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## CIVIL RIGHTS, PRESIDENT TRUMAN AND THE SOUTH

*by*

Monroe Billington

Less than two months after taking the presidential oath of office in April 1945, Harry S. Truman wrote to Illinois Congressman Adolph Sabath, chairman of the House of Representatives Rules Committee, urging that committee to allow the House to vote upon a long-pending bill providing for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the new President also protested recent action by the House Appropriations Committee cutting off funds for the continuation of the wartime Fair Employment Practices Committee.<sup>2</sup> Upon writing this letter in which he stated that it was un-American to discriminate in employment because of race, creed, or color, Truman took his first stand as President regarding the basic civil rights of all Americans. As he

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<sup>1</sup> The manuscript sources for this paper are the Truman Papers (Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri).

<sup>2</sup> The term FEPC has been commonly used for both the temporary Fair Employment Practices Committee and the proposed Fair Employment Practices Commission. To avoid confusion the adjectives "wartime" and "permanent" are used in this essay when references to FEPC are made.

pressed for a fair employment act and other civil rights legislation throughout his nearly eight years in office, Truman received an unusually varied response from white Americans who resided in the South.<sup>3</sup>

Southern members of Congress were outspokenly opposed to the temporary Fair Employment Practices Committee, and only after much difficulty was the committee granted an appropriation large enough to extend its life until June 1946. Even though this concession was made, the Southerners in Washington had no intention of allowing the committee additional funds nor would they permit the establishment of a permanent FEPC. Led by Senator Theodore G. Bilbo and Representative John E. Rankin, both of Mississippi, they filled the *Congressional Record* with invectives, arguments, and emotion-laden attacks against the FEPC. When Bilbo heard of a petition circulated in Georgia favoring the FEPC, he assumed that "the great majority of these petitioners, representing Negroes, Quislings of the white race, and other racial minorities, hail from the city of Atlanta, the hotbed of Southern Negro intelligentsia, Communists, pinks, Reds, and other off-brands of American citizenship in the South."<sup>4</sup>

Despite this opposition, Truman delivered a comprehensive post-war message to Congress in September 1945 in which he suggested twenty-one guidelines for action on pressing social and economic matters, one of his recommendations being that the FEPC be made permanent.<sup>5</sup> When administration leaders in Congress early in 1946 introduced a bill to establish a permanent FEPC, Senator James Eastland announced that if the bill became law he would recommend to his state's legislature that it protect the sovereignty of Mississippi and the liberty and freedom of Mississippians by passing a nullification proclamation.<sup>6</sup> Bilbo insisted that the FEPC was "nothing but a plot to put niggers to work next

<sup>3</sup> The South in this paper is defined as the eleven former Confederate states plus Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.

<sup>4</sup> *Congressional Record*, 79 Cong. I Sess., pp. 6336-37.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times* Sept. 7, 1945; *Cong. Record*, 79 Cong. I Sess., p. 8369; Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, 1955), p. 485.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, Jan. 19, 1946.

to your daughters and to run your business with niggers.”<sup>7</sup> A three-week filibuster prevented a vote on the measure.<sup>8</sup>

During World War II while the wartime FEPC was in operation and when the first proposals for a permanent FEPC were made in Congress, the Southern press was not particularly hostile to the subject. The feeling of many Southern editorialists was that although the wartime FEPC had made some mistakes, it was basically desirable.<sup>9</sup> Some Southern papers declared that a permanent FEPC was not only to be desired, but also a necessary part of the reconversion program and essential for the future of the nation.<sup>10</sup> The Salisbury (N.C.) *Post* was quoted as stating that the FEPC issue had nothing to do with the problem of social mingling of the races. It went on to say: “The question is solely one of equal opportunity. We may hope that both employers and white workers will realize this simple truth, and that they will also realize that if opportunity can be denied to any group, for reasons of color . . . no minority group’s rights are safe. The principle of equal opportunity is not divisible.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, June 30, 1946.

<sup>8</sup> The story of pressures for establishing a permanent FEPC is related in: Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs, & Politics: The Story of FEPC* (New York, 1953); Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959); Louis C. Kesselman, *The Social Politics of FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (Chapel Hill, 1948).

<sup>9</sup> See Birmingham (Ala.) *Age-Herald*, May 26, 1944, Miami (Fla.) *Miami-Herald*, June 26, 1944, Kansas City (Mo.) *Times*, Sept. 1, 1944, Asheville (N.C.) *Citizen*, Sept. 5, 1944, quoted in *Cong. Record*, 79 Cong. I Sess., pp A2811-13.

