal case "largely helped define and inspire much of the agitation to end lynching in the 1930s." See also Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The* Emergence *of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 215-223.

[3] For Walter White's leading role in the NAACP's 1930s anti-lynching campaign, see Kenneth Robert Janken, *Walter White: Mr. NAACP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, chap. 7). For White's own account of the campaign, see his autobiography, originally published in 1948, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White, 1893-1955* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 166-173.

[4] "Group Here Wires Roosevelt," *New York Times*, October 28, 1934, 31.

[5] "GROUP KILLS NEGRO, DISAPPOINTS CROWD: 'Invited' Guests Wait Vainly for Lynching as Neal Is Slain in Florida Woods," *New York Times*, October 28, 1934, 31.

[6] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown,* 352. During the Obama administration, the FBI opened an investigation into the Neal case as part of the Department of Justice's Cold Case Initiative examining civil rights homicides that occurred before 1970. It reviewed the state investigative file from the Alabama Department of Archives and History; the grand jury report from the Circuit Court of Jackson County, Florida; Howard Kester's 1934 report for the NAACP; newspaper accounts; and McGovern's *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal*. However, no new leads were discovered that would reveal the identities of the men who lynched Neal, and the Justice Department closed the case in 2013. https://www.justice.gov/crt/case-document/claude-neal-notice-close-file.

[7]http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/?p=collections/findingaid&id=540&rootcontentid=190148&q=Colored+Matters#id191989.

[8] In 2015, a major report by Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Alabama, documented 4,084 racial terror lynchings in twelve southern states between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950, and an addition three hundred racial terror lynchings outside the South. https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/. See also Campbell Robertson, "History of Lynchings in the South Documents Nearly 4,000 Names," *New York Times*, February 10, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/10/us/history-of-lynchings-in-the-south-documents-nearly-4000-names.html. The literature on lynching in the United States is extensive and still growing. Among the most essential texts are James Allen, Hilton Als, John Lewis, and Leon F. Litwack, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms, 2000); Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay. *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). For a concise guide to the long history of lynching as a distinct phenomenon in the United States, see Christopher Waldrep, "Lynching and Mob Violence," in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0020.

[9] https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report. Note the online version is not paginated.

[10] Copies of the memo are in the NAACP Papers and in the Howard Kester Papers. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, 128, states: "For the original mimeograph report see 'The Marianna, Florida Lynching' in NAACP Papers, I, C-352. Howard Kester Papers, 1923-1972 (collection no. 03834). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill," http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kester,Howard.html. The full text of the report is available at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/03834/#folder_216#1.

[11] Joshua Youngblood, "'Haven't Quite Shaken the Horror': Howard Kester, the Lynching of Claude Neal, and Social Activism in the South during the 1930s," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 [Race and Civil Rights in Florida] (Summer 2007): 3-38 at 22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30150098.

[12] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown,* 351-352; Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 2: The Defining Years, 1933–1938* (New York: Viking, 1999), 243; McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, at 119 cites the letter at "Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt," November 27, 1934, in Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Series 100, 1325, Roosevelt Library.

[13] Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown, 259-271; Janken, Walter White, 69-71; Carolyn Wedin, "Dyer Antilynching Bill," in Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0372.

[14] Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown, 303-304.

[15] Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 202-210; Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown, 324-333, 342-343. For southern white liberals and anti-lynching, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974; 1993); John Egerton, Speak Now against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[16] Janken, *Walter White*, 227. There is an extensive literature on the topic of African Americans, the New Deal, and the Roosevelt administration's actions and inactions on civil rights. Among the most important are Patricia Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady: Portrait of a Friendship: Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Struggle for Social Justice* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016); Ralph J. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day;* Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Joyce A. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014); Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, ed., *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); William Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*; Lauren Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Joe William Trotter, *From a Raw Deal to a New Deal?: African Americans, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[17] Janken, *Walter White*, 199.

[18] "Strange Fruit: Anniversary of a Lynching," National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, August 6, 2010, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129025516. Cameron, the sole survivor of the lynching, would later become active in the NAACP, serve as Indiana's director of the Office of Civil Liberties, and found America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. https://abhmuseum.org/the-history-impact-of-abhm/.

[19] See Allen et al., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.

[20] Nicole Poletika, "Strange Fruit: The 1930 Marion Lynching and the Woman Who Tried to Prevent It," Indiana History Blog, May 15, 2018, https://blog.history.in.gov/strange-fruit-the-1930-marion-lynching-and-the-woman-who-tried-to-prevent-it/ The most complete account is James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

[21] Janken, *Walter White*, 200.

[22] Steven J. Niven, "Scottsboro Boys," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e0514.

[23] Statistics from the historians Amy Bailey and Stewart Tolnay's website *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home. For their full study, see Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*.

[24] Genna Rae McNeill, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 88-89.

[25] McNeill, 89.

[26] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 322-323; DeNeen L. Brown, "History of lynchings on Maryland's Eastern Shore," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/07/20/history-of-lynchings-in-md-s-eastern-shore.

[27] Cook, *ER 2*, 179-180.

[28] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 333.

[29] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 334.

[30] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 335-336; Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address before the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America," December 6, 1933, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-the-federal-council-churches-christ-america.

[31] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 64.

[32]The Costigan-Wagner bill is discussed in detail in Janken, *Walter White*, 202-23; Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 340-344, 355-362; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks,* 211-223.

[33] For a brief summary, see Kenneth R. Janken, "White, Walter Francis," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e0598.

[34] Janken, *Walter White*, 21.

[35] Janken, *Walter White,* 29-55.

[36] The "one-drop rule" was a racial classification unique to the history of the United States. In Latin America and the Caribbean, people of primarily European but very distant African descent came to identify and be identified as white, but in the United States, a person known to have even one African ancestor came to be considered Black, even if they had a very light skin tone like Walter White. See Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000).

[37]Janken, *Walter White,* xiii.

[38]For "passing," see Gayle Wald, Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Karl Rodabaugh, "Passing," in Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul Finkelman, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0950. Palmer's joke is cited in Janken, Walter White, 18 and 376, n. 57, citing NAACP papers on Microfilm. L. B. Palmer to WFW, 25 January, 1925. NAACP pa/mf p.2 r8f558. By 1925 FDR had been a vice presidential nominee, but for most Americans at that time, the single name "Roosevelt" still implied Eleanor's Uncle Theodore, the twenty-sixth president of the United States.

[39] Paula Cochran, "Atlanta Riot," in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0005/e0082. For a full study, see David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Vision: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[40] Kenneth Robert Janken, "White, Walter Francis," in Oxford African American Studies Center, May 31, 2013, https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-34786.

[41]An excerpt of White's autobiography recalling this incident can be found at "Defending Home and Hearth: Walter White Recalls the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot," *History Matters*, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/104/. For the original, see White, *A Man Called White*, 5–12. Janken's biography states that White came to exaggerate his role as a thirteen-year-old defending his family home from the white mob, even though his "involvement was heroic and horrific enough." White's embellishment of the story was part of "his attempt to relieve the tensions of class and color that he must have felt since childhood." Janken, *Walter White*, 18.

[42] Janken, *Walter White*, 29-55. Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

[43] For a discussion of White's role in the 1922 Dyer anti-lynching bill, see Janken, *Walter White*, 69-71. The fullest account of the Dyer bill is in Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950*, especially chap. 3, "The Struggle for the Dyer Bill, 1919–1923," and chap. 4, "In the Wake of the Dyer Bill: Transition, 1923–1933." See also Wedin, "Dyer Antilynching Bill." For White's battles with the Communist Party, see Janken, *Walter White*, 149-160.

[44] The most comprehensive biography on Du Bois remains David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993) and *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000). For a brief biography, see Thomas C. Holt, "Du Bois, W. E. B," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e0169.

[45] Cited in Janken, *Walter White*, 190-191.

[46] White's early battles with the Communists are discussed in Janken, *Walter White*, 149-160. For Scottsboro, see Niven, "Scottsboro Boys." For the Communist Party USA's policy on a separate Black Belt state for African Americans, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[47] Janken, *Walter White,* 203.

[48] "Urge Federal Law to Stop Lynchings," *New York Times*, February 21, 1934, 16.

[49] Punishment for the Crime of Lynching: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 73 Cong., 2nd sess., February 20 and 21, 1934, Washington: G.P.O., 1934, 83.

[50] Punishment for the Crime of Lynching, 88.

[51] Punishment for the Crime of Lynching, 157.

[52] White's remarks appear at *Punishment for the Crime of Lynching*, 9-17. He also entered into the record newspaper editorials and other testimonials in support of a federal anti-lynching bill at 17-37. Full text is available at https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100666546.

[53] Punishment for the Crime of Lynching, 13-14.

[54] Webb's testimony is at *Punishment for the Crime of Lynching*, 79-82. By 1939, Webb was serving as the NAACP conference chair and would be involved in Eleanor Roosevelt's discussions with Walter White on the Daughters of the American Revolution ban on Marian Anderson performing at Constitution Hall. Allida M. Black, "Championing a Champion: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Marian Anderson 'Freedom Concert,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 724.

[55] *Punishment for the Crime of Lynching*, 49-58.

[56] *Punishment for the Crime of Lynching*, 14.

[57] *Punishment for the Crime of Lynching*, 14.

[58] Chapter II looks at the early relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and the Black educator Mary McLeod Bethune, while Chapter III examines the relationships between the Roosevelts and their African American domestic staffs at Hyde Park, New York City, the White House, and Warm Springs, Georgia.

[59] Cook, *ER 2*, 153.

[60] After one early meeting, White reported to Charles Hamilton Houston that the first lady had referred to her husband by his first name, suggesting a high level of comfort between herself and the secretary. This was unusual according to the racial etiquette of the day. Janken, *Walter White*, 410, n. 25.

[61] According to family history, Madeline Harrison was born in 1863 to Marie Harrison, who was enslaved and had four children with a white man, Augustus Ware. Because the condition of enslavement followed the mother, Madeline would have been born enslaved. Janken, *Walter White*, 3, 174, n. 12. Another source gives February 1864 as her date of birth. https://www.geni.com/people/Madeline-Harrison/6000000015525623941. For correspondence between White and ER on the death of his mother, see Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, July 28, 1940, and Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White, July 31, 1940, FDR library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/ersel/ersel098e.pdf, 56-57.

[62] Katznelson. *Fear Itself*, 159.

[63] Janken, *Walter White*, 209.

[64] Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Political Life* (New York: Viking, 2017), 146-147.

[65] Cook, *ER 2*, 180. For the conservative southern Democrats' role in thwarting civil rights during the New Deal and World War II, see Katznelson, *Fear Itself*.

[66] The historian Tony Badger argues that from the New Deal to the 1950s, southern liberal and moderate politicians were paralyzed by their fear that ordinary white southerners would revolt again against integration and so provided no cohesive alternative to the conservatives who opposed any and all racial change. Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal/New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007). See also Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day*; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University. Press, 1977). Driven primarily by a crisis of Christian conscience, southern whites began to challenge such moderation after World War II. See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), and Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative*, Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

[67] Cook, *ER 2*, 179.

[68] Cook, *ER 2*, 181.

[69] The second Amenia conference at Joel Spingarn's Troutbeck home in Dutchess County, New York, was held in August 1933. Eben Miller, *Born along the Color Line: The 1933 Amenia Conference and the Rise of a National Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Spingarn had known his fellow Dutchess County resident Franklin Roosevelt since at least World War I. "Amenia & WWI," Amenia Historical Society, https://ameniahs.org/portfolio/amenia-wwi/.

[70] Janken, *Walter White*, 210.

[71] White, *A Man Named White*, 169-170.

[72] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 58. See also Janken, *Walter White*, 211.

[73] Cook, *ER II*, 243.

[74] Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*.

[75] Janken, *Walter White*, 218. Images can be found at https://www.flickr.com/photos/washington_area_spark/28727078670. FDR's remarks quoted in "President Demands Drive by All Forces of Nation to Solve Crime Problem; Warning of Social Peril," *New York Times*, December 11, 1934, 1.

[76] McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, loc. 1963 (Kindle pagination).

[77] "President Demands Drive by All Forces of Nation to Solve Crime Problem."

[78] Janken, *Walter White,* 214.

[79] Cook, *ER II*, 243.

[80] For White's efforts in Hollywood to promote *Fury*, an MGM movie based on the 1933 California lynching, see Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, 223-260.

[81]Janken, 364, notes the work of Herbert Hill, the NAACP's white director of labor issues beginning in the early 1950s, which states that the AFL-CIO "aggressively continued to discriminate against African American workers."

[82] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for* Blacks, 214.

[83] FDR to Cummings, March 13, 1935, in Presidential Papers, President's Public File 1971, FDR Library, cited in McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, Loc. 1974 and FN 27, Loc. 3277.

[84] FDR to Cummings, March 13, 1935.

[85] Cook, *ER II*, 246.

[86] Linda Lotridge Levin. *The Making of FDR: The Story of Stephen T. Early, America's First Modern Press Secretary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2008).

[87] Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, September 12, 1935, and Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White, September 16, 1935, FDR library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/ersel/ersel098b.pdf.

[88] Cook, *ER II*, 244-245, 439. ER was also surprised when her use of the term *darky* offended some readers of her autobiography in 1937, but from that point on, her biographer notes, she "never used the term again and forevermore excised words and stereotypes that lingered from her family traditions."

[89] Cook, *ER II*, 279.

[90] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for* Blacks, 217.

[91] Cook, *ER II,* 440.

[92] Lizzie McDuffie, "Drafts of Book Chapters folder."

[93] Walter White, "U.S. Department of (White) Justice," *Crisis*, October 1935, 309-310.

[94] McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, loc. 1983.

[95] Janken, *Walter White*, 130.

[96] McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching,* chap. 6, loc. 1970, and notes, loc. 3278. Hoover's lack of interest in investigating lynching is also noted in Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 21-22.

[97] Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 218; Leuchtenburg, The White House Looks South, 435.

[98] Cook, ER *II*, 442.

[99] Janken, *Walter White*, 224.

[100] Janken, *Walter White*, 224.

[101] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 139.

[102] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 349.

[103]Janken, *Walter White*, 224; David Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).

[104] Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 223.

[105] White was supported by the civil rights activist Osceola McKaine and the South Carolina Progressive Democrats, African Americans who pledged loyalty to the Democratic Party of FDR, but not the party of Byrnes. Steven J. Niven, "McKaine, Osceola," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e1648. White's own candidate, the then-Vice President Henry Wallace, was also defeated, but he could live with FDR's choice of Harry Truman, and indeed built a strong relationship with Truman when he became president. Miles S. Richards, "James F. Byrnes on the Democratic Party Nomination for Vice President, July 1944," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 109, no. 4 (Oct. 2008): 295-305, stable URL https://www.jstor.org/stable/40646868.

[106] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 223.

[107] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 219.

[108] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 221.

[109] Janken, *Walter White*, 221; Bailey told Senator Byrnes that when the president appointed Hugo Black to the Supreme Court, FDR "finished himself up with me." Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 85.

[110] One critic of White's support of Black accused him of being "under the Roosevelt spell." Janken, Walter White, 227.

[111] FDR also supported Brooks Hays's campaign against the poll tax in Arkansas.

[112] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 91. Pepper's opposition to a federal lynching bill, despite a brutal double lynching in Tallahassee, is discussed Walter T. Howard, "Vigilante Justice and National Reaction: The 1937 Tallahassee Double Lynching," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (July 1988): 32-51.

[113] Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 20. "Dutch is Up: FDR vs. Congress," *New York Times*, April 3, 1938.

[114] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 221.

[115] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 221.

[116] Janken, *Walter White*, 416, note 66.

[117] George C. Rable, "The South and the Politics of Antilynching Legislation, 1920-1940," *The Journal of Southern History* 51, No. 2 (May 1985): 201-220.

[118] In the 1940s Willkie would go on to forge a close relationship with Walter White, particularly on using Hollywood to further the cause of civil rights and full African American inclusion in the nation's culture. Willkie also addressed an NAACP convention in 1942. FDR never did. Harry Truman would be the first president to do so. Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter White were in attendance. David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2018), 168, 222.

[119] Judson Turner, "Willkie Promises 'Everything' in Chicago Speech: 5,000 Hear Him," *Chicago Defender* (national edition), September 21, 1940, 12.

[120] Statistics from the historians Bailey and Tolnay were taken from their website, *Lynched: The Victims of* Southern Mob Violence, which was previously located at http://lynching.csde.washington.edu/#/home. For their full study, see Bailey and *Tolnay*, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*.

[121] https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jackson_County,_Florida; Katznelson, *Fear Itself,* 164.

[122] Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 163.

[123] Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 161-168.

[124] Daniels was the son of Josephus Daniels, Woodrow Wilson's secretary of the Navy in World War I and thus Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt's only boss. Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Discovering the South: One Man's Travels through a Changing America in the 1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[125] Joseph P. Lash, Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship, Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971; 2014), 788.

[126] Biddle's DOJ also supported the nation's only Black congressman, Arthur Mitchell, in his suit against segregated interstate transportation. Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., "The Lynching of Cleo Wright: Federal Protection of Constitutional Rights during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 72, no. 4 (March 1986): 859-887.

[127] Capeci, Jr., "The Lynching of Cleo Wright," 868, 871.

[128] Capeci, Jr., "The Lynching of Cleo Wright," 868.

[129] Steven J. Niven, "Wright, Cleo," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e2425.

[130] Walter White, "The Negro Loses A Friend," *Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1945, 13.

[131] Eleanor Roosevelt, *My Day*, April 5, 1955, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydocedits.cfm?_y=1955&_f=md003135.

[132] Poletika, "Strange Fruit: The 1930 Marion Lynching and the Woman Who Tried to Prevent It."

[133] https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2016/02/12/eleanor-roosevelts-battle-to-end-lynching/.

[134] There were nearly two hundred anti-lynching bills introduced into Congress between 1882 and 1986. The 2018 legislation was introduced by the Senate's only African American senators in that Congress, Cory Booker of New Jersey and Kamala Harris of California, both Democrats, and Tim Scott, Republican of South Carolina. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/us/senate-anti-lynching-bill.html.

[135] https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/35/text. The *New York Times* reported that a single senator, Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, held up the bill because of his concerns that "the bill would allow excessive penalties against people who commit more minor, racially motivated acts of violence, like slapping or pushing." https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/us/politics/rand-paul-anti-lynching-bill-senate.html.

[136] "Antilynching Act Signed into Law," Equal Justice Initiative, March 29, 2022, https://eji.org/news/antilynching-act-signed-into-law/.

Chapter II

"When They See Me, They Know That the Negro Is Present" Mary McLeod Bethune, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Black Cabinet

In December 1927, Mary McLeod Bethune—college president, president of the National Association of Colored Women, and, like most African Americans, a staunch Republican—traveled to New York City to attend a luncheon hosted by a predominantly white organization, the National Council of Women. The luncheon was held at the Roosevelt House on East Sixty-Fifth Street, the home of Sara Roosevelt, the mother of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democrat who would soon become governor of New York. Bethune was the only Black woman there, and the simple act of finding a seat proved complicated when white delegates hesitated to eat with her. In defiance of the racial standards of segregation, which existed in northern cities as well as in the South, Sara Roosevelt personally asked Bethune to sit beside her. "I can remember, too, how the faces of the Negro servants lit up with pride when they saw me seated at the center of that imposing gathering," she later wrote. "From that moment my heart went out to Roosevelt. I visited her at her home many times subsequently, and our friendship became one of the most treasured relationships of my life." This act of kindness also became the root of a political alliance between Bethune and the Roosevelts, especially Sara's daughter-in-law Eleanor, that would have lasting, significant consequences for the history of the United States over the following two decades.[1]

Mary McLeod Bethune was born Mary Jane McLeod in Mayesville, South Carolina, on July 10, 1875, in the twilight of Reconstruction, as the promises of a reinvented American experiment faded away. "There is a story that when Bethune was born, her eyes were wide open," the historian Paula Giddings writes. "The midwife who delivered her is said to have told Bethune's mother that Mary will always see things before they happen." She was the fifteenth of seventeen children born to Samuel and Patsy McLeod, who, along with eight of Mary's older siblings, had been enslaved. Patsy McLeod told her daughter about the ever-present threat of sexual abuse. She lived with the scar of a branding on her breast as a permanent reminder of the violence she endured. Patsy's mother, Sophie—Mary's grandmother—bore scars on her back from a severe whipping after she refused a white man's advances. The stories haunted young Mary.[2]

Like so many African Americans before her, Bethune recounted a story of when she realized that she would be treated differently from white children. "I could see little white boys and girls going to school every day," she told the Fisk University professor and sociologist Charles S. Johnson in 1940, "learning to read and write; living in comfortable homes with all types of opportunities for growth and service and to be surrounded as I was with no opportunity for school life, no chance to grow."[3] Even as the McLeods worked as independent farmers, Patsy McLeod had continued doing domestic work, including in the home of her former owner. Her daughter would sometimes tag along. It was in one of these white homes that she flipped through her first book. A white girl, knowing that Bethune could not read, told her to put it down. "I thought, 'Maybe the difference between white folks and colored is just this matter of reading and writing,'" Bethune later reasoned. "I made up my mind I would know my letters before I ever visited the big house again."[4]

Despite their financial struggles, the McLeods arranged to purchase five acres of land from their former master—a rare occurrence in the postbellum South—and the men of the household built a log cabin for their new home. Their fortunes improved to the point that young Mary could leave the fields to get an education. She would be the only McLeod child with this privilege, but every Saturday afternoon she passed on what she learned to family members and neighborhood children. She recalled that her parents took a particular shine to her potential: "My mother said when I was born I was entirely different from the rest. My ideas were different. My mother was proud of it. She felt: Here comes one of the children who is going to do something. My father felt the same way."[5]

Bethune attended school in a Presbyterian church. "There were some home-made benches, a little table, and desks, a little pulpit, a little wood stove in the corner. . . . [It] had a blackboard on the wall." A light-skinned African American missionary, Emma J. Wilson, ran the school. "The things that affected me most about Miss Wilson," Bethune later said, "were her patience, and her tenderness and kindly way in which she handled us. The beautiful smile which was always kept on her face. We were not afraid of her. We could approach her at any time." In Wilson's school, Bethune asserted her independence and leadership: "[I] was always proclaimed as the leader. I don't know why, but [I] always was the captain of this or the chairman of that." She remained at the school until she "completed possibly the sixth or seventh grade. That was about as high as they went."[6]

In 1888, Bethune boarded a train for the first time and traveled to Concord, North Carolina, to attend the Scotia Seminary for Negro Girls, Miss Wilson's alma mater, on scholarship. There she

would enter a brick building for the first time in her life. On top of her learning, she performed various chores, such as doing the laundry for the school president or making bread. "Nothing was too menial or too hard for me to find joy in doing," she recalled, "for the appreciation of having a chance." She was particularly inspired by the African American teachers who "gave me my very first vision of the culture and ability of Negro women and gave me the incentive and made me feel that if they could do it I could do it, too."[7]

After six years at the Scotia Seminary, she traveled to Chicago to attend the Moody School, later known as the Moody Bible Institute. Bethune's experiences during her two years there convinced her to become a missionary, to bring what she had learned to Africa. "I applied to the Mission Board in New York for a chance to go to Africa," she later explained. "They informed me that no openings were available where they could place Negro missionaries, so they sent me to Augusta, Georgia, to work with Lucy Laney."[8]

Bethune embarked on a different path: education. In 1896 she moved to Augusta to begin her year as an apprentice to Lucy Craft Laney at the Haines Institute. In Augusta her educational and community work gave her a new goal, to one day open a school of her own, one with a particular emphasis on the empowerment of Black women. In 1898 she married Albertus Bethune; the couple had one child. They were married for nine years before Albertus left to return to South Carolina. "He could not understand that my soul was on fire to do things for my people," she later said. But they never officially divorced, and Mary McLeod Bethune kept the surname for the rest of her life.[9]

Bethune soon moved again, this time south to Daytona Beach, Florida. Daytona had demographics that favored her new mission: African Americans in large numbers, and white philanthropists with vacation homes. In 1904 she founded the Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. (Her husband was a trustee until 1906.) The historian Audrey McCluskey explains how Daytona shaped the school and its mission, with grants from the Carnegie Foundation, the Rosenwald Fund, and John D. Rockefeller providing much-needed funding. "Although she steered toward Booker T. Washington's philosophy of vocational education, which appealed to many whites, she also devised a broad curriculum that offered classes in math, science, literature, history, and languages," the type of liberal education promoted by W. E. B. Du Bois as essential for the formation of a "Talented Tenth."[10]

The boarding school grew and evolved quickly, as did Bethune's role in the Daytona Beach community. She opened McLeod Hospital in 1911, which played a critical role in containing the influenza pandemic of 1918. Four years later she led the charge to convince the city to build a high school for African Americans. Before the mayoral election, the local Ku Klux Klan confronted Bethune at her school. She recalled that she and her students stood firm, singing hymns until the terrorists left. They then went to the polls and came out victorious in their drive for a new school.[11]

In 1923 Bethune's school took a major step, merging with the oldest of Florida's HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), Cookman Institute, to form Bethune-Cookman College. The next year she defeated Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the great anti-lynching campaigner, to become president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), an organization formed because white women's clubs would not allow Black members. These two events spoke to Bethune's passions and overall strategy: promotion through education and grassroots activism channeled through the women's club movement. Her name had spread well beyond Daytona, and she emerged as a foremost African American leader. Her victory over the more confrontational Wells-Barnett also reflected Bethune's skills at forging alliances; as Giddings notes, Bethune "was as diplomatic as Wells-Barnett was uncompromising."[12]

The Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes witnessed Bethune's renown in 1929, when he traveled to Florida with the artist Zell Ingram to read to Bethune-Cookman students. Bethune, he wrote, "welcomed us graciously, although she was not forewarned of our visit." That night Bethune suggested that Hughes "tour the South reading your poems." After reading to Bethune's students, Hughes left for Miami, but his time with Bethune had not ended. Hughes and Ingram returned to Florida with no cash, but Hughes knew that Bethune would cash a check for him. She did so and then said, "Boys, I was intending to go North myself in a few days by train, so I might as well ride with you and save that fare." The three of them piled into a small Ford coupe and headed out. "What luck for us!" Hughes remembered. "All along the highway, Mary McLeod Bethune had friends. So whenever we got hungry on the road, we stopped at the home of some friends of hers in some Southern village. According to a popular saying in Florida, before Mrs. Bethune reached the wayside home of any friend anywhere, the chickens, sensing that she was coming, went flying off frantically seeking a safe hiding place. They knew some necks would surely be wrung in her honor to make a heaping platter of Southern fried chicken."[13]

Hughes wrote about how Bethune had made her name in the 1920s: "Mrs. Bethune, aside from her fame in educational circles, was a power in lodge and club activities. She was known far and wide at conclaves, conventions and church meetings. She had spoken at every colored school in the South, too." Many years later the actor William Warfield recalled the importance of Bethune's visits: "The black heroes like Frederick Douglass were remote from me when I was growing up. We didn't see them. But Mary McLeod Bethune was there. She used to come to my town to speak. My father was a self-educated man, a minister, and so what that great lady said was very important to him."[14]

Politics was becoming an important arena for Bethune as well. Republican President Calvin Coolidge made her a delegate to a child welfare conference, and she joined President Herbert Hoover's National Committee on Child Welfare. In 1929 Hoover extended to Bethune a last-minute invitation to a White House conference on children's health and education. Bethune frequently told a story of experiencing racism there. A white groundskeeper spotted Bethune and asked, "Hey there, Auntie, where y'all think you're going?" Bethune offered a cutting reply: "I don't recognize you. Which one of my sister's children are you?"[15]

Bethune endorsed the Republican Hoover for reelection against Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. To show that her budding relationship with the Roosevelt family had not affected her political loyalty, she wrote to Mary Church Terrell in October, "I want you to know that I am doing all that I possibly can for our party. I am using my influence in every section I touch. I feel confident that the best efforts will bring forth the best result."

But when Roosevelt won, Bethune took part in one of the more dramatic political realignments in U.S. history, as African Americans fled to the Democratic Party. A significant moment came in December 1933, when FDR gave an address against lynching (although it came only after two white men were lynched), calling it a "vile form of collective murder." Although the president proved to be a disappointment in the crusade against lynching, Bethune saw the address as a positive development: "President Roosevelt has touched, in my mind, the most vital problem of American life—mob rule, in denouncing lynching. We have been waiting patiently to hear his voice on this growing spirit of barbarism in our country. It looks like we are getting somewhere."[16]

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, however, became a staunch defender of Black rights. In 1934 she addressed the Commerce Department about the inequities of Black education. "When I read those

figures, I couldn't help but think how stupid we are," she said. "We must learn to work together—all of us regardless of race, creed, or color. We must wipe out the feeling of intolerance whenever we find it—or belief that any other group can go ahead alone. We must go ahead together, or we go down together." She then shook hands with Bethune and the other Black speakers in attendance. "With that," Jill Watts argues, "Eleanor Roosevelt had broken one of racism's strictest codes—one that forbade even the most formal physical contact between whites and blacks. It affirmed in many people's minds that a friendship, unique for its era, had developed between the First Lady and America's most celebrated African American female leader."[17]

That same year Bethune-Cookman College secured a $62,000 donation from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1935, the NAACP awarded Bethune its highest honor, the Spingarn Medal. She accepted the award "in the name of womanhood of America." "I accept it," she continued, "with gratitude for the opportunity for God-given service. I accept it as a badge which will mark me before all men as an advocate of respect and justice for all mankind." Bethune also discussed the progress and future of civil rights activism. "The success of the early clearers of the way is but an indication of what is yet to be done by those who follow in their train. The dead branches hewn away by those stalwart pioneers left plain and straight the highway which the youths are traveling. That way brought us hope." The Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of New York's Abyssinian Baptist Church, sent a congratulatory letter: "It is a long way from the rice and cotton fields of South Carolina to this distinguished recognition, but you have made it in such a short span of years that I am afraid you are going to be arrested for breaking the speed limit."[18]

By 1936, then, all of these events—the Spingarn Medal, the rising prominence of Bethune-Cookman, and her relationship with the Roosevelt family—paved the way for Bethune to find a political home in the New Deal. The New Deal Coalition was an unsteady one, a mix of African Americans, reformers, union members, working-class northern whites, immigrants, and Jim Crow southerners. These voters, at odds on so many issues, saw the New Deal as a broad-based vehicle to affect the change they sought in Depression-era America. It was a difficult balancing act for Roosevelt, and he more often chose the interests of white southern voters over those of African Americans, believing that he could accomplish nothing without their support. But it also opened a space, albeit a small, informal space, for African American women and men to influence the New Deal. FDR's Black advisers were informally known as the Black Cabinet.[19]

Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Josephine Roche attended the Spingarn ceremony and concluded that Bethune should, in some way, join the Roosevelt administration. She contacted ER and encouraged Aubrey Williams, a white civil rights activist and head of the National Youth Administration, to bring in Bethune as an adviser. The NYA sought "to provide relief, work relief, and employment for persons between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five years" who were out of school or unemployed. Williams agreed and hired Bethune as one of two African Americans on the advisory board, the other being Mordecai Johnson, the president of Howard University. Bethune, like the other members of Roosevelt's Black Cabinet, had no direct role in policymaking, a shortcoming she fully recognized. And she also understood that whatever the intention of New Deal programs, they would be vulnerable to exploitation by the state and local officials charged with implementing them. Still, Bethune took justifiable pride in her symbolic importance in Washington, saying, "When they see me, they know that the Negro is present."[20]

Bethune immediately sought to bring in more African Americans. In her first year, she visited NYA centers in twenty-nine states and reportedly traveled a total of forty thousand miles. As she said in 1936, the year she became the director of the NYA's new Office of Minority Affairs, "May I advise the committee that it does not matter how equipped your white supervision might be, or your white leadership, it is impossible for you to enter as sympathetically and understandingly, into the program of the Negro, as the Negro can do. Then it will give, also, the thing that we very much need nowadays, that opportunity for the development of leadership among the Negro people themselves, and it is becoming more important that the right type of leadership be produced." Bethune herself had elevated dozens of Black people to official NYA committees at the state level, which not only trained African Americans for leadership but also helped, in the historian Joyce Hanson's words, "the development of a national black political power base. Black state administrators distributed throughout the country effectively gave Bethune a national field staff that reported directly to her."[21]

Bethune emerged as the de facto leader of the Black Cabinet, and she brought all of its members into a new group, the Federal Council on Negro Affairs. "Mrs. Bethune has gathered everything and everybody under her very ample wing," wrote Edward Lawson of the Associated Negro Press. "With the possible exception of Congressman Arthur Mitchell, she occupies undoubtedly the most strategic position in the administration." Current and later Black Cabinet members sometimes resented her leadership, but never to the point that they dared break from her.