<sup>10</sup> St. Louis (Mo.) *Post-Dispatch*, May 26, 1944, Wilmington (Del.) *News*, May 29, 1944, Durham (N.C.) *Herald*, Jan. 11, 1945, Knoxville (Tenn.) *News-Sentinel*, Feb. 11, 1945, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Aug. 5, 1944, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A2812, The Durham (N.C.) *Herald* agreed: “Equal opportunity has nothing whatever to do with ‘social equality’—whatever those words mean. Equal opportunity means what it says—a chance for every one according to his character and abilities, plus equal pay for equal work.” The *Herald* argued that the need for a permanent FEPC was “desperate.” Sept. 11, 1944, quoted in *ibid.* The Birmingham (Ala.) *Age-Herald* summarized its stand on federal prohibition of discrimination in employment: “It will be generally agreed that voluntary progress against the results of discrimination is better than that brought about by compulsion. But it is also true that even under a democracy we must protect and enforce certain freedoms and rights by compulsory measures.” Dec. 9, 1944, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A2813.

At the same time newspapers were expressing favorable sentiments towards the FEPC in 1944, several Southern Congressmen were increasing their agitation against it,<sup>12</sup> and a noticeable change in sentiment began to appear on the editorial pages of many Southern papers in 1945 and 1946. Following the lead of the delegations in Washington, some papers charged the sponsors of the FEPC with trying to introduce a system of "State socialism."<sup>13</sup> One argued that the FEPC was conceived by politicians who were seeking the Negro vote and that it was nursed by "totalitarian bureaucrats who never miss an opportunity to increase the power of government over the lives of men."<sup>14</sup> Many newsmen believed that the FEPC was unconstitutional, one writing, "Witch-hunting by a permanent FEPC clothed with inquisitorial and dictatorial powers over private employments . . . would constitute a dangerous encroachment upon the individual freedom Americans have cherished throughout their national history. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

If the newspapers of the South were several months behind Southern Congressmen in objecting to the FEPC, the general public was even slower to respond. Despite the outspoken critical comments in 1945 from their Congressmen regarding Truman's stand on the FEPC, Southerners generally showed little interest in the subject. Truman's letter to Sabath brought a great flood of mail to the White House from all over the nation, but Southerners wrote the fewest letters in proportion to their population, and the letters which

<sup>12</sup> See especially *ibid.*, 78 Cong. I Sess., pp. A5454, 10294-95; 78 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 5026, 5029, 5038, 5043, 6804, A2853, A2723, A3695.

<sup>13</sup> Vernon (Tex.) *Daily Record*, Feb. 20, 1945, quoted in *ibid.*, 79 Cong. I Sess., p. A837.

<sup>14</sup> High Point (N.C.) *Enterprise*, May 25, 1945, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A2638.

<sup>15</sup> New Orleans (La.) *Times-Picayune*, July 18, 1945, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A3590. The Richmond (Va.) *Times-Dispatch* wrote that a permanent FEPC in the long run would hurt rather than help the Negro race. It "could arouse great interracial hostility and create almost interminable friction . . . and interracial progress would be set back for decades," concluded the *Times-Dispatch*. June 12, 1945, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A2869. Other newspapers critical of the FEPC included the Raleigh (N.C.) *News and Observer*, Nashville (Tenn.) *Banner*, Charlotte (N.C.) *Observer*, and Memphis (Tenn.) *Commercial Appeal*. See *ibid.*, p. A2052; 79 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 812, A712-13.

Southerners did write were not heavily in opposition to Truman's stand.<sup>16</sup>

In December 1946 Truman appointed the President's Committee on Civil Rights composed of fifteen prominent citizens from over the country. This committee issued its formal report in October 1947 in which it declared that the time had come to create a permanent nationwide system of guardianship for the civil rights of all Americans. Published under the title *To Secure These Rights* (Washington, 1947), the widely distributed report listed thirty-five specific recommendations for improving and protecting the civil rights of American citizens.<sup>17</sup> Important Southern newspapers reacted negatively to the committee's report, one indicating that the committee "proposed to extinguish a smouldering and slowly dying fire by drenching it with gasoline."<sup>18</sup>

The public opinion files in the Truman Papers at the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, contain numerous letters from Southerners expressing similar sentiments directly to the President. A general belief in the South was that Truman planned to try to force immediate integration in all areas of civil rights. Many people informed Truman that he did not understand the relationship of the races in the South if he felt such changes could be brought about without trouble. A man from Memphis wrote, "Mr. President, if the dogooders and Damyankees would keep their noses out of our Business as regarding the Negroes of the South we will get along fine as we have been getting along for years." The same writer penned: "Your civil rights body is fixing to stir up more Hell and Damnation than Carter has oats."<sup>19</sup> More than one person in the South hoped to

<sup>16</sup> "Analysis of the President's mail on F.E.P.C." (typewritten), Truman Papers.