As Lawson continued, "Either they were unaware of her tremendous energy and grasp of things or they underestimated the potential power of her position. At any rate, they were unprepared for the manner in which she took the whole situation under control." Some of her colleagues called her "Ma" and called themselves "her boys," in reference to the white outlaw group Ma Barker and Her Boys. To her face she was always Mrs. Bethune. In 1939 the writer Alain Locke credited her with "the most constructive single piece of work that has been done in the Negro field with respect to the New Deal, because in addition to upholding the New Deal you have helped to improve its shortcomings, and in a way that has strengthened its hold upon the public mind." [22]

Bethune did not confine her work to the Black Cabinet during the 1930s. She took on an equally ambitious task when she organized a new umbrella group for African American women activists, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), which held its first meeting at the 137th Street YMCA in New York City on December 5, 1935. Notable attendees included Mary Church Terrell, Daisy Lampkin, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown. "The National Council of Women has 43 organizations with only one Negro organization," Bethune explained, "and we have no specific place on their program. We need an organization to open new doors for our young women and when the council speaks its power will be felt." Still, not everyone in the room shared Bethune's enthusiasm. "I don't think this Council will be any more successful than other organizations have been," said the longtime activist Terrell. "I cannot see any reason how this group can do any more than others, but I think it worthwhile."[23]

It was worthwhile. Over the next decade Bethune would fuse her New Deal and NCNW missions, and her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt remained crucial. At the 1940 conference of the NCNW, themed "Negro Women Face New Frontiers," 450 women met in Washington to discuss topics including "The Negro Woman in Public Affairs" and "The Problem of Citizenship." ER attended, and Bethune introduced her on stage. The meeting's addresses such as "The International Program" and "The Negro in National Defense" also indicated Bethune's increasingly internationalist perspective. "Bethune linked the fight against anti-Black racism in the United States with anticolonial movements around the globe," argues the historian Martha Jones.[24]

Like many activists during these years, Bethune also found herself the target of baseless accusations of communism. J. Edgar Hoover put Bethune on the FBI's custodial detention list as a "danger" to national security. The FBI even interviewed her at home in 1942, where she expressed

her disappointment in the charges: "It startles me just a little to even have anyone surmise ... from the role of my activities in life and from the things I do and stand for that there would be within my thinking any type of belief or action that would bring me under the rays of communistic ideas. . . . My great antagonism to communistic ideas ... has been its irreverence to God." The Justice Department cleared her of all charges, but she could never shake the unfounded allegations. She became sick under the pressure of the investigation and received gifts and a note from ER saying, "I am sorry because I know how it must annoy you to be ill at this time."[25]

Bethune leveraged her friendship and professional relationship with the first lady in a number of ways during the Second World War. For one, she continuously worked to better Bethune-Cookman College, and she leaned on ER to bring money into the school. The first lady was happy to help. "I have real admiration for Mrs. Bethune and her devotion to her race as well as her tact and wisdom in all the work she undertakes," ER wrote in August 1940 after buying tickets to a benefit event for the school. "She has helped immeasurably as head of the work for young colored people in the National Youth Administration, and I hope that many people, not only of her race but also of mine, will be interested to help by attending this benefit."[26] The following year ER agreed to let Bethune name her to the Bethune-Cookman board of trustees, writing that while she "cannot do any work at the present time . . . if using my name will help in any way you have my permission to do so." Bethune accepted but in a follow-up letter nudged Roosevelt, as she often did, writing. "Now you are able to think of our work in an official manner and through this affiliation you may feel free to bring our problems to the attention of friends who may be willing to give us their good-will." In May, Bethune thanked ER for using her influence to bring increasing donations to the school.[27]

But there were limits, especially when dealing with the president. Paula Giddings argues that Bethune "probably had too much faith in the idea that visibility and competence would open doors, more than they ever really could." Bethune met with FDR at the White House in 1939, twice in 1940, and again in 1944, but she always left with mixed feelings regarding his commitment. Bethune had hoped to have more influence in making sure that African Americans themselves played key roles in any discussions that involved Black people. In November 1941 ER relayed to her husband Bethune's request to have "a Negro in a position who can actually confer with the President occasionally on problems that are pertinent to Negroes." The president wrote on the memo, "No—any more than I can put in a Jew as such or a Spiritualist as such." The letter Bethune received from

ER put it more tactfully: the president "says he feels it unwise to appoint people definitely as of any race or creed. I think, therefore, it is better to have a white person who is sympathetic."[28]

At a banquet for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in September 1942, A. Philip Randolph introduced both women to the crowd, calling on Bethune as "the first lady of our Negro nation to present to us the First Lady of America."[29] ER recorded many of these meetings in her "My Day" columns. On April 21, 1942, ER had heard Bethune speak at a meeting in Nashville of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, which Bethune had co-founded. Later that year, in December 1942, both women attended a SCHW luncheon honoring Bethune. In 1943 ER attended a benefit for Bethune-Cookman in Harlem. And in the final months of the war, on March 26, 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt attended a National Council of Negro Women meeting.[30]

Perhaps Bethune's most notable wartime work was the NCNW's drive to integrate Black women into the Women's Army Corps (WAC). When the war began, Black women could not become WACs, even in segregated units, but Bethune convinced ER to force the military to make the change. Of the first group of 440 trainees to attend officer training school in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1942, forty were Black, and they trained in an integrated setting. Bethune and other NCNW members attended the first camp, which she called "democracy in action." What Bethune did not know is that only classes and drills would be integrated. Barracks, social events, meals, recreation, and marches would continue to be segregated. Efforts by Bethune and ER deepened white resentment, and white officers only dug in, marking another in a long line of incomplete victories that Bethune and other Black activists scored during the Roosevelt era.[31]

When FDR died, Bethune joined the nation in mourning, sharing a poignant story that emphasized what she viewed as his empathy for African Americans. "I shall never forget that evening of the early days of his administration when he sat alone in his private office and I

was privileged to talk with him," she said. "I can see him now as he stretched forth his gracious hand in greeting. I can hear the pathos of his voice as he said: 'Hello, Mrs. Bethune. Come in and sit down and tell me how your people are doing.'"[32]

Bethune's influence lessened but did not disappear when Harry Truman assumed office after FDR's death. She also maintained and even increased her focus on internationalism. Bethune and the NCNW strongly supported the 1945 San Francisco conference to create a charter for the United Nations. When the State Department appointed only African American men as delegates, Bethune

appealed to Eleanor Roosevelt, and she then joined W. E. B. Du Bois and Walter White as delegates. Still, the two men did not consider Bethune an equal partner, and they preferred to work with each other rather than with Bethune. The only African American delegate who endorsed women's rights specifically, she instead joined forces with the African American actress and activist Eslanda Robeson and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, a leader of India's anti-colonial movement, ensuring that women's voices were heard. "Through this Conference," Bethune said, "the Negro becomes closely allied with the darker races of the world, but more importantly he becomes integrated into the structure of the peace and freedom of all people everywhere." [33]

The year 1949 offered time for reflection for the seventy-four-year-old Bethune. In April she made what was likely her only trip to Hyde Park. On the 12th, the four-year anniversary of Franklin Roosevelt's death, she joined White and Channing Tobias, the African American director of the philanthropic Phelps-Stokes Fund, in paying tribute to the late president, alongside ER, the Roosevelt children, and members of the FDR Memorial Foundation. That day's luncheon at Val-Kill would be one of the foundation's last meetings; established in 1945 "at the request of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, to consider a suitable memorial to the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt," it never had sufficient funding, and its leaders were generally too busy to dedicate significant time to the foundation.[34]

Bethune wrote in the *Chicago Defender* that the day "was the most beautiful, the most ideal I have ever seen." ER and her sons were in attendance, and, in Bethune's eyes, the first lady "was more charming than I seemed to have ever seen her." Bethune described the scene:

> In the midst of a marvelous grass plot, bordered by roses and plants of various colors and by a hedge 100 years or more old, was the beautiful resting place marked by a plain, heavy, solid white stone. And though there were no pores through which the atmosphere might leak in, there seemed to pour out therefrom that in-dwelling philosophy of goodwill toward all mankind, an extending hand to the weakest, the poorest, the whitest, the blackest among the human family.

"As I stood among them, I carried his cane in my hand," she said, referencing FDR's cane that ER had given her as a gift. (Bethune had long used a cane, more for fashion than out of necessity.) "I

seemed to feel the impulse of his vibration as I clasped more and more tightly to the cane he once so firmly held as he thought through and worked out the great destiny of the peoples of his time and those who are to follow. As I stood there, I realized that Franklin Delano Roosevelt is more alive today than he was four years ago. He is living in the hearts of the peoples of the world."[35]

Bethune also retired from the NCNW that year, saying she wanted the organization to be in "younger, stronger, surer hands." Her successor, Dorothy Height, would prove more than able to keep its mission going. (Height had also visited Hyde Park, invited by ER in 1938 to plan the World Youth Conference, which would be held at Vassar College that year.[36]) In her farewell address, Bethune said, "Yes, this has been a work of joy—joy in the struggle and responsibilities which we sought and accepted. A means to the realization of a dream for the Negro women of America, united with their sisters of all races, throughout the world." She closed with a symbolic flourish: "The cane of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which supported me physically and served as a spiritual inspiration since his passing, now stands in the corner by the big chair in my room . . . and I can rest awhile!"[37]

In 1952 Bethune finally visited Africa, to witness the second inaugural of Liberian President William V. S. Tubman. At home, though, Bethune could not escape the era's growing anti-communist hysteria. In 1952 she prepared to give a speech in Englewood, New Jersey, but the local anti-communist league successfully pressured the city board of education to cancel the event. Even though the speech was rescheduled, the cancellation stung. It also drew direct rebuke from Eleanor Roosevelt, who addressed the matter at length in her May 3 "My Day" column.

I cannot let this incident go by without protesting such treatment of an elderly woman who is a leader among the American colored citizens and loved and admired by all American citizens who know her. She has headed and worked for the Negro Council of Women, and made it into a strong organization. She has the gift of getting people to cooperate with her. She is the kindest, gentlest person I have ever met. She lent her talents to the Federal service in the National Youth Administration during my husband's Administration, and there are countless other positions and responsibilities that she has taken and filled with honor both for her country, for organizations and for individuals. She is the last person that I can imagine any thinking person would believe to be a Communist.

Mrs. Roosevelt denounced communism but also recognized that the ideology wasn't really the point here: "If it were not so sad to have a respected and beloved American citizen insulted and

slighted, it would be funny. But those of us who have loved and known Mrs. Bethune for many years, must speak up in her defense. If we do not, then this country of ours is in danger of curtailing the liberties for which our forefathers fought."[38]

Bethune died of a heart attack at home on May 20, 1955. Black Americans grieved, as did Eleanor Roosevelt, who wrote in "My Day" on May 20 that she "will miss her very much, for I valued her wisdom and her goodness."[39] Noting that her "death was not far off," Bethune had written an essay, "My Last Will and Testament," published posthumously by *Ebony* magazine in August, where she provided a list of things that she wanted to leave to all African Americans "in the hope that an old woman's philosophy may give them inspiration." She wrote about love, hope, the challenge of developing confidence of one another ("Economic separatism cannot be tolerated in this enlightened age, and it is not practicable. We must spread out as far and as fast as we can, but we must also help each other as we go."), a thirst for education, and respect for the uses of power, which, "unwisely directed, ... can be a dreadful, destructive force." She encouraged her readers to keep "faith, courage, brotherhood, dignity, ambition, responsibility" and to remember that "the problem of color is world-wide."[40]

Bethune's relationship with the Roosevelts was personal and political. From their first meeting Bethune had the support of Sara Delano Roosevelt, who made raising money for Bethune-Cookman College one of her most important projects. FDR's mother hosted multiple fundraisers at her home on East Sixty-Fifth Street, including a tea party where she promised to raise $500,000.[41] Bethune also had a tangible impact on FDR's New Deal, ushering African Americans into federal positions and convening the Federal Council on Negro Affairs. As her possession of FDR's cane showed, the president valued and admired the work she did for his administration, and for the country more generally.[42]

Her closest relationship was with the first lady. Perhaps the most potent weapon that Bethune and ER deployed was the simple act of appearing together, in what the historian Martha Jones has called "a conspicuous rejoinder to Jim Crow."[43] Few images could better counter the lies of segregationists than the white first lady and the esteemed African American activist Bethune side by side as equals, as human beings. In her "Last Will and Testament," Bethune conceded that the "greatest of my dreams—full equality for the Negro in our time" had not come true. But she took pride in a lifetime of work that moved the rest of the country ever closer to her vision. And she found

in this work an unlikely kindred spirit in Eleanor Roosevelt. In July 2022 a marble statue of Bethune was unveiled at the United States Capitol, sent by her home state of Florida in place of a statue of a Confederate general that once had stood there—a magnificent, deserving tribute to one of the significant figures of the twentieth century.[44]

[1] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 198; *Washington Post*, March 5, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/03/01/mary-mcleod-bethune-roosevelt-statue/.

[2] Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 203; Jill Watts, *The Black Cabinet: The Untold Story of African Americans and Politics during the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Grove Press, 2020), 233; "Women's Council Spends Busy Day," New York Times, December 8, 1927.

[3] Charles S. Johnson, interview with Bethune [abridged], 1940, in Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 35.

[4] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 233.

[5] Johnson interview, 36-38; Watts, *The Black Cabinet,* 233-234.

[6] Johnson interview, 40-41.

[7] Johnson interview, 42-44.

[8] Johnson interview, 42; McCluskey, introduction to *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 4-6.

[9] Martha S. Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 2020, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/mary-mcleod-bethune-vanguard-more-than-50-years-black-progress-180975202/; Johnson interview, 42; McCluskey, introduction to *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 4-6; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 23, 234-236.

[10] Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress"; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 237.

[11] Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress"; Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

[12] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 237-238; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 177.

[13] Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1956; reprint: Hill and Wang, 1995), 5-6, 39-40.

[14] Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 40; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 243.

[15] Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 201-202; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 78-80, 238; Joyce A. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 120.

[16] Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism*, 124; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 240.

[17] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 241.

[18] McCluskey, introduction to *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 68; Bethune, "Response, Twenty-First Spingarn Medalist" (1935), in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 112-114; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 212.

[19] Jones, Vanguard, 219; McCluskey, introduction to Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World, xii.

[20] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 241-243; Hanson, Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism, 125, 133; Jones, Vanguard, 220.

[21] Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism*, 139-141.

[22] Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 221; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 14-15; Smith, introduction to *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World*, 199.

[23] Minutes of the Organizational Meeting of the National Council of Negro Women (1935) in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 168-173.

[24] Jones, *Vanguard,* 216-222; Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress."

[25] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 506-507.

[26] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," August 9, 1940.

[27] Eleanor Roosevelt to Mary McLeod Bethune, May 14, 1941; Bethune to Eleanor Roosevelt, April 22, 1941; Bethune to Eleanor Roosevelt, May 29, 1941, all in Box 734, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Part 1, 1884-1964, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Hyde Park, NY.

[28] Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 230; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 503-504; Eleanor Roosevelt, Memo for the President, November 22, 1941, Box 734; Eleanor Roosevelt to Bethune, November 27, 1941, Box 734, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Part 1, 1884-1964 .

[29] *New York Age*, September 21, 1940; Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 11.

[30] See "My Day" annotations and details for these dates.

[31] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 503-504; Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 230.

[32] Mary McLeod Bethune, "Tribute to Franklin D. Roosevelt (1945)," in Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World, 249; Hanson, Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism, 4.

[33] Jones, *Vanguard,* 216-222; Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress."

[34] "Papers of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Foundation," http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/pdfs/findingaids/findingaid_fdrmemorialfoundation.pdf.

[35] Mary McLeod Bethune, "Memories of FDR and Spring at Hyde Park," *Chicago Defender,* April 23, 1949.

[36] "Memorializing Dorothy Height," *Congressional Record* 156, no. 56 (Tuesday, April 20, 2010), page H2690, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2010-04-20/html/CREC-2010-04-20-pt1-PgH2687-2.htm.

[37] Mary McLeod Bethune, "Stepping Aside . . . at Seventy-Four (1949)," in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World,* 249; Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism*, 192-193; "Dorothy Irene Height," National Council of Negro Women, https://ncnw.org/ncnw/height/.

[38] Mary McLeod Bethune, "Holistic Living: Yes, I Went to Liberia (1952)," in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World*; Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," May 3, 1952, the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Digital Edition, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1952&_f=md002212.

[39] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," May 20, 1955, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1955&_f=md003174.

[40] Mary McLeod Bethune, "My Last Will and Testament (1955)," in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World.*

[41] Jan Pottker, Sara and Eleanor: The Story of Sara Delano Roosevelt and Her Daughter-in-Law, Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005), 297, 309.

[42] Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 230; Watts, The Black Cabinet, 503-504.

[43] Jones, "Mary McLeod Bethune Was at the Vanguard of More Than 50 Years of Black Progress."

[44] *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, February 11, 2022, https://www.news-journalonline.com/story/news/local/volusia/2022/02/11/when-mary-mcleod-bethune-statue-unveiled-statuary-hall-florida/6733833001/.

Chapter III

"Next to His Wife, I Am around the President More Than Anyone Else" The Roosevelts' Black Domestic Staff

In March 1942 Armstead Barnett, a twenty-nine-year-old African American man originally from Lynchburg, Virginia, went to the Marriage License Bureau in Washington, D.C., to complete the necessary paperwork for his upcoming marriage to Viola Carpenter. When it came time to fill in his home address, he told the truth: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the White House. "It was the only address I had," Barnett later said. Despite the disbelief of the people at the bureau, and with the reported intervention of Eleanor Roosevelt herself, Barnett's application was approved. The announcement of the marriage, listing Barnett's august address, appeared in the *Washington Post* on March 20.[1]

According to the 1940 census, Barnett was one of four Black servants listed among the residents of the White House. In 1933 he had traveled from Lynchburg to Washington to visit family. His cousin was a doorman at the White House and invited him to work at a cocktail party. Barnett went on to become a professional waiter and cook, and in 1938, he returned to the White House to live and to work, moving out only after he got married. In February 1943, almost a year after his wedding, Barnett traveled to Hyde Park to preside over the service staff during the visit of the Chinese first lady, Madame Chiang Kai-shek. In a 1971 interview with the *Washington Post*, Barnett recalled discovering that the Black staff members were to be segregated from their white counterparts. "We were kind of shocked behind it," he recalled. "We kind of expected something else." Unfortunately, he provided no further details on the segregation he encountered. Barnett continued working at the White House under Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, eventually becoming the butler-valet for Eisenhower's Executive Office. He then tried his hand in the private sphere, parlaying his experience into a successful Washington catering service, Barnett's Caterers, whose high-end clients included the State Department.[2]

Barnett's story was exceptional but not singular. In fact, African Americans had worked as domestic staff at the White House for many years. These men and women had a unique vantage point from which to view the inner workings of a president's government, social, and family lives and

how they often intertwined. In addition, White House staff did not necessarily leave with an outgoing president; therefore, many Black employees observed firsthand the transition to the Roosevelt administration, in which African Americans played roles that often went beyond their typical work assignments. And yet, as Barnett's experience at Hyde Park shows, inequality persisted.

In an interview with Frederick Weaver of the Baltimore *Afro-American* in 1933, the Roosevelts' housekeeper Henrietta Nesbitt, who was white, explained: "Besides myself and the ushers all employees are colored. These include the doormen, hall-men, personal maids for the President and the First Lady, chamber maids, the President's valet, cooks, butlers, and waiters." The head maid and seamstress Lillian Rogers Parks described the sea change away from the Hoover White House in her 1961 book *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*: "Under the Roosevelts, doors stood open, and happy voices rang out, and there was no more popping into closets, and no more hiding when the President or the First Lady took the elevator. You were invited to 'come in and ride along.' We walked freely down the halls."[3]

Eleanor Roosevelt spearheaded these changes, discarding the usual White House formalities and creating a space for African American employees. Segregation reigned at the White House upon ER's arrival, and she viewed its elimination as politically unfeasible. FDR did, after all, depend upon southern Democrats for votes. Instead, she let go of the white workers and let the Black employees use the formerly white dining room. She added new appliances to the kitchen, a locker room, and a staff lounge. She and her husband also developed more personal relationships with staff members. For example, when the doorman John Mays's wife died, ER sent White House staff to care for him and then joined him herself. FDR's relationships with his valets were intensely close as well.[4]

Many of these workers had been with the president and first lady for sometime even before they went to Washington. FDR had grown up with Black servants, including the porter and cook William Yapp, and his valet LeRoy Jones was at his side during his lengthy convalescence and rehabilitation from polio.[5]

In 1919, while living in Washington during FDR's tenure as assistant secretary of the Navy, ER decided to replace the couple's white staff with African American workers. Why did she make the change? Most obviously, she could pay them less than she could white help. But she also stereotyped domestic workers according to their race. The biographer Joseph P. Lash tells us of a letter ER wrote to her mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt, in which she claimed that Black workers were

"pleasanter to deal with and there is never any question about it not being their work to do this or that." Still, she was skeptical whenever one of the African American employees called out sick. ER used offensive language in one letter to Sara, writing, "With darkies one is always suspicious even of a death in the family." Lash writes that this "was Eleanor's first intimate contact" with Black people. As she worked with them, her views rapidly evolved.[6]

A chance meeting with Curtis Bean Dall, the husband of Anna Roosevelt, led the butler James Mingo to a job at the Roosevelts' apartment on East Sixty-Fifth Street in Manhattan while they were in Albany when FDR was governor of New York. "I took care of things in their house," Mingo told an interviewer in 1992. He also highlighted the generational difference in the next-door neighbors: "Now, the peculiar thing about it, his mother lived next door to him. . . . And on his mother's side was all white help." Even then, Mingo enjoyed ER's more hands-off approach. "She was not strict," he said, "so social minded that you had to be perfected to do things for her. She was the greatest woman that I have ever known."[7]

ER looked out for Mingo, making sure he remained employed at the White House even when it turned out his original job had been occupied. "When I left New York, I was to go as Mrs. Roosevelt's chauffeur, I thought," he said. "But, when I got there, they had a chauffeur. So, she was the kind that would never interfere or try to break up things like that or anything. So then, next I was supposed to be the head waiter. We got that they had a head waiter. So, I just became one of the waiters at the White House."

Mingo accompanied the family on trips to Hyde Park, where, he recalled, he tried to ride a horse. "So I got on one horse one day and it was a jumper, which I didn't know. . . . And when I got to the sort of obstruction or something, he stopped like he was going to jump and I almost fell off, so I didn't bother him anymore." He enjoyed the visits to Hyde Park "to the degree that it was a change from New York City and a change in my life from my childhood," but he never volunteered to go, as a trip meant time away from his family. This was Mingo's job, and, like any other employee, he preferred that his work not infringe on his family time. Still, he became close to the Roosevelt grandchildren, particularly Ellie (Sistie) and Curtis (Buzzie), who called him "Gogo"—a mispronunciation of "Mingo."[8]

To the great benefit of historians and anyone interested in the Roosevelt administration, many of these Black workers, like Mingo, left records of their work in and out of the White House. In

1961, for instance, Alonzo Fields published the memoir *My 21 Years in the White House.* Fields was born about 150 miles east of St Louis, in Lyles Station, Indiana, an all-Black town founded by formerly enslaved people in the 1850s. His father owned a general store; interestingly, he, too, would eventually take a job in Washington, as a custodian in the Post Office Department. His mother ran a boardinghouse for railroad hands who worked on the trains that ran between Louisville and St. Louis, which stopped in Lyles twice a day. Fields's father also led a brass band, and early on Fields had planned his own career in music. After briefly running a grocery store in Indianapolis, he moved to Boston to take a graduate course at the New England Conservatory of Music. But Fields's musical dreams ran up against the practical realities of earning a living. He found training as a butler for Samuel W. Stratton, the president of MIT, and his secretary Morris Parris. "It was an education to know and to be able to appreciate these fine things of good living," he later wrote in his memoir. "Here I met men like Thomas Edison, Otto Kahn, Lessing Rosenwald, John D. Rockefeller, Gerard Swope, President Lowell of Harvard, and the famous lady, Hetty Green." All the while, Fields kept working toward a career in music, having linked up with music teacher Art Wilson as a sort of teacher and manager in 1931.[9]

That same year Stratton died, Fields received a phone call from Lieutenant Frederic Butler, one of the men he'd met at MIT. Butler worked as an aide to President Herbert Hoover. First Lady Lou Henry Hoover remembered Fields serving her during a visit to Stratton's home, and when an opening came up at the White House, she wanted to offer it to Fields. "This was the best (and only) offer I had," he wrote. "So, with a wife and child depending on me, an ambitious pride to be a concert singer faded into the background." His upcoming concert debut in Boston would not happen. He was off to Washington.[10]

For Fields, the job at the White House had some familiar aspects. Remembering the rumors that swirled upon his arrival, Fields recalled, "'So this is the White House,' I thought. 'The help gossips here just like any other place.'" But no other job would have him hosting national and international dignitaries. On one such occasion, he worked a White House dinner for national governors. His boss gave him important instructions: "Fields, I am assigning you to Mr. Roosevelt's chair. They say he is going to be the Democratic candidate for the White House, so he may be the boss around here this time next year." Fields worked the breakfast the following morning and heard speculation that Roosevelt would not win the nomination or the presidency because voters would not

vote for a man with a disability. "The breakfast ended with the thought that Franklin Roosevelt, despite his infirmities, was no doubt the most exciting among the possible candidates the Democrats might offer up for the slaughter in the 1932 election," Fields wrote.[11]

When Roosevelt won and his family entered the White House, Fields was promoted to chief White House butler. Things changed as the Roosevelts sought to "throw Old Man Protocol and formality right out the window"—but not always for the better, at least as far as employees were concerned. Fields recalled that, as a cost-cutting exercise, the new president slashed the salaries of the White House staff by 25 percent. Fields earned $90 a month. Also, despite the loosened restrictions and increased respect paid to Black employees, the work became even more difficult once the compulsively industrious Roosevelts moved in. "Although the removal of this tension was a great relief and many of the rigid formalities were dispensed with," Fields wrote, "we had longer working hours and less time off. But the closeness of the family had a way of making us enjoy working hard, up to a certain point." Each day brought a litany of tasks: polish the wood floors, vacuum the rugs, clean the kitchen, dust every room. Duties were even more intense during larger gatherings, which were frequent. Mary Jo Binker of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project at George Washington University explains the sheer amount of food the staff had to prepare for some of these events: "A routine event such as the Roosevelts' annual prewar garden party for World War I veterans required the White House kitchen staff to make 3,200 sandwiches, hand squeeze 2 ½ crates of lemons to make lemonade, and order 72 cakes and untold quantities of ice cream and cookies from outside sources. The menu for the annual White House press corps dance included 25 hams, 20 tongues, 10 pounds each of different kinds of cold cuts and 24 pounds of potato chips." The Roosevelts did not eat on a typical schedule, sending cooks and butlers scurrying when more people arrived for meals than expected. And to make matters worse, workers, led by Mingo, had to fight to get a full day off, and salaries fell as an unintended consequence of FDR's campaign promise to cut government salaries.[12]

Fields worked one of the most dramatic moments of FDR's presidency, the June 1939 visit from King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The event marked the first time that a reigning British monarch had visited America. The timing was not coincidental, as FDR understood that he needed to forge greater ties with the United Kingdom and to sell the US public on helping to support America's former colonial rulers during the imminent World War II. "Washington went all out in its

reception for the King and Queen of England," Fields writes. "The king was a retiring, frail-looking man. The queen, with her pleasant expression, was mild-mannered in appearance. They were likable people, without affectation, and I admired their royal dignity."[13]

After two days in Washington, everyone traveled north to Hyde Park. Fields recalls FDR taking a more active role in the dinner here, offering a fairly backhanded compliment. "He actually went over the dinner personally. In all the twelve years of his Administration I dare say this was the only dinner that compared in dignity and quality with the White House dinners of the Hoover Administration." The great African American singer Marian Anderson performed. Fields was pleased with how the dinner came off, and he had direct interaction with the queen, even giving her a pillow for her chair. The visit also offered the Black press an opportunity to highlight the roles of Fields and other African Americans in major presidential events. On June 10 the *Chicago Defender* declared, "Alonzo Fields Heads White House Personnel Which Will Serve England's King and Queen."

Despite the grandeur, Fields, like Barnett, was surprised and disappointed by the segregated conditions at Hyde Park, which, unlike the White House, still employed white service staff. "At Hyde Park," Fields wrote, "whenever the colored help went there to serve the President, they were not permitted to eat in the dining room for the help. They had to eat in the kitchen. Of course at the White House, with Virginia so nearby, the separate dining rooms could be attributed to the influence of that State's policy, but in New York you did not expect this." While he celebrated the lack of segregation in Washington, D.C., his Hyde Park experience gave him "reservations concerning the White House as an example for the rest of the country." After all, the White House was not desegregated, as it was completely Black.[14]

As White House butler, Fields was often privileged to be in the "room where it happens" during some of the most important decisions of the Roosevelt White House. Notably, on December 7, 1941, he observed the president in his study being told about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He recalled Roosevelt's initial, stunned reaction: "My God! How did it happen? I will go down in disgrace!" At the very least, Fields's perspective casts doubt on the enduring claims that FDR intentionally encouraged the Japanese attack on Hawaii to maneuver a reluctant United States into World War II.[15]

Fields would go on to work with other foreign dignitaries, most notably Winston Churchill during his extended stay in Florida during the war.[16] He quickly learned that the "key to keeping the

British prime minister happy was the one that opened the liquor cabinet: sherry for breakfast; Scotch and soda for lunch; champagne for dinner; and more Scotch in the evening." Roosevelt assigned Fields to look after Churchill at a secret location in a dry county in Florida, where the butler somehow managed to procure the necessary wines and spirits. Discretion was paramount to Fields's position, and he kept the prime minister's penchant for swimming nude a secret from nearby residents."[17]

After FDR's death in 1945, Fields would go on to serve Harry Truman and, very briefly, Dwight Eisenhower as chief White House butler. Fields felt a particular bond with Truman. He praised Truman's "sense of human understanding and appreciation" for the household staff as people, rather than as servants. Notably, Truman was the only president to personally introduce Fields to his family, a rare implicit criticism of the Roosevelts that appeared in the butler's autobiography published in 1961, a year before ER's death and drawn upon a diary he had kept while in service. Later, Fields was more openly critical of the FDR White House, noting the different pay scales for Black workers and white workers. "The inequality burned me up," he told the *Boston Globe* in a 1992 interview, "but what could you do? At that time, you were lucky to have a job; if they laid me off I would have been in the soup kitchen."[18]

If Fields held a noticeable behind-the-scenes position in the FDR White House, Elizabeth and Irvin McDuffie emerged as public faces. Elizabeth "Lizzie" Hall was born on September 13, 1881, in Newton County, Georgia, to parents who had been born in the final decade of slavery. Her father, William Hall, was nine when emancipation came, and he remembered being disappointed that he would never rise to the position of his mistress' coachman. Lizzie recalled that her father told this story with some degree of shame, having been too young to understand what it would mean to leave the plantation and embark on a journey of freedom. Lizzie's mother, born in 1862, was too young to have any memory of slavery at all. William Hall and his wife worked as sharecroppers as adults. Lizzie's earliest memories were shaped by her life on the farm, with "the green gourd vines that grew on the porch, the chinaberry tree that threw its umbrella of shade over the yard, and the feel of the hot sand against my bare feet in the cotton field."[19]

When Lizzie was six, her father found a job on the grading crew at Atlanta's Grant Park, and the family moved to the city. Her mother worked as a cook. Lizzie attended school, first at the Summer Hill grammar school and then at the high school at Morris Brown College, where she

excelled on stage, despite her nervousness. She was also a classmate of the NAACP's Walter White. After dropping out of Morris Brown for financial reasons, she worked as a children's nurse.

In 1906, Lizzie lived through the brutal Atlanta Race Riot. A live-in nursemaid at the time for a white family named the Hillyers in a neighborhood untouched by the violence, she recalled that her employer was agitated, "but no one explained anything to me." Gradually, she learned of the mounting death toll, which included people she knew, like Sunny Boy Smith, the "Western Union boy," and one of her best friends. She "watched the march from South Atlanta" as "Negro families streamed by... loaded down with their pitiful bundles of household treasures and clothing.... innocent men, women, and children, hunted and fearful for their lives." It was "perhaps because I remembered that fearful march of my people," she wrote, that "my job at the White House became a little more than a job. It also became also a small crusade."[20]

Her invaluable memoir, published in part in *Ebony* in 1952, included joyful memories, too. "Once," she wrote, "while working for the Inmans," the family by whom she was employed for the better part of twenty years, "I attended a small party where I met a barber named Irvin McDuffie." Though they were not formally introduced at the party, they kept an eye on each other all night. At the end of the evening, McDuffie approached her and said with great formality, "Miss Hall, I have been favorably impressed with you. I would like to call." They married not long after.

Irvin "Mac" McDuffie was born on March 14, 1882, in Elberton, Georgia. He attended school through eighth grade. In 1900 he moved to Atlanta, where he learned to be a barber. Mac rose through the ranks to become the manager of the McDuffie Herndon barbershop, which was bankrolled by the African American barber-turned-businessman Alonzo Herndon of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Most of the shop's customers were white.

Despite his success, Mac began to ponder a career change after a leg injury made his work difficult. He had a reputation for good conversation at the barbershop, and he learned through a customer that the Democratic Party's 1920 candidate for vice president, Franklin Roosevelt, was looking for a valet at his home in Warm Springs, Georgia. "After ten minutes of conversation," Mac recalled of his first meeting with FDR, "we closed the deal." Mac initially took a yearlong leave of absence from the shop to decide whether he liked working for Roosevelt. But the pair hit it off: "After I had been with him ten days I knew I would like him and sent in my resignation to the barber shop." Mac accompanied FDR back to New York; Lizzie stayed in Atlanta until joining her husband at the

White House in 1933. Fully confident in an FDR victory, she had already planned to move to the city to get a job in the White House or elsewhere and was delighted when ER offered her a maid position.[21]

The McDuffies had a uniquely close, personal relationship with the president. Mac was responsible for the everyday needs of a man paralyzed from his bout with polio.[22] He woke FDR in the morning, put on his metal braces, and helped him into his wheelchair. "After eating his breakfast," Mac said, "the President reads the morning papers, including the leading Negro weeklies. He does lots of work before he gets up. He can work five men to death while he lies in bed." Mac cleaned the president's clothes and shoes, cut his hair (although FDR did his own shaving), and took the braces off before helping the president into bed at night. He also looked after FDR's health. "He spent twelve years trying to get Mr. Roosevelt to bundle up against the cold," Lizzie wrote, "and never gave up trying to stop his taking a hot bath in the morning and then going straight out into the winter air." When FDR ran for governor in 1928, Mac helped him through a cold, prompting Roosevelt to say, "I don't know what I'd have done without him."[23]

This relationship made the McDuffies unofficial liaisons between the White House and the Black press. The details of FDR's paralysis were mostly hidden from the public, but remarkable profiles of the McDuffies by the journalist Frederick Weaver in the Baltimore *Afro-American* in July 1933 demonstrated how intimately they connected with the president, as well as how the Black press focused on White House domestic staffers. "Next to his wife," Mac said, "I am around the President more than anyone else. I am the first he sees in the morning and the last at night." Weaver noted that Mac was with FDR while he tried out a new car. "The car is a specially built one for the President with everything needed for the operation on the steering wheel." When FDR arrived back at the White House, Weaver wrote, "The President came through in a wheel chair (as he had off his braces)." Weaver gave Mac plenty of space to sing FDR's praises, including putting an interesting spin on the fact that the president rarely acknowledged Black issues publicly: "I can frankly say that the President does not think in terms of races but in terms of Americans, and he believes the Negro is an American. I heard every speech he made during his campaign, and never did he single out the colored people. It was always 'Americans.'" Mac called FDR "the finest man in the world. He is one that the humblest need not fear to approach. . . . As a boss? I do not think of him in terms of a boss,

because he never orders, but requests. I think of him not as a boss but as a friend. One thing I can truthfully say, I have worked for one good, great man."[24]

"The entire work of the staff of maids is more of a personal nature," Lizzie told Weaver. She was in charge of FDR's grandchildren's rooms when they visited, as well as the room of the president's secretary. "She later wrote that "the job overflowed into practically every corner of the White House," as well as at Hyde Park and Warm Springs. At Hyde Park, for instance, she helped grandchildren Sistie and Buzzie put on a show for the staff with the goal of raising money for charity. The president attended their performance, which "occurred on the porch of their playhouse." The show raised $36. "Sis and Buz sang several numbers," Lizzie wrote, "and I recited three pieces." Her recitations often impressed and entertained the Roosevelts, FDR's mother, Sara, in particular. [25]

Remarkably, Sara Delano Roosevelt discussed the New Deal with Lizzie. "One day at Hyde Park," McDuffie recalled, Sara "even called me out on the front porch and had me sit down and discuss the theory of pensions with her. 'Don't you think I take good care of my help on this place?' she asked me. 'Shouldn't they be able to save money for their old age, and not expect pensions?' "That was a hard one to answer!"[26]

Lizzie McDuffie's rapport with the president went beyond her staff position and surprised many of the White House employees. FDR called her "doll" and permitted no one else to clean his room. Like her husband, she took the opportunity to praise the Roosevelts, saying that ER "is loved by all who know her." Lizzie also emphasized her accommodations at the White House and told Weaver, "We are well cared for with everything arranged for our comfort and convenience." She later wrote that FDR was "a true friend of the Negro race without paternalism. I felt that I was 'Lizzie McDuffie' to the President, not an automaton in a black moiré or white uniform saying, 'Yes, sir.'"[27]

In 1934 the *New York Amsterdam News* wrote that the McDuffies were a "helpful influence in many directions where the welfare of the Negro is concerned." Indeed, Lizzie McDuffie took advantage of her close relationship to the president, as she later wrote, "to put in a good word for some of the artists in my own race." She claimed credit for suggesting Marian Anderson perform for ER, as well as for bringing the Morehouse Quartet, which had performed previously in Warm Springs, to the White House. Other prominent guests included Etta Moten, Dorothy Maynor, Caterina Jarboro, and Todd Duncan. "It was often my good fortune to wait on these artists, and I got a big thrill out of it . . . as well as an autograph." She met dozens of foreign dignitaries, with Ras

Desta Demtu, the Ethiopian noble and son-in-law of that nation's leader, Haile Selassie, creating "probably the most excitement. . . . There was a screened alcove on the second floor where we could see and not be seen, and we were packed in there when he walked by."[28]

Lizzie also met the king and queen at Hyde Park. She was pleased to be the person to sweep the carpet one last time before their arrival. Much to her surprise, the king and queen desired to meet the household staff. "Our visit to your country has been a great opportunity," she recalled the king saying. "We have enjoyed every moment and hope we can return again." After the king finished, everyone stood still, unsure of what to do next in the presence of royalty. Lizzie decided to respond and "tried to sound dignified," saying, "Your majesties, we are happy you have been pleased with our country. We have been happy to serve you." She then introduced the staff, including the white members from England and Ireland. When she introduced Mac and herself, the king replied, "McDuffie! Sounds like Scotland to me!"[29]

The McDuffies attempted to exert political pressure on the president and the first lady. "My husband and I received so many letters," she later wrote, "from Negroes who heard of our position in the Roosevelt Household." (She added in an amusing aside, "Mac even received quite a few fan letters, some of them sensible little notes complimenting him on his service as a valet, and some were not very sensible notes from colored high school girls!") The letters ranged from heartbreaking stories of life amid the Great Depression to absurd proposals for New Deal programs to letters asking about the clothes ER wore. In one example that proved particularly memorable to Lizzie, "A woman wrote about pictures she made from fish scales and chicken bones." The great blues composer W. C. Handy sent the McDuffies an autographed copy of his "St. Louis Blues" to give to ER, whom he believed "has done so much for our people."[30]

Lizzie branched out into politics as part of her "small crusade." FDR laughed when she told him that she intended to serve as his "SASOCPA, self-appointed-secretary-on-colored-people's-affairs," but, if she were joking, there was also a large kernel of truth to the statement. She kept FDR up to date on issues important to African Americans, such as the Scottsboro Boys case, and claimed to have been "able to interest" the president in the case of three Black veterans who had allegedly fought police in Houston in 1917. FDR pardoned the men. She also worked behind the scenes to bring FDR's attention to the iniquities of the New Deal. After all, domestic workers such as herself and thousands of other African Americans did not qualify for Social Security benefits. "I was also able to

interest Mr. Roosevelt in cases of discrimination in the postal service, and in stories of discrimination against Negro women by the WPA."[31]

In 1936 she even hit the road to stump for FDR, speaking in midwestern cities including Chicago, St. Louis, Gary, Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. As the scholar Mary-Elizabeth Murphy notes, she usually had to stay with fellow Black Democrats, since she was not welcome at the segregated local hotels. Lizzie faced a tall task: to encourage African Americans to leave the Party of Lincoln for the Democrats. Murphy writes: "McDuffie had to influence Black voters to embrace a political party long associated with Jim Crow policies, including segregation and disfranchisement." She appealed to Lincoln's legacy whenever possible. In St. Louis she told a crowd of four thousand, "Throughout the nation today, colored men and women are playing the part in the government under President Roosevelt's New Deal that we have awaited to, these seventy years which have passed since President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation." She knew that she could never succeed if she highlighted the Democrats' grim history on race. Instead, she focused on how the New Deal could benefit all Americans, white and Black.[32]

It was unprecedented for a Black maid—or really any Black person—to play such a prominent role in a presidential campaign, but it was Lizzie's job that made her so attractive to audiences. Black domestic workers in midwestern cities could identify with her, and few other speakers could—or would—regale crowds of stories about the day-to-day lives of the president and first lady. "I was asked all sorts of questions," she wrote. "How many rooms in the White House? Can Mr. Roosevelt walk at all? Do Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt get any privacy?" She also effectively parried criticisms of Roosevelt. When one man asked her why FDR had not publicly condemned lynching, McDuffie mentioned the president's December 6, 1933, address in which he called lynching "that vile form of collective murder."[33] "Thank goodness I was able to quote him a speech in which the president did just that.... I later mailed him a copy."[34]

Lizzie's speeches, and the victory of the Democrats the following month, made her an in-demand speaker moving forward. In 1938 she campaigned for Democratic Senator Robert J. Bulkley of Ohio. Bulkley lost, but the president of the Ohio State Democratic League informed FDR that "Everywhere McDuffie went she was enthusiastically received and made a lasting and valuable impression with both her personality and sincerity." She also campaigned in Illinois, Ohio, and

Pennsylvania. She returned to those states two years later, in 1940; that year the Baltimore *Afro-American* named her one of the eight women of the year.[35]

In fact, Lizzie took her speaking talents beyond the campaign trail. In the late 1930s, she auditioned for the role of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. Sources differ as to how involved the Roosevelts were in her effort. Lizzie wrote in her unpublished memoir that she traveled to New York to audition without the knowledge of anyone in the White House, although it has also been said that ER provided her with a letter of recommendation. When she called the White House she tried to disguise her voice, only to be immediately recognized by the switchboard operator. The part, of course, went to Hattie McDaniel, a veteran actor, and Lizzie was gracious in defeat, writing that she still had a job to do: "I kept right on playing my bit part on a real-life stage where history was being made."[36]

She expanded her part after FDR's reelection when she became treasurer of the United Government Employees Incorporated (UGE), which Murphy describes as "an advocacy organization designed to improve conditions for Black government workers." Here she promoted Black economic citizenship, calling, for example, for a minimum wage of $1,500 for all federal employees, including maids such as herself. She also amplified causes that were important to her, such as when she and UGE president Edgar Brown testified before the Senate in defense of Virginia laundresses who were paid a pittance, only $600 per year, for their work cleaning the clothes of US military members. The Senate responded by increasing their pay. Here again, Lizzie McDuffie's unique role as a maid and a political activist was central. "The fact that the laundresses in Virginia personally reached out to McDuffie," Murphy notes, "suggests that black women workers viewed her as an approachable figure who could tap her political connections to address their low wages."[37]

Lizzie continued her important work with the UGE into 1938 and 1939, but all was not well in Washington.[38] In 1939, her husband left the White House before FDR announced he was running for a third term, saying, "I just figured that with things as uncertain as they are, I'd better get me a regular job while the getting was good." The real story was darker, as Mac had developed a serious drinking problem. Eleanor Roosevelt's father and brother had fallen to alcoholism, and ER recognized the potential problems that might occur should Mac remain in a position so crucial to the president. "During the latter part of FDR's second term," Jill Watts writes, "McDuffie's drinking had worsened, and on occasion he was too incapacitated to answer the president's call." ER convinced

her regretful husband that it was time for a new valet. Mac himself said that he suffered a nervous breakdown, that the president "wore him out," but emphasized that he remained friends with the president and supported him politically. He took a new job with the Treasury Department, and Lizzie continued working at the White House even though she no longer lived there. In a testament to their close relationship, FDR kept tabs on Mac for the rest of his life. In 1944 Lizzie wrote to Grace Tully saying that "the sun would cease to shine" for her husband if FDR forgot his birthday. She asked for a pair of stockings for Mac's damaged legs, and FDR came through on that request.[39]

Lizzie was at Warm Springs with the president when he died on April 12, 1945. One of the last things he said to her, she recalled, was "Tell McDuffie I didn't forget his birthday. I was at Yalta, you know." She rode the funeral train to Washington. Mac called FDR's death "the greatest shock I ever had. It was as though part of me had died." Mac himself died the following January 30, on what would have been FDR's 64th birthday. Lizzie returned to Atlanta. She was no longer directly involved in politics, but her name continued to loom large in the Black press thanks to her pivotal role in the Roosevelt administration. In April 1966, in a story picked up by the Associated Press, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., visited her, bringing flowers and well wishes. "Oh, darling boy," the moved McDuffie replied. She died on November 27.[40]

The Roosevelt administration marked a sea change in African American political allegiances, one that has held steady to this day. The Black workers of the administration helped to make its success possible, not only working behind the scenes but also, in the case of the McDuffies especially, showing Black voters that the Roosevelts respected them as people and had their best interests at heart. But beyond being ambassadors to the Black community, they were with the Roosevelts in their most vulnerable moments, privy to information shielded from the government, such as the president's disability. They served as the family's protectors and knew them more humanly than the public ever could.[41]

[1] Jeanette Smythe, "A Success Story: The Butler Did It," *Washington Post,* March 14, 1971; Adam Bernstein, "Armstead Barnett Dies," *Washington Post,* June 14, 2003.

[2] Smythe, "A Success Story: The Butler Did It"; Bernstein, "Armstead Barnett Dies."

[3] Rogers quoted in Jill Watts, *The Black Cabinet: The Untold Story of African Americans and Politics during the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Grove Press, 2020), 155-156; Frederick Weaver, "Mrs. Roosevelt Picked Her Own White House Servants," Baltimore *Afro-American,* September 16, 1933.

[4] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 156.

[5] Geoffrey Ward, The Roosevelts: An Intimate History (New York: Knopf, 2014), 146, 249; Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship, Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971; 2014), 294. The FDR Library website features a photo of Jones and FDR in 1924 at https://www.flickr.com/photos/fdrlibrary/7585237998/in/album-72157630607552654.

[6] Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, 294; Jan Pottker, Sara and Eleanor: The Story of Sara Delano Roosevelt and Her Daughter-in-Law, Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005), 76, 190.

[7] James Mingo Oral History, May 8, 1992, National Park Service, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt NHS Archives, Hyde Park, NY.

[8] James Mingo Oral History.

[9] Alonzo Fields, *My 21 Years in the White House* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1960; reprint Kindle edition, Red Kestrel Books, 2019), 16-22; Steven J. Niven, "Fields, Alonzo," in Oxford African American Studies Center, https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.35629.

[10] Fields, My 21 Years in the White House, 22-23.

[11] Fields, My 21 Years in the White House, 38-40.

[12] Niven, "Fields, Alonzo"; Fields, *My 21 Years in the White House*, 106-109; Mary Jo Binker, "Eleanor Roosevelt's 'My Day': Household," The White House Historical Association, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/staff-at-the-roosevelt-household. For more on how the Roosevelts changed the White House kitchen, see Laura Shapiro, "The First Kitchen: Eleanor Roosevelt's Austerity Drive," *The New Yorker*, November 22, 2010, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/11/22/the-first-kitchen; and Kat Eschner, "How Eleanor Roosevelt and Henrietta Nesbitt Transformed the White House Kitchen," *Smithsonian Magazine,* October 11, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-eleanor-roosevelt-and-henrietta-nesbitt-transformed-white-house-kitchen-180965159/.

[13] "The British Royal Visit," FDR Library and Museum, https://www.fdrlibrary.org/royal-visit; Fields, *My 21 Years in the White House*, 70-72.

[14] Niven, "Fields, Alonzo"; Fields, *My 21 Years in the White House*, 42.

[15] Niven, "Fields, Alonzo"; Fields, *My 21 Years in the White House*, 80. Most recent scholarship confirms Fields's recollection about FDR and Pearl Harbor. According to the biographer Jean Edward Smith, "He [FDR) was totally caught off guard by it. ... The record is clear. There was no evidence of the Japanese moving toward Pearl Harbor that was picked up in Washington." https://www.npr.org/2016/12/06/504449867/no-fdr-did-not-know-the-japanese-were-going-to-bomb-pearl-harbor; Jean Edward Smith. *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007).

[16] Fields, My 21 Years in the White House, 72; Chicago Tribune, June 10, 1939.

[17] Niven, "Fields, Alonzo."

[18] An engaging raconteur with a vivid recall of key events and a front-seat view of the presidency, Fields appears as a compelling contributor in a series of PBS television's *American Experience* documentaries, *FDR* (1994), *Truman* (1997), and, most notably, Henry Hampton's *The Great Depression* (1993). Niven, "Fields, Alonzo." He died in Medford, Massachusetts, in 1994.

[19] McDuffie, "Drafts of Book Chapters Folder," chap. 5, 1.

[20] McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 5, 1-4.

[21] Frederick Weaver, "The President's Valet," Baltimore *Afro-American,* July 15, 1933; Frederick Weaver, "The Wife of the President's Valet," Baltimore *Afro-American,* July 29, 1933; Finding Aids, Elizabeth and Irvin McDuffie Papers, http://findingaids.auctr.edu/repositories/2/resources/64.

[22] Others assisted FDR in coping with his diminished physical capacity. A photograph from his recuperation at the Massachusetts home of Dr. W. McDonald in 1924 shows McDonald and his valet, Marion (surname not listed), helping

Roosevelt to stand up.
http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/index.php?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=2487.

[23] Watts, *The Black Cabinet,* 158; Weaver, "The President's Valet"; McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 4, 1; Elizabeth McDuffie, "FDR Was My Boss," *Ebony,* April 1, 1952, 67; Sam Childers, "Presidential Valets: Confidantes of the Wardrobe," The White House Historical Association, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/presidential-valets.

[24] Weaver, "The President's Valet."

[25] McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 3, 7-9.

[26] Pottker, Sara and Eleanor, 278.

[27] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 157-158; Binker, "Eleanor Roosevelt's 'My Day': Household"; McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 3, 2.

[28] McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 4, 2-8.

[29] McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 4, 11-12.

[30] Mary-Elizabeth Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns': African American Women and the Politics of Economic Justice in Washington, D.C., in the 1930s," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no 2 (2018): 190; McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 5, 6-7; McDuffie, "FDR Was My Boss," 81.

[31] McDuffie, "FDR Was My Boss," 81; Watts, *The Black Cabinet,* 159.

[32] Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns,'" 191-192.

[33] Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns,'" 191-192; McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 5, 10-11; McDuffie, "FDR Was My Boss," 82; Paul M. Sparrow, "Eleanor Roosevelt's Battle to End Lynching," FDR Presidential Library Blog, February 12, 2016, https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2016/02/12/eleanor-roosevelts-battle-to-end-lynching/.

[34] McDuffie, "Drafts of Book Chapters folder."

[35] Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns,'" 191-192; McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 5, 10-11.

[36] McDuffie, "Drafts," chap. 5, 2-3.

[37] Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns,'" 193.

[38] A photograph of a standing FDR onstage with Elizabeth McDuffie and other African American officials of the UGE is held at the Elizabeth and Irvin McDuffie Papers/Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia. A copy of the photo appears in Reed Sparling, "FDR's Deft Civil Rights Advocate, Elizabeth McDuffie," Scenic Hudson, https://www.scenichudson.org/viewfinder/fdrs-sosocpa-remembering-civil-rights-pioneer-elizabeth-mcduffie/.

[39] Watts, *The Black Cabinet,* 397; Binker, "Eleanor Roosevelt's 'My Day': Household"; Elizabeth McDuffie to Grace Tully, March 12, 1944; Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Irvin McDuffie, March 14, 1944, FDR Libraries Digital Collections; Murphy, "'The Servant Campaigns,'" 198.

[40] McDuffie, "FDR Was My Boss," 65, 68; Watts, *The Black Cabinet,* 553; "Elizabeth 'Lizzie' McDuffie," The Living New Deal, https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/elizabeth-lizzie-mcduffie-1881-1966/; *Las Cruces Sun News*, April 13, 1966; *Indiana* (PA) *Gazette,* April 12, 1966.

[41] Dawn Turner Trice, "'The Butler' Hits Home for Chicago Siblings," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 2013.

Chapter IV

"Genius Knows No Color Line"
Marian Anderson, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Roosevelts

Sunday, February 26, 1939, was a "peaceful day" in the increasingly busy life of Eleanor Roosevelt. She made only a single excursion, driving a short distance from the White House to ferry some friends headed to a winter vacation in Florida, and hoped to finish a backlog of mail "in time to enjoy an evening of uninterrupted reading." There was an important issue, however, that she wanted to share with the millions of readers of her syndicated "My Day" column:

I have been debating in my mind for some time, a question which I have had to debate with myself once or twice before in my life. Usually, I have decided differently from the way in which I am deciding now. The question is, if you belong to an organization and disapprove of an action which is typical of a policy, should you resign or is it better to work for a changed point of view within the organization? In the past, when I was able to work actively in any organization to which I belonged, I have usually stayed until I had at least made a fight and had been defeated.

Even then, I have, as a rule, accepted my defeat and decided I was wrong or, perhaps, a little too far ahead of the thinking for the majority at that time. I have often found that the thing in which I was interested was done some years later. But in this case, I belong to an organization in which I can do no active work. They have taken an action which has been widely talked of in the press. To remain as a member implies approval of that action, and therefore I am resigning.[1]

The first lady did not state the name of the organization in "My Day," but it was soon confirmed that she had resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution, an organization of women with genealogical ties to the founding of the United States. At that time, the DAR was exclusively white and "devoted to an aggressively atavistic style of American patriotism," as one historian describes it.[2] The DAR also owned the famous Constitution Hall, the largest concert venue in the federal city of Washington, D.C.; in fact, it was not too far from the White House. When the Roosevelts lived in Washington, it was still a largely Jim Crow city, and Constitution Hall was no exception, with its discriminatory policy barring African American performers from appearing on its stage. And because all Constitution Hall contracts included a "white artists only" clause, the

renowned Black contralto Marian Anderson, who had sung in the largest and finest concert halls in Europe and North America, could not perform in the four-thousand-seat venue in her own nation's capital.

There is some debate among scholars about Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement in the DAR. One of her biographers, Blanche Wiesen Cook, suggests that ER was a "member in good standing" in the 1920s when she first criticized its transformation from a progressive, pro-women's rights and pro-League of Nations body into a conservative, strongly nativist organization.[3] There was certainly no doubt of the first lady's eligibility for DAR membership. On her mother's side, she was descended from Robert R. Livingston, chancellor of New York, who presided over the inauguration of George Washington as the first US president in 1789. Robert's father, Philip, signed the Declaration of Independence.[4]

Raymond Arsenault, Anderson's biographer, states that ER only joined the DAR in 1933 when her husband entered the White House, and she did so with some reluctance because of its increasingly conservative agenda and opposition to the New Deal and the NAACP, among other progressive causes. Her involvement was limited to hosting an annual White House reception for the DAR, but the first lady's resignation still came as a shock, transforming what had been a relatively minor but growing controversy about a segregated Washington venue into a conflict of national importance. "No first lady had ever interjected herself into a public controversy in such a personal and forthright way," Arsenault writes.[5] It was a move consistent with ER's controversial intervention the previous year at a meeting of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama, when she had deliberately placed her chair on the line separating white and Black attendees in the city's Municipal Auditorium.[6]

ER had been aware since early January 1939 of both efforts to secure an appropriately large Washington venue for a Marian Anderson concert and the resistance of the DAR to make Constitution Hall available. Keen to increase the number of African American artists invited to perform at the White House, she had first invited Anderson to sing before her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1936, following the contralto's extremely successful tours of Europe and North America. Anderson was not the first Black performer invited to the White House, to be sure, but she was one of only a handful since the opera singer Madame Selika (Marie Williams) entertained President Rutherford B. Hayes and First Lady Lucy Webb Hayes in 1878.[7] Selika,

known as the Queen of Staccato, was a close friend of Hayes's Republican political ally Frederick Douglass, who accompanied her to her White House debut. Among the others were Madame Sissieretta Jones, another opera singer, who sang before Benjamin Harrison in 1892, the same year she broke the color bar at Carnegie Hall in New York City.[8] Anderson would have known, however, that command performances for presidents and European monarchs could not overcome the endemic racism that prevented Selika and Jones from the financial rewards equally talented white opera singers enjoyed. Jones would die in poverty.

When the Roosevelts moved to Washington, D.C., in 1933, ER made a concerted effort to invite African American performers to the White House. Just as Douglass had suggested Selika to Hayes, Walter White recommended Todd Duncan, Dorothy Maynor, Lillian Evanti, and the Sedalia Quartet to Eleanor Roosevelt, who invited them to the White House during FDR's first three years in office.[9] Significantly, in 1936, the president and first lady also invited Anderson's mother, Anna, to attend. Kosti Vehanen, Anderson's Finnish pianist and former suitor, recalled that "Marian sang with a special fire," and that after she sang, "there was a very touching scene. Mrs. Roosevelt, our charming hostess, took Marian's mother by the hand, and led her over and introduced her to the President. I shall never forget seeing these two ladies enter the room. Mrs. Roosevelt's manner was sure and free, as becomes a woman of the world, happy to welcome the mother of America's best-known singer. In all of Mrs. Anderson's being, there was evident the feeling that this was one of the greatest moments in her life. Her face reflected her gratitude and the pride she felt."[10]

The bond formed between the first lady and Anderson on that evening would continue. In January 1939, ER agreed to award Anderson the NAACP's prestigious Spingarn Medal award later that summer, and she also invited her to return to the White House in June to entertain the visiting British royals, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. ER remained quiet, however, as several of her friends, notably Walter White of the NAACP and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, grew increasingly critical of the DAR's insistence that Constitution Hall remain restricted to white performers.

Only in the last week of February did ER join the fray, sending two telegrams. The first was to John Lovell, a young African American instructor at Howard University who led the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee, a group seeking to secure a venue for the singer in Washington. Having learned that the Washington School Board had also denied Anderson use of a large

auditorium, ER wrote: "I regret extremely that Washington is to be deprived of hearing Marian Anderson, a great artist." She then telegrammed Sally Robert, president-general of the DAR, to inform her of her resignation from the organization. "You had an opportunity to lead in an enlightening way" on integration, she told Roberts, "and it seems to me that your organization has failed."[11]

By resigning her membership of the DAR, Eleanor Roosevelt grasped an opportunity to lead—in the most enlightening way *she* thought possible—on the issue of equal rights for all Americans. It was a gamble. There was already a growing resentment among white southerners over ER's pronouncements and political actions in favor of racial equality, such as her segregation protest in Birmingham and now her resignation from the DAR. As ER knew from FDR's cautious response to her anti-lynching activism, directly challenging Jim Crow could be "dynamite."[12] Nevertheless she persisted, inspired perhaps by Anderson's own success against the odds, as a working-class African American from South Philadelphia who had honed and refined an early talent for music to become the most celebrated singer of her day.[13]

Marian Anderson was born in an ethnically mixed, but predominantly African American, working-class neighborhood in South Philadelphia. All four of her grandparents had been enslaved in Virginia before the Civil War, and her father, John Berkley Anderson, worked as a barber and as a refrigerator room employee at Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market. Her mother, Anna Rucker Anderson, had trained as a teacher in the segregated schools of Virginia, but that did not qualify her to teach in Pennsylvania and she contributed to the family's income as a laundress, factory worker, and cleaner, scrubbing the immaculate floors of John Wanamaker's, the city's leading department store. The family's economic fortunes were tight and quickly plummeted after her father's sudden death following a work accident in late 1909, just before Anderson's thirteenth birthday. Anna, Marian, and her two younger sisters then moved in with John Anderson's parents, Benjamin and Isabella. Grandfather Benjamin's death just one year later squeezed their finances even further, such that Marian's hopes of attending high school were thwarted. Isabella, her grandmother and the matriarch of the family, insisted that the fifteen-year-old help the family make ends meet by delivering laundry.