<sup>17</sup> The working papers of this committee are in the Truman Library.

<sup>18</sup> New Orleans (La.) *Times-Picayune*, n.d., quoted by columnist John Temple Graves in Birmingham (Ala.) *Post*, Oct. 31, 1947. See also Atlanta (Ga.) *Constitution*, Oct. 31, 1947, and Raleigh (N.C.) *News and Observer*, Nov. 2, 1947, quoted in *Cong. Record*, 80 Cong. I Sess., p. A4243; Mobile (Ala.) *Press*, Oct. 30, 1947, quoted in George B. de Huszar, *Equality in America* (New York, 1949), p. 241.

<sup>19</sup> Ray N. Beeman (Memphis, Tenn.) to Truman, Oct. 29, 1947. This and all succeeding letters quoted in this essay are in the Truman Papers.

reach the President through his wife. A man from Missouri wrote to Mrs. Truman: "There is a lot of Southern Blood in your veins. Am sure you are bitterly opposed to such [the committee's report], so please bear down on Harry and persuade him to drop this Tolerance Question."<sup>20</sup> A great number of those Southerners who did not like the suggestions of the President's committee related them to the political scene. A minister expressed the sentiments of many when he predicted, "If that report is carried out you won't be elected dog catcher in 1948."<sup>21</sup> Surprisingly few Southerners followed the lead of their Congressmen in 1947 arguing that a civil rights program would interfere with states' rights or the Constitution. Nor did many people claim that the proposed program was inspired by the Russians or the Vatican.<sup>22</sup>

Some Southerners who wrote to Mr. Truman following the publication of the Committee's report may be classified as moderates. These people either mildly opposed the suggestions in the report or felt that the recommendations should be set aside for a more propitious time. But not all of the mail to Truman was negative or suggested delays. Some writers, especially representatives of churches, women's groups, and youth groups, expressed appreciation to Truman for the committee's report and for the President's stand.<sup>23</sup>

On February 2, 1948, President Truman included ten recommendations of the Civil Rights Committee in a special message to Congress. The four proposals directly affecting the South were the FEPC, an anti-lynching law, an anti-poll tax measure, and the prohibition of discrimination in interstate transportation facilities. The response from Southern Congressmen was immediate with virtually all of those who spoke on the subject showing strong objection to the President's program. Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia asserted

<sup>20</sup> Robey D. Trader (Kansas City, Mo.) to Mrs. Truman, Nov. 4, 1947.

<sup>21</sup> Rev. A. C. Shuler (Jacksonville, Fla.) to Truman, Oct. 30, 1947.

<sup>22</sup> For exceptions see Mrs. Sayda T. Williams (Trenton, Ga.) to Truman, Oct. 31, 1947; Mrs. Elizabeth M. Ford (Atlanta, Ga.) to Mrs. Truman, Nov. 2, 1947; Edward N. Gleason (Danville, Va.) to Truman, Oct. 30, 1947.

<sup>23</sup> Numerous letters in the public opinion papers in the Truman Library substantiate these generalizations.

that the civil rights program constituted a “devastating broadside at the dignity of Southern traditions and institutions” and that its passage might lead to bloodshed in the South.<sup>24</sup> Representative John Bell Williams of Mississippi believed that Truman “has seen fit to run a political dagger into our backs and now he is trying to drink our blood.”<sup>25</sup> Many references were made in both houses of Congress accusing Truman of playing to the Northern Negro vote in view of the forthcoming presidential election in November.<sup>26</sup> Hints of a Southern revolt in the 1948 election were made in both the House and the Senate within hours after Truman had delivered his message.<sup>27</sup>

The newspapers of the South which commented upon the President’s speech generally took the same position as the Congressmen, many of them pleading that Truman should let the states and local communities handle racial problems.<sup>28</sup> The Nashville (Tenn.) *Banner* referred to those “vicious planks” in Truman’s proposed program which included “the monstrous character of an FEPC proposal, and attendant force bills transgressing both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution.” It went on to say that “the people of the South are tired of being pushed around, subjected to abuse, invaded by a constant influx of odd characters bent on reforming it to suit their own designs of reconstruction.”<sup>29</sup>

Many Southerners who wrote to the White House following the speech took the same general stand as their representatives and the press. Arguments which had been used by Southerners for nearly a hundred years were resurrected

<sup>24</sup> *Washington Post*, March 8, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> *Cong. Record*, 80 Cong. 2 Sess. p. 1294.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 975, 1070, *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 975, 1009, 1197. See also *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1948.