Anderson was disappointed to be deprived of a high school education, but truth be told, she enjoyed the opportunity to devote more time to her true passion: music. She was born into a musical family. Her grandmother played the organ and her mother and aunt sang in church choirs. She had shown an aptitude for singing from an early age, quickly mastered the piano to accompany herself, and by age ten, "the baby contralto" was the youngest singer invited to join the Philadelphia-wide People's Chorus.[14] At thirteen, she joined the Senior Choir at Union Baptist, her late father's church, where, the following year, in 1911, Marian attended an annual gala concert for church funds. There she met the renowned African American singer Roland Hayes, who would "serve as her primary role model and mentor" for more than six decades.[15] Hayes, then only twenty-four years old, was beginning to forge a reputation as a new kind of African American musical performer, one who combined traditional Black spirituals with European folk songs, attracting support from music followers from both traditions. Anderson would follow in this vein in her own career and took Hayes's credo as her own: "the only real freedom is the freedom to produce and create."[16]

There was no doubting that Anderson had a "singularly rare contralto voice," as the music critic for the *Philadelphia Tribune* newspaper put it after her performance at a People's Chorus concert in 1914, but if she were to enjoy a professional career as a concert artist like Hayes, the seventeen-year-old would need professional training of the type only provided by the prestigious Philadelphia Music Academy. She decided to apply. Marian waited patiently in line for an application only to find that the assistant tasked with handing them out completely ignored her. When she asked directly for a form, the assistant told her, coldly, "We don't take colored." It was, Marian recalled, "a painful realization of what it meant to be a Negro."[17]

Instead, Anderson began to take lessons with Mary Saunders Patterson, the city's leading Black voice teacher and a friend of Hayes. Patterson taught her the French, Italian, and German folk songs that Hayes had mastered. In the meantime, Anderson was invited to sing at several venues, usually Black churches outside of Philadelphia, including in New York, where she sang at a National Baptist Convention meeting at the legendary Abyssinian Baptist Church; Boston, where she performed with Hayes; and Savannah, Georgia, in late 1917. It was Anderson's first visit to the Deep South and the first time she had sung before a segregated audience. The Municipal Auditorium accommodated a thousand people, around one-third of them white, seated near the stage; African Americans, including her mother, were forced to the rear. Although exposed to the indignities of full-blown Jim

Crow, Anderson's performance did not suffer. Indeed, the white music critic for the local paper hailed her voice as "one of the most remarkable ... ever heard in Savannah. A contralto, its range is amazing and the upper notes as perfect and full as the lower, with a lovely middle register. Something unusual in its quality, difficult to analyze, made it sound more like an exquisite wind instrument than like the human voice, the tones ringing out like a clarinet."[18]

As she reached her twenties and her reputation as a vocalist grew, Anderson traveled with greater frequency, building an impressive reputation while facing the indignities of Jim Crow transport when she ventured south of the Mason-Dixon line. She also persevered in her effort to complete a formal education, graduating from the integrated South Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1921 when she was 24. By then she had finally found a well-regarded, professional voice teacher—a white man—willing to take her on and provide the classical training she required to compete in the concert world. Giuseppe Boghetti had studied at the Royal Conservatory in Milan, one of Europe's finest music schools, but he might have recognized something of his own struggles in the aspiring young singer. Giuseppe Boghetti was born Joseph Bogash, the son of a Russian Jewish family in Philadelphia, just a year before Anderson's own birth. As a favor for two of their mutual friends, Dr. Lucy Wilson, principal of South Philadelphia High School for Girls, and Lisa Roma, a musician, Anderson was given the opportunity to audition before Boghetti. The two white women accompanied her to the audition, a scene she recalled vividly in her memoir three decades later.

Mr. Boghetti was short, stocky, and dynamic. He could be pleasant, but there were times when he could be stern and forbidding.... He began by declaring that he had no time, that he wanted no additional pupils, and that he was giving his precious time to listen to this young person only as a favor to Miss Roma. Dr. Wilson did not look happy. I was amazed. My song was "Deep River." I did not look at Mr. Boghetti as I sang, and my eyes were averted from him when I had finished. He came to the point quickly. "I will make room for you right away," he said firmly, "and I will need only two years with you. After that, you will be able to go anywhere and sing for anybody." Then he began to talk about his fees as if the lessons would begin at once.[19]

The lessons would begin a little later, after a Union Baptist concert starring Hayes had raised $600 for Boghetti's fees. It was money well spent as Anderson expanded her vocal technique and

repertoire and began to develop an interest in opera and classical European composers, such as Schubert, Verdi, and Brahms. Boghetti also taught her Italian and engaged a tutor to help her improve her French. Anderson appeared at Carnegie Hall in New York and toured throughout the Midwest in the early 1920s, making her first recordings in December 1923. These records featured African American spirituals, for which there was a growing audience, but Anderson also wanted to improve her interpretations of *lieder,* classical songs in German arranged by Brahms, Handel, and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers. Her debut of this new repertoire at Manhattan's prestigious Town Hall in April 1924 received mixed reviews in the press. By her own admission, her German was poor, the result of having only learned it phonetically.

One important observer, the NAACP Secretary Walter White, agreed. He described her voice to Hayes as "marvelous…but she sings too mechanically and without any great depth of feeling." Still, White believed that with practice and greater experience, Anderson would develop into "the artist which she ought to be with that voice."[20] It was White's ambition to encourage the integration of African American artists into the highest levels of all American cultural productions, including theater, opera, and film, especially in roles that had traditionally excluded Black people. When Anderson returned to Philadelphia, full of doubt after her disappointing Town Hall performance, it was White who coaxed her out of all thoughts of "retirement," inviting her to sing at the NAACP's 1924 Spingarn Medal ceremony for her mentor, Roland Hayes, in her home city. This time Anderson triumphed. White wrote in his autobiography that "she sang superbly and was forced to give encore after encore and then to take curtain call after curtain call. When at last the applause had subsided, Marian burst into tears and exclaimed, 'Thank God! I've got my faith again!'"[21] Of even greater importance to her confidence and career, Anderson made a successful return to New York City in 1925, beating out three hundred other aspiring singers to win the National Music League competition. Her prize was a solo appearance with the New York Philharmonic orchestra.[22]

The New York Philharmonic concert set the stage for Anderson's series of tours throughout North America, and, after 1926, to Europe and Latin America. All American classical musicians wishing to be taken seriously in their profession at that time had to prove themselves in Europe. Anderson was no exception. She leveraged her growing reputation, $1,500 in savings from her domestic tours, and her close friendships with Hayes and his accompanist Lawrence Brown to sail to England. There she studied with Amanda Aldridge, also a contralto, the daughter of the late Ira

Aldridge, the leading African American Shakespearean actor of the nineteenth century. Ira Aldridge had enjoyed a memorable career in Britain when racism forced the closure of the pioneering African Grove Theater in New York. Amanda Aldridge had also taught Hayes and Paul Robeson, who, like her father, would portray Othello on the London stage.[23]

In England, Anderson focused on mastering German lieder with Baron Raimund von zur-Mühlen, the recognized expert in that genre, and improved her knowledge and proficiency in interpreting the work of Schubert with Mark Raphael, who specialized in that composer's work. She also engaged with several African and Caribbean American artists then making their home in Europe. Among them were Albert Hunter and Josephine Baker, who had found stardom and a break from American racism in the vibrant nightclubs of Paris and the French Riviera, and Robeson, who was then appearing in the London West End production of the musical, *Show Boat*. His performance of "Ol' Man River" from the film version of the play would become iconic.

By the time Marian Anderson returned to the United States in 1928, she was able to command a fee of $500 per concert, an increase of $150 on what she had earned previously. It was a standard fee at that time, just before the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and it ensured that her mother no longer had to work scrubbing floors at John Wanamaker's. Anderson could now afford to shop for concert wear at the same department store. But after paying for a commission to her management agency and for publicity and travel, there was less left than she had hoped. Nevertheless, she could now perform the lieder of Schumann and Schubert that she wanted to sing, as well as the spirituals that her audiences, especially African American ones, expected to hear.

After the crash, though, and with the number of concert venues dwindling, Anderson resolved to return to Europe in 1930, this time with $1,500 in financial assistance from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a philanthropic organization devoted to promoting African Americans in the arts and academia. Accepting the award, which she used to finance two trips to Germany, Anderson wrote: "It is my true ambition to become a great artist and a credit to my race in every way possible.... I do not feel that the voice is my personal property, it belongs to everybody. I do feel that I should make every effort to present it to the public in the best form possible. It is also my sincere wish to, in the future, help some talented Negro boy or girl who has ambitions to become a great singer. It is my earnest prayer that someday my financial position will permit me to do this."[24]

For that to happen, Anderson would have to immerse herself in Germany and the Germanic culture that produced the music she loved. The Nazi Party of Adolf Hitler had yet to ascend to power when she arrived in Berlin in the summer of 1930, and the Philadelphian found a warm welcome from the city's artistic community. She lodged with a theatrical couple who tutored her in German and hired two of the city's finest musicians as accompanists at her first German recital in the capital city's famed Bachsaal Hall that October. Still, the Berlin concert impresario Max Walter was unsure about a foreigner's ability to sing the most challenging of German lieder and requested that Anderson contribute $500 of her own money toward the concert. He needn't have worried. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, the city's equivalent of the *New York Times*, praised the performance: "Her command of our language and of our world of feeling was amazing."[25] Another major paper, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung,* recognized Anderson's unique talents but was somewhat incredulous. "Imagine this," the critic wrote, "a member of the black race, an artist through and through, she began her evening with lieder by Beethoven, and continued with songs by Wagner, Liszt, and Grieg (all sung in German). . . . And she sang these German lieder—above all those by Beethoven—with such a mature understanding, so soulfully inspired and deeply musical; you do not hear something like this every day."[26]

Anderson gloried in the universally positive coverage and in the attentions, some of them romantic, of prominent Berliners. She wrote back home to her mother, "I've been photographed and sketched and now ... your child is to be painted. A great world this." Though resident in Charlottenburg, a wealthy suburb, she could not help but notice that the "situation with the lower classes is steadily growing worse." Violent demonstrations by both the Communist and the Nazi parties were a daily occurrence.[27]

Among her new admirers were Rule Rasmussen, a Norwegian concert manager, and Kosti Vehanen, a Finnish pianist, who encouraged her to leave Berlin for a tour of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. The tour was a great triumph. Scheduled to give six performances in three weeks, the positive response was such that she gave twelve, a grueling schedule, but one that cemented a lifelong association for Anderson with and affection for Scandinavia and its people.

After performing twenty-six concerts in fifteen states in the United States in 1931, Anderson returned to Europe to complete her Rosenwald-funded studies in German language and culture and to perform across the continent. In Finland, the famed composer Jean Sibelius, a friend of Vehanen,

who was now her permanent accompanist, invited her to his salon. Sibelius had ordered coffee, but upon hearing Anderson sing, he canceled that order and requested champagne instead. He later dedicated a composition, *Solitude*, to the contralto.[28]

After extensive tours of Europe in 1934, including a triumphant series of concerts in Paris, Anderson entered new territory in 1935 when she crossed the border from Finland into the Soviet Union. The United States, under FDR, had not recognized the communist state until 1933, sixteen years after its founding, but several African American artists and activists had already made their way there, intrigued by its promises of racial equality. These included the poet Langston Hughes, who had traveled to Russia in 1932 to make a film critical of American race relations; he returned when the planned film was abandoned following Roosevelt's recognition of the USSR. Others, like the Mississippi-born agricultural scientist Oliver Golden, settled in the Soviet Union, believing it was "the only country in the world today that gives equal chances to black and white alike." Golden was so impressed with his first visit to Russia in the 1920s that he persuaded his mentor, Tuskegee's George Washington Carver, to send him a group of fifteen agronomists from several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to Uzbekistan to develop a hybrid cotton that could thrive in that Soviet republic's hot climate, which was similar to the American South.[29] Paul Robeson was another frequent visitor to the USSR, and indeed was nearing the end of a concert tour in the country just as Anderson arrived. Although the contralto did not know it, the Soviet authorities had just fired several radio officials for allowing Robeson's recording of the African American spiritual "Steal Away to Jesus" to be broadcast in a country hostile to organized religion of any kind. There were, however, no repercussions for Anderson's performance of spirituals and other religious works like "*Ave Maria*." Anderson's biographer Allan Keiler suggests that this was because the authorities recognized Robeson as sympathetic to the communist system and therefore "of considerable propagandistic importance to the Soviets." His rendition of a religious song thus created "awkward and embarrassing … ideological confusion." While Robeson was "ideologically engaged," Anderson was "moderate and self-composed." The focus was entirely on her music and the unique character of her voice, not politics.[30]

Anderson's first concert in Leningrad set the scene for those that followed, where the adulation of concertgoers exceeded even her ecstatic Scandinavian reception. After ending her performance with a series of African American spirituals, Anderson and pianist Vehanen "walked off, not looking

back." But then, she recalled, "we heard a swelling noise. It grew in volume and intensity, and when we reached the artist's room it had mounted to horrifying proportions. It sounded as if the building were being torn up by its roots. 'What on earth is going on?' I asked. 'I don't know,' said Kosti, looking as bewildered as I surely did." A young woman then came into the room and asked them to return to the stage. "We did, and what we saw astonished us. Half the audience—the [less wealthy] half that had sat in the rear of the house—had rushed down the aisles and had formed a thick phalanx around the stage. Those nearest the stage were pounding on the board floor with their fists. Deep voices were roaring in Russian accents, 'Deep River' and 'Heaven, Heaven,'" the titles of two Spirituals. "We did several encores with the throng almost underfoot," Anderson recalled. "It was disconcerting for a few moments, but how could one resist such enthusiasm?"[31]

The enthusiasm continued throughout her European tour, in Warsaw, Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Monte Carlo, and Rome, where she gave a special command performance for Italian Crown Princess Marie-José, before dates in Milan, Trieste, and Venice, a return to Russia, and a lengthy sojourn in the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia. Even though Nazism now ruled in Germany, a potential return date in Berlin was proposed for that summer. The Nazi authorities wrote to Anderson's management inquiring whether the singer was "100 percent Aryan." On being told she was not, one biographer notes, "there was no further correspondence."[32]

Anderson, however, could not resist an opportunity to perform in Austria, at the annual music festival in Salzburg that celebrated the life and career of the city's most famous son, the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The nation was now governed by an authoritarian fascist regime, albeit one that still resisted unity with Nazi Germany. In May, the authorities denied the request for Anderson to perform in Salzburg because "non-Aryans" were now barred from performing, but by August, under pressure from Anderson's many supporters in the Viennese music world, the organizers agreed on a compromise: the African American contralto could sing at one of the festival's main venues, the Mozarteum, but she would not appear in the official festival program.

As she took the stage, Anderson was nervous, but not because of the fear of racial violence. She had learned that Arturo Toscanini, the famed Italian conductor whom she held in the highest esteem, was in the audience. She managed to get through the first half of the concert featuring challenging pieces by Sibelius and Schubert, only to be shocked by the maestro's appearance in her dressing room at intermission. "The sight of him caused my heart to leap and throb so violently that I did not

hear a word he said," she later recalled. "All I could do was mumble a thank you, sir, thank you very much, and then he left." She would soon learn the famous words Toscanini uttered that would transform her life and career: "Yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years." "It was enough, more than enough, that he addressed such words to me," she wrote in her memoir. "If it had been up to me, I would not have allowed his comment to be made public. I certainly would not have allowed it without asking his permission. But it was already news before I had any power to intervene.... He was the dominant personality in Salzburg and the musical world at large, and it was news that he had seen fit to come to a concert by a singer who was not yet well known."[33]

In late 1935, Marian Anderson returned home to the United States from her European tour in triumph. Her new manager, the impresario Sol Hurok, was widely regarded as the best in the business, and he knew just how to market his new client on the back of her stunning triumphs in Europe: definitively not as a diva in the pejorative sense of that word, but as a humble, working-class girl from South Philadelphia whose rise to the pinnacle of the classical music world was both a rags-to-riches fairy tale and a testament to her combination of genius and dedication to her art. Fittingly, Anderson's return to New York came at the Town Hall venue where she had struggled a decade earlier. This time, the *New York Times* music critic Howard Taubman wrote that the "Negro contralto" was "mistress of all she surveyed," and compared her to perhaps the only African American more famous than Anderson at the time, the boxer Joe Louis, then the leading contender for the world heavyweight title. The rest of the New York press followed suit, particularly after a famed appearance at Carnegie Hall in January 1936. Movie stars including Katharine Hepburn and Gloria Swanson were among those determined to be seen at the musical event of the year to witness a "transcendent artist." In the words of the *New York Herald Tribune's* music critic, "No one can see and listen to Miss Anderson for two minutes without realizing that one is in the presence of an artist of extraordinary devotion, intensity, and self-effacement. Her poise, her simplicity, her spiritual transparence, the mood of exaltation that enwraps her, are immediately influential upon all who sit before her."[34] Similar reviews and accolades met Anderson's next appearances in Atlanta, Tuskegee, Alabama, and Hampton, Virginia, where she attracted primarily African American audiences in segregated venues, and in Chicago and Utica, New York, where, as at Carnegie Hall, the audience was predominantly white. No performer had ever reached that degree of crossover appeal.

By February 1936, Anderson and Hurok set their sights on another major American city, Washington, D.C., where she had not performed since 1933. The problem for a crossover artist like Anderson who appealed to both Black and white concertgoers, however, concerned where she could perform. Her last appearance in the capital had been at a church auditorium that was too small, even then, for her growing fan base. In light of Toscanini's tribute and her Carnegie Hall triumph, the venue was switched from Howard University's small Rankin Chapel to Armstrong High School Auditorium, one of the largest venues in the city that allowed African American performers on stage. The city's largest auditorium, the four-thousand-capacity Constitution Hall, owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), had barred African Americans from appearing on its stage since 1931, when Roland Hayes and the choir of Hampton University had performed. Because Hayes had protested the segregation of the audience, the DAR was determined there could be no further such protests by including a "white performers only" clause in future contracts.

Anderson's recital at Armstrong High School sold out, with around one hundred white audience members, and it was a critical success like the earlier dates on her tour, though one Black reporter noted that the "auditorium was far too small to hold the crowd that wanted so badly to get it."[35]

The next morning, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt invited Anderson, her mother, and her pianist Vehanen to perform in the White House at a private dinner. ER had requested a "spirituals only" program, but Anderson insisted on also including selections from Schubert, a choice the first lady endorsed in her "My Day" column. "My husband and I had a rare treat Wednesday night," she wrote, "listening to Marian Anderson, a colored contralto, who has made great success in Europe and this country. She has sung before nearly all the crowned heads and deserves her great success, for I have rarely heard a more beautiful and moving voice or a more finished artist."[36]

Over the next two and a half years, as tensions in Europe moved the continent to the brink of war, Anderson continued to tour to packed venues and critical acclaim at home and abroad. She performed in Spain just before the outbreak of its civil war, France, England, Belgium, Holland, the Soviet Union, and Austria in 1936. The latter event was particularly poignant as Bruno Waller, a German Jewish conductor exiled from his homeland after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, had just come out of retirement to direct the Vienna State Opera, despite death threats and disruptions to his concerts, including a stink bomb. Determined that his show would go on, Waller invited Anderson to

sing Brahms's "Alto Rhapsody" at that year's Vienna Music Festival, a double rebuke to ideas of white or Aryan supremacy. Germany itself remained off limits to a "non-Aryan" artist, but Scandinavia, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were more hospitable, as were the South American nations she toured in 1938. Several concerts on her US tours in 1937 and 1938 were also broadcast to millions of listeners on NBC radio. Anderson's appearance with her white accompanist, Kosti Vehnanen, was unprecedented among major performers, but did not provoke any controversy where they appeared before segregated audiences, even in Texas and Oklahoma.[37] Only in Princeton, New Jersey, was Anderson refused a hotel room on account of her race. Fortunately, a Princeton resident, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Albert Einstein, a German Jewish refugee, heard of her plight and invited her to stay with him, initiating a deep and long-lasting friendship.[38]

By January 1939, Anderson's fortunes had been transformed. Her income from concert fees alone the previous year had neared a quarter-million dollars. She was able to look after her mother and younger sisters and afford to dress in the style appropriate to her status as a diva in the music world. But soon it would be time for another appearance in the nation's capital, and Hurok, Anderson's manager, knew it would be problematic because of the ongoing ban on Black artists at Constitution Hall. Hurok and Charles Cohen, director of Howard University's Lyceum series of concerts, had already agreed the previous year that Anderson would appear as part of the series on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939. With Anderson's unprecedented reputation in the music world, Hurok and Cohen wondered if the DAR might come around and allow four thousand aficionados in the district a chance to enjoy the "voice that one hears once in a hundred years."

On learning that the DAR would not budge, Walter White of the NAACP swung into action, protesting the denial of a platform for a world-famous artist. First, he assembled endorsements from prominent musicians and conductors including Toscanini and Leopold Stowkowski. Then he arranged that the NAACP award its highest honor, the annual Spingarn Medal, to Anderson, persuading Eleanor Roosevelt to agree to present it at a ceremony in July. In February, when the District of Columbia school board refused Anderson the use of the city's large Central High School auditorium, another member of FDR's Black Cabinet, Howard University Law Dean Charles Hamilton Houston, was elected chair of the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee (MACC), which lobbied and organized to protest the DAR and the School Board's actions. These protests and the unanimous statement by the entire Philadelphia Orchestra decrying the "great injustice" against

Anderson certainly earned mentions in the press. But it was only once ER discussed the issue with White in late February and announced her resignation from the DAR in "My Day" on the 27th that the color bar at Constitution Hall became a national cause célèbre. Newspaper accounts of ER's resignation overwhelmingly came down on her side and supported Anderson's right to appear at an appropriately sized venue. The *New Yorker* noted "a neat if rather elementary irony" in the DAR's "decision to bar Miss Anderson, a distinguished Negro singer, from Constitution Hall, which, of course, takes its name from a document guaranteeing Miss Anderson freedom from racial discrimination."[39] Even in the South, many newspapers supported ER's resignation and condemned the DAR; opinion polls suggested that a significant minority of southerners did as well—43 percent.

In the White House and the Cabinet, Anderson's strongest supporter other than Eleanor Roosevelt was Harold Ickes, who served as secretary of the interior for the entirety of FDR's presidency and in the transition to Truman's. Weeks before ER's resignation, Ickes had made his views plain in a stinging letter of rebuke to the DAR for the "astounding discrimination against equal rights" in its exclusion of non-white performers.[40] And Ickes, a former president of the Chicago NAACP, proved to be a very useful ally once White proposed the Lincoln Memorial as an alternative for Anderson's Easter Sunday concert. Although Secretary Ickes had authority over the National Park Service and therefore could grant use of the Memorial and the National Mall to showcase Anderson's talents of his own volition, he chose to seek the president's approval as well. On March 30, just ten days before Easter, with FDR preparing to depart for Warm Springs for the holiday, Ickes secured a meeting with the president. As Ickes remembered it, FDR enthusiastically approved: "I don't care if she sings from the top of the Washington Monument, as long as she sings!" Ickes went forward with the eagerly anticipated announcement: Marian Anderson would perform at the Lincoln Memorial.[41]

Neither of the Roosevelts was in Washington on that now-historic Easter Sunday. FDR spent the holiday at the Little White House in Warm Springs while ER was at the family home in Hyde Park, having just returned from Seattle, where her daughter, Anna, had given birth to a son. ER sent Anderson a bouquet of roses and her apologies for missing the concert, but she did not appear.[42] Instead, it was Ickes who stood with the singer on the steps in front of Lincoln's statue, declaring that "in this great auditorium under the sky, all of us are free." The crowd, seventy-five thousand strong and racially integrated, cheered the secretary, who gave what he would remember as "the best

speech" of his long career. A powerful if not a great orator, Ickes captured the moment perfectly. "When God gave us this wonderful outdoors and the sun, the moon and the stars, He made no distinction of race or creed or color," Ickes began, to rapturous applause, which continued when he honored Abraham Lincoln, "who laid down his life" to end slavery, "and so it is as appropriate as it is fortunate that today we stand reverently and humbly at the base of this memorial to the great emancipator while glorious tribute is rendered to his memory by a daughter of the race from which he struck the chains of slavery." Ickes's invocation of other founders, notably Jefferson, was met with relative silence from an audience less willing to exalt an owner of humans as property. But loud applause returned with Ickes's declaration that "Genius, like justice, is blind… Genius draws no color line. She has endowed Marian Anderson with such a voice as lifts any individual above his fellows, as is a matter of exultant pride to any race. And so it is fitting that Marian Anderson should raise her voice in tribute to the noble Lincoln, whom mankind will ever honor."[43]

Wrapped in a long fur coat to protect her from a biting wind, Anderson made her way to the microphones that relayed her voice to the massive crowd gathered at the Mall as well as to the millions more tuned in on NBC radio. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and began the patriotic anthem "America":

My country, tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty
To thee we sing.

Consciously or not, Anderson had subtly changed the third line, usually rendered as "*Of* thee *I* sing." "To thee we sing" was more inclusive, a reflection, perhaps, of the collective endeavor of the integrated, adoring crowd. They were listening to the voice of a generation but also pledging their faith in a more equal, democratic future, where talent or genius might mark distinctions between people, but race would not.

But if "America" reflected hope for unity in her homeland, Anderson's next songs reflected her mastery of the European art form of classical and operatic music. "*O Mio Fernando*" had challenged singers of Italian opera in the ninety-nine years since the Paris debut of *La Favorita*, Donizetti's tale of a royal love triangle in fourteenth-century Spain. Anderson had mastered the piece over the years

and sang it at her debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Schubert's 1825 arrangement of "*Ave Maria*" was another of her favorites, perfected during her studies and performances in Europe in the 1920s. After a brief intermission, she returned to sing three traditional numbers that many of the African Americans in the crowd would have known well, the work song "Trampin'" and the spirituals "Gospel Train" and "My Soul Is Anchored in the Lord." The latter was met with an enthusiastic, thunderous ovation. Many in the crowd were in tears, as was the woman who stood at the microphone before them. Anderson paused, briefly, before responding with an encore, the classical spiritual, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," which she had recorded in 1925. Thanks to the speedy actions of the police, the contralto was able to escape the surging crowd that bore down on her to give thanks.

In all, the ceremony lasted less than an hour, but the powerful symbolism of the day would resonate through the years and inspire many millions who listened on the radio or watched it on a newsreel, as well as the three-quarters of a million individuals who watched it live, among them Mary McLeod Bethune. Writing to Houston the next day, Bethune speculated that history "may and will record it, but it will never be able to tell what happened in the hearts of the thousands who stood and listened yesterday afternoon. Something happened in all of our hearts. I came away almost walking on air. We are on the right track—we must go forward. The reverence and concentration of the throngs . . . told a story of hope for tomorrow—a story of triumph—a story of pulling together—a story of splendor and real democracy. Through the Marian Anderson protest concert we made our triumphant entry into the democratic spirit of American life."[44]

Although neither FDR nor ER were in attendance, both benefited politically from Anderson's historic performance. With the next election only a year away, the president's support for the concert signaled to African American voters that his administration shared some of Bethune's "hope for tomorrow." And when in the fall of 1940 the Republicans nominated a racially progressive presidential candidate in Wendell Willkie, the Democrats were able to shore up Black support by highlighting the symbolism of the Lincoln Memorial event. They even enlisted Anderson herself to stump for the president, a celebrity endorsement that countered boxer Joe Louis's support of Willkie.

White assured ER that her resignation from the DAR had been pivotal in making the concert possible. He also shared some of her concerns about the next steps to take on the broader question of segregated facilities in the nation's capital. Three days after Easter Sunday, Houston and the Marian

Anderson Citizens' Committee informed the Daughters of the American Revolution leadership of their plans to picket its upcoming conference in Washington, D.C., unless the DAR agreed to resolve the "fundamental issue of the ban on Negro artists at Constitution Hall." ER was concerned that such a direct attack on segregation in Washington, D.C., would both overshadow Anderson's personal triumph and undermine what Bethune called the renewed "hope for tomorrow" that was inspired by the integrated Lincoln Memorial concert. She rushed a telegram to White. "It worries me very much to have anything of this kind done. In the first place, Washington is a city where one could have serious trouble and I think it would not do any good to picket the D.A.R. It would only create bad feeling all the way around." ER believed that "at present the D.A.R. Society is condemned for the stand it took" in barring Anderson from Constitution Hall. Picketing the DAR, however, might "result in the sympathy swinging to the other side." Keen to keep the first lady on board and generally sympathetic to her strategic assessments, White alerted Charles Hamilton Houston in an urgent telegram requesting that MACC end the proposed picket: "Let's not do anything to pull the D.A.R. out of the deep hole into which they have sunk themselves," he wrote, echoing ER's sentiments. But the clincher was the response of Anderson herself. Through her lawyer, Hubert Delany, she declared she "would very strongly agree with Mrs. Roosevelt's position as a matter of strategy."[45] Houston immediately backtracked on the picketing plan in favor of a coordinated letter-writing campaign. That change in tactics was typical of the first lady's approach to civil rights and other controversial political positions. It avoided confrontation but was also effective, keeping the DAR in reactive mode for the duration of its conference.

ER confided to her friend, the journalist Lorena Hickok, that she had "thought up an alternative" to picketing that would still put the DAR "in a hole."[46] She did not tell Hickok what the alternative was, but may have been referring to two further public events that year where she showcased Anderson's talents: the first was President Roosevelt's request that Anderson perform at the White House's social highlight of that year: the June state dinner honoring King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain that was also part of the growing alliance of the two nations most concerned by Hitler's expansionist plans in Europe. The second was ER's presentation of the NAACP's Spingarn Medal to Anderson before a capacity audience of 5,300 people at its annual convention in Richmond, Virginia. The event took place on Independence Day weekend and was broadcast live in all forty-eight states by NBC radio, at a time when "nationwide hookup" broadcasts

were still quite rare. In presenting the medal, ER praised Anderson's "courage" in overcoming many difficulties. ER did not elaborate on those difficulties, but most in the audience would have understood she meant that despite her incomparable talent, she was considered by her homeland a second-class citizen, suffering the indignities historically (and contemporarily) heaped upon African Americans and women, as well as the specific challenges presented by the DAR controversy. ER stated that Anderson's "achievement far transcends any race or creed," but also called on her fellow Americans to confront "subjects of primary importance," the foremost of which was "the preservation of democracy … and the ability of every individual to be a really valuable citizen."[47] Those words were particularly resonant, spoken by the first lady in Richmond, the segregated former capital of the Confederacy.

Marian Anderson's Lincoln Memorial concert was a turning point in the federal government's approach to racial segregation. It symbolized the Roosevelt administration's growing commitment to the words given voice by ER on that day in Richmond, when she presented Anderson with the NAACP's highest honor. But it also highlighted the limits of that commitment in directly challenging Jim Crow and state and local laws that excluded African Americans from full equality. Washington, D.C., remained a segregated city throughout the Roosevelts' thirteen years in the White House. And in 1941, a full two years after the Anderson controversy, the DAR also refused the African American singer and actor Paul Robeson the use of Constitution Hall for a benefit concert for China, which was then at war with Japan, on the same racial grounds that had excluded Anderson in 1939. Once war broke out between the US and the Axis powers, the DAR temporarily dropped its Jim Crow policy and allowed Anderson to appear at a benefit concert in Constitution Hall, again for Chinese aid, in January 1943. African Americans made up around half of the audience that evening and were not visibly segregated. But this was merely an exception for the war effort, not a change of policy. The DAR leadership remained resistant to change, banning the African American soprano Hazel Scott, the wife of Harlem's new Black congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., from its D.C. auditorium in 1945. Finally in 1951, the DAR abandoned segregation at Constitution Hall, as the soprano Dorothy Maynor became the first African American to perform there. Two years later, on March 14, 1953, nearly fourteen years after her Lincoln Memorial concert, Anderson appeared on stage at Constitution Hall, before a fully integrated audience.[48]

In the decades that followed, Anderson appeared regularly at White House events. She sang the national anthem at the presidential inaugurations of Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953 and his Democratic successor, John F. Kennedy, in 1961. The following year President Kennedy also invited Anderson to the White House and arranged for her to perform at a special concert in her honor at the State Department.

Kennedy nominated Anderson for the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963, and President Lyndon Baines Johnson bestowed it on her a month after JFK's assassination. LBJ also invited Anderson to perform at his Festival of the Arts in June 1965. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter worked with leaders in Congress, including Walter Fauntroy, the first African American delegate in the House of Representatives from the District of Columbia, to award Anderson the Congressional Gold Medal. She was the first African American recipient of the Medal, and the ceremony recalled the central role of Eleanor Roosevelt's resignation from the DAR in making possible her historic performance at the Lincoln Memorial.[49]

Anderson no doubt welcomed these formal recognitions of her historic talents, but she also cherished the deep, personal relationship that developed with Eleanor Roosevelt in the wake of the DAR controversy. The singer's 1956 memoir notes that on a trip abroad, she left ER a note written with soap on a mirror at a concert hall upon learning that the First Lady was expected to appear at the same venue. The two women also met in Tel Aviv and Tokyo as well as at Hyde Park. Perhaps the most important of these was Anderson's appearance at the opening to the public of the Roosevelts' Hyde Park home as a national historic site on April 12, 1946, a year to the day after FDR's death. President Truman attended as well, and a notable photograph of the occasion shows Marian Anderson, the Reverend George W. Anthony (minister of St. James's Episcopal Church in Hyde Park), Director Newton Drury of the National Park Service, and Eleanor Roosevelt in the front row at the memorial service.[50] Following remarks by Anthony, Dury, ER, and Truman, Anderson sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." These remarks and Anderson's performance can be heard on audio recording of the ceremony.[51]

That the first lady turned to her dear friend to sing the national anthem at the Hyde Park dedication ceremony spoke volumes about ER's understanding of Anderson's importance as a symbol of the Roosevelt era and its special relationship with African Americans and the cause of equal rights.

[1] Eleanor Roosevelt. "My Day," February 27, 1939, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1939&_f=md055200.

[2] The DAR was founded in 1890, during the historical era known as the nadir of American race relations (1880-1920), when lynching peaked, segregation was enacted, and Black political power was destroyed by the white majority in southern states. Raymond Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009, Kindle edition), 91.

[3] Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 1: The Early Years, 1884–1933*. (New York: Viking, 1992), 21, 25.

[4] Cook, *ER 1*, 243. FDR shared a similar pedigree to his wife's, descended from Isaac Roosevelt, known as "Isaac the Patriot" for his support of the Revolution.

[5] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 91.

[6] Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 100.

[7] "Madame Marie Selika: First African American to Perform at the White House," *Ohio's Yesterday*, http://ohiosyesterdays.blogspot.com/2009/01/madame-marie-selika-first-african.html.

[8] "Sissieretta Jones," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/people/sissieretta-jones.htm; Michael Cooper, "Overlooked No More: Sissieretta Jones, a Soprano Who Shattered Racial Barriers." *New York Times*, August 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/15/obituaries/sissieretta-jones-overlooked.html.

[9] Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom*, 94. Many sources suggest that the Sedalia Quartet were from South Carolina, but they were a group formed to raise funds for the Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, near Greensboro, North Carolina. Palmer's president was Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a close ally of Mary McLeod Bethune. The G.C. and Frances Hawley Museum website, https://www.ncmaahc.org/blog/the-sedalia-quartet.

[10] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 95.

[11] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 129.

[12] See Walter White chapter in this study, TK.

[13] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 58.

[14] Eileen Southern, "Marian Anderson," in *Encyclopedia of African American Music*, ed. Emmett G. Price III, Tammy L. Kernodle, and Horace J. Maxile, Jr. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2011), 18-20.

[15] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 14-15.

[16] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 15.

[17] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 15.

[18] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 23.

[19] Marian Anderson, My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002, rev. ed. 1956), 49.

[20] Kenneth Robert Janken, Walter White: Mr. NAACP (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 102.

[21] Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 181.

[22]Antoinette Handy, "Anderson, Marian," in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Oxford African American Studies Center, May 31, 2013, https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-34204.

[23]Allan Keiler, *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 73-74.

[24] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 46.

[25] Keiler, *Marian Anderson*, 99.

[26] Kira Thurman, "Performing *Lieder*, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3: 825–865.

[27] Keiler, *Marian Anderson*, 99, 102-103.

[28] Handy, "Marian Anderson."

[29] Steven J. Niven, "Black in the USSR: 3 Generations of a Russian Family," *The Root.com,* December 13, 2015, https://www.theroot.com/black-in-the-ussr-3-generations-of-a-russian-family-1790862051.

[30] Keiler, *Marian Anderson*, 146-147. The African American press, at least in the 1930s, was broadly supportive of the Soviet Union's racial policies. The Baltimore *Afro-American* praised the election of an African American, Robert Robinson, to the Moscow Soviet (city council) the year before Anderson's visit, while the *Chicago Defender* published a series of weekly columns from Homer Smith, who had been a humble postal clerk in Chicago but was now a consultant and inspector for the Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs in Moscow. Even the conservative and anti-labor union *Pittsburgh Courier* hailed the Soviet Union for extraditing two white Americans who had assaulted Robinson in Moscow. Meredith L. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012). Roman notes that Black press stories "testifying to the inclusion of African Americans in Soviet society therefore served as an inspiration for readers to continue the struggle for equality," 149.

[31] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 55-56.

[32] Keiler, Marian Anderson, 114.

[33] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 58.

[34] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 87.

[35] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 93.

[36] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," Feb. 21, 1936, https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/browse-my-day-columns.

[37] Neither Roland Hayes nor Paul Robeson had performed with a white accompanist at that time. The recent appearance of a less well-known African American singer, Anne Brown, with a white accompanist "had created a considerable stir" in Anderson's own Philadelphia. Keiler, Marian Anderson, 157.

[38] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 104.

[39] New Yorker, March 4, 1939.

[40] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 117.

[41] Allida M. Black, "Championing a Champion: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Marian Anderson 'Freedom Concert,'" Presidential Studies Quarterly 20, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 727.

[42] The historian Allida Black speculates that the first lady could have returned directly from Seattle to Washington, D.C., in time for Anderson's performance but did not want to upstage Anderson's moment in the spotlight. She wanted the day to be a celebration of democracy and Marian Anderson's talents, not about ER's dispute with and resignation from the DAR. That same goal may have prompted ER's decision to return a few days later to the West Coast to be with Anna and her grandchildren in Seattle, a trip that enabled her to miss a potentially fraught reception for the DAR at the White House on April 16, which went ahead despite her resignation from the organization. Black, "Championing a Champion," 727-728; Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 164-166.

[43] Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom*, 159-160.

[44] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 164.

[45] Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom*, 168-169.

[46] Black, "Championing a Champion," 730.

[47] Black, "Championing a Champion," 730.

[48] Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 195.

[49] "The Congressional Gold Medal for Singer Marian Anderson," History, Art, & Archives of the United States House of Representatives, https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/The-Congressional-Gold-Medal-for-singer-Marian-Anderson/.

[50] Bethany Nagle, "A Friendly Voice: Marian Anderson and White House History," White House Historical Association, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/a-friendly-voice. This article includes the photograph from the memorial service, courtesy of the Harry Truman Presidential Library. https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/73-2214 See also *New York Times*, April 12, 1946, 1-17.

[51] An audio recording can be heard at Gordon Skene, "A Remembrance and a Dedication—Hyde Park Dedication—April 12, 1946," PastDaily.com, April 13, 2015, https://pastdaily.com/2015/04/13/a-remembrance-and-a-dedication-hyde-park-dedication-april-12-1946/.

Chapter V

"Mass Power"
A. Philip Randolph and the Roosevelts in Wartime America

> *The Army Jim Crows us. The Navy lets us serve only as messmen. The Red Cross refuses our blood. Employers and labor unions shut us out. Lynchings continue. We are disfranchised, Jim Crowed, spat upon. What more can Hitler do than that?*
>
> —African American student, 1941[1]

> *I wouldn't mind fighting for a country that gave me a chance to make a living. I don't feel like fighting for a country that gives everyone a chance but me.*
>
> —African American janitor, Georgia, 1941[2]

In the fall of 1940, a global crisis provided the backdrop to Franklin Roosevelt's historic and unprecedented bid for a third term in office. A second world war, already raging in Europe and Asia, seemed increasingly likely to entangle the United States, but it was not yet inevitable. Nazi Germany's successful invasion and occupation of France, Belgium, and other European countries that summer posed a dilemma for FDR, as did Japan's imperial ambitions, which saw it occupy the eastern coastal regions of China and Vietnam and threaten American trade interests in the rest of the Pacific. Italy had recently invaded the independent African nation of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and threatened the colonial possessions of Britain and France in North Africa, while the Soviet Union had joined the Nazis in 1939 in partitioning and occupying Poland.

President Roosevelt promised to fight for peace as well as prosperity, but he believed that the United States should prepare for the possibility of war in an increasingly hostile and unpredictable world. His Republican opponent, the Indiana businessman Wendell Willkie, essentially agreed with FDR on that point, but many in the president's party wanted to keep America out of foreign wars at all costs.[3] Some Democrats would even flock to the isolationist banner of Charles Lindbergh and the American First Committee.

The passage of the Selective Service Act in September 1940, the first peacetime draft in the nation's history, signaled FDR's desire to prepare the nation for war. The act passed with solid

Democratic majorities in both chambers. Soon, thousands of African American men aged twenty-one to thirty-six registered for the lottery that selected draftees for one year of active-duty service. Black people had historically fought in every American conflict, but their enthusiasm to register was much higher than the military and Roosevelt's War Department had anticipated or desired. One in six of all enlistments in 1940-1941 were African American, even though African Americans made up only one-tenth of the US population.[4] Leading Army officials, who were white without exception, believed that too many Black soldiers would "demoralize the white majority," according to one historian.[5] As a result, many would-be Black GIs were turned away from enlistment centers.

When W. E. Mahon of Dallas was rejected, he wrote to the president: "I am one of the Negro citizens who is awfully proud that I am an American and am ready to contribute my share whatever it is for the defense of my country.... I speak the sentiment of a number of my race [who] want an opportunity for training that we may be better able to Defend America with you." In New York, Charles Edwards, Charles Walton, Richard Frazier, and Alfred Friedman, like a growing number of African Americans, believed that the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, would offer a more sympathetic ear than her husband when they were refused enlistment in the Colored Tenth Cavalry, a historic Buffalo Soldier regiment. They were also told that they could not join any other Black division because these regiments were "already over their quota." The four men wrote to ER: "The very fact that there should be separate divisions for white and colored in such a democratic nation as this at all is bad enough. But to deprive those who really wish to serve their country of the opportunity to do so because of their race is intolerable and something drastic should be done to eliminate the situation."[6]

As he prepared for the fifteenth anniversary convention of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), the nation's most powerful all-Black labor union, A. Philip Randolph, the organization's president, would have agreed wholeheartedly that a Jim Crowed military was "intolerable" and that "something drastic" needed to be done to root out segregation in the armed forces. Black Americans were excluded from the Air Corps, the Signal Corps, the Coast Guard, and the Marines. The branch of the service that FDR knew best, the Navy, had no officers of color. African Americans could serve only as messmen, in menial positions. Little had changed, indeed, in the two decades since Roosevelt had served as assistant secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson during World War I. As the NAACP's magazine, the *Crisis*, highlighted with a cover showing

an airplane factory marked "For Whites Only," only 0.2 percent of aircraft industry employees were African American in 1940.[7]

Randolph, along with the NAACP's Walter White, Mary McLeod Bethune, and others in the Black Cabinet, lobbied the Roosevelt White House to change that situation. The results at first were not promising. As with the campaign against lynching waged by White and others, civil rights leaders faced the implacable opposition of southern Democrats in Congress, in the military, and in FDR's own Cabinet. Also in an echo of the anti-lynching campaign, civil rights leaders hoped that the first lady would serve as a go-between with her husband. First, early in July 1940, Bethune met with ER "with a bundle of papers citing chapter and verse on discrimination against Negroes in the armed forces." Then, White "hurried to Hyde Park to see Eleanor," leaving a letter that Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's legal counsel, had sent to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, which "listed the [military] services that excluded Negroes and warned that when conscription was enacted, Negroes who were refused the right to serve in all branches would prefer to go to jail."[8] Marshall's implied threat of civil disobedience highlighted the growing frustration of African American leaders with the White House's indifference to desegregating the military.

ER did indeed serve as an intermediary between Randolph and the president. With much prodding after her attendance at a Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters conference, FDR convened a White House meeting with his secretary of the Navy and undersecretary of war, as well as Randolph, White, and T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League, a business-oriented organization. Of the trio, Randolph would emerge as the undisputed leader and focal point of efforts to integrate the US military and increase African American participation in the broader national defense effort.

Asa Philip Randolph was born in Crescent City, Florida, on April 15, 1889, the younger son of the Reverend James Randolph, an American Methodist Episcopal (AME) minister, and Elizabeth Robinson Randolph. Both parents were descended from enslaved Virginia families. Perhaps fittingly for a man who advocated significant wealth redistribution, Asa was named for an Old Testament monarch who "took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants."[9]

The Randolph family moved eighty miles north to Jacksonville in 1891 when Asa was two years old and as the city was undergoing a major political upheaval in the wake of the deadly Yellow

Fever epidemic of 1888. White Democrats in the state had used the dislocation of the epidemic to dismantle the local government apparatus that, along with the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, had guaranteed the right of many African American men to vote and hold political office, even after the end of Reconstruction. Rev. Randolph had a small and largely working-class congregation, among whom the family lived in a modest, rented, two-story home. To make ends meet, the Randolphs kept chickens and hogs, repaired and laundered clothes, started a meat market, and sold wood. None of these ventures were successful, and the family was often in debt.

Young Asa and his older brother James were rich, however, in access to books and literature. Randolph recalled the family library included the works of Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen, as well as the Bible and histories of the AME Church and other religious publications. His father read from and explained these works to his sons before they could read themselves. Soon, Asa and James could be found regularly on their porch with a book. Their father taught them that many of the great leaders in history were people of color and about the struggles and successes of Hannibal, Crispus Attucks, Toussaint Louverture, and Frederick Douglass, as well as leaders of the AME Church, like Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, the influential chaplain for the Union Army during the Civil War and Reconstruction-era politician who espoused a Black Nationalist theology that preached "God is a Negro."[10] Randolph would fondly remember a boyhood meeting with Bishop Turner, who praised his father as "a fine man."[11] He also recalled his father's restrained militancy in the face of repeated racist slights and the indignities of Jim Crow. Rev. Randolph prohibited his sons from entering the segregated Jacksonville public library and from riding its segregated streetcars. Throughout one long evening that stretched into morning, Asa and James sat with their mother, a shotgun in her lap, as their father and other armed men surrounded the Duval County jail to prevent a Black prisoner from being lynched. They succeeded.

In 1903, when Asa was fourteen and James sixteen, the teenagers entered Jacksonville's Cookman Institute, founded by white Methodists, which was the first high school for African Americans in Florida. (In 1923 Cookman amalgamated with Mary McLeod Bethune's Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Girls to become Bethune-Cookman College.) By the time Asa graduated as valedictorian in 1907, he had decided not to follow his father into the ministry, and indeed would soon become an atheist. He was academically gifted, excelled in

literature, drama, and public speaking, and was a promising first baseman, but the family was too poor to finance his further education at an HBCU like Fisk or Howard.

Like most young Black men of his age and talents, Asa found few opportunities in his native South. He took poorly paid employment as a door-to-door insurance collector, a store clerk, and a laborer, but, like his father, he showed little aptitude for a business career of the type recommended by Tuskegee's Booker T. Washington. Instead, Asa was very much a devotee of Washington's ideological adversary, W. E. B. Du Bois, whose 1903 masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk,* was the "most influential book" he ever read. Du Bois advocated both the necessity of fighting for equality of the races and for encouraging the intellectual talents of its most exceptional men and women. Randolph agreed, but he knew he could not pursue that goal—or his dream of becoming a stage actor—in Jacksonville. And so, in 1911, at age twenty-two, he left the South for New York City.

Like many before him, Randolph's dreams of a career on the New York stage soon foundered, but a period acting in Shakespearean plays for a Harlem theater group left him with a more powerful public-speaking voice and what was often described by contemporaries as a distinguished "Oxford" or "Harvard" accent. At the Harlem theater, he also met his future wife, Lucille Campbell, a widow and beauty salon owner who had graduated from Howard and was a close friend of Madam C. J. Walker, Harlem's famed cosmetics millionaire. Lucille would prove invaluable to Randolph across their five decades of marriage, during which she helped finance his studies in economics and political theory, including Marxism, at City College, and his chosen career as a political organizer in the Socialist and labor movements. "I had no job and no plan for the next meal," he later recalled. "She"—Lucille—"carried us."[12]

A. Philip Randolph, as he had begun to call himself, joined the American Socialist Party in 1916, and, with Chandler Owen, a Black student at Columbia University, began his first attempt to unionize Black workers in the short-lived United Brotherhood of Elevator and Switchboard Operators. With Owen, he also honed his public-speaking skills as a soapbox orator on Harlem street corners, attracting crowds through his cultured, calm, and conversational vocal projection: his wasn't the voice of a rabble rouser, but of a thoughtful and measured public intellectual.

Randolph was certainly radical, though, as was the *Messenger*, the newspaper that he and Owen founded (with Lucille Randolph's crucial financial support) in 1917, just after America entered the world war against Germany and as Lenin began the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Randolph

and the American Socialist Party were adamantly opposed to the war, attacking it as a conflict of benefit only to capitalists and imperialist nations. But that was a lonely position among African Americans, most of whom supported the war and agreed with Du Bois of the need to "close ranks" around the American war effort and withhold protest for the duration of the conflict.[13] Randolph admired the nation's leading African American public intellectual but viewed his alliance with the racist and segregationist president Woodrow Wilson as a betrayal. The *Messenger* attacked the hypocrisy of Wilson and Du Bois's claims that the war would make "the world safe for democracy" as "a sham, a mockery, a rape on decency and a travesty on common justice" as long as "lynching, Jim Crow, segregation, discrimination in the Armed services and out, [and] disfranchisement of millions of black souls in the South continued."[14]

Several Socialists, including party leader Eugene Debs, were imprisoned as part of a general government crackdown on civil liberties using the 1917 Espionage Act.[15] Both Randolph and Owen were arrested for evading the draft but were eventually released. The *Messenger*'s uncompromising opposition to the war and early support of Bolshevism were also extremely dangerous positions for Randolph. James Byrnes, then an ambitious young congressman who almost became FDR's vice president during World War II, demanded an investigation of the newspaper and its "Bolshevik" editors when a copy of the *Messenger* appeared in his native South Carolina.[16] The Bureau of Investigation, forerunner of the FBI, acknowledged the magazine as "representative of the most educated thought among Negroes" but concluded that this was not a good thing, since Randolph's paper was also "by long odds the most dangerous of all the Negro publications."[17] The Red Scare that continued throughout the war and its immediate aftermath undoubtedly weakened the Socialist Party; when Randolph ran for public office as the Socialist candidate for state comptroller in New York in 1920, the year FDR ran as the Democrats' vice presidential nominee, he came in a distant third with around two hundred thousand votes (about 7 percent of the total), much the same that the Socialist Party's presidential candidate received.[18] Randolph never sought political office again, though it could be argued that his Socialist candidacy in 1920 prompted the two main parties to work harder for the African American vote. That election saw four Black Republicans and one Black Democrat elected to the New York legislature.

As the United States returned to normalcy in the mid-1920s, Randolph turned his attention from electoral politics to organized labor. Because of the racism of mainstream unions in the American Federation of Labor, many African Americans were suspicious of unionization. But as Harlem's Black population continued to grow, with migrants from the South and the Caribbean, Randolph saw an opportunity to advance the union cause among a group of New York railroad porters employed by the Pullman Company. Pullman was the single largest private employer of African Americans, with more than twelve thousand workers. By the end of World War I, Pullman employees began to earn around $60 per month, a higher wage than even most Black college graduates at the time could earn. But none of the Pullman employees were unionized. Indeed, the company trumpeted its in-house labor organization, the Employee Representative Plan (ERP), which provided a forum to address workers' grievances, as superior to unions.

While the porters did win an 8 percent wage increase in 1924, a growing number of African American ERP representatives wanted more radical change. They demanded shorter hours; the abolition of tipping, which was entirely voluntary and kept wages artificially low; and an end to the psychologically and sometimes physically abusive relationship of white superintendents aboard the train. Not only were Black Pullman employees universally and demeaningly called "George," as historian Charles Rosenberg has written, they "paid for their own meals, uniforms, and equipment, including the polish to clean passengers' shoes from this monthly wage. They were required to report up to five hours early to prepare the assigned Pullman cars, and receive passengers, but paid time began when the train pulled out, and then, only if there were passengers on the sleepers. They were required to 'deadhead' without pay on empty trains in hope that there would be passengers coming back."[19]

Ashley Totten, an immigrant from the US Virgin Islands who served as an ERP representative in New York, believed that the company union was a sham and had come to realize that Pullman had no real interest in negotiating with the ERP. The company believed, correctly in many cases, that special favors and treatment for a tiny number of ERP delegates, "wined and dined" at company headquarters in Chicago, would keep them obedient and forestall any talk of unionization. But Totten resented the brazen effort to buy him off. Like many Caribbean migrants, Totten was more amenable to the idea of socialism and labor unions than native New Yorkers and southern Black migrants to the city.

A longtime subscriber to the *Messenger*, in June 1925 Totten approached Randolph and asked him to publicize the Pullman porters' grievances in his paper. By August, Randolph had thrown himself so wholeheartedly behind the porters' cause that he became the president of the labor union representing them, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), and began to campaign for the rights of Black railroad workers.

The opposition of the Pullman company—through economic and physical intimidation—and the resistance of many Black railroad employees ensured that the BSCP's path to unionization was long and difficult. In Chicago, Black churches refused to open their doors to the Brotherhood and urged their parishioners who worked for Pullman to stand by the company. From a high of 7,300 members in 1927, the BSCP fell to just 2,000 by 1930 as the Great Depression began to take hold, and workers became wary of actions that might put their jobs at risk. A major academic study of Black workers declared Randolph's attempt to rally labor unionism among African American workers dead.[20] The Black press was also initially dismissive of Randolph, but he fought back, organizing boycotts of the *Chicago Defender* and winning support among urban NAACP members, Black women's clubs, and younger railroad employees. As always, his wife Lucille's business acumen helped keep Randolph and the union financially afloat.

Randolph's determination to keep his eyes on the prize of union recognition eventually paid dividends, in large part because of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal's support of the rights of organized labor. In particular, Section 7a of the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act guaranteed workers the right to "organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." In addition, the 1934 Amendment to the Railway Labor Act made company unions like the ERP illegal.

The Pullman company responded by encouraging the efforts of a new group, led by older, more conservative Black porters who opposed Randolph, the BSCP, and their allies in the predominantly white American Federation of Labor. But FDR's New Deal for organized labor emboldened union members throughout the nation. Porters began flocking back to the Brotherhood, inspired by Randolph "waving the promises of the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act."[21] Dramatically, in June 1935, exactly a decade after Totten first approached Randolph outside his Harlem office, Pullman employees voted by 5,931-1,422 to recognize the Brotherhood as the legal bargaining agent for the railroad—a victory for Randolph and his allies.

Though the Pullman company was legally bound to recognize the union, it continued to resist negotiating a contract and fought the Railway Labor Act all the way to the US Supreme Court. Only after the court rejected the company's challenge in August 1937 did Pullman sign its first contract with the BSCP. The results were impressive: wages were raised by $12 a month to a minimum of $89.50. The work month was set at 240 hours (it had been 400 in 1925), and time and a half would now be paid for hours worked over 260. A new grievance procedure to be negotiated by BSCP and the company was also initiated.[22] Randolph's biographer Jervis Anderson notes that "almost overnight, Randolph became the most popular black political figure in America." New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia concurred, naming him "one of the foremost progressive labor leaders" in the nation.[23]

The Brotherhood's formal affiliation with the American Federation of Labor in 1936 was a feather in the cap of AFL leader William Green, who was being challenged by the new Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO), led by the Union of Mine Workers (UMW) president John L. Lewis. The UMW and other CIO unions, some led by Communists, were more aggressive than the AFL in recruiting African American workers and in supporting civil rights causes. After his initial support of the Bolshevik Revolution, however, Randolph had become a staunch anticommunist, and he resisted the efforts by Black members of the Communist Party-USA to take over the National Negro Congress (NNC), an umbrella civil rights organization that was formed in 1936 with Randolph as its president. At the NNC's third annual meeting in Washington, D.C., in 1940, more than 1,700 delegates gathered to hear Randolph give a speech in which he urged the Congress to avoid too close a relationship with any political party. When he went on to attack the Soviet Union of Joseph Stalin as a threat to world peace and democracy, just like the European imperialist and totalitarian powers, a large number of the Communist delegates began to walk out. More left when Randolph pushed back on the claim that in a war between the Soviet Union and the United States, African Americans would defect to the Soviet cause. By the end of the speech, fewer than six hundred audience members remained. Randolph had drawn a line in the sand against a Communist takeover of the Congress because he believed that the NNC "should be dependent on the Negro people alone, for wherever you get your money you get your policies and ideas," and he was thoroughly opposed to the American Communists—Black and white—who followed instructions from Moscow.[24]

Randolph duly resigned as NNC president, but he continued to promote the idea of non-partisan, Black-led organizations as the most effective vehicles with which to overcome racism and Jim Crow in the United States' preparations for war. It was no coincidence that FDR's first White House invitation to Randolph to discuss the issue came in September 1940, when the presidential election was reaching its climax, with questions of war at the forefront of the campaign. Significantly, the Republican Party had selected a nominee, the Indiana businessman Wendell Willkie, who could creditably challenge FDR on his weak civil rights flank. Whereas FDR had prevaricated and allowed southern Democrats to filibuster anti-lynching legislation, Willkie promised a federal anti-lynching law, abolition of the poll tax for voting, and an end to Jim Crow in the federal government. Many leading Black newspapers, including the Baltimore *Afro-American*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *New York Age*, and the *Chicago Defender*, supported Willkie, in large part because of his unabashed support of civil rights—and FDR's silence on those issues.[25] FDR's unwillingness to even discuss integration of the armed forces or the demands of Randolph, Walter White, and the Black Cabinet for greater opportunities for African Americans in the war effort was for many Black leaders another flaw in his candidacy.

For Randolph, though, it was an opportunity, a place to apply pressure on FDR. Roosevelt needed strong African American turnouts in northern cities, as in 1932 and 1936, to ensure a third victory, yet he feared that moving too far left in support of equal rights might lose support from southern white Democrats in Congress who were among his most loyal supporters on foreign policy issues.

On September 16, 1940, the very day the Selective Service Act was passed by Congress, ER was a guest of Randolph and addressed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' fifteenth convention at the Harlem YMCA. Randolph must have impressed the first lady, since only two days later, she called FDR's press secretary, Stephen Early, to instruct him to arrange an "important and immediate" White House meeting "to discuss the rights of Negroes—their rights to volunteer, their rights under the [Selective Service] Conscription Act, their general rights to participate in the whole structure of national defense, but particularly the Army and Navy."[26] The meeting would include the president, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson, and Randolph, White, and the National Urban League's Hill. It occurred on September 27, recorded for posterity, as Roosevelt was the first president to install audiotape equipment.[27] Since only eight

hours of FDR's White House meetings are known to have been recorded, the tapes offer a unique perspective on his relationship with African American leaders.

The tapes begin with the president trying to charm the three Black leaders, but FDR was typically noncommittal on the specifics of the memorandum they came prepared to hand him. That memo demanded the wholesale desegregation of the US armed forces. The recording suggests a disconnect between the three Black leaders, who expressed a sense of urgency about full integration of the armed services as a right, and Roosevelt, who touted his proposed military draft as an improvement on World War I. African Americans, he promised, would serve in combat roles in any future conflict.[28]

Randolph agreed that this was a positive step but insisted that "the Negro people ... feel they are not wanted in the armed forces of the country, and they feel they have earned the right to participate in every phase of the government by virtue of their records in past wars since the time of the Revolution." Unwilling to use the language of "rights" or to challenge Jim Crow directly, FDR nonetheless conceded that integration might be "backed into"—if Black and white regiments happened to be in adjacent parts of the battlefield. When Randolph suggested that similar integration had succeeded in some labor unions, FDR concurred, indulging in a reminiscence about an integrated brickworks near Fishkill, New York, in his native Hudson Valley. Perhaps this was one of those many moments when, as one historian has suggested, "FDR ... employed humorous remarks and anecdotes as diversionary tactics when faced with difficult issues."[29]

Randolph, aware of his group's limited time, got directly to the heart of the matter, requesting that Knox give "the position of the Navy on the integration of the Negro." Knox stated simply that full integration was not possible because "men live aboard ship. And in our history we don't take Negroes into a ship's company." Pressed by Randolph, he confirmed that not a single Black officer was currently serving in the Navy and that all were "messmen's rank."

Roosevelt, perhaps keen to suggest some positive news on military integration, interjected to tell Knox about a thought he'd had a month ago, but "forgot to mention": "We are training a certain number of musicians on board ship. The ship's band. There's no reason why we shouldn't have a colored band on some of these ships, because they're darn good at it. That's something we should look into. You know, if it'll increase the opportunity, that's what we're after."

FDR also suggested two other minor adjustments of Jim Crow policy to appease the civil rights leaders: extending access to a training school for air force ground crew in Florida to include African Americans and adding a Black administrator responsible to the secretaries of the Navy and Army, or, as FDR put it while reminiscing about Frederick Pryor, his "colored messenger in the Navy Department" under Woodrow Wilson: "Get somebody, a boy who will act as the clearinghouse" for these changes. Racial change, in the president's view, should be limited and gradual: "A little opportunity here, a little opportunity there."[30] When White handed over petitions from eighty-five veterans' posts condemning segregation, however, FDR cut him off, and the meeting ended abruptly.

Still, the Black leaders left the White House believing progress had been made. FDR's optimistic mood music had indeed charmed them. But opportunity was not the same as equality, and Knox soon made clear he was thoroughly opposed to change: he threatened to resign if FDR followed through on the civil rights leaders' memorandum beyond the token measures the president had offered to Randolph's group. Undersecretary Patterson likewise agreed that the Army would not countenance integration. FDR had promised to get back to Randolph and his colleagues about their memorandum, but he never did. His press secretary, Stephen Early, made matters worse by telling reporters that Randolph, White, and Hill had gone along with FDR's decision to keep the military segregated.

The Black press immediately attacked FDR and the three leaders for accepting the status quo. Randolph, White, and Hill quickly released their memorandum to prove they had demanded integration and greater access to defense industry jobs. For good measure, feeling betrayed by the president, they added that FDR's continued support for a segregated military was "a stab in the back for democracy."[31]

Significantly, John L. Lewis, the radical white leader of the CIO's mine workers union, joined the chorus attacking Roosevelt for keeping a Jim Crow military. Lewis also endorsed Willkie over FDR in the coming election. So, too, did probably the most popular African American man in the nation: the heavyweight boxer Joe Louis. Even Randolph's close friend, the vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Milton Webster, remained loyal to the Party of Lincoln, as he had done through the presidencies of Coolidge and Hoover, despite the fact that Hoover had obstructed the BSCP's efforts to unionize the porters.[32]

Randolph, White, Bethune, and other members of the Black Cabinet, along with their white allies in the Roosevelt administration, all urged FDR to act quickly by giving African American voters a reason to stay within his Democratic coalition. Remarkably, their full-court press worked. In the final two weeks of the presidential campaign, FDR announced a flurry of appointments of African Americans to prominent military roles. Colonel Benjamin O. Davis was promoted to brigadier general, the first African American elevated to that high rank in the Army. Campbell O. Johnson was appointed as a special adviser to the director of Selective Service to oversee the needs of Black draftees, and William Henry Hastie, a brilliant young NAACP lawyer, was appointed as a civilian aide to the secretary of war, Henry Stimson. The latter appointment, Bethune assured Eleanor Roosevelt, would help the president with Black voters. FDR also promised African Americans access to aviation training and greater opportunities to serve as officers in the military. These appointments, along with the broad support among African Americans for Roosevelt's economic policies, kept the majority of Black voters in the Democratic Party column as Election Day approached.