<sup>28</sup> *E.g.*, see Shreveport (La.) *Times*, Feb. 5, 1948; *Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman*, Feb. 7, 1948; *Mobile (Ala.) Press*, Feb. 3, 1948; *Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser*, Feb. 4, 1948. The Jackson (Tenn.) *Sun* editorialized: “If Truman persists in clinging to his civil-rights program, it will be useless, we think, for him to campaign for the electoral votes in the South.” Feb. 26, 1948, quoted in *Cong. Record*, 80 Cong. 2 Sess., p. A1325.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* See also *New Orleans (La.) Times-Picayune*, March 1, 1948, quoted in *ibid.*, p. A1446.



by the mid-twentieth-century generation. According to these Southerners, Truman's suggestions were Communistic, unconstitutional, in violation of state's rights, and would result in an undesirable mongrelization of the white race. Some accused Truman of being politically motivated in his message to Congress. More than one argued that Truman did not understand the situation in the South, that the South treated the Negro well, and that conditions in the region had been misrepresented. Secession or civil war was threatened by the more aroused Southerners, while others predicted that Truman's stand would cause the Ku Klux Klan to rise again.

A man from the President's home state wrote: "Well I see you done messed up things again. Please Harry come back to Missouri and get behind the Plow."<sup>30</sup> From Florida came this reaction: "If you think you are going to cram niggers down the throats of we Southerners,—you are badly wrong. You should be smart enough to know that the niggers get better treatment in the South from Southerners, than any other section of the U.S.A. Southern families have known how to handle niggers better than any others; they help them when they get in jail, through sickness and other adversities, but when it comes to making them our social equals, allowing them to ride with us in trains and buses, theatres and resturants [*sic*] etc,—well that just don't go!"<sup>31</sup> "You have advocated and asked Congress for a lot of good legislation, both Domestic and Foreign," acknowledged a Tennessean, "'but' when you asked Congress to pass your Civil Rights Legislation, and press down the Crown of Thorns on the South's brow and crisify [*sic*] the South's people on a Communistic Cross disguised in Negro Equality, that was the straw that broke the Camel's back."<sup>32</sup> One man ventured that if attempted enforcement followed any civil rights measures passed by Congress, "there will be enough blood shed to make the Mississippi River run RED." He then tried to appeal to Truman's conscience: "If you have

<sup>30</sup> Paul Heitman (Maplewood, Mo.) to Truman, Feb. 21, 1948.

<sup>31</sup> "Ex-Supporter and voter" (Tampa, Fla.) to Truman, Feb. 2, 1948.

<sup>32</sup> J. Edd Replogle (Medina, Tenn.) to Truman, Feb. 11, 1948.

the power to prevent such legislation and don't use it, you will be just as guilty of MURDER as if you had slain thousands of innocent people with your own hand.'<sup>33</sup> Expected to carry much weight was an inevitable statement: "I've talked to a thousand or more Negroes on this great question, and they are against it.'<sup>34</sup>

A straight-forward letter warned: "Mr. President, you cannot make the people of the South lie in bed with the Negro. . . . No matter how many laws you may pass you cannot do it without a Civil War.'<sup>35</sup> Traditional fears of sexual attacks were expressed: "Multiplied thousands of Negro men in the South have almost an insane desire to rape a white woman and despoil her body and reduce her to his own level. . . . Many of the Negroes of the South are not much more than two jumps ahead of an ape. . . .'<sup>36</sup> Several Southerners suggested that the Negroes be colonized in Africa, since God did not intend to mix the races, and one man who favored an African settlement for young Negroes suggested that other white nations be asked to help finance the project. He thought such a suggestion would "bluff the hell out of Russia!"<sup>37</sup> A typically inconsistent phrase was used by a woman who assumed that American Negroes would remain in the United States where there existed "segregation, with liberty and justice for all"<sup>38</sup>

The most violent reaction to the February 2 speech came from those Southerners who wanted no interference with any of the South's racial traditions. The White House mail room received comparatively few letters which mentioned any of Truman's four specific proposals which would most affect the South. Thus, much of the reaction from the South was not reasoned and rational with condemnation of innumerable proposals of the Truman program. Rather the re-

<sup>33</sup> N. B. Mitchell (Enid, Miss.) to Truman, Nov. 10, 1948.