Just a week before the election, however, a notorious fracas in which Press Secretary Early kicked a Black New York police officer threatened to undermine the president's outreach efforts. Early had been rushing to board a train when he clashed with the officer James Sloan, provoking a firestorm in the Black press. The *Amsterdam News* claimed Early used a racial epithet. This was a gift to the Republicans looking to highlight FDR's racist "southern friends" in their effort to win back the Black vote. The GOP duly dispatched Louis to Sloan's hospital bed two days before the election. The plan was to highlight Willkie's concern for the injured officer and criticize Early and FDR on civil rights. It was a move replicated two decades later by the presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, whose call to Coretta Scott King following her husband's arrest during the 1960 election signaled to Black voters that the Democrats cared more about Martin Luther King, Jr., and civil rights than did Kennedy's Republican opponent, Richard Nixon, who made no call.[33] But for Willkie, the plan backfired. Officer Sloan was able to differentiate between what Early did *to* him and what President Roosevelt had done *for* him. The officer said he was going to vote for FDR. So, too, was perhaps the most popular African American woman in the nation, the singer Marian Anderson, who endorsed FDR on the radio. Ultimately, it was neither celebrity endorsements nor the racism of FDR's southern supporters that tipped the scales. The New Deal's redistributive economic policies proved decisive for African American voters in 1940 as they had in 1936. Even with Louis in their column,

Willkie and the Republicans still represented the interests of big business. FDR and the Democrats represented working-class voters.[34]

FDR's last-minute appointments of Hastie, Johnson, and Davis may have helped him win the 1940 election, but they did not satisfy A. Philip Randolph. These changes, while important symbolically, had sidestepped the issue of desegregating the military, the core reform that Randolph and other Black leaders had demanded in their September White House meeting. Without a pending election to concentrate FDR's mind, Randolph wondered how he could persuade the president, fresh off being elected to an unprecedented third term, to follow through on his promises of advancing equal rights and opportunities for African Americans to serve. Wouldn't FDR return to his pattern of charm and evasion, as he had with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and the NAACP's Walter White on the issue of lynching?

The answer, Randolph began to realize, was to change tactics. The NAACP and the Urban League had already begun another "postcard blizzard" to lobby Congress on increased access to defense industry jobs, but progress in the Senate was slow.[35] "Calling on the President and holding these conferences are not going to get us anywhere," Randolph told Milton Webster on a trip south to meet Brotherhood officials in December 1940. "I think we ought to get 10,000 Negroes to march on Washington in protest, march down Pennsylvania Avenue" to demand jobs in defense industries and to integrate the military. At stops in Georgia and Florida—Savannah, his hometown Jacksonville, Tampa, and Miami—Randolph told local BSCP leaders about the new strategy and found an enthusiastic response.[36]

The idea of a March on Washington quickly percolated to the Black press and among activists more generally. At a gathering of civil rights groups in Chicago in early January 1941, one African American woman gave a fiery speech on the defense industry's exclusion of Black workers. She had a solution: "Mr. Chairman, we ought to throw 50,000 Negroes around the White House, bring them from all over the country, in jalopies, in trains and any way they can get there, and throw them around the White House and keep them there until we can get some action" from the president. Whether she was aware that she was echoing Randolph's plan—albeit increasing the number of protesters fivefold—is unknown, but the labor leader was also present at the meeting and seconded

her proposal. "I agree with the sister," Randolph told the meeting, adding that he would be "very happy to throw in [the BSCP's] resources and offer myself as leader of such a movement."[37]

Randolph was not yet ready to increase the size of the march to fifty thousand, but the idea quickly gathered pace with the formation of a March on Washington Committee with Randolph as director and White and the Urban League's Lester Granger in prominent roles alongside other labor, educational, religious, and civic leaders. While the group encouraged white liberal and progressive support, it resembled Randolph's original plan for the National Negro Congress as a predominantly African American protest vehicle. In announcing the march in late January, he issued a stark denunciation of "the whole National Defense set up" that "reeks and stinks with race prejudice." With an eye, as always, to undermining the Communist Party, Randolph's challenge blended Black nationalism with American patriotism. The banner he proposed to lead the marchers would read: "We Loyal Colored Americans Demand the Right to Work and Fight for Our Country." In supporting the march, he believed that masses of ordinary African Americans would show they were not "scared and unorganizable" as some claimed but would instead "wake up and shake official Washington as it has never been shocked before."[38] The militancy of Randolph's language highlighted and captured a new mood among African Americans. For many, the closer America came to entering a war against fascism and racism abroad, the more pressing the need became to set the nation's own house in order on issues of democracy and equal opportunity.

In March 1941, Randolph ratcheted up his rhetoric around the march, declaring that "mass power can cause President Roosevelt to issue an executive order abolishing discrimination in defense jobs and the military."[39] Across the nation, members of the Brotherhood, the NAACP, the Urban League, and other organizations began forming local chapters of what had now become the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Randolph also set a specific date for the demonstration: July 1. Walter White, Charles Hamilton Houston, and other NAACP officials quibbled that the MOWM was not racially integrated, but they eventually fell in line behind Randolph's focus on a Black-led movement. As one leading Brotherhood official, C. L. Dellums, put it: "we were unalterably opposed to segregation, but we also knew that Negroes needed an example of Negroes doing something for themselves."[40] By late May, Randolph appeared so confident of the growing support for a march that he also upped its proposed size: he now vowed that one hundred thousand African Americans would descend on Washington, and he even invited leading Washington figures to address the march,

including Secretary of War Stimson, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (the first woman to serve as secretary in a presidential Cabinet), and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt themselves.

There remained many who doubted that the march would actually take place or that Randolph could really muster ten thousand people, let alone ten times that. The *Pittsburgh Courier* called the March a "crackpot proposal."[41] The Communist Party bristled, too, that Randolph's focus on an all-Black march was intended to keep the white majority Communist Party USA at arm's length. Even Randolph's most passionate supporters worried about logistics: where would the predominantly Black marchers eat, find lodging, or go to the bathroom in the segregated capital?

But the most important response came from the White House itself, and especially from the first lady, who might have been expected to support a cause with unanimous backing from allies like Walter White. On receiving her invitation to address the march, ER wrote to Randolph to tell him that she had discussed the situation with the president, "and I feel strongly that your group is making a very grave mistake."[42] FDR agreed. He called in Aubrey Williams, a liberal white southerner who headed the National Youth Administration, and ordered him to resolve the matter. "Go to New York and try to talk Randolph and White out of this march. Get the missus [Eleanor] and Fiorello [La Guardia] and Anna [Rosenberg] and get it stopped."[43]

At the meeting on June 13, 1941, ER made clear that she shared the MOWM's desire to increase opportunities for Black defense work but feared that a mass demonstration of African Americans in the nation's capital could lead to violence at the hands of the overwhelmingly white, southern police force. Randolph certainly agreed with her assessment of the police, having once referred to D.C. as the "capitol of Dixie, where crackerocracy is in the saddle." But he would not budge. He told the first lady that "there would be no violence unless her husband ordered the police to crack black heads."

ER duly reported to the president that only a direct meeting between himself, his secretaries of war and the Navy, La Guardia, Randolph, and White could prevent the MOWM from acting on its threat. FDR acquiesced to the meeting, and when they convened at the White House five days later, Randolph and White offered to call off the march once the president issued an executive order barring discrimination in defense jobs and the military. Recalling how FDR had bluffed and charmed his way through their last meeting in September 1940, the two civil rights leaders stood firm. They insisted that one hundred thousand people were prepared to march on Washington. When FDR

stated that "somebody might get killed," Randolph replied, perhaps half-jokingly, that the president could prevent that from happening by speaking at the march.

Ultimately, Roosevelt accepted that Randolph would not call off the march without some kind of an executive order. The president was disturbed by a "hastily compiled FBI report" indicating Randolph's plan was a "credible threat": the labor leader had both the broad support and the organizational skill to successfully hold the march. Local FBI reports from New York, Chicago, and St, Louis, the main centers of MOWM activity, likewise noted the upsurge of enthusiasm and planning for the march. And because Randolph and White knew from their own White House sources that the proposed march was "disturbing" FDR "more than anything that has happened among Negroes in recent months," they held firm in demanding an executive order.[44]

Keen to settle the matter as quickly as possible, the president then accepted La Guardia's proposal that the parties should seek a compromise. Joseph Rauh, one of the brightest young lawyers in Roosevelt's administration, was given the task of drafting a fair employment practices order.[45] Rauh's recollection was that Roosevelt was more concerned with "social stability, rather than concern for black workers," but that his fear of a destabilizing march required an urgent solution.[46] Randolph, Rauh recalled, kept rejecting drafts that did not meet his satisfaction. "Who the hell is this guy Randolph?" he wondered. "What the hell has *he* got over the President of the United States?"[47] The answer, it turned out, was Randolph's ability to derail FDR's domestic and foreign policy agenda by calling on one hundred thousand African Americans to stage the largest civil rights protest in the nation's history. And with the world in conflict and America on the brink of war, the president could not risk such a destabilizing event.

On June 25, 1941, after several days of tense and tough negotiation—and six days before the scheduled march—all parties agreed on a formula. The president promised to issue an executive order prohibiting racial discrimination in defense work and establishing a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to enforce it. FDR's order represented a major victory for Randolph's campaign.

In turn, Randolph promptly postponed the march. FDR held firm, however, in resisting any language in the order that proposed integration of the armed forces, knowing that would be opposed by the military and southern Democrats in Congress. In the end, Randolph accepted this compromise. By then, the first lady had decamped to the Roosevelts' summertime retreat at

Campobello Island in New Brunswick, Canada, but Aubrey Williams ensured that she was informed straight away. "Executive Order concerning the Randolph situation was signed today," the terse nine-word telegram read.[48] ER's relief was palpable. The next day, she replied to another telegram, this time from Randolph himself: "My dear Mr. Randolph: Thank you for your wire. I am very glad the march has been postponed and delighted the President is issuing an executive order on defense industries. I hope from this first step, we may go on to others."[49]

Most African Americans immediately agreed with the first lady that Executive Order 8802 represented an important milestone in the long struggle for racial equality. And, like Williams, they credited "the Randolph situation" as decisive in securing the most important federal civil rights order since Reconstruction. The *Chicago Defender* hailed Randolph for ushering in the "death of Uncle Tom-ism" while the *New York Amsterdam News* called EO 8802 "epochal." An editorial in that paper even suggested that "Randolph, courageous champion of the rights of his people," had taken "the helm as the nation's No. 1 Negro," and "is being ranked along with the great Frederick Douglass."

That year, the NAACP awarded Randolph its highest award, the Spingarn Medal, for his leadership of the MOWM, while Mary McLeod Bethune praised the order as "a refreshing shower in a thirsty land."[50] Above all, Randolph's strategy proved a dictum of Frederick Douglass's that the labor leader would surely have learned from his father and his early reading of African American history:

If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will.[51]

Some African American activists inspired by the MOWM and Randolph's passionate rhetoric were disappointed by his decision to call off the march. Bayard Rustin, a part-time City College student and the director of the MOWM's Youth Division, urged Randolph to continue with the march until all of its goals—including desegregation of the military—were met. Despite this early difference on tactics, Randolph would become an important mentor to Rustin, encouraging him to abandon communism in favor of socialism and pacifism as practiced by Mohandas K. Gandhi in his

struggle against British colonial rule in India. In 1963, they would team up to plan—and pull off—the historic March on Washington at which the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed "I Have a Dream."

Many critics noted the shortcomings of the Federal Employment Practices Committee. It lacked enforcement powers, the five-person committee was headed by a white southerner, and it included only two African American members. Typically, Randolph chose not to serve, recommending instead his close ally Milton Webster of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Randolph also had an answer to those like Rustin who opposed calling off the march. He proposed to keep the March on Washington Movement alive as a national organization to put pressure on the Roosevelt administration and the FEPC to defeat racial discrimination in wartime industries.

The United States finally entered World War II in December 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but this did not diminish Randolph's determination to eliminate, with immediate effect, "Jim Crow in education, housing, in transportation, and in every social, economic, and political privilege; full enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments; abolition of all suffrage restrictions and limitations; and of private and government discrimination in employment." As Randolph told a large rally of MOWM supporters in Detroit in September 1942, "We want the full works of citizenship with no reservations. We will accept nothing less."[52]

The Odell Waller case, however, highlighted how distant "full citizenship" was for many African Americans in 1942.[53] Waller, a twenty-five-year-old Virginia sharecropper, had been sentenced to death in December 1940 for killing his white landlord during a dispute over their sharecrop. Pauli Murray, a young activist in the Workers Defense League and the March on Washington Movement, took on the case when Randolph and other more experienced labor figures proposed by the Workers Defense League had declined, citing prior commitments. She did not dispute the murder itself but the constitutionality of the trial and Waller's attendant sentence.[54] By the summer of 1942, with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt enlisted by Murray to join the campaign to lobby Virginia's governor to grant clemency to Waller, Randolph took on a very visible role in the effort. On June 16, at a "Save Odell Waller" rally, he addressed a twenty-thousand-strong, predominantly African American crowd assembled at Madison Square Garden. In his stirring and resonant voice, he declared the gathering "the beginning of a nationwide drive to kill Jim Crow." At

the end of the five-hour-long rally, where Mary McLeod Bethune also spoke, Randolph introduced Waller's mother; she begged the cheering crowd to help save her son. Two days later, twenty-four hours before Waller's scheduled execution, Virginia Governor Colgate Darden granted him a temporary reprieve and announced a hearing for June 29. Despite the public pressure campaign, despite the impassioned involvement of the first lady and of an earlier, unpublicized "personal and unofficial note" from FDR seeking clemency, Darden ultimately resisted all efforts to change course. With a heavy heart, ER, unable to convince FDR to intervene, broke the news to Murray and Randolph. "I am so sorry, Mr. Randolph," she apologized, "I can't do any more." Waller went to the electric chair on July 2, 1942.[55]

While President Roosevelt deeply disappointed Randolph in the Waller case, FDR's actions on the Fair Employment Practices Committee were initially more promising. A month before Waller's execution, Roosevelt extended the scope of the FEPC by opening thirteen field offices to investigate claims of racial discrimination in job hiring and by holding FEPC hearings in several cities, including Birmingham, Alabama. The FEPC became a lightning rod for segregationists who saw it as the opening wedge of a Second Reconstruction. Southerners in Congress waged a constant battle to weaken the committee, with Democratic Senator Richard Russell of Georgia calling it "a greater threat to victory than 50 fresh divisions enrolled beneath Hitler's swastika or the setting sun of Japan."[56]

But from the perspective of Randolph, other civil rights leaders, and millions of Black workers, the FEPC did not go nearly far enough. It was chronically underfunded and understaffed, and many businesses, notably the railroad industry that Randolph knew so well, ignored the committee's extensive findings of discrimination against qualified African American workers. Frustrated by its inability to compel railroad executives and white labor unions to increase opportunities for Black workers, the FEPC asked President Roosevelt to intervene. In early 1944, preoccupied by the war, the president chose not to take decisive action in support of Black workers. Instead he punted, proposing that a new committee should resolve the dispute between the FEPC and the railroad industry. While FDR believed that "all Americans … should be anxious to see to it that no discrimination prevents the fullest use of our manpower … in the major military offensive now planned," he added a caveat: "obviously in such a complicated structure as the transportation

industry, we cannot immediately attain perfect justice in terms of equal opportunities for all people."[57]

Another weakness of the FEPC was that it was a temporary wartime measure. As one March on Washington Movement poster put it: "And brother, if you've had it tough, wait until after the war!" Once "the shooting ends," Randolph warned, Black workers would once more be "last hired and first fired."[58] Looking forward to peacetime, Randolph launched a national committee for a permanent FEPC in 1943 and invited the first lady to serve on it. ER declined because it "would open the way to criticism and brand you as a political organization."[59] She did, however, persuade her husband to endorse the principle of a permanent FEPC and to discuss the matter with Randolph and other civil rights leaders during the 1944 election.[60] Indeed, on the morning of FDR's death, April 12, 1945, White House Press Secretary Jonathan Daniels called a northern congressman to lobby for his support of legislation for a permanent commission to ensure fair employment practices. [61] And Randolph, despite concerns about the speed of change under Roosevelt, "was hearty in his praise for the late president" in a Pittsburgh address the day FDR was buried. "Roosevelt," he told a mass gathering at a Methodist Church, "has done more for labor than any other president and was [a] champion of the common man."[62] In private and later in life, Randolph was more critical. "President Roosevelt was a strong man," he told one interviewer, "but on this issue of civil rights we were never able to get him to take a basic position on it."[63]

Eleanor Roosevelt eventually signed on to Randolph's campaign for a permanent FEPC, joining him at a Madison Square Garden rally attended by nineteen thousand supporters in February 1946.[64] But their efforts, even with the support of President Harry Truman, failed to prevent the elimination of the program by Congress later that year. On June 25, 1951, the tenth anniversary of the original FEPC order and the cancelation of the first March on Washington, ER presided over a ceremony at her husband's graveside, attended by Randolph and White.[65] While several northern and western states established Fair Employment Practices Commissions in the 1940s and 1950s, it would take another thirteen years, with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, for Randolph's dream of a permanent FEPC to be realized at the national level.

Randolph's fight to desegregate the military did not end with the death of FDR, nor did his relationship with the former first lady. Under President Truman, this goal, another of Randolph's original aspirations in the March on Washington Movement, was eventually achieved. In November 1947, with the onset of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, Truman called for a peacetime military draft. His announcement made no reference to integration of the military, however, prompting Randolph to found what would become the League for Non-Violent Civil Disobedience against Military Segregation. The League encouraged African Americans to refuse conscription until the military was desegregated. As in the 1941 March on Washington Movement, Randolph believed that the threat of civil disobedience would persuade the president to issue an executive order. Yet, as with FDR in 1941, Truman was reluctant to meet with Randolph. Eventually, however, in March 1948 Truman did invite Randolph, Bethune, White, and other Black leaders to the White House. According to Randolph's account, he bluntly told the president that the "mood among Negroes of this country is that they will never bear arms again" until segregation was abolished in the military.[66] He doubled down on his support for Gandhian civil disobedience and draft resistance before the Senate Armed Services Committee, even when Wayne Morse of Oregon, an NAACP member and perhaps the most liberal Republican in congress, accused him of advocating treason. Randolph responded that, if indicted for treason, he and others would continue to advocate draft resistance "on the grounds that we are serving a higher law than the law which applies the act of treason to us . . . when we are attempting to make the soul of America democratic."[67] As in 1941, White backed Randolph's militant stance, pledging to provide legal support to draft resisters, though he insisted that the NAACP "neither advocates nor believes in civil disobedience."[68]

Eleanor Roosevelt did not approve. In August 1948, she noted in her "My Day" column that "one of the best known . . . Negro newspapers is editorially opposed to the stand taken by A. Philip Randolph and Grant Reynolds, leaders of the League for Non-Violent Disobedience Against Military Segregation." She indicated her agreement with the paper "that nothing is to be gained by using undemocratic methods to fight undemocratic actions within our democracy. . . . The President has decreed that as far as government is concerned both in military and in civil service there shall be no segregation and no disabilities incurred because of race or creed."[69] ER was referring to Truman's Executive Order 9981, issued in late July, which ordered the military to integrate "as rapidly as possible." The *New York Times*, among others, credited Randolph's campaign and the upcoming

presidential election for forcing Truman's hand. At first, Randolph criticized the order for not integrating immediately, but he was appeased by Truman, who sent the Democratic National Committee chairman Howard McGrath to meet with Randolph and win his backing. On August 16, Randolph gave his answer, calling EO 9981 "a step in the right direction upon which it is possible to build for the future." As in 1941, he did not believe the president's actions were "wholly satisfactory," but they were "a definite gain and a victory," and therefore he "felt morally bound to call off the civil disobedience."[70]

A few weeks later, Harry Truman was elected president in a surprise victory. He did not win Randolph's vote; Randolph had supported the Socialist Norman Thomas, "a consistent champion of civil rights." But a strong majority of African American voters did vote for the Democrats, partly because of Truman's promise to integrate the military under pressure from Randolph.[71] As the NAACP's Henry Lee Moon had predicted, the African American vote in the urban centers of the North and West proved to be the "balance of power" for Truman, notably in California, Illinois, and Ohio.[72]

Randolph did not enjoy as close a relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt as did Mary McLeod Bethune, Pauli Murray, or Walter White. Their correspondence was cordial but brief, and the first lady was ill at ease with Randolph's preference for confrontational politics as illustrated by the threatened March on Washington and draft resistance. But their political interests generally converged, particularly after Truman's election and the hardening of Cold War politics in the late 1940s and 1950s. ER, along with Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., was one of the founders of the pressure group Americans for Democratic Action in 1947, which was strongly anti-communist and pro-civil rights, positions that Randolph shared. But it was the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott that drew Randolph and ER together on the same stage as elder statespersons in support of a new chapter toward their shared goal of equal rights and social justice.

Montgomery, Alabama, was one of several southern cities where Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had long been active. The BSCP's leader there was E. D. Nixon (1899-1987), a Pullman porter since his early twenties, who was inspired by hearing Randolph speak for the first time. "It was like a light," he recalled. "Most eloquent man I ever heard.... I never knew the Negro had a right to enjoy freedom like everyone else. When Randolph stood there and talked that day it made a

different man out of me. From that day on, I was determined that I was gonna fight for freedom until I was able to get some of it for myself."[73] Nixon, who led Montgomery's March on Washington Movement during the war, also organized 750 African Americans from that city to register to vote in 1944, defying threats of violence and economic retaliation from the white majority. Eleven years later, Nixon, fellow NAACP activist Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr., a twenty-six-year-old minister, would lead the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, launching a new phase of the civil rights struggle.[74]

It was through Nixon's long friendship with Randolph, and Randolph's close ties to the pacifist activist Bayard Rustin, that Rustin came to have such a pivotal influence on King and the Montgomery movement, steering the young minister toward Gandhian principles of nonviolence. On Rustin's first visit to Montgomery in early 1956, he noted with alarm that there were guns all over King's house. Armed self-defense was a necessary precaution for outspoken African Americans in the Deep South like the minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, but, his biographer notes, Rustin would "initiate the process that transformed King into the most illustrious American proponent of nonviolence in the twentieth century."[75] Rustin also brokered a meeting between King and Randolph in New York in April 1956, setting in motion yet another massive Madison Square Garden rally organized by Randolph in May to publicize and raise funds for the Montgomery movement. The event, billed as "New York's Greatest Civil Rights Rally" drew a crowd of more than twenty thousand to hear Randolph, ER, and other civil rights and progressive leaders "salute and support the heroes of the South." Among them were Nixon, Rosa Parks, and Autherine Lucy, who had recently been admitted as the first African American student to the University of Alabama, prompting a riot by white students and her immediate expulsion. King, though invited as the main speaker, had a scheduling conflict and could not appear.[76] ER told her "My Day" readers that the "rally was an impressive meeting" and that she had the "pleasure of interviewing" Lucy at the event. She also praised "the Rev. Luther King in Montgomery, Ala." for his insistence that "resistance can only be won by peaceful perseverance." She concluded with a prediction that Randolph, though an atheist, would have endorsed: "So may it be found that the Christian spirit and a quiet opposition, without the use of force, may, as in India, prove the most effective way of finally achieving equality of opportunity for all in this country, which made this promise to its citizens nearly 100 years ago."[77]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, ER and Randolph found themselves in agreement on a broad range of domestic and foreign policy issues. Both served on the board of the NAACP, and when Randolph formed another new civil rights group, the National Trade Union Committee for Racial Justice, he invited ER to serve as honorary chair, given the public's "deep respect for and warm confidence in the integrity and wisdom of your leadership."[78] ER accepted and reciprocated Randolph's praise in her column, offering support for him in his well-publicized spat with AFL-CIO President George Meany. When Randolph criticized white union leaders for delays in integrating their locals, Meany shot back: "Who the hell appointed you the guardian of all the Negroes in America?"[79] An ally of both men, ER nonetheless took Randolph's side, agreeing that the situation resembled the slow, "deliberate speed" of school integration after the Supreme Court's *Brown* (1954) and *Brown II* (1955) rulings. "It seems to me," she told her readers, "that Mr. Randolph is not asking anything unreasonable in saying that the union, just like the states, should specify a time when they would accomplish compliance with the Supreme Court order" to desegregate.[80]

Randolph and ER also worked closely in the National Advisory Committee of the National Sharecroppers Union (NSU), led by Frank Porter Graham, the former president of the University of North Carolina and a staunch southern liberal ally of the Roosevelts. ER used her "My Day" column to publicize the NSU's exposé of harsh living and working conditions of Bahamian migrant farm laborers employed by US Senator Harry F. Byrd, an arch segregationist and opponent of union rights.[81] In 1959, Randolph and ER testified in Washington before the National Farm Labor Advisory Committee and met with Eisenhower's secretary of labor on extending the rights of migrant workers.

It was no great surprise, then, that King invited ER to address a celebration for Randolph's seventieth birthday in January 1960. "Unquestionably, your presence as America's First Citizen," King wrote, "will heighten the significance of the occasion and serve to dramatize the profound meaning for all Americans of Mr. Randolph's dedicated decades of service."[82] ER accepted and enjoyed a night of high-quality entertainment that included Juanita Hall, the first African American to win a Tony, who reprised selections from *South Pacific*; the poet Langston Hughes, who delivered a poem written for the occasion; and the actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, who gave a dramatized performance about the union leader's life and career, which no doubt appealed to Randolph, the one-time would-be actor.[83] ER and Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota were among the featured

speakers, while President Dwight Eisenhower sent a recorded tribute to Randolph's career. The former first lady extended her praise to her column. "Mr. Randolph . . . has been a remarkably good labor leader and has advanced the cause of his race generally as well as the welfare of the workers he represents. He has done this without stirring up hatred between the white people and Negroes, and I have great respect for his ability and calm persistence in accomplishing his ends. He is never, however, flamboyant or inflammatory in his speeches or actions."[84]

When Eleanor Roosevelt died in November 1962, the *Chicago Defender* dedicated its front page to photographs and tributes to the former first lady. The paper singled out the late Mary McLeod Bethune and Walter White as particularly firm friends of ER, but also listed "those closest to her, or whom she held in highest regard: Josh White... Pauli Murray, the late Channing Tobias, Dr. Ralph Bunche, A. Philip Randolph, the late Dr. Louis T. Wright . . . and Alice Freeman and William White (Josh's brother), who were in charge of her Hyde Park home."[85] Fittingly, a few weeks later in Detroit, the Trade Union Leadership Council awarded Randolph its annual Eleanor Roosevelt Freedom Award "in recognition of his uncompromising dedication to freedom and justice for all" and in "gratitude to his career as a 'Citizen of the World,'" a title that the former first lady personified.[86]

Randolph's work did not end with this celebration of his own life or the passing of ER's. A month after her death, in December 1962, he and Rustin met for one of their occasional chats about politics, history, and the state of the civil rights movement at the Brotherhood of Street Car Porters headquarters at 239 West 136th Street in Harlem. Both were optimistic. They were inspired by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's steady and growing victories against segregation in the courts and the continued nonviolent activism and moral voice of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Also promising was the emergence of other civil rights groups like CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), founded during World War II, and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), which evolved from the sit-in protests at segregated lunch counters and various public accommodations in Greensboro, North Carolina, and other southern cities in early 1960. But, in Randolph's view, something was missing from this new wave of protest: "the passion for economic justice that had shaped his own career in politics," as Rustin's biographer put it.[87]

The year 1963 would mark the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, the first decisive step in the long struggle for Black equality. How, the two men wondered, might the civil rights movement best highlight the "economic subordination of the American Negro"? They struck on the

idea of finally completing the March on Washington Randolph had first broached in 1941. Randolph insisted that Rustin be the event's chief organizer, despite a concerted campaign by the fiercely segregationist US Senator Strom Thurmond to discredit Rustin as a former communist and as a homosexual who had once been arrested on morals charges. It was a brave stance by Randolph at a time when LGBTQ Americans faced deep discrimination in the nation's laws and culture.[88]

Rustin was generally praised for his meticulous and tireless planning for the March, although he and Randolph did face criticism from longtime ally Pauli Murray, who was incensed that no women were scheduled to address the crowd. Murray also opposed Randolph and King speaking before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on the eve of the march. The National Press Club famously excluded women from membership and from front-row seating at NPC events. "It is as humiliating for a woman reporter assigned to cover Mr. Randolph's speech to be sent to the balcony as it would be for Mr. Randolph to be sent to the back of the bus," Murray said. Thanks to Murray's lobbying, Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women was added to the official delegation of civil rights leaders who met with President Kennedy at the White House after the march. Daisy Bates, the leader of the campaign to integrate Little Rock High School, was hastily added to the day's speakers, but her comments were brief.[89] In 1986—seven years after Randolph's death and a year after Murray's—Rustin would tell the activist Maida Springer, who aligned with Randolph and Murray on support for labor unions and independence movements in Africa, that before Randolph spoke to the assembled reporters at the National Press Club, he voiced his opposition to the treatment of women, and immediately before delivering his address, the club invited the women guests down from the balcony onto the main floor.[90]

More than two decades after Randolph's initial proposal, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963—a broadly peaceful gathering of a quarter of a million people primarily remembered for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s stirring "I Have a Dream" speech—was the continuation and culmination of the tireless civil rights leader's wartime efforts.

In his later years, Philip Randolph enjoyed regaling friends, reporters, and others with stories about his long and storied career in the labor and civil rights movement. A favorite was his June 18, 1941, appointment with Franklin Roosevelt at the White House. FDR was worried about his campaign for one hundred thousand African Americans to march on Washington unless the

president issued an executive order "making it mandatory that Negroes be permitted to work" in the defense industry. Unlike their first White House parley, this event was not recorded on audiotape for posterity, but Randolph's biographer Jervis Anderson provides a useful "reconstruction" of several accounts Randolph gave of the meeting. As on the September audiotapes, the president was full of charm, bonhomie, and flattery, greeting the labor leader with a cheery, "Hello, Phil! Which class were you in at Harvard?"[91]

FDR, Harvard class of 1904, would likely have known if Randolph, only seven years his junior, was one of the handful of African Americans at his alma mater at the turn of the twentieth century. Randolph, with his deep, resonant, and measured tones, was often asked if he had attended Harvard or Oxford. But even after he replied, "I never went to Harvard, Mr. President," FDR continued with the compliment, "I was sure you did," perhaps signaling to Randolph that he "belonged," that he *sounded* like a Harvard man and that he would be respected as one. FDR then quickly pivoted to establish another point of agreement: "Anyway, you and I share a kinship in our great interest in human and social justice."

This time, Randolph agreed: "That's right, Mr. President."

Randolph—in his telling, at least—then took charge of the meeting, with "as much graciousness as he commanded," breaking in to prevent another FDR anecdote and to focus on the matter at hand. "Time is running on. You are quite busy, I know."

Randolph didn't want words. He knew that FDR's vague promises had not been enough in September 1940. As Walter White, the only other African American leader at the meeting, understood from his failure to secure anti-lynching legislation, "The President's promises are not more than water, and soon forgotten because it is politically expedient."[92] And so Randolph made a demand for "something concrete, something tangible, definite, positive, and affirmative," an executive order to give substance to FDR's words about shared kinship with "Phil" on issues of social and human justice. More importantly, Randolph could back up this demand with consequences: a march that could potentially create social unrest. FDR could not be certain that Randolph and White were bluffing about their claim that one hundred thousand march. It was a remarkable demonstration of a new phenomenon, a form of "Black Power," that would shape the civil rights movement in the decades ahead. Roosevelt's willingness to recognize that power, by granting

Executive Order 8802, was also new. He was the first president willing to engage with Black leaders like Randolph and White as equals.

[1] Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 239.

[2] Eric Arnesen, Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 189.

[3] Willkie relayed his support for helping Britain against Nazi Germany to Lord Lothian, the UK ambassador to Washington, in words that could have been uttered by FDR himself. Willkie was "in favor of doing everything possible to see that Great Britain did not get beaten in the war.... [But because] of the overwhelming desire of the United States not to get involved in the war...[it] would be necessary to convince the American people about every particular step." David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright, 2018), 167.

[4] Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 242.

[5] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 211-212.

[6] Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 212.

[7] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 225. In the September 27, 1940, White House meeting discussed below, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox states that there were "4,007 Negroes out of a total force at the beginning of 1940 of 139,000. They are all messmen's rank." Transcripts of White House Office Conversations, 08/22/1940 - 10/10/1940 "FDR Meets With Black Leaders. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Side 1, 1637-1972, September 27, 1940, http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/transcr4.html. The audio transcript is available at https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/office-conversation-philip-randolph.

[8] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 243. Anderson's source is Joseph Lash, the first lady's adviser, confidante, and future biographer.

[9] 1 Kings 15:9-24, cited in Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 32.

[10] https://www.thejaxsonmag.com/article/yellow-jax-the-1888-jacksonville-yellow-fever-epidemic-page-2/. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 36-42. For Turner, see Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992). Angell writes: "Turner's significance is multifaceted and far-reaching. His black theology and political activism paved the way for twentieth-century civil rights and black nationalist movements. His African emigrationism constituted a pointed challenge to the nation's retreat from civil rights in the post-Reconstruction era. Turner, however, devoted most of his time to his church work, not to politics, and he played a large part in making the AME Church the strongest and most influential organization controlled entirely by African Americans in the latter half of the nineteenth century." Stephen W. Angell, "Turner, Henry McNeal," in *African American National Biography*, May 31, 2013, https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.34754.

[11] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 41.

[12] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 78.

[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, Crisis 16, no. 3 (July 1918): 111.

[14] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 98. On Wilson's commitment to implementing southern white supremacist ideals in federal office, see Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 364-371.

[15] Chip Gibbons, "Repressing Radicalism," Jacobin (June 15, 2017), https://jacobinmag.com/2017/06/espionage-act-sedition-debs-socialist-party-whistleblowers.

[16] As a senator, Byrnes opposed anti-lynching legislation. The NAACP's Walter White used Byrnes's openly racist stance against him to derail his chances at the vice presidential nomination. For more, see Chap. I, page number TK.

[17] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 119.

[18] Randolph was not the first African American to run for statewide office in New York. Frederick Douglass of Rochester had run for secretary of state in 1855.

[19] Charles Rosenberg, "Totten, Ashley Leopold," in African American National Biography, https://oxfordaasc-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-39176.

[20] Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).

[21] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 217.

[22] Arnesen, Brotherhoods of Color, 87-96.

[23] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 225.

[24] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 238. Randolph's primary concern with the Communists concerned the American party's fealty to Moscow. The CPUSA supported a broad "popular front" of all progressive parties, including FDR's Democratic Party in the mid-1930s, then switched to opposing the Democrats and FDR as "fascist" and as "a war party" in 1939 when Stalin and Hitler united in the Nazi-Soviet Pact and partitioned Poland. Randolph, however, agreed with many Communists and National Negro Congress (NNC) activists on a broad range of issues, from integration to voting rights. On the latter issue the NNC and the Communists were bolder than the two main parties, seeking votes even in the Black Belt counties of Alabama, where ideas of white supremacy ruled. Robin D. G. Kelley, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression, 25th anniversary edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). The NNC also sought political office in Mississippi. The Reverend James Parsons, a Black minister and NNC member from Tupelo, Mississippi, declared his candidacy for the seat of Congressman John Rankin: Parsons only backed down when whites "forcibly" showed him that they opposed "the idea of a Negro running for Congress." Sullivan, Days of Hope, 137.

[25] Lewis, The Improbable Wendell Willkie,168, 222.

[26] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 244. ER made this direct appeal to Stephen Early, knowing that he often clashed with African Americans. The historian Jill Watts notes that Early ordered Eleanor Roosevelt to "NOT visit the colored school with which a Mrs. Bethune is associated." The reason he gave was that "Florida's Democrats had told the White House it would hinder their attempts to maintain white support for the party and the president." The Press Secretary also treated Mrs. Bethune with disrespect. Bethune recalled how during a phone conversation with Early, he addressed her as "Mary." She bristled. 'We have never seen each other, Mr. Early," she commented. "I am Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune." In the South, "we are not so formal," Early replied, reminding her of his privilege as a white man to call her by her first name. She corrected him. "Did we know each other better, I might call you Steve and you might call me Mary," she remarked." Jill Watts, The Black Cabinet: The Untold Story of African Americans and Politics during the Age of Roosevelt (New York: Grove Press, 2020), 188, 218-19.

[27] Transcripts of White House Office Conversations, 08/22/1940-10/10/1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum website, http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/transcr4.html. Audio transcripts of the meeting are available online at the University of Virginia's Miller Center. The first part of the tape is "Office Conversation with A. Philip Randolph," https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/office-conversation-philip-randolph. The second part of the conversation is "Office Conversation," https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/office-conversation-1.

[28] Approximately 80 percent of African American soldiers in World War I served in labor battalions. Two important African American Army regiments, the 92nd Infantry and the 93rd Infantry, did see combat, though under French command. Cary D. Wintz, "World War I," in Oxford African American Studies Center, December 1, 2009, https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-46380.

[29] Patricia Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady: Portrait of a Friendship: Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Struggle for Social Justice (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, Kindle edition, 3234).

[30] "Office Conversation," https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/office-conversation-1.

[31] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 230-231.

[32] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 247.

[33] Stephen Levingston, "John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Phone Call That Changed History," *Time*, June 20, 2017, https://time.com/4817240/martin-luther-king-john-kennedy-phone-call/.

[34] Watts, *The Black Cabinet*, 408-428.

[35] Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 236.

[36] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 247-248.

[37] Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 236.

[38] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 236-237.

[39] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 250.

[40] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 254. Dellums was one of the leaders of the Brotherhood for several decades. His nephew Ronald Dellums would later serve as a Democratic representative in Congress from California from 1971 to 1998 and as mayor of Oakland from 2007 to 2011.

[41] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 251.

[42] Kenneth Robert Janken, Walter White: Mr. NAACP (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 255.

[43] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 255. Fiorello La Guardia, the liberal Republican mayor of New York, was trusted by both Randolph and the president and first lady. Anna Rosenberg was a trusted adviser to both FDR and La Guardia, who served as a link between the two leaders. Her service in a range of government roles in the New Deal and World War II led to her becoming the first woman awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1945. https://jwa.org/thisweek/oct/29/1945/anna-rosenberg. John McGuire, "In the Inner Circle: Anna Rosenberg and Franklin D. Roosevelt's Presidency, 1941-1945," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2015): 396-406.

[44] David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 32. The quoted words are by Walter White.

[45] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 258. Joseph Rauh graduated first in his class at Harvard Law School in 1935 and clerked for Justices Felix Frankfurter (his professor at Harvard) and Benjamin Cardozo. He later represented the BSCP, the United Auto Workers, and other labor unions in court and helped found the liberal, anti-communist Americans for Democratic Action, with Eleanor Roosevelt in 1946. In 1948 he successfully led the charge for a civil rights plank in the Democratic Party's platform in that year's election and was a prominent lobbyist for civil rights legislation in the 1960s and 1970s. After his death in 1992, he was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Bill Clinton. Ann T. Keene, "Joseph L. Rauh, in "*American National Biography*, 2006, https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1501307.

[46] Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy*, 37.

[47] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 258-259. In later years, Rauh's frustration at Randolph developed into a strong admiration. They both shared a dedication to the rights of labor and racial equality, as well as a deep antipathy to communism. "I don't know I've met a greater man in my life," he said of Randolph.

[48] Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy*, 37.

[49] Eleanor Roosevelt to A. Philip Randolph, June 26, 1941, "A. Philip Randolph 1938-1943" file, FDR Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/ersel/ersel077.pdf.

[50] Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy*, 48. John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 58.

[51] Frederick Douglass, "West India Emancipation" speech at Canandaigua, NY, August 3, 1857, The Black Past, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress/.

[52] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 244.

[53] See more on the Waller case in the Pauli Murray chapter of this study, Chap. VI.

[54] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 67-71.

[55] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 90.

[56] William Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 66 (Kindle pagination).

[57] FDR cited in Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 200.

[58] Lucander, Winning the War for Democracy, 151.

[59] Randolph and Chalmers to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 18, 1943; Eleanor Roosevelt to Randolph, November 24, 1943, Eleanor Roosevelt papers, FDR Library, cited in Paula A. Pfeffer, "A. Philip Randolph: A Case Study in Black Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1980), 742; reproduced in "A. Philip Randolph 1938-1943" file, FDR Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/ersel/ersel077.pdf.

[60] Pfeffer, "A, Philip Randolph," 307, 743.

[61] Leuchtenburg. *The White House Looks South*, 66 (Kindle pagination).

[62] "'Nip Filibuster In Bud'—Randolph," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 21, 1945, 1, 4.

[63] A. Philip Randolph interview, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Collection, 10/29/1968, 20-21, http://blackfreedom.proquest.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/randolph5.pdf.

[64] A very good photograph of this event, showing Randolph, ER, and La Guardia can be found at the La Guardia and Wagner archives website, http://laguardiawagnerarchives.blogspot.com/2014/09/as-la-guardia-looks-on-president_16.html.

[65] Pfeffer, "A. Philip Randolph," 321.

[66] Randolph's account of the meeting with Truman appears in Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 276.

[67] Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 278.

[68] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet,* 151.

[69] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," August 9, 1948. The newspaper was likely the *New York Amsterdam News,* which published an editorial stating that Randolph's call for civil disobedience and draft resistance "could so weaken the defense of the nation that a powerful totalitarian state could be tempted to step in and take over." Cited in Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 278.

[70] D'Emilio, Lost Prophet, 158.

[71] "Randolph to Vote for Thomas," New York Times, October 25, 1948, 15.

[72]A study of the 1948 election concludes: "Quite simply, victories in Ohio, California and Illinois would have resulted in a Dewey presidency; without the African American vote Truman would not have won the election." Simon Topping, "'Never Argue with the Gallup Poll': Thomas Dewey, Civil Rights and the Election of 1948," Journal of American Studies 38, no. 2 (2004): 179–198, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27557513; Gary A. Donaldson, Truman Defeats Dewey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 190.

[73] Anderson, A. Philip Randolph, 177.

[74] Nixon was later very critical of King's role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, believing that the minister's fame deprived him and other working-class African Americans of their due credit for the boycott's success.

[75] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 236.

[76] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 239-241. A photograph of the rally can be found at http://www.mcreynoldsphotos.org/special-events.

[77] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," May 26, 1956, https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1956&_f=md003494

[78] Brigid O'Farrell, *She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Kindle edition), 194.

[79] O'Farrell, *She Was One of Us*, 216.

[80] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, October 2, 1959," The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition (2017), https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1959&_f=md004552.

[81] O'Farrell, *She Was One of Us*, 196; Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," October 30, 1958.

[82] Randolph turned seventy in April 1959, but the Carnegie Hall birthday celebration was held in January 1960.

[83] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Outline, Remarks for 'A Salute to A. Philip Randolph,'" The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/outline-remarks-salute-philip-randolph.

[84] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, January 28, 1960," The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition (2017), https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1960&_f=md004652.

[85] Ernestine Cofield, "Mrs. Roosevelt Beloved by All," *Chicago Defender* (weekly), November 10-16, 1962, 1.

[86] *Detroit Free Press*, December 10, 1962, 2A.

[87] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 326.

[88] "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/articles/march-on-washington.htm.

[89] Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady*, Kindle edition, 6970.

[90] Yevette Richards, *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 264. Among the African labor leaders that Springer and Randolph championed was Tom Mboya, a charismatic Kenyan, who was at the forefront of the struggle against British colonialism. Mboya's close ties to the American Labor movement would result in several talented young Kenyans traveling to the U.S. to study in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Among them were two economists: Wangari Matthai, a future Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Barack Obama, Sr., the father of the forty-fourth president of the United States. The National Press Club finally voted to admit women in 1971.

[91] The "reconstruction" of Randolph's accounts of the Oval Office meeting are at Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph*, 256-258.

[92] Janken, *Walter White*, 236.

Chapter VI

Pauli Murray and "The First Lady of the World"

Pauli Murray lived one of the most extraordinary and influential American lives of the twentieth century, even if she may not be as well known as many of her contemporaries.[1] As the *New Yorker* writer Kathryn Schulz put it, "This was Murray's lifelong fate: to be both ahead of her time and behind the scenes." Murray earned law degrees from Howard, Berkeley, and Yale, where she became the first African American to earn a doctor of jurisprudence degree. In 1940, fifteen years before Rosa Parks, Murray was arrested for refusing to bend to Jim Crow bus laws. She led lunch counter sit-in protests at Howard University in 1943, seventeen years before the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, launched a national movement. She wrote prolifically: prose and poetry, legal theory and history. Murray held a tenured professorship at Brandeis and taught in Ghana. She grappled with ideas about class, race, sexuality, and gender, politically and personally, publicly and privately. She co-founded the National Organization for Women. In 1977 she took perhaps her most dramatic career turn, becoming the first Black woman Episcopal priest. This dramatic list of accomplishments only begins to describe Murray's body of work.[2]

Murray was also a friend and frequent correspondent of Eleanor Roosevelt, though on the surface their backgrounds could hardly have been more different: the wealthy, white first lady, and Murray, the great-granddaughter of a slave, the daughter of middle-class, successful mixed-race parents. William H. Murray graduated from Howard and taught in the Baltimore public schools; Agnes Fitzgerald Murray graduated from the Hampton Training School for Nurses. But Roosevelt and Murray, who incidentally shared the first name Anna, had experienced similar childhood trauma and were raised by relatives instead of their parents. Roosevelt's emotionally distant mother, Anna Hall, died when she was eight. Her alcoholic father, Elliott Roosevelt, the brother of President Theodore Roosevelt, died when she was ten. Murray's mother, seven months' pregnant, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of thirty-five, when Pauli was only three years old. Her father never recovered. His siblings saw a proud man fallen, spiraling out of control, depressed, unpredictable, and unable to work, and had him committed to the Hospital for the Negro Insane in Maryland. There his life took an even darker turn as he lived in wretched, overpopulated surroundings, at a time

when the mentally ill lived among criminals, sex offenders, and tuberculosis victims. His condition only grew worse. None of his adult relatives was willing to be his caretaker. Tensions increased between William Murray and a racist white attendant—there were four attendants employed to manage 275 patients. The attendant beat the fifty-one-year-old Murray to death, leaving twelve-year-old Pauli parentless. She saw her father's dead body at the funeral parlor, his head "split open like a melon and sewed together loosely with jagged stitches."[3]

Murray first encountered Eleanor Roosevelt in 1934, the year after earning her bachelor's degree at Hunter College. It would be a stretch to say that they met. Murray was living at Camp Tera (Temporary Emergency Relief Administration) in Bear Mountain, New York, which the federal government had established as part of the New Deal to offer housing for unemployed women. Murray's doctor suggested she move there after leaving her job at *Opportunity* magazine. ER had helped to establish and grow the camp, and she was disappointed on her first visit to find only thirty residents. "There must be two hundred girls in New York City who need to get back their health and spirits in a place like this," she protested. "You can't make me believe there aren't." She also made sure that camp administrators made more of an effort to recruit Black women to live at the camp. When ER visited, the shy Murray did not go out of her way to introduce herself, receiving a scolding from camp director Jessie Mills, who accused her of "obsequious behavior" and kicked her out of the camp after finding a copy of *Das Kapital* among her books. Murray had lived at Camp Tera for only three months.[4]

The next five years were difficult for Murray, who struggled with employment, poverty, her gender identity and sexuality, romantic relationships, and mental health. Her relationship with ER began in earnest in 1938, after FDR accepted an honorary doctorate at the segregated University of North Carolina, which had previously denied Murray admission on account of her race. FDR called UNC a "liberal" institution, which incensed Murray, who decided to take the matter up with the president himself in a lengthy letter. "Can you for one moment," Murray wrote, "put yourself in our place and imagine the feelings of resentment, the protest, the indignation, the outrage that would rise within you to realize that you, a human being, with the keen sensitivities of other human beings were being set off in a corner, marked apart from your fellow human beings?" Calling his hypocrisy into focus, Murray continued, "You called on Americans to support a liberal philosophy based on democracy. What does this mean for Negro Americans? Does it mean that we, at last, may

participate freely, and on the basis of equality, with our fellow-citizens in working out the problems of this democracy? Does it mean that Negro students in the South will be allowed to sit down with white students and study a problem which is fundamental and mutual to both groups?" Of course, Murray already knew the real answer: "Or does it mean, that everything you said has no meaning for us as Negroes, that again we are to be set aside and passed over for more important problems? I appeal for an answer because I, and my people are perplexed."[5]

She copied ER, reminding her that "I was the girl who did not stand up when you passed through the Social Hall of Camp Tera during one of your visits in the winter of 1934–35. Miss Mills criticized me afterward, but I thought and still feel that you are the sort of person who prefers to be accepted as a human being and not a human paragon." To Murray's surprise, ER responded on December 19 with an appeal for patience, writing that "great changes come slowly." "The South is changing," she wrote, "but don't push too fast." Despite replying with what had become almost boilerplate rhetoric for arguing a more cautious approach to civil rights advancement, ER took the letter seriously and used it as inspiration for a "My Day" article about justice and equality. biographer Patricia Bell-Scott summarizes: "The contrasting tone in their exchange—Murray the impatient youth and ER the cautious elder—symbolized the tension at the beginning of their friendship." That tension would mellow over time but never disappear completely.[6]

In that letter, Murray also brought up the vulnerability of WPA workers, a topic she broached again with ER in 1939. Murray submitted an opinion piece to multiple newspapers under an assumed name and shared it with the first lady as well. Chiefly Murray criticized the cumbersome and embarrassing process a person had to endure in order to apply for relief. "It is the surrender of personal pride and self-esteem sacred to the individual when he becomes a mere number on a yellow slip of paper," Murray wrote. "It is the waste of time and emotional energy that comes with waiting in a bare reception room, on ridiculous stiff-backed benches in an atmosphere of grimness and desolation which makes the applicant feel like a prisoner awaiting trial." Again, ER listened, writing in "My Day" about the letter without naming Murray: "I don't think there is any way in which we can save people from relief registration, but I do think that letters of this kind should remind us of the necessity of continuing to solve our own economic problems."[7]

January 1940 offered evidence of the growing push and pull of the relationship between Murray and ER. Murray had recently become the executive secretary for National Sharecroppers

Week, which was organized by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Workers Defense League. It aimed to raise awareness of the poor conditions of sharecroppers regardless of race and to raise money for the union's organizing efforts. NSW leaders hoped to persuade ER, who sympathized with impoverished farmers and in particular their vulnerable children, to host an essay contest and donate money.

On January 15 Murray and her colleagues met with ER in her New York apartment. "All of us were experienced teachers, but we stammered like schoolgirls," Murray recalled. "I got up and bowed so awkwardly that Mrs. Roosevelt had to suppress a smile." ER's "warmth was so embracing that I soon forgot the public personage and began to feel as if I might be talking with an affectionate older relative. Whenever I was speaking to her she gave me her complete attention, as if in that moment I was the most important person in her world. I also discovered that she radiated an inner beauty I had not associated with her press photographs." Murray would continue to allude to this maternal theme throughout their relationship. Roosevelt signed on in support of National Sharecroppers Week, and Murray felt "giddy with success."[8]

As pleased as she may have been, Murray was not afraid to criticize the first lady. "She was impetuous and rebellious in a way that could get under Roosevelt's skin," the historian Kenneth Mack argues. On January 22 the Newspaper Women's Club hosted a screening of the film *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* to benefit the Washington Children's Hospital. It aroused controversy first because Black people could not attend any film at the theater, and second because of, of all things, an Abraham Lincoln lookalike contest. When judges awarded the contest to Thomas Bomar, an African American, the theater canceled the contest. (Bomar did manage to get into the theater and see the show, using the tickets he'd won before the cancellation of the contest.) The Washington Civil Rights Committee organized a picket line, which ER crossed to attend the benefit.

Roosevelt attempted to justify her stance in "My Day," where she wrote, "It may not have been quite fair or wise to picket this particular show, because the house had been taken over by an organization for charity and the organization had a right to sell its tickets to whomever it wished. As the evening progressed, however, I could not forget those banners outside, partly because I have a deep-rooted dislike of crossing picket lines. Though this was not a strike where any question of unfair labor conditions was involved, still I could not help feeling that there was another question here of unjust discrimination, and it made me unhappy." Murray was not convinced. "The continual day-to-

day embarrassment of a group is greater than the momentary embarrassment of the individuals who attended the Keith Theatre performance of Abe Lincoln in Illinois," Murray wrote to ER. "There can be no compromise on the principle of equality."

Roosevelt did not respond, but she still attended and spoke at the National Sharecroppers Week New York ceremony, which raised about $10,000 for the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. But Murray could not make it, as she had recently entered psychiatric care due to stressors from work, family life, and, in her own words, "either falling in love with a member of my sex, or finding no opportunity to express such an attraction in normal ways—sex life, marriage, dating, identification with the person and her environment." Two days later she wrote a thank-you letter to ER and apologized for the tone of her Keith Theatre letter, writing that the version of "My Day" she'd read had omitted the crucial final paragraph. [9]

ER offered support after Murray was arrested on Easter Sunday, March 24, 1940. Murray and a friend, Adelene McBean, were traveling to Durham, North Carolina, where Murray intended to spend Easter with her aunts Pauline and Sallie. The trouble began in Richmond, Virginia, where Murray and McBean boarded a rickety, uncomfortable bus for the final leg of their trip. When McBean complained of stabbing pains in her side due to being jostled around on her broken seat, Murray hoped that the bus driver, Frank W. Morris, might let them move to two empty seats at the front of the bus. Her effort met with predictable results: "It was foolish of me to expect humane treatment within the segregation system; to make the system work fairly would threaten the entire structure of white supremacy which Jim Crow was designed to reinforce. The driver shoved me backward with an impatient elbow and told me to get out of his face and take my seat." When the bus stopped in Petersburg, they moved up to the fourth row from the back, still behind the white passengers. The driver threatened arrest and left the bus to get the police. Murray, fearing the worst, gave her aunt Pauline's contact information to a fellow Black passenger heading to Durham so that he could inform her if Murray failed to arrive.[10]

Two police officers talked with the driver, who eventually fixed McBean's original broken seat. The officers wrote warrants for Murray and McBean but did not arrest them. They were free to resume their trip. But Murray's patience hit its breaking point when Morris gave the white passengers cards to fill out as witnesses to any accident or incidents. "Up to this point," Murray wrote, "my role in the ludicrous affair had been relatively minor, but this final damning implication

that black people were nobodies and did not have to be taken into account was more than I could bear." When Murray asked Morris why he did not give forms to Black passengers, he promptly had her and McBean arrested. McBean fainted. "As I stood there shivering in the chilly twilight air, worrying over what had happened to Mac, all the horrors of the South which had shaped my childhood and lurked just beneath the level of consciousness came back and left me almost rigid with fear. I had seldom felt so alone and helpless as I did now, surrounded by strange white men who looked on with bawdy amusement."[11]

Murray and McBean were convicted of disorderly conduct, fined, and sent to jail. During their incarceration, Murray's sister Mildred Fearing sent a telegram to Eleanor Roosevelt. Her secretary replied over a week later: "Mrs. Roosevelt asked me to write you and say that she had an investigation made after receiving your telegram about your sister. She asked the Governor of Virginia about it, which was all she could do, and he says that Miss Murray was unwise not to comply with the law. As long as these laws exist, it does no one much good to violate them." ER's response left Murray understandably cold. "Much as I admired Mrs. Roosevelt," she wrote, "I was deeply troubled when I learned of her letter and was even more convinced that she had little understanding of what it meant to be a Negro in the United States at that time."[12]

Yet ER was a key ally as Murray pursued the case of Odell Waller, an African American sharecropper who shot and killed his white landlord, Oscar Davis, for withholding his family share of the wheat crop, evicting family members, and other exploitative behavior. Murray and her allies, working with the Workers Defense League, did not dispute that Waller shot Davis; rather, they argued that his crime was not premeditated and did not deserve the death sentence he received with his guilty verdict. Waller claimed to have killed in self-defense, as he believed he saw Davis reach toward his pocket for a gun. Murray cast doubt upon the reliability of witnesses to the crime. She also protested that the jury consisted solely of white men who could afford Virginia's poll tax.[13]

What followed was a massive fundraising campaign, led by Murray, that enlisted the support of the NAACP and other labor and civil rights organizations. On November 20, 1940, Murray sent a letter to the first lady, explaining the case and asking for help. ER was sympathetic but feared anything that might upset white southern Democrats, and she was also conscious of FDR's need for broad support for helping Great Britain in its war effort and did not want to create a distraction. ER

thus refused Murray's request that she meet with Waller's mother, and she took no public stand on the issue.

But ER did not demur entirely. She sent Murray's letter to the then-governor of Virginia, James H. Price, writing, "I hope very much that you will look into the case and see that the young man has a fair trial." When Murray asked if she could publicize ER's letter, her secretary declined the request. By the summer of 1942, Murray had persuaded the first lady to join the campaign to lobby Virginia's governor to grant clemency to Waller, a cause that had won the support of other liberal activists and intellectuals, including the philosopher John Dewey and the novelist Pearl S. Buck, as well as former First Lady Grace Coolidge and labor leaders William Green of the AFL and Phillip Murray of the CIO. Despite her initial reticence to openly align herself with the case, Roosevelt wrote to the new governor of Virginia, Colgate Darden, after Dewey published a defense of Waller in the *New York Times.* "I have had a great many letters about Odell Waller's case," she wrote on June 2, 1942, "and the thing which impresses me is that one of the women who made the original investigation, writes me that she feels very strongly Odell Waller should not be executed. She begs me to ask you for clemency." The woman to whom she referred was, of course, Murray. ER continued by citing the broader reach of the Waller case: "If the facts as stated by Dr. Dewey are true, I hope very much that you will be able to go over the case very carefully, as it has created a great deal of feeling among both white and colored people and it may have not only national but international implications." ER even tried to persuade her husband, but he was unconvinced, telling her to refuse to speak publicly on the issue and that he "thought the Governor was acting entirely within his constitutional rights and, in addition to that, doubted very much if the merits of the case warranted the Governor's reaching any other decision."

African American luminaries gathered at Madison Square Garden on June 16 for a "Save Odell Waller" rally. Twenty thousand people attended, mostly African American. A. Philip Randolph and Mary McLeod Bethune addressed the crowd, calling for justice for Waller and an end to the injustice of Jim Crow. Neither goal would be met. Although Darden granted Waller a reprieve in the aftermath of the rally, in the end, the governor concluded that Waller had had a fair trial by a fair and impartial jury. His execution would go ahead. Pauli, Randolph, and Bethune attempted a last-minute meeting with the president at the White House to persuade him to intervene, but they were rebuffed. The first lady also tried to reach her husband, to no avail, until finally, frustrated, he accepted her call,

only to inform her that he would not "interfere again" in the case. Waller was executed on July 2, 1942.[14]

A distraught Murray thanked ER, writing, "Your compassion during those two trying hours on Wednesday night and the magnificent effort you put forth in behalf of our delegation made us know you were bearing our burden with us and softened the steel which entered our souls. All the members of the delegation feel the same way. You are a splendid American." FDR, though, remained a target of her anger. As she wrote in an open letter to the president, "We view your silence as a tacit political alliance with Southern reactionaries which may maintain the Democratic Party, but does not help democracy." She continued, "The time will come when a Negro life will not be sacrificed on the altar of reactionary and behind-the-scene politics. As all Americans remember Pearl Harbor, Negro Americans will remember Odell Waller, and we solemnly pledge that he shall not have died in vain." Murray worked with Randolph to organize a march of five hundred people in New York City on July 25 to protest Waller's death. They carried a banner reading, "We solemnly pledge that our dead shall not have died in vain."[15]

Murray continued to vent her anger at FDR, sometimes to the dismay of the first lady. On July 23, 1942, she wrote another letter to the president, making the provocative claim that "If Japanese Americans can be evacuated to prevent violence being perpetrated upon them by our less disciplined American citizens, then certainly you have the power to evacuate Negro citizens from 'lynching' areas in the South, and particularly in the poll tax states." ER opposed internment—though not publicly—and fumed at Murray's comparison. Exasperated, she replied to Murray, "How many of our colored people in the South would like to be evacuated and treated as though they were not as rightfully here as any other people? … For one who must really have a knowledge of the workings of our kind of government, your letter seems to me one of the most thoughtless I have ever read."

In her memoir, Murray recalled that "The shock of having provoked Mrs. Roosevelt to use such strong language made me realize that at least I had her ear. Her response gave me an opening to make her more fully aware of the mood of bitterness among Negroes, a bitterness that would explode into riots the following summer." In her response, Murray complimented ER but did not back down. "I do not deny that my letter to President Roosevelt seems thoughtless, even reckless. Certainly, it was not intended to offer any fundamental solution to a major problem. It was written from a depth of desperation and disgust, such as every thinking Negro often experiences."[16]

Kenneth Mack argues that "The most transgressive aspect of Murray and Roosevelt's friendship, however, was not their letters—however frank they were—but their social interactions." For all their frequent correspondence, ER thought it best that the women meet in person at her Manhattan apartment to hash out their differences. Murray recognized that she may be "mesmerized" by ER's charm and brought her friend, the African American activist Anna Arnold Hedgeman, with her on August 27. Murray was right; as soon as they arrived, ER "disarmed me completely by throwing her arms about me and giving me an affectionate hug." Meetings with ER were more common after that. She visited the White House for tea "when group tensions and political crises were not on the agenda. On such relaxed occasions I basked in the maternal warmth Mrs. Roosevelt radiated, feeling like a member of her family."[17]

Still, she did not shy away from criticizing FDR's inattention to the plight of African Americans. The president responded to the June 1943 Detroit Race Riot by saying that uprisings "endanger our national unity and comfort our enemies. I am sure that every true American regrets this." Murray in turn responded with one of her greatest poems, "Mr. Roosevelt's Regrets," published in the August 1943 issue of the *Crisis*. The title was a play on the Cole Porter song "Miss Otis Regrets," and the poem remains as relevant now as it was then:

What'd you get, black boy
When they knocked you down in the gutter
And they kicked your teeth out
And they broke your skull with clubs
And they bashed your stomach in?
What'd you get when the police shot you in the back
And they chained you to the beds
While they wiped the blood off?
What'd you get when you cried out to the Top Man?
When you called on the man next to God, so you thought
And you asked him to speak out to save you?
What'd the Top Man say, black boy?
"Mr. Roosevelt regrets . . ."