<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Alex J. McAllister (Columbus, Ga.) to Truman, Sept. 12, 1948.

<sup>35</sup> George A. Rule (Baltimore, Md.) to Truman, July 18, 1948.

<sup>36</sup> Chester B. Collins (Fort Worth, Tex.) to Truman, Sept. 7, 1948.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Camille J. McDonald (New Orleans, La.) to Truman, July 20, 1948; J. M. Pyne (Webster Groves, Mo.) to Truman, July 4, 1948.

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Roy Franklin (Overton, Tex.) to Truman, Feb. 19, 1948 (telegram).

sponse was a deeply emotional one related to ingrained Southern traditions and attitudes.<sup>39</sup>

But not all of the mail received at the White House as a result of President Truman's address was critical. A considerable portion of it was written by moderate Southerners. Many of them agreed with Truman's program in theory, but they often advocated a "go-slow" implementation policy. A man cautioned: "Don't you think you have picked the wrong time to bring up an issue such as civil rights. I am for civil rights, but not at this time."<sup>40</sup>

A surprising number of letters written by Southerners praised Truman for his program, and more than a few expressed admiration or support for him in his undertaking. These letters were sent from every Southern state. Some were written by business and professional people, ministers, and other recognized community leaders of the middle class, but others obviously came from lower class Southerners, one signing himself "ex-sharecropper" while others admitted to being "dirt" farmers. Local League of Women voters' groups, voters' leagues, civil rights committees, church women's groups, ministerial alliances, local chapters of Masons and other fraternal organizations, a chapter of the order of the Eastern Star, labor unions, veterans organizations, college professors, student groups, elementary school children, and housewives were among those who pledged support for Truman's program. Expectedly many Negroes, both individuals and groups, indicated support for Truman, but internal evidence reveals that the great majority of the pro-civil rights letters from the South were written by whites. A woman wrote: "I just want to inform you that if the South wants to secede from the Union again, there will be plenty of us *best* Southerners who will not go with them. Your *Civil Rights* program was very courageous and long overdue. The Jim Crow law is the silliest thing I ever heard of in a Christian land."<sup>41</sup> A man told Truman that the latter was

<sup>39</sup> For Truman's comments in his memoirs on this subject, see Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, 1956), p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Stephens (Palatka, Fla.) to Truman, July 30, 1948.

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. W. A. Breining (Houston, Tex.) to Truman, Feb. 3, 1948.

“completing what Lincoln left undone.”<sup>42</sup> Another praised Truman and then added: “It is no doubt pertinent to say that I am a native Texan, white, of southern ancestry. . . . Perhaps I should mention, too, that I am not a Communist.”<sup>43</sup> Although our ‘Bilboists’ have made a great stir in the press so that it would seem we are *all* unprogressive,” a Georgia couple wrote, “nevertheless there are numerous [liberals] among us, and to your program we lend our most sincere support.”<sup>44</sup>

Mr. Truman continued to receive mail throughout 1948 as Southern Congressmen filibustered against his civil rights program and as the presidential election in November drew near. Many Southerners wrote during that summer asking the President to forego his stand on civil rights for the sake of the unity of the nation and the Democratic party in the upcoming elections. Other letter-writers accused Truman of playing politics with the Negro vote, some announcing that they would “go fishing” on election day.<sup>45</sup> A man reported: “I am Mr. Average Voter of the South, and expecially [*sic*] in Virginia. We voted the party straight, through thick and thin—except for Mr. Al Smith. This time the exception will be—Mr. Harry Truman.”<sup>46</sup>

After Truman’s stunning upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey in November 1948, the White House mail bag was filled with letters from the South. Not atypical was this plea: “Now, please, Sir, do something about Civil Rights! Being a white Southerner, I can only be an onlooker to the Negroes’ miseries, but what I see is enough to make my heart sick to realize that everyday persons masquerading as loyal United States Citizens repeatedly disregard our Constitution. Don’t, please, tend to be gradual! Cut out this destroying tumor immediately, drastically.”<sup>47</sup> Many Southerners expressed

<sup>42</sup> Edward F. Kerman (Baltimore, Md.) to Truman, Feb. 4, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> Vernon Fortassain (San Antonio, Tex.) to Truman, March 18, 1948.