She sent it to ER; her "response was prompt and to the point": "I have your poem dated July 21. I am sorry but I understand."[18]

Nearing graduation from Howard Law School, Murray applied to attend graduate school at Harvard Law. The ensuing situation would recall her earlier attempt to attend the University of North Carolina's flagship campus in Chapel Hill, but this time it was her sex that made the difference. On January 5, 1944, the school notified Murray that it did not accept women. The chair of graduate studies, Thomas Reed Powell, informed her, "Your picture and the salutation on your college transcript indicate that you are not of the sex entitled to be admitted to Harvard Law School." (Murray noted that he probably dictated the letter "with an impish smirk.") Murray contacted ER with the letters she sent to Harvard, and FDR, Murray wrote in her memoir, "was not merely amused; he actually wrote a letter on my behalf to President James B. Conant of Harvard University." That said, Patricia Bell-Scott unearthed FDR's letter and rightly wondered about the seriousness of the president's attempt, even if both Murray and ER appreciated his effort. "Here is a letter that I really do not know how to answer," the president wrote to Conant. "Wholly aside from Radcliffe College, I always had an idea that women were admitted to many courses. Or perhaps this young colored lady wants to become an undergraduate freshman. I do not want to start you on a new dormitory program but perhaps you might ask one of your Deans to drop me a line." Murray went to Berkeley instead.[19]

Murray visited the White House on May 30, this time bringing her sister, her aunt Pauline, and Ruth Powell. She graduated from Howard in June and received flowers and a card from the Roosevelts. When the president died on April 12, 1945, Murray sent a lengthy letter of condolence. "There is not one I've seen," Murray wrote on the day of FDR's death, "who has not expressed a physical illness over the disaster which has befallen each individual American today." Referencing World War II, Murray continued, "While death has touched the homes of individual Americans, this thing touches all of us in a personal way. The President's going will unite the American people in an equality of sorrow which will cleanse and purify us, I believe." She comforted ER but also reminded the first lady of her importance: "I pray for your strength and fortitude, because we all need you more than ever now."[20]

The relationship between Murray and ER deepened after the president's death. "In spite of her crowded schedule," Murray wrote in her memoir, "Mrs. Roosevelt found time to invite me to her

New York apartment for tea or dinner once or twice a year, or for an occasional weekend at Val-Kill Cottage in Hyde Park, New York." Murray believed that they both benefitted from these visits. "She liked having young friends around, and I think she admired and trusted my habit of not letting her high position prevent me from speaking out on a political issue when I disagreed with her. For me, these visits were like pilgrimages for renewal of the spirit. I sensed an unspoken spiritual bond between us, and I treasured them so much I could not bear to keep them all to myself. With her amused indulgence, I usually contrived to bring along a family member or close friend to share the magic of her presence." For example, in August 1952, she brought her aunts Pauline and Sally to Hyde Park, and the women felt completely at home. After all, Murray wrote, "The First Lady of the World was as comfortable to be with as one's own favorite aunt."[21]

ER even invited Murray to Hyde Park during important meetings and events. Meeting with the likes of the Soviet delegate to the United Nations Andrei Gromyko, Israel's UN delegate Golda Meir, and New York Judge Justine Wise Polier, Murray wrote, "gave me the heady experience of being a spectator of world history in the making." Still, it meant just as much to watch the now former first lady feeding bacon scraps to her dog or completing other mundane tasks. She recalled with great fondness traveling with her niece Bonnie in 1954 to Val-Kill right as the deadly Hurricane Hazel prepared to land in New York. When they arrived at Hyde Park the power was out, but, despite the circumstances, ER told them to get ready, as she was going to do a reading at Bard College. "We skittered along the utterly deserted road littered with fallen tree limbs, at times plowing through swirling rivulets up to our hub caps, while the wind screamed and rain smashed against the windshield, blocking our vision beyond a few feet. . . . We succeeded in getting within walking distance of the school before an uprooted tree lying across the road stopped us. Abandoning the car, we stumbled on foot the rest of the way, arriving bedraggled and hungry well after the dinner hour, to be greeted by astonished students who had long since given up hope that anyone would venture abroad on such a night."[22]

Despite their personal and political closeness—ER donated the maximum $25 to Murray's unsuccessful 1949 bid for a New York City Council seat, under the Liberal Party banner—the tension between the more radical Murray and the more incremental ER remained. Murray was flattered that ER mentioned her in an article in *Ebony* magazine, although the piece did include something of a backhanded compliment, as ER wrote, "I think there were times when she might have done foolish

things. But now I think she is well ready to be of real use. My relationship with Pauli is very satisfying." Both supported the Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson in 1952, and ER supported his second bid in 1956. Murray, however, doubted Stevenson's support of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* school integration decision and thus his overall commitment to racial equality. Although the first lady sent a copy of Murray's book *Proud Shoes* to Stevenson, the civil rights platform Murray developed for the Democratic Party contained nothing on the *Brown* decision. The party still rested on that unsteady coalition of African Americans, northern liberals, and southern Democrats, and ER continued to fear alienating the latter group, even as she recognized that Stevenson needed to do more to attract African American voters. Murray supported Stevenson despite her reservations, but Stevenson lost Black support in his 1956 defeat.[23]

Murray's professional life continued to evolve during these years. She joined the New York law office of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton, and Garrison in 1956. In 1960 she moved to Ghana to teach at the Ghana Law School in Accra. The political situation there became untenable, as the new president, Kwame Nkrumah, solidified his power, threatened civil liberties, and curtailed academic freedom. In addition, Murray found teaching "overwhelming," writing, "We had the almost impossible task of developing lawyers in a country where the bar had not functioned as a professional group; where the statutes were antiquated and in a hopelessly confused state; where no professional legal journal existed in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa which might facilitate academic discussion; and where we had no casebooks or textbooks and had to develop our materials as we went along." After sixteen months Murray returned to the United States to attend Yale Law School, where she would earn a doctor of juridical science degree. She experienced racism immediately, as a New Haven rental agent refused to rent her an apartment because she was Black.[24]

In 1962 Murray accepted Eleanor Roosevelt's invitation to serve on John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Murray reconnected with ER in person that summer when the former first lady spoke at Yale. On July 14 Murray, along with her brother and his family, attended a picnic at Val-Kill, which ER was hosting for UN families. "A small incident during the luncheon should have alerted me to what was to come," Murray later wrote. The incident: ER asked Murray to bring her a glass of lemonade. "In all the years I had known Mrs. Roosevelt, this was the first time she had ever asked a personal favor of me, and I was so delighted to perform even

so small a service and pleased that she felt close enough to me to request it that I did not realize the significance of that moment."[25]

It would turn out to be the last time Murray saw her. Eleanor Roosevelt's health declined as the summer turned to fall, and she died on November 7. "She had filled the landscape of my entire adult life," Murray wrote, "as she had done for millions of my generation, and it was unthinkable to associate her with death. As First Lady of the World, she belonged to humanity, an extension of ourselves. Yet in this crisis those of us outside her intimate family circle had no way of showing our love for one who had given us so much." Murray attended ER's rainy funeral at Hyde Park and viewed the weather as symbolic: "A great light had gone out of the world, and even nature was weeping."[26]

Pauli Murray's relationship with the Roosevelts differed in many important ways from those of the other subjects of this study. For one, Murray was the most directly confrontational, especially in her dealings with FDR. She appreciated what help he offered, but she did not play politics or back down in the face of his inaction. Such was also true in regard to Murray's relationship with ER. Time and again Murray spoke truth to power, even as their friendship evolved and grew formidable, and indeed had a greater effect on the lives of both of them. Murray shared her time with ER in Washington, New York City, and especially Hyde Park with people as varied as her own family members and UN diplomats, Black friends, and white politicians. As with Mary McLeod Bethune, these shared experiences represented a break from segregation in and of themselves, but they also nurtured Murray, even if their relationship was never one or equals, nor could it ever be. But the facts are clear: Murray influenced ER's thinking on racial matters, her writing, and her views on what was important with regard to national and international politics.

[1] Current scholarship and biography about Pauli Murray (1910-1985) often focuses on issues of gender identity and expression, both of which Murray explored in personal writings and relationships with a candor that predated much of the language commonly used today in reference to gender expression, particularly "they/them/theirs" pronouns. According to the Pauli Murray Center, Murray "self-described as a 'he/she personality'" early in life and later in life "employed 'she/her/hers' pronouns and self-described as a woman." Where pronouns are necessary, the editors of this project have chosen to use those that were available during Murray's lifetime.

[2] Kathryn Schulz, "The Many Lives of Pauli Murray," *The New Yorker,* April 10, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/the-many-lives-of-pauli-murray; Troy R. Saxby, *Pauli Murray: A Personal and Political Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), xii-xiii; "Murray, Pauli," in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African American Experience,* Oxford African American Studies Center, https://doi-org./10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.42583. Peter Wallenstein, "Murray, Pauli," in African American National Biography,

Oxford African American Studies Center, https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.34607. The historian Rosalind Rosenberg has highlighted Murray's gender identification as male. Rosenberg and most biographers, however, have followed Murray herself in using female pronouns when writing about her. Rosalind Rosenberg, *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xvii, 1-6.

[3] Patricia Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, Portrait of a Friendship: Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Struggle for Social Justice (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), xvi; Schulz, "The Many Lives of Pauli Murray"; Geoffrey C. Ward, "Roosevelt, Eleanor," in American National Biography Online, https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1500580; Saxby, Pauli Murray: A Personal and Political Life, xii-xiii, 28-30.

[4] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 3-6, 13-17.

[5] Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady*, 27-30; Kenneth W. Mack, "Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt's Beloved Radical," *Boston Review,* February 29, 2016, http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/kenneth-mack-patricia-bell-scott-firebrand-first-lady-pauli-murray-eleanor-roosevelt.

[6] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 27-30.

[7] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 48-49.

[8] Pauli Murray, Song in a Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrimage (1987 reprint, New York: Liveright, 2018), 175; Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 50-52; Saxby, Pauli Murray: A Personal and Political Life, 83.

[9] Mack, "Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt's Beloved Radical"; Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 175-177; Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady,* 52, 56-58.

[10] Murray, Song in a Weary Throat, 178-181.

[11] Murray, Song in a Weary Throat, 181-184.

[12] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 190; Schulz, "The Many Lives of Pauli Murray."

[13] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 67-71.

[14] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 72-86, 90.

[15] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 94-96.

[16] Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 99-102; Murray, Song in a Weary Throat, 246-247.

[17] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 249-252; Mack, "Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt's Beloved Radical."

[18] Mack, "Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt's Beloved Radical"; Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 273-274.

[19] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat,* 308-312; Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady,* 133-134. The first women to attend Harvard Law School graduated in 1953. Three years later, Lila Fenwick was Harvard Law's first African American woman graduate.

[20] Bell-Scott, *The Firebrand and the First Lady*, 167-168.

[21] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 374.

[22] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 375-378.

[23] Saxby, *Pauli Murray: A Personal and Political Life*, 158; Bell-Scott, The Firebrand and the First Lady, 212, 245, 253-254.

[24] Biography, Papers of Pauli Murray, 1827-1985, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/4874; Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 433, 439, 448; Peter Wallerstein, "Murray, Pauli," in American National Biography Online, https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1500499.

[25] Rosenberg, *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray*, 4, 244; Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 456.

[26] Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 456-457.

Coda

The Arc of Memory and the Movement
W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was one of the giants of the century following the Civil War. A preeminent African American public intellectual and activist, Du Bois was a principal founder of the NAACP in 1909, one year before Franklin Roosevelt ran—and won—his first political race for the New York State Senate.

Both men were Harvard graduates; in addition to earning his bachelor's degree from the college in 1890, Du Bois became the university's first Black Ph.D. in 1895. He may have had more years in Cambridge than Roosevelt, but as Du Bois pointedly put it, he was "'in Harvard, but not of it." He could not even sleep in the dorms.[1]

As Du Bois and Roosevelt grappled with matters of economic and social justice, democracy, war, and peace, it would have been surprising if their paths had never crossed. But as Du Bois put it in an essay reflecting on FDR's death, "I never had met Franklin Roosevelt personally, I had seen him only once, looking down upon him as he rode along the rain swept Fifth Avenue; and I could only get the impression of his drawn and tired face; he had just returned from one of the world's conferences. My reactions, then, at his death were not personal."[2] But this statement, like many of Du Bois's statements, obscured a more complex reality.

It is possible that Du Bois had simply forgotten about the conference he attended in June 1918 in Washington, D.C., where he and forty African American leaders and supportive white allies met to discuss African Americans' role in the mobilization for World War I. President Woodrow Wilson did not attend, but his young assistant secretary of the Navy did, along with Joel Spingarn, FDR's near neighbor in the Hudson Valley. (Spingarn's Troutbeck is twenty-five miles from Hyde Park.) Du Bois was a frequent visitor of Spingarn, the white Jewish president of the NAACP in the 1930s, who was one of his closest allies in the organization. Writing of his first visit to Troutbeck in 1916, Du Bois reminisced that "I had no sooner seen the place than I knew it was mine. It was just a long, southerly extension of my own Berkshire Hills" in western Massachusetts.[3]

FDR certainly knew of Du Bois's preeminence among Black leaders. So when Roosevelt was inaugurated president in 1933, his secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., considered Du Bois for a prominent role as a "Negro advisor." Morgenthau, a resident of Dutchess County like FDR, had attended the second Amenia conference at Spingarn's Troutbeck estate in August and had been impressed by Du Bois's intellectual rigor. Spingarn urged Du Bois to accept but had some concerns that the appointment of the NAACP leader would provoke a backlash among Roosevelt's southern white supporters. Spingarn speculated about whether "FDR would dare to appoint you," but the issue became moot when Du Bois proposed a less controversial alternative, Henry Alexander Hunt, a Black Georgian who headed the Fort Valley High and Industrial School and would be acceptable to most of FDR's allies.

FDR did, however, offer Du Bois a formal role on December 21, 1938, when he wrote to "My dear Dr. Dubois," inviting him to serve on the advisory committee for what would become the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.[4] Du Bois replied on January 3, 1939, that he would be "very glad" to serve on the committee and telegrammed Waldo G. Leland, chair of the project's executive committee, on January 26, confirming his plan to attend a "Black tie" advisory board meeting at the Hotel Carlton on February 4 that the "president will attend." Leland had served on the advisory committee on Du Bois's *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, which, unfortunately, was never published. Five days later, however, Du Bois rescinded his acceptance of the invitation, telling Leland that he had just returned to his home in Atlanta from Washington for a meeting of the Stokes-Phelps Foundation and "I do not feel that I can afford another trip. I am very sorry."[5]

After the meeting, Leland reached out to Du Bois to apologize for inviting him to the meeting "without offering … to meet the expenses of the trip, which in some cases, as in yours, would be very considerable."[6] Leland and others maintained a steady correspondence with Du Bois about the library's progress, including invitations from FDR and ER to attend a reception they would host and the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the library at Hyde Park on November 19, 1939. Again, Du Bois replied to "regret exceedingly" his inability to attend the ceremony, but this time did not indicate whether the issue was financial or some other conflict.[7]

Du Bois had voted for the Socialist candidate Norman Thomas in the two previous presidential campaigns, but in 1940 he backed Roosevelt. He still had reservations about the president's deference to white southern opinion on issues like lynching and voting rights, but it helped that FDR

had ditched his arch-conservative Texan vice president John Nance Garner for the liberal Iowan Henry A. Wallace. On economic issues, Du Bois had no reservations. He viewed Republican Wendell Willkie as an unrepentant capitalist, whereas FDR was "the only living man who could lead the United States on the path which will eventually abolish poverty." He had an even more favorable opinion about the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, not least for her principled stand in resigning from the DAR to protest its ban on Marian Anderson. He hoped she would continue to be a voice of conscience in her husband's ear and admired her refusal to be "head housekeeper at the White House and pour tea. She insists on thinking in public. She consorts with Negroes and Communists and says so."[8]

Four years later, Du Bois again endorsed Roosevelt for president, stating that FDR "openly championed the cause and rights of organized labor and fought race discrimination in employment." A vote for Roosevelt, he told the readers of the Harlem-based *People's Voice*, would make it more likely that the United States would follow Britain and other nations in taxing excess wealth, establishing socialized medicine, and widening access to higher education. A vote for his Republican opponent, Governor Thomas Dewey of New York, would reverse the progress Roosevelt and the New Deal had achieved.[9]

Du Bois's immediate reaction to FDR's death is also instructive. In the *New Masses* magazine on April 13, 1945, a day after Roosevelt's passing, he wrote that "the extraordinary accomplishment of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was to take a party whose core consisted of one hundred and thirty four rotten borough electoral votes from the reactionary South and transform it into a political force for the social reconstruction of America and the modern world." There was a caveat, though: Du Bois said FDR "was not entirely successful" and at the time of his death was losing ground to his "Southern [white] allies" and the "Republican Party of wealth and privilege." His struggle with these opponents, Du Bois claimed, "shortened his days by at least a decade. And yet what he did accomplish was superb." To Du Bois, Roosevelt's most significant achievements were making employers recognize the rights of labor, reorganizing "a reactionary Supreme Court," and giving a "social and political recognition to the American Negro greater in effect … than any president of the United States since the Civil War." He also gave Roosevelt credit for inspiring a southern white minority "who know that race prejudice is fatal to social uplift and who are beginning to organize for

real progress ... across the color line. This is accomplishment enough for any one human being in one comparatively short life.[10]

Du Bois would later recall that FDR's death "tremendously affected" him because of its impact on plans for postwar peace promised by the Atlantic Charter, the August 1941 declaration by President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.[11] The agreement built on FDR's Four Freedoms speech to Congress earlier that year envisioning a world founded on the principles of freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from want and from fear. Freedom, the president asserted, "means the freedom of human rights everywhere."[12] The charter "respected the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live," and promised to "restore the sovereign rights and self government . . . to those [nations] who have been forcibly deprived of them."[13] Churchill, an unrepentant imperialist, interpreted those goals as applying only to European nations occupied by Nazi Germany, but for FDR, Du Bois, most African Americans, and anti-colonial activists in Africa and Asia, the Atlantic Charter also applied to the subject peoples of the British and French empires.[14]

Believing that these Rooseveltian principles of self-determination would apply to the new international body the Allies had agreed to establish after the war, Du Bois attended the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in the late spring of 1945. Eleanor Roosevelt had ensured that three African Americans would serve as delegates: Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Walter White. But their hopes for immediate decolonization were soon dashed. American government officials had no interest in inscribing the rights of African and Asian colonial peoples in the UN. Significantly for Du Bois, the Soviet ambassador, Vyacheslav Molotov, did support that move. Increasingly, Du Bois came to see the Truman administration as a block on anti-colonial aspirations.

But he still believed that FDR would have pursued different policies. He addressed this issue most clearly in a January 1948 speech in Baltimore to the Progressive Citizens of America, the organization supporting the presidential candidacy of Henry A. Wallace. Wallace was FDR's vice president from 1941 to 1944, when delegates at the Democratic National Convention replaced him with Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri, who they believed would be a less radical and polarizing president than Wallace should FDR (who was then visibly ailing) die in office. Wallace's 1948 presidential candidacy was premised on the claim that he was the true spiritual heir to FDR. His

rhetoric even echoed Roosevelt: he heralded the "Century of the Common Man," just as the president had hailed the "forgotten man." It was natural that Du Bois gravitated to Wallace because they shared the same critique of the Truman administration, namely that it had betrayed FDR's domestic and foreign policy agendas. Domestically, they believed that the logical extension of the New Deal was for the United States to adopt the welfare state policies that Britain and other European nations had begun to adopt. In foreign relations they argued for a return to the wartime cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union, in opposition to Truman's distrust of the USSR's growing influence in Eastern Europe and the emergence of a "Cold War" between the two powers.

Du Bois's Baltimore speech was titled, simply, "Roosevelt," and he began by declaring that the "stature of Franklin Roosevelt will increase as time goes on."[15] The New Deal he described was "a tremendous system in national planning" and government control of the economy. "Nothing of this sort had taken place in the world, in modern times except in Russia after the revolution of 1917." Conservative critics of the New Deal had often used analogies to the Soviet Union to attack FDR, but here Du Bois was using the analogy in a positive sense. The end of World War II, he argued, necessitated more planning of the world economy and within nations so that the "distribution of wealth be more logical and ethical." America had failed to achieve that goal, he believed, because it had been "deprived of the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt; of his unvarying good humor; of his clear and broad insight. And in his place we have indecision [and] bitter aversion to …planning concerning industry, business, and wages," a clear swipe at Truman, though he does not mention him by name. Du Bois also praised the "greatest work of Franklin Roosevelt," which "was to start cleansing the Supreme Court of the accumulated refuse of reaction to economic democracy. Living men may yet see a Supreme Court with guts and common decency to throw out the window the whole body of legal color-caste … as both unconstitutional and uncivilized." That process would advance in Du Bois's own lifetime with the court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* school integration ruling in 1954.[16] Du Bois concluded his speech by claiming that Wallace was the only candidate in 1948 who represented the values that FDR "worked and died for" and that "there could be no greater tribute to the memory of Franklin Roosevelt than the election of Henry Wallace." But this was not a view that many voters, Black or white, shared.[17]

Truman also made a strong case that he represented FDR's legacy, a claim bolstered by ER's strong endorsement of him.[18] After all, Truman had addressed the NAACP conference, which FDR

had never done. Moreover, he did so at the Lincoln Memorial, on June 29, 1947, eight years after the Marian Anderson concert there. ER, now on the NAACP's Board of Directors, was present as well. The president pledged to "remove the last remnants of the barriers, which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright." He insisted, "there is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion. Or race, or color."[19] Truman had also appointed William Hastie, a Black Cabinet member, as governor of the US Virgin Islands, and he established a Civil Rights Commission, To Secure These Rights, in 1947, that promised to integrate the military. Under pressure from A. Philip Randolph and others, that goal was made concrete in the summer before the election with Executive Order 9981. Truman did not barnstorm the South, directly attacking Jim Crow like Henry Wallace did, but he did enough to advance the civil rights cause to persuade a strong majority of African American voters, including Walter White and Mary McLeod Bethune, to back him. Their support helped to ensure his victory over Wallace and Governor Thomas Dewey of New York in the fall campaign.

As the postwar years unfolded and the immediacy of the Roosevelt presidency receded, Du Bois evidenced a major shift in his thinking about what those years had meant and where the Roosevelt legacy stood in his own memory—and in history. By the time he wrote his third *Autobiography* in the late 1950s, he had thrown his support behind the cause of communism in both the Soviet Union and China, while losing his faith in the ability of American institutions to combat racism. This time, Du Bois devoted only a single page to FDR, explaining his support for some policy innovations of the New Deal, like the Tennessee Valley Authority, while criticizing FDR's industrial policy for "deliberately provid [ing] lower wages for Southern Negro workers." Du Bois also said regretted his support for FDR's foreign policy and aid to Britain in 1941, believing now that the British Empire "had been built on the same exploitation of land and labor and race hate" as Hitler's Germany. He also gave only a brief mention of Eleanor Roosevelt that was highly critical of her refusal to endorse Du Bois's pamphlet, *An Appeal to the World*, which in 1948 attempted to enlist the United Nations in the fight to end segregation and racism in the United States.[20]

Although he was born in 1868, just three years after the abolition of slavery, Du Bois would outlive both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and several of the leading figures covered in this study. Irvin "Mac" McDuffie would pass on January 30, 1946, on what would have been FDR's 64th

birthday. Mary McLeod Bethune and Walter White would live to see the Supreme Court's historic 1954 *Brown* v. *Board of Education* school desegregation ruling they had both worked so hard to advance, but both would die the following year, when a young Black minister, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would begin a new phase of civil rights leadership with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama.

King was a sixteen-year-old freshman at Morehouse College when FDR died in 1945, but he had already been inspired by one of the major legacies of the Roosevelt era, Marian Anderson's historic performance at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939. As a junior in 1944, King represented Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta at a statewide oratorical contest on the topic of "The Negro and the Constitution." He spoke movingly of the integrated crowd's response that "rang out over that great gathering" to Anderson's renditions of "America" and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," noting "that there was a hush on the sea of uplifted faces, black and white, and a new baptism of liberty, equality and fraternity." But the young King was keenly aware that this "touching tribute" of interracial unity was merely a promissory note. Much work needed to be done as long as "Miss Anderson cannot be served in many of the public restaurants of her home city, even after [Philadelphia] declared her to be its best citizen."[21]

As a young minister with a doctorate in divinity from Boston University, King would call upon FDR's example at a sermon he gave at his father's Ebenezer Baptist Church. The 1953 sermon praised notable figures in history who had overcome physical handicaps, such as "Franklin D. Roosevelt, inflicted with infantile paralysis (polio) and yet he rises up to leave such an imprint in the sands of our nation's history, that future history books will be incomplete without his name." At the inaugural meeting of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December 1955, he again invoked FDR, earning applause and amens from the congregation for stating that they had "nothing to fear but fear itself."[22]

Eleanor Roosevelt was inspired by King's leadership, and she admired both the goals and the tactics of the nonviolent crusade the Black minister had launched. She wrote in her syndicated "My Day" column that there "must be great pride, not only among the Negroes but among white people all over the country, in the remarkable restraint and courage shown by the Negroes in their struggle for their rights in Montgomery, Ala., and other places in the South." ER met with two of the boycott leaders, Rosa Parks and E. D. Nixon, in 1956 and was prominent in the campaign among northern

activists to publicize the Montgomery movement. Only a scheduling conflict kept King from meeting with ER at "New York's Greatest Civil Rights Rally" at Madison Square Garden later that year, where a crowd of over twenty thousand hailed Parks, Nixon, and other leaders of the new southern-based movement.

By then, the two leaders had initiated a frequent correspondence that both would learn from and cherish. ER often highlighted her support for King in "My Day." After his arrest for leading a sit-in demonstration in Atlanta in October 1960, for example, she gave her full support, and typically framed the issue through the broader context of international human rights and America's place in the world. ER wrote, "The people of the world will condemn—not Georgia, unfortunately—[but] the United States for treating as a criminal a man who is looked upon with respect." In 1961, she also praised the younger activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress on Racial Equality for their "determination to do away with inequality between races and to have real democracy in the United States."[23]

King appreciated ER's support, writing to thank her "for all you have done, and I'm sure will continue to do to help extend the fruits of Democracy to our southern brothers, please accept my deep and lasting gratitude" Although in failing health, ER continued to look to new venues to promote the broad goals of human justice that she and King shared. King, indeed, was lined up to talk about civil rights on the first episode of a new television series that she was planning to host, but she was hospitalized and then died on November 7, 1962. In condolence, King wrote the Roosevelt family the next day: "Her life was one of the bright interludes in the troubled history of mankind.[24]

And so it was that Eleanor Roosevelt would not live to see the March on Washington for Peace, Jobs, and Freedom that A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin organized, and that Dr. King electrified with his "I Have a Dream" speech, ten months after her death. Nor was W. E. B. Du Bois present on that hot August day, which many have come to see as the zenith of the heroic phase of the civil rights movement. It was a movement that Du Bois, more than any other single figure, had set in motion as early as 1903. In his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, he declared that the "problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races … in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." As King saw it, Du Bois had devoted his life to solving that problem, embedded in the nation's fabric by "one generation after another of Americans," who were "assiduously taught the falsehood" of Black inferiority such that the "collective

mind of America became poisoned with racism and stunted with myths." Du Bois's great achievement was that he "confronted this powerful structure of historical distortion and dismantled it. He virtually, before anyone else and more than anyone else, demolished the lies about Negroes in their most important and creative period of history. The truths he revealed are not yet the property of all Americans but they have been recorded and arm us for our contemporary battles."[25]

Those truths would certainly arm King for the momentous speech he gave on August 28, 1963. But Du Bois would never hear them. Having abandoned the United States for Ghana, he died there, in Accra, one day before the march. As a solemn Roy Wilkins—White's successor as NAACP secretary—told the integrated crowd of 250,000 people gathered under a blazing sun at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington that afternoon, Du Bois had passed in his sleep. The "Old Man," as many had come to know him, had finally returned to Africa and would remain there.

Picking up the torch he'd lit was twenty-three-year old John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on that bright, hot day, challenged the political institutions that kept segregation alive and kept African Americans in the Deep South from voting. "Listen, Mr. Kennedy, listen Mr. Congressman, listen fellow citizens—the black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a 'cooling-off' period."[26]

Just as FDR had listened when Randolph had threatened to set one hundred thousand of those Black masses on the march twenty-two years earlier, JFK also listened, and even invited the leaders of the march to the White House. It would, however, take Kennedy's shocking assassination two months later, and the political skills of his successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a protégé of FDR, to enact legislation ending segregation with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and securing the right to vote the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It could be said that the United States finally approached becoming a true democracy with the passage of those two pieces of legislation, whose roots lay in the debates and struggles of the Roosevelt era.

The other main protagonists in this study would complete their life journeys in the more democratic, more equal society that emerged after 1965. Lizzie McDuffie would pass first, in 1966, followed by A. Philip Randolph in 1979 and Pauli Murray in 1985. Marian Anderson and Alonzo Fields would live until the Clinton administration, with Fields the last to die, in 1994, while work on

the FDR Memorial in Washington continued ahead of its dedication three years later. In a larger sense, that work continues.

[1] Alexandra L. Almore, "'In Harvard, But Not of It': Harvard, Slavery and the Civil War, A Profile of W. E. B. Du Bois," *Harvard Crimson*, October 21, 2011; "Frank Roosevelt at Harvard," FDR Foundation website, https://fdrfoundation.org/the-fdr-suite/franklin-roosevelt-at-harvard/.

[2] W. E. B. Du Bois, "When Franklin D. Roosevelt Died," manuscript mailed to Gabe Sanders, who was compiling a book of reflections on FDR's death, on January 18, 1949. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Amherst Special Collections, online at https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b126-i009. There is no evidence that Sanders ever published his book.

[3] David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography*, condensed, single volume edition (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 361; *Address to the Committee on Public Information by Representatives of the Negro Press* (1918), Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum http://presidentwilson.org/items/show/24526. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Amenia Conference: An Historic Negro Gathering* (Amenia, NY: Troutbeck Press, 1925).

[4] Franklin D. Roosevelt to W. E. B. Du Bois, December 21, 1938, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Amherst Special Collections, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b086-i429.

[5] Du Bois to Leland, January 31, 1939, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b089-i242.

[6] Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt Library to W. E. B. Du Bois, February 7, 1939, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b089-i244.

[7] Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Advisory Board, November 13, 1939, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b089-i253.

[8] Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 633.

[9] "Du Bois states his reasons for backing Roosevelt," ca. October 1944, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Special Collections, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b209-i054.

[10] "What He Meant to the Negro," draft of article for *New Masses*, April 1945, Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Amherst, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b209-i058.

[11] Du Bois, "When Franklin D. Roosevelt Died."

[12] "The Four Freedoms," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum Website, https://www.fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms.

[13] "The Atlantic Charter," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum Website, https://www.fdrlibrary.org/atlantic-charter.

[14] Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022), 354-355, 479-481. Elkins notes that FDR's support of self-determination for colonial peoples "was no small matter." It strengthened anti-colonial movements struggling against the French, British, and other European empires. Elkins, 480.

[15] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Roosevelt," January 30, 1948. Typed draft of speech given to the Progressive Citizens of America, Baltimore, MD. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Special Collections, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b199-i017.

[16] On hearing of the 1954 *Brown* ruling, Du Bois stated, "I have seen the impossible happen." The following year, however, brought the *Brown II* implementation ruling that he did not endorse, believing that the "deliberate speed" was an oxymoron. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 699.

[17] Du Bois, "Roosevelt," January 30, 1948.

[18] Eleanor Roosevelt to Harry S. Truman, October 4, 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/eleanor-roosevelt-harry-s-truman-october-4-1948.

[19] President Truman's Address before the NAACP, June 29, 1947, Truman Library Institute, https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/historic-speeches-naacp/.

[20] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194, 214.

[21] In March 1941 Philadelphia awarded Marian Anderson its Bok award—also known as the Philadelphia Award—given annually to its leading citizen. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro and the Constitution," May 1944, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute Online, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/negro-and-constitution.

[22] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Accepting Responsibility for Your Actions," July 26, 1953 sermon, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/accepting-responsibility-your-actions; MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, December 5, 1955, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute Online, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church.

[23] "Anna Eleanor Roosevelt," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/roosevelt-anna-eleanor.

[24] "Anna Eleanor Roosevelt," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

[25] The quotation is from King's remarks at a Carnegie Hall celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Du Bois's birth in February 1968, a few months before his assassination. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Honoring Dr. Dubois," *Jacobin* (January 2019), https://jacobin.com/2019/01/web-du-bois-martin-luther-king-speech.

[26] Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois, 2.

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