<sup>44</sup> Mary L. and William H. Pinson, Jr. (Atlanta, Ga.) to Truman, Feb. 4, 1948.

<sup>45</sup> Mrs. G. H. Ford (Gainesville, Fla.) to Truman, Aug. 7, 1948.

<sup>46</sup> Weston S. Newton (Roanoke, Va.) to Truman, Aug. 2, 1948.

<sup>47</sup> Mary G. Moser (Portsmouth, Va.) to Truman, Nov. 3, 1948.

their prayers for the President after the election victory as he continued his fight for civil rights, and not a few of them believed that his re-election was a mandate from God to do something positive about the condition of the Negro. On the other hand, a woman from Louisiana believed that Truman had received bad advice from "a bunch of dumb bells" and that "what Mr. Truman ought to do is to dismiss his domestic advisers and go to the Lord in prayer."<sup>48</sup> A correspondent from Missouri wrote soon after the election: "I am not prejudiced against the Negro. But God Almighty is. It was God who gave them the black skin and the lower-than-the-whites character. God is WHITE. Jesus Christ is WHITE. Moses is WHITE. There were no BLACK APOSTLES FOR JESUS CHRIST. THERE NEVER WILL BE! The Negro question, God alone will settle, and He will do nothing about it until the RESURRECTION."<sup>49</sup>

If some Southerners expected Truman to forget civil rights legislation after his November triumph, they were quickly disappointed. On January 5, 1949, in his State of the Union message, the President emphatically demanded action on his whole civil rights program.<sup>50</sup> One man responded: "I wish to register my strong protest against an equal rights bill for negroes . . . [which] I thought you would drop . . . after election, when the going got rough. The Republicans always have."<sup>51</sup> But Truman did not forego his requests for civil rights. He continued to advocate them in his addresses to the American public, the Congress, and in press releases during his last four years in office.<sup>52</sup>

The responses white Southerners made from 1949 through 1952 were not significantly different from those made from 1946 through 1948. Conservatives, moderates, and liberals in the South continued to write in about the same numbers and with the same intensity. Assuming that the Southerners

<sup>48</sup> Miss Hope Dolen (New Orleans, La.) to Charles Ross, Nov. 24, 1948.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph A. Ferris (St. Joseph, Mo.) to Truman, Nov. 23, 1948.

<sup>50</sup> *Washington Post*, Jan. 6, 1949.

<sup>51</sup> Raymond E. Cathell (Wilmington, Del.) to Truman, March 3, 1949.

<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, Jan. 10, April 14, 1950; Jan. 16, 1951; Jan. 10 and 22, June 14, Nov. 15, 1952.

who wrote to President Truman about civil rights constituted a reasonably representative cross-section of the white population in the South, and assuming that the hundreds of letters retained in the public opinion files of the Truman Library fairly reflect in numbers and intensity the thousands of letters which the White House received, several conclusions may be drawn. Because a significant number of letter-writers were liberal or moderate on the civil rights issues and because virtually no opponents to Truman's program expressed dissatisfaction with proposed laws against lynching and the poll tax, the great mass of Southerners would have offered no resistance had these measures been passed. Although more objections came from below the Mason-Dixon line regarding desegregation of transportation facilities, writers invariably included a "please" in their communications to the President. Neither would this bill have met undue opposition from the Southern public. A larger group expressed concern about the FEPC, but comparatively few of the total letters concerned with Negro rights referred to the FEPC by name. It is not outside the realm of possibility that this law also would have been accepted—however grudgingly—by the South.

Despite the presence of imponderable forces, subconscious motivations, and automatic reactions of dyed-in-the-wood Southerners, a violent response might not have arisen from the South if Truman's civil rights program had passed soon after the end of the war and before the opposition became crystallized. The filibusters who prevented the passage of this legislation did more to arouse and harden opposition to the measures than to reflect Southern opinion. Since the public opinion letters reveal discernibly less opposition from the South in 1945 and 1946 than appeared in 1947, 1948, and 1949, it is entirely possible that the South could have successfully accommodated to the concessions for Negro advancement. President Truman's civil rights program did not pass, however, and with truculence on the part of one segment of the Southern population increasing each year, every step since that time toward full equality for black Southerners has been agonizingly slow